

Viewing cable 07BEIJING6864, PRC LIMITS COVERAGE OF BURMA "DISTURBANCE,"

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07BEIJING6864	2007-10-26 10:16	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beijing

VZCZCXRO0186

PP RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC

DE RUEHBJ #6864/01 2991016

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 261016Z OCT 07

FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3099

INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE

RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 4631

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 006864

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/27/2032

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PROP](#) [CH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: PRC LIMITS COVERAGE OF BURMA "DISTURBANCE,"
FORBIDS DISCUSSION OF CHINA'S ROLE

Classified By: Classified by Political Internal Unit Chief
Dan Kritenbrink. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Despite having taken a largely hands off approach to managing coverage of Burma by relying on editors to engage in "self-censorship," Chinese authorities nevertheless have required reporters to restrict their description of events in Burma to words like "disturbance," so as not to legitimize the actions of anti-junta demonstrators. Discussion of China's role in Burma is forbidden. While Burma is a sensitive story given China's experience during the 1989 democracy movement, some journalists tell us that Burma is also just one of many international stories and is not particularly newsworthy to Chinese readers. End summary.

Don't Say "Protest"

[2](#)2. (C) PRC propaganda officials are giving China's media reasonable latitude to cover the ongoing crisis in Burma, Zhou Qingan (protect), Tsinghua University journalism professor and editorial writer for several

major metropolitan newspapers, told Poloff October 25. The only propaganda guidelines specific to Burma that Zhou is aware of is a rule forbidding journalists from referring to anti-junta activities as "protests" (kang yi) or "marches" (you xing). Such words, Zhou said, imply that Burmese demonstrators have a legitimate cause and would, authorities fear, conjure up images of the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement. Rather, Zhou explained, reporters must refer to the demonstrations as "disturbances" (sao luan, which can also mean "riot" or "turmoil"). Tang Lu (protect), a senior editor at Xinhua News Agency, agreed with Zhou regarding the sensitivity of the Burma story in light of China's recent history. The images of monks demonstrating with soldiers and military equipment in the background are certainly reminiscent of Tiananmen, Tang said.

And Don't Mention Chinese Policy

13. (C) Several journalists we spoke with said propaganda authorities have not attempted to directly manage Burma coverage but are instead relying on individual media outlets to conduct "self-censorship." All contacts agreed, based on established guidance applicable to any sensitive international story, that discussion of China's role in Burma, especially its support to the military regime, is forbidden. Huang Shan (protect), international editor for Caijing magazine, told Poloff that, in his own reporting, he has only referred obliquely to Chinese policy. Huang said he recently wrote a piece analyzing India's influence in Burma, but in reality, he was using India as a proxy for China.

Sensitive Does Not Always Mean Newsworthy

14. (C) Some contacts warned against exaggerating the significance of the Burma crisis in China. Zhao Li (protect), publisher of the Economic Observer (one of China's few privately owned newspapers), told Poloff October 25 that he did not think Burma was particularly important to the Observer's business-focused readership. Zhao said his paper had decided not to cover the Burma story at all because, lacking its own correspondent in Rangoon, the Observer is unable to offer any unique insights or new information. Cheng Mingxia (protect), the Observer's international page editor, added that she would rather not print anything than rely on pre-packaged Xinhua News Agency copy.

Comment

15. (C) China's press has provided a regular, though restrained, stream of reporting on Burma. Xinhua

stories have mentioned protestor deaths, and the Beijing News (Xin Jing Bao), among other papers, has run photos of demonstrating monks. As our contacts noted, however, there is no discussion of Chinese

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policy beyond Foreign Ministry statements in support of U.N. mediation and against sanctions. In addition to the restrictions placed on media coverage of Burma due to PRC sensitivities, the Burma story here has also been overshadowed by other events, being just one of many stories relegated to the back pages by the Party-directed media blitz surrounding the just-completed 17th Communist Party Congress.
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<http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2007/10/07BEIJING6864.html>