

Institution: Queen Mary University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 19 Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Impacting UK Policy towards Myanmar (Burma)		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Lee Jones	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Reader in International Politics	Period(s) employed: Sept 2009-Present
Period when the impact occurred: 2014-19		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Dr Jones's research found that sanctions against Myanmar (Burma) have failed and that engagement, however constrained, is a superior policy option for promoting democracy and human rights. These findings have been accepted at the highest levels of the UK government. Through briefings, participation in policy planning, consultancy, and training, Jones's work has directly informed the work of the UK Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Parliament, and officials across Whitehall.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>From 1988-2011, Myanmar's military regime was subjected to extensive Western sanctions. The army formally withdrew from power in 2010, enabling a civilianised government to take power in 2011. The main opposition party, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, won elections in 2015. However, Myanmar remains militarised and riven by severe internal conflicts, including civil war in the northeast and the persecution of the Muslim Rohingyas in Rakhine state, peaking in Autumn 2017 with a brutal military campaign, displacing over 700,000 people into Bangladesh. Hence, Western governments seeking to support Myanmar's 'transition' face enormous challenges.</p>		
<p>Dr Jones is one of Britain's foremost experts on Myanmar. He has researched Myanmar's domestic politics and international relations since 2006, undertaking major grant-funded research and producing key outputs during this REF cycle. This has included extended periods of fieldwork in Myanmar and neighbouring states. ESRC-funded research on economic sanctions (2011-15) used Myanmar as a key case study, producing the first systematic evaluation of the embargoes' impact, and generating deep expertise on Myanmar's political economy and 2011 regime transition [3.6]. This expertise was further extended by Australian Research Council-funded research (with Shahar Hameiri) on non-traditional security threats originating in Myanmar (2011-15) [3.2] and Sino-Myanmar relations (with Hameiri and Chinese collaborator Yizheng Zou; 2016) [3.1].</p>		
<p>This research has generated original and highly policy-relevant findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early research showed that, contrary to received wisdom, Myanmar's neighbouring states, while rejecting Western sanctions, had also pressured Myanmar for regime change to little effect [3.6]. • Sanctions research, published as <i>Societies under siege</i>, found that, contrary to claims – including from British policymakers – that Western sanctions had caused Myanmar's 2011 regime transition, they had actually impeded regime change [3.2]. Sanctions had harmed the economy and social groups, but had not shifted the military regime's ruling coalition or its transition strategy; they merely hampered its realisation. <i>Societies under siege</i> also generated a framework for planning and evaluating future sanctions regimes. • Analysis of the 2011 transition demonstrated that, contrary to then-rosy assessments by Western governments and international organisations, Myanmar's new order was designed, and remained largely superintended, by the military, with severe power imbalances, corruption, and ongoing ethnic conflict largely unaffected by Myanmar's 		

apparent 'democratisation' [3.4, 3.5]. This research provided crucial information for external powers seeking to re-engage with Myanmar and shape its ongoing development.

- Combined, this research shows that, given the lack of substantial social, economic and political change beneath Myanmar's regime transition, sanctions, if re-imposed, would be highly likely to fail again.
- Jones's most recent research identifies Chinese efforts to curb Western influence in Myanmar and shape its internal peace processes [3.1]. Since China remains Myanmar's most powerful neighbour, these are also crucial considerations for Western policymakers, particularly with the onset of the Rohingya crisis.

3. References to the research

[3.1] Hameiri, S., Jones, L., & Zou, Y. (2019). The development-insecurity nexus in China's near-abroad: Rethinking cross-border economic integration in an era of state transformation. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 49(3), 473-499. doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2018.1502802

[3.2] Jones, L. (2015). *Societies under siege: Exploring how international economic sanctions (do not) work*. Oxford University Press, USA.

[3.3] Hameiri, S., & Jones, L. (2015). *Governing borderless threats: Non-traditional security and the politics of state transformation*. Cambridge University Press. <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/28204>

[3.4] Jones, L. (2014). Explaining Myanmar's regime transition: the periphery is central. *Democratization*, 21(5), 780-802. doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.863878

[3.5] Jones, L. (2014). The political economy of Myanmar's transition. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44(1), 144-170. doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.764143

[3.6] Jones, L. (2016). *ASEAN, Sovereignty and Intervention in Southeast Asia*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Evidence of quality of the research

[EQR.3.1] Jones [Joint PI]. (2017-20). Rising Powers and State Transformation [DP160101120]. ARC. GBP177,740. *Journal of Contemporary Asia* is ranked 1st in Area Studies.

[EQR3.2] Jones [PI]. (2011-14). How Do Economic Sanctions (Not) Work [ES/1010157/1]? ESRC. GBP120,558.

[EQR3.3] CUP was globally 1st-ranked for politics in Garand & Giles 2011.

[EQR3.4] *Democratization* is the top journal in the study of democratisation

[EQR3.5] Most-cited article on Myanmar's transition (over 200 citations as of Mar 2021). *Journal of Contemporary Asia* is ranked 1st in Area Studies.

4. Details of the impact

Influence on Policymaking

Through over 40 engagements between 2014 and 2019, Jones influenced policymaking by providing advice and training and through direct involvement in policy planning and briefings. His key findings – that sanctions had failed and engagement, however constrained, was a superior policy option – have been accepted at the highest levels of government. This was a substantial change from 2012, when a then-Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) minister declared that Myanmar's transition proved 'the power of sanctions.'

Summarising the impact, Britain's ambassador (2013-17) identifies Jones as

'one of the two or three most active advisors to the UK Government on Burma [...] his briefings significantly enhanced my understanding and thus helped me and the Embassy to achieve our goals' [5.1].

