



December 12, 2011

Burma's Nuclear Aspirations: Less Reason Now for Concern

But Burma should sign the Additional Protocol and answer questions about its ties to North Korea

By David Albright and Andrea Stricker

In November 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a ground-breaking visit to the reclusive state of Myanmar (Burma) to discuss, among other topics, Burma's commitment to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. During the visit, Burma's president, Thein Sein, [provided strong assurances](#) of Burma's commitment to United Nations Security Council resolutions against North Korea and suggested Burma would consider signing the Additional Protocol, which would allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) more authority to conduct inspections at suspicious sites. These positive moves provide reassurance for U.S. and international [concerns](#) over the past several years that Burma had worked to illicitly procure sensitive, dual-use industrial equipment with applications in gas centrifuge manufacturing or missile development via North Korea and European countries. Clinton [noted](#) during the visit that while concerns remain about missile cooperation with North Korea, "We've looked at this carefully and we do not see signs of a substantial effort at this time [on nuclear weapons development]." Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) allegations and defector interviews claiming that Burma had or has a nuclear weapons research program remain unsubstantiated and poorly evidenced.

Secretary Clinton's visit follows intense pressure and scrutiny on the ascetic state over proliferation concerns, particularly over the past two years. Earlier, in June 2011, Burma [renounced](#) all nuclear research aspirations. According to its vice president, Burma wished to avoid misunderstanding within the international community over the issue. Despite the June pledge and the regime's more recent statements during Secretary Clinton's visit, the international community must remain steadfast in its calls on Burma to fully commit to nuclear non-proliferation objectives and allow full [verification](#) of those commitments.

To assuage international concerns over any nuclear activities, including cooperation with North Korea, Burma must advance its dialogue with the IAEA over the Additional Protocol, which President Sein [claims](#) to be ongoing, and both ratify and implement the agreement. Burma should answer any questions the IAEA has about its nuclear activities and illicit procurement efforts relating to sensitive equipment potentially related to nuclear applications. It should also allow the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea to visit the country and answer questions about past suspicious transfers and cooperation with North Korea. Burma should provide an explanation for why it continues to send hundreds of students to Russia for [training](#) in nuclear and missile applications.

The international community should fully support Burma's apparent push for openness and transparency over the nuclear issue and indicate that its confidence-building actions will garner incentives. But in order to fully close the issue over Burma's nuclear aspirations, the international community must implement a policy of "trust but verify."

Read ISIS's extensive set of assessments about evidence of nuclear aspirations in Burma [here](#).