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Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke with Webb by telephone on Sunday and plans more extensive talks with him once he returns, officials said.

The initiative by Webb, who heads the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on Asia, has angered many activists working on Myanmar who fear he is giving the junta a rare opportunity to appear in a favorable light.

Leonard Leo, chair of the **US Commission on Religious Freedom**, a government advisory board, said that the administration should "pursue a dual strategy of more sanctions and more engagement."

"Burma's military leaders will continue their repressive ways unless diplomatic efforts are coordinated, targeted and tough," he said.