

Viewing cable 07BEIJING1518, DAS JOHN DISCUSSES BURMA, VIETNAM AND JOINT

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07BEIJING1518	2007-03-08 04:05	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beijing

VZCZCXRO9186

OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHGH RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHVC

DE RUEHBJ #1518/01 0670405

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 080405Z MAR 07

FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5384

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 001518

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/08/32

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [UNSC](#) [CH](#) [BM](#) [VN](#) [XC](#)

SUBJECT: DAS JOHN DISCUSSES BURMA, VIETNAM AND JOINT
INTERESTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA WITH CHINESE ACADEMICS

REF: BEIJING 1448

Classified By: Daniel Shields, Political Minister Counselor.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) Chinese scholars of Southeast Asian affairs told EAP DAS Eric John that Burma presents a major challenge and opportunity for United States-China relations following China's veto blocking a Burma resolution in the UN Security Council (UNSC). The academics said China wants to cooperate with the United States and continues to pressure Burma to reform, but may emphasize economic reform and resolving ethnic conflicts more than the political inclusiveness that the United States stresses. Zhai said China thinks Burma's plans for a new constitution are "better than nothing" and that America's criticism of procedural and other flaws in the regime's roadmap toward national reunification might be lost on Beijing. DAS John countered that a bad constitution is worse than nothing if it permanently excludes from the political process any legitimate opposition. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the United States and China share many interests, including promoting economic growth, increasing cooperation on nontraditional security issues and fighting

terrorism. The weakness and indecisiveness of ASEAN creates problems for building regional architecture. China sees Southeast Asia as a growing market, especially for exports from China's border provinces. Vietnam is rapidly growing more powerful and this causes China some concern, according to the scholars. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On March 5, EAP DAS Eric G. John, joined by EAP DAS Thomas D. Christensen, discussed American and Chinese interests across Southeast Asia, including Burma and regional architecture issues, with scholars Han Feng, Deputy Director of the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) Institute of Southeast Asian studies, Zha Daojiong, Professor of International Political Economy at People's University and Zhang Xuegang, research fellow at the Ministry of State Security-affiliated China Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). In a separate meeting, DAS John discussed similar topics with Zhai Kun, Director for Southeast Asia at CICIR.

Burma: A Challenge and an Opportunity

¶3. (C) Burma presents a challenge and an opportunity that only major powers like the United States and China can hope to address, CICIR's Zhai told DAS John. The UNSC debate on Burma pushed the Burma issue back to the major powers to resolve, he said, noting that ASEAN has "given up." Chinese analysts think top General Than Shwe believes resource-rich Burma can resolve its problems alone, while others in the regime know that they need support from China, India, Russia or Japan. China wants to cooperate with the United States and continues to pressure Burma to reform, but may emphasize economic reform and resolving ethnic conflicts more than the political inclusiveness that the United States stresses. State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan's recent trip to Burma put further pressure on Burma to respond to international concerns, the scholars said.

China Thinks Regime's Roadmap is Not So Bad

¶4. (C) Zhai said China thinks Burma's plans for a new constitution are "better than nothing" and that America's criticism of procedural and other flaws in the regime's roadmap toward national reunification might be lost on Beijing. DAS John countered that a bad constitution is worse than nothing if it permanently excludes from the political process any legitimate opposition. Chinese support of a "bad" reunification process risks putting the United States and China in an ongoing cycle of confrontation over Burma, DAS John said, something that Washington wants to avoid. Han said China sees Burma's situation improving, in part because Beijing focuses as much on resolving disputes with armed ethnic groups as on the regime's reaching out to the National League for Democracy.

Burma Thanks China for Veto

¶5. (C) Since China's veto in the UNSC, the Burmese junta has expressed appreciation to Beijing for its support, scholars said. Third-ranking general Thura Shwe Mann (whom Zhai said

BEIJING 00001518 002 OF 003

China sees as Than Shwe's likely successor) visited Beijing to thank Chinese leaders, the academics stated.

