

Viewing cable 07BEIJING7197, VFM WANG YI BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON BURMA VISIT;

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07BEIJING7197	2007-11-21 10:47	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beijing

VZCZCXRO2194

OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHGH RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHVC

DE RUEHBJ #7197/01 3251047

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3589

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIJING 007197

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DEPARTMENT FOR IO/UNP, EAP/MLS, EAP/CM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2027

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: VFM WANG YI BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON BURMA VISIT;

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION EFFORT IS "DOMESTIC AFFAIR"

REF: EAP/CM - EMBASSY EMAIL (11/21/07)

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr., Reasons 1.

4 (b/d).

1. (C) Summary: Briefing the Ambassador on his recent trip to Burma, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the ongoing "political reconciliation and democratic process" are the domestic affairs of Burma and should therefore be addressed by the Burmese Government and people themselves. The international community could be of assistance, but otherwise should not interfere. VFM Wang said Burmese leaders described the ongoing dialogue with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as "still in the confidence-building period, clarifying misunderstandings and misgivings." ASSK, the Burmese leaders complained, is "stubborn," "feels she is always right and everyone else is always wrong," and is "hard to talk to." VFM Wang also reported that Burmese leaders expressed eagerness to resume bilateral dialogue with the United States; Wang asked pointedly about U.S. willingness. Drawing upon ref email points, the Ambassador urged China to use its influence with the regime to promote genuine dialogue, which would require the release of opposition leaders from arrest and detention. End Summary.

A "domestic affair"

12. (C) Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi on November 21 briefed the Ambassador on the VFM's November 14-16 visit to Burma in his "one-time" capacity as the Chinese Government's Special Envoy to Burma. VFM Wang stated that purpose of his visit was to learn about the domestic situation in Burma and recent developments. In explaining the context of his visit, VFM Wang emphasized that the ongoing political reconciliation and democratic process are the domestic affairs of Burma and should therefore be addressed by the Burmese Government and people themselves. Wang stated that the Burma situation is different than that of North Korea and Iran because it does not affect international peace and stability and, therefore, the international community should not interfere. That said, if outside countries respect Burmese sovereignty, perhaps they could be of assistance.

13. (C) VFM Wang said that during his visit he met with Senior General Than Shwe in the presence of other key Burmese Government leaders, as well as with the Minister of Information Kyaw Hsan, Foreign Minister Nyan Win, and Minister of Labor Aung Kyi, who is also the Liaison Minister to Aung San Suu Kyi. VFM Wang told Burmese leaders that the Chinese Government appreciates the positive steps initiated by the Burmese Government to stabilize the situation in Burma. VFM Wang commented that these efforts responded to concerns of the international community and helped restore domestic stability. VFM Wang observed that both the Burmese Government and democratic opposition offered positive messages about participating in a dialogue, and the Chinese Government encourages Burma to keep positive momentum for that dialogue.

14. (C) The Chinese fully recognize the "good offices" mission of UN Special Envoy Gambari, Wang stated, and he expressed hope to Burmese Government leaders that Burma will also increase exchanges with its neighbors, particularly SEAN.

China expects Burma to accelerate "road map"

15. (C) VFM Wang expressed the Chinese Government expectation that Burma will accelerate the seven-step "road map" process, complete "a transition" at an early date and achieve long-term, domestic stability. VFM Wang further advised Burmese Government officials to improve the economic development and livelihood of the Burmese people.

Burmese on national reconciliation and ASSK dialogue

16. (C) For their part, Burmese Government officials, affirming that they "attach great importance to Chinese views and proposals," briefed VFM Wang on the situation in Burma. Wang stated that Burmese officials described Burma as a multi-ethnic country containing over 100 ethnic groups. His Burmese interlocutors "complained," Wang said, about the

system of British colonial rule whereby different ethnic groups were governed under different administrative systems. The result, according to Burmese officials, was ethnic separation and inter-ethnic antagonism. Because of ethnic

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tensions, the Burmese Government's top priority is to restore national unity and solidarity.

