

United States Ends Sanctions on Myanmar Military Allies

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The United States has lifted sanctions on several Myanmar military-linked businesses and individuals, drawing criticism from human rights advocates and raising concerns about Washington's commitment to holding the junta accountable. While U.S. officials say the action was part of standard Treasury procedures, observers argue it sends the wrong message as Myanmar's military continues to commit atrocities against civilians.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury recently removed several Myanmar-based entities from its sanctions list, including KT Services & Logistics and its founder, Jonathan Myo Kyaw Thaug. These parties were sanctioned in 2022 for conducting business with military-owned companies, specifically leasing port facilities in Yangon. Also delisted were Myanmar Chemical and Machinery Company and Suntac Technologies, both previously cited for producing arms such as tanks and mortars.

The decision follows a letter from Myanmar's junta chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who praised former U.S. President Donald Trump for his firm stance on trade and for shutting down American-funded media outlets critical of the junta. While this timing has raised eyebrows, a senior Trump administration official insisted the delistings were unrelated to the general's letter.

Human Rights Watch Asia Director John Sifton condemned the move, describing it as "extremely worrying," and warned it could weaken the sanctions framework against a regime responsible for war crimes. Analyst Sean Turnell echoed the sentiment, noting that the individuals removed from the list were deeply involved in Myanmar's war economy and in facilitating arms imports from China and Russia. "Lifting sanctions on them sends the wrong message," Turnell told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar has only intensified in recent months. In May, a junta airstrike killed 22 people, including schoolchildren and teachers, at a school in the Sagaing region. Another attack in July struck a monastery sheltering displaced civilians, killing at least 20. Despite sanctions on aviation fuel, Myanmar's military continues to carry out lethal air operations using fuel supplied through international channels.

While the U.S. still maintains restrictions on top military figures and major state banks such as the Myanma Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) and the Myanma Investment and Commercial Bank (MICB), critics argue that broader financial pressure is necessary. Turnell stressed that cutting off access to foreign currency is vital, as even allies such as China and Russia require payment in U.S. dollars or euros. "That makes financial sanctions one of the most effective levers the U.S. still holds," he said.

Representative Ami Bera, a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, criticized the delisting decision, saying it runs contrary to American values of democracy and freedom. However, a White House spokesperson maintained that the

actions were taken after a year of review and were consistent with routine processes by the U.S. Treasury.

As Myanmar's junta regains strategic territory and strengthens ties with authoritarian powers, the role of targeted economic measures remains central in limiting its reach. With civilian casualties mounting and the conflict showing no signs of abating, the international community's response, especially from the United States, continues to carry serious weight.