Oil Pipeline through Burma

¶6. (C) Zha said he has read in Chinese economic publications that China is moving ahead with plans for an oil pipeline through Burma. He was critical of the pipeline on economic grounds. He noted that Chinese officials previously urged China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) to sign an energy deal with Burma without suitable geological or feasibility studies. The site turned out to have no oil or gas resources, he said.

Shared Interests in Southeast Asia

¶7. (C) Turning from Burma to Southeast Asia as a whole, the scholars agreed with DAS John's position that the United States and China share interests in promoting the economic development of the region. CICIR's Zhang stressed the risk of terrorism spreading from underdeveloped parts of the region and said that improving economic development can help to stem some underlying causes of Islamic extremism in Southeast Asia. Zha noted that we also share interests in combating nontraditional security problems involving the spread of drugs, crime and infectious disease. Zhai and Han pointed to disaster response and maritime safety as other fields in which the United States and China have shared interests.

¶8. (C) All four scholars agreed with DAS John that the United States and China are not competing in a zero-sum game in Southeast Asia. Some in America may believe any gain for China is a loss for the United States in the region, but Zha said the United States has lost nothing to China in Southeast Asia. In terms of security, economics and politics, the United States remains as influential as ever in the region, in Zha's view. Increased United States-China cooperation in Southeast Asia could help to undermine zero-sum thinking and containment rhetoric, Han said. In Indonesia, the United States and China could coordinate their investment and development aid to encourage good governance and discourage destabilizing factors, Zha suggested. Working cooperatively on development in places like Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines could provide positive examples and help build confidence between the United States and China, he suggested.

Regional Architecture: Does it Work? Is it Needed?

9. (C) Efforts to build regional architecture are plagued by indecisiveness and inaction by ASEAN and its member states, the scholars said, with the result that the existing architecture has produced few results. Zha said perhaps no true regional architecture is needed for the next five to ten years. CICIR's Zhai said it is anomalous that regional architecture in Asia involves the smaller ASEAN states leading larger, more powerful countries like Japan and China.

Han said this unusual arrangement is more in the interest of China than Japan, because China is more comfortable than Japan with giving ASEAN states the lead on regional architecture issues. Han and Zhang both called attention to the United States' refusal to sign ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, saying this creates an image problem for the United States in Southeast Asia, where the treaty is seen as a symbolic way of establishing the equality of the signatories. Zhang said that on regional architecture, China's advantage is politics, because for China doing something like signing a non-substantive agreement is not a problem. Japan's advantage is economics, especially Tokyo's large assistance programs. The advantage of the United States lies in the area of security, Zhang stated.

Opportunities for China's Border Provinces

10. (C) CICIR's Zhai told DAS John he had just returned March 5 from a conference on cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin sponsored by the Guangxi Province government. Chinese provincial governments have increasing interests in Southeast Asia because of their desire for economic growth. Provincial leaders in China's South and Southwest see markets in Southeast Asia as key to their expansion, Zhai said. Zha, however, said officials in China's Ministry of Commerce recently voiced concerns that China's export of large volumes of cheaply manufactured goods will hurt China's relations in Southeast Asia in the long-term. People in Southeast Asia

BEIJING 00001518 003 OF 003

are increasingly resentful of what they see as losing investment and local jobs to Chinese manufacturers. In 2006, a Chinese train was ambushed at the Vietnam-China border by locals who dumped out the Chinese agricultural products seen as flooding Vietnam's markets.

Vietnam

11. (C) Vietnam is rapidly growing more powerful and this causes China some concern, according to the scholars. Chinese scholars and policy makers are watching the improvement in United States-Vietnam ties closely, Zhai said, noting that there is a major debate about how quickly those ties will improve. China sees more room for Vietnam to play an active role in the region, but Zhai said that Beijing will be concerned if Washington's ties with Hanoi expand too

rapidly.

Laos

¶12. (C) Laos ranks near the bottom of most development scales, Zhai said, but President Hu Jintao's visit to Vientiane last year was part of the "democratization" of Chinese foreign policy, showing that large and small countries play equally important roles in the international community.

¶13. (U) DAS John cleared this cable.
RANDT

<http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2007/03/07BEIJING1518.html>