

## **Burma: The World Is Watching**

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With few notable exceptions, first ladies stay clear of foreign policy. Those who do play with fire.

Remember the uproar when Hillary Rodham Clinton was caught on camera exchanging a ceremonial kiss with Mrs. Yasser Arafat in 1999? In an earlier era, Eleanor Roosevelt took her lumps for being a cheerleader for the United Nations. In 2005, Laura Bush found herself in hot water when, during a visit to Egypt, she praised President Hosni Mubarak for taking a "very bold step" toward democracy by holding a presidential election that had been a sham.

Mrs. Bush has moved on from Mr. Mubarak to the generals who rule Myanmar, the country formerly known as Burma. Earlier this month she openly condemned the junta's crushing of pro-democracy demonstrators. She spoke more forcefully than the State Department. She called U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and asked him to denounce the junta. She reiterated her request that the Security Council condemn the Myanmar government for human rights abuses.

Mrs. Bush also has called for the release of dissident and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who will soon begin her 12th year in detention. In 1990, Ms. Suu Kyi's party won elections by a landslide but the junta refused to hand over power.

Myanmar has been off the radar screen in Washington. There have been occasional denunciations from Capitol Hill and the White House and pleas for action by the Hollywood set. The first lady has been vocal and persistent. Mrs. Bush says her front-seat involvement is intended to remind the people of Myanmar that the world is watching. Good for her.

"I've been interested in political issues like this, policy issues around the world, for the whole time George has been president," she told a reporter. "You know, I think this is sort of one of those myths that I was baking cookies and then they fell off a cookie sheet and I called Ban Ki-moon."

Remember when Mrs. Clinton was widely parodied when she used the cookie metaphor? That was in the past century. We've come a long way.

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