

EDITORIAL
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The truth about Myanmar

Myanmar's democrats continue to struggle to be heard. After a series of protests around the country, the military junta has deployed street toughs to rough up anyone who dares take to the streets to demonstrate. The military's over-reaction indicates how brittle its rule is, how fearful it is of any sign of popular unrest, and the junta's lack of legitimacy.

Increases in fuel prices set off near daily protests in mid-August. While it is difficult to get accurate information about events within the country, exile groups report that several hundred people have participated in marches throughout the country. Buddhist monks are said to have joined some of the protests. While bystanders are reported to have cheered the marchers, they have not joined in.

The government responded by sending out gangs of undercover police and security forces to break up the demonstrations. According to one account, marchers got about 10 meters before being set upon by thugs, beaten and dragged off to trucks. The opposition National League for Democracy reports that more than 100 people have been arrested and that the homes of leading opposition figures have been raided. Several well-known figures are said to be hiding and on the run.

The military government in Myanmar is clearly scared. The frantic deployment of security forces and the desire to crush any sign of dissent is the sign of a government that knows it can rule only through fear and intimidation. This should be the most important determinant of other nations' policy toward Myanmar, rather than its geostrategic position or who is courting its leaders. Myanmar's democrats deserve the world's support — not the generals who profit from their misery.

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