17. (C) Burmese officials told VFM Wang that Burma remains committed to the seven-step "road map" and that three steps of the "road map" have been completed. A drafting committee for the new constitution has been formed and will begin its work December 3. The remaining steps include the referendum on the constitution, a general election, an election of new leaders in parliament, and the achievement of a peaceful, modern and democratic Burma with good borders.

18. (C) VFM Wang said the Burmese Government has displayed a readiness to restart a dialogue with opposition leaders as evidenced by Minister of Labor Aung Kyi's recent meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi. Burmese officials told Wang that the dialogue is "still in the confidence-building period, clarifying misunderstandings and misgivings."

19. (C) VFM reported that Burmese leaders complained about Aung San Suu Kyi, saying she is "stubborn" and that "she feels she is always right and everyone else is always wrong" and therefore is "hard to talk to." Burmese officials commented that "Burma is a Buddhist country, and only the Buddha is always right." They stated that while Aung San Suu Kyi expressed a willingness to engage in dialogue, she also gave signs that she wishes to represent Burma's ethnic minority groups. Burmese officials, VFM Wang stated, believe that Aung San Suu Kyi has a "second agenda," which is an attempt to set the ethnic groups, particularly those marginalized through the "road map" process, against the government.

10. (C) Senior General Than Shwe and other leaders told VFM Wang that despite these difficulties, they believed that as long as Aung San Suu Kyi had the appropriate attitude, the dialogue would make progress.

11. (C) Burmese Government officials also said that the guiding principles for drafting a constitution have been adopted at the National Convention. Reconsidering those principles will "cause a new round of rivalry between the ethnic groups and the government," and, therefore, Burmese officials will not revisit this issue.

12. (C) Burmese officials offered that the opposition could take part in the "road map" by expressing support for or opposition to articles under consideration for the new constitution. The opposition could also start political parties to take part in the elections.

¶13. (C) VFM Wang stated that Burmese officials noted that in respect to the views of the UN and China, they have cooperated with UN Special Envoy Gambari. However, they complained that after each of Gambari's visits, international pressure on the regime has only increased.

U.S.-Burma dialogue

¶14. (C) VFM Wang noted that during Special Envoy Gambari's visit to Beijing, Gambari asked the Chinese to encourage a restart of the U.S.-Burma bilateral dialogue. In probing Burmese leaders on their attitudes towards the United States, VFM Wang stated that Senior General Than Shwe described the United States as a "great power" and that Burma does not wish to antagonize nor be the enemy of the United States. He stated that Than Shwe agreed that VFM Wang could convey to the USG Burma's readiness to restart a bilateral dialogue. At the close of the meeting, Wang pointedly asked about U.S. willingness to restart bilateral dialogue with Burma. The Ambassador promised to report the query for Washington consideration.

Impressions

¶15. (C) Noting his visit to Burma was his first in more than three years, VFM Wang shared five impressions from his recent visit. First, the domestic situation had returned to stability since the August and September turbulence. Western sanctions hurt Burma's economy, but he still saw progress since his last visit. Second, Burma's "special national conditions," by which he meant the relationship between the government and ethnic minority groups, continued to be an important factor. While formally the ethnic groups and the government had reconciled, the groups maintain their arms, so the military will continue to play an indispensable role. Third, a process is needed to promote domestic

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reconciliation. The United States holds differing views regarding the adequacy of the "road map", but in Wang's view the "road map" serves as a better basis for democratic development than no "road map." The ASSK-Government dialogue may not be completely smooth, but it could lead to progress. The international community should entrust the Burmese people and government to solve their own problems.

¶16. (C) Fourth, the international community should help in a positive, constructive way, not push sanctions. Burmese leaders told VFM Wang that the Burmese people suffer under sanctions. "When basic needs cannot be met," they said, "how can we talk about democracy?" Fifth, like the rest of the international community, China wants Burma to speed up domestic reconciliation and the