Jones informed UK government work by providing regular input for FCO Research Analysts' internal analysis and policy recommendations, and by training government personnel through the FCO's Diplomatic Academy. For example, under FCO contract Jones organised a day-long training event for FCO officials on Myanmar and Bangladesh (February 2016). The FCO states that attendees 'learnt a lot... [We] have some better-informed policy leads out there now' [5.3]. Jones also taught senior military officers about sanctions, with the Commandant of the Royal College of Defence Studies stating that Jones had 'achieved that rare goal of changing how [participants] thought about a subject' [5.4].

Policy and Strategy Consultation and Reporting

Jones shaped official thinking, recommendations and policies by participating directly in policy discussion and development. As the FCO's former Burma analyst states, Jones participated 'in a wide range of FCO-led conferences, seminars and training events [and briefed] FCO staff including very senior officials' [5.2]. Examples of engagements include a workshop on sanctions with FCO and Treasury officials (2014); two Wilton Park conferences to brainstorm long-range Western policy towards Myanmar (2019); three workshops to develop UK policy around the 2015 elections (October-December 2015); two meetings on the Rohingya crisis (2016, 2017); and a forum on narcotics at the British embassy (September 2018).

Jones also consulted for the Department for International Development's Legal Assistance for Economic Reform (LASER) programme. His research showed that LASER's specific objectives (pro-market legal and rule-of-law reforms) were unlikely to succeed in Myanmar's socio-political context. Accordingly, LASER 'decided to invest funds elsewhere' [5.5].

Jones's findings also formed the basis of an internal report circulated across Whitehall in 2016, which argued that sanctions had failed. Its author states that:

'through this report, Dr Jones's research had an extremely important influence on UK Burma policy, helping to support continued engagement and avoid a return to sanctions' [5.6].

This was especially critical after the 2017 Rohingya crisis, when calls for sanctions mounted. Notwithstanding the moral outrage sparked by the horrendous treatment of the Rohingya, Jones reiterated his findings that sanctions would be ineffective, proposing instead a strategy of aid and diplomatic engagement, including working with China. He briefed the heads of the FCO's Bangladesh and Burma teams (September 2017) and the Cabinet Office (November 2017), and his research was also used to brief the Foreign Secretary [5.6].

As a Cabinet Office official states, Jones supplied 'important and well-judged advice [...] at a critical time for UK-Burma relations,' having 'significant impact on a briefing paper setting out policy options for the Prime Minister. His influence was especially notable on the section on international sanctions' [5.7].

Reporting to Government and Parliament

Jones directly shaped Parliament's recommendations. He provided written evidence to the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) on Myanmar and sanctions (7 January 2015) and written and oral evidence to the FAC's Rohingya crisis inquiry (October 2017). His evidence – described by FAC's chair as 'hugely useful' – was cited nine times in the FAC's Rakhine report, and clearly steered the Committee to recognise 'the difficulty of securing and making sanctions effective' [5.8].

The FCO's response to the FAC report, and its policy decisions, reflected Jones's research findings. It noted that 'analysts argue there is a risk that a return to this approach [of sanctions] may set back Burma's democratic transition [...] without changing the behaviour of the Burmese

military;' that targeted sanctions 'have a limited impact on senior Burmese military figures;' and that 'two decades of Western sanctions' had simply 'led the Burmese military to look elsewhere for its main defence and economic ties' [5.8]. The government limited sanctions to small, symbolic measures, opting for an alternative strategy of engagement, as Jones had recommended. This included recognition that 'the democratic transition remains incomplete, and the positive trajectory has stalled' (as indicated in outputs 3.4-3.5) and a commitment to 'encourage China... to add their weight to efforts to respond to the crisis' [5.8].

Jones subsequently participated in a July 2019 Cabinet Office review of UK Myanmar policy, having 'a major impact on our thinking, directly contributing to the assessment that will influence UK policy on Myanmar' [5.9].

He was also consulted regularly by officials, providing analysis and policy advice following Myanmar's 2021 military coup. Due to Jones's input, government continued to recognise that earlier sanctions had 'hurt the wrong people and may even have strengthened the military. Mindful that punitive measures have a very limited impact, there is a desire to explore other options,' including working with regional powers and supporting opposition forces [5.6].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] [Testimonial] Her Majesty's Ambassador to Burma (2013-17), 2 February 2018 [Corroborator 1]

[5.2] [Testimonial] Research Analyst, Southeast Asia Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 7 April 2016 [Corroborator 2]

[5.3] [Testimonial] Head of the Asia Pacific Research Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 19 September 2016 [Corroborator 3]

[5.4] [Testimonial] Commandant, Royal College of Defence Studies, 25 November 2015

[5.5] [Report] Lee Jones, 'Myanmar: A Political Economy Analysis', December 2014 (confidential); DfID LASER, 'Where We Work: Burma', available at: <http://dfidlaser.org/burma> screenshot on file from 21 December 2017

[5.6] [Testimonial] Confidential communication from UK government employee (details available on request from REF panel) 26 July 2019

[5.7] [Testimonial] Cabinet Office/ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 17 January 2018 [Corroborator 4]

[5.8] [Testimonial] MP, 17 October 2018; UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's Response*, 11 December 2017, available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfaff/435/435.pdf> (see esp. pp. 14-19), and Appendix: Government Response, 20 February 2018, available at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfaff/868/868.pdf> (see esp. pp. 8, 11-12)

[5.9] [Testimonial] Cabinet Office, 26 July 2019. [Corroborator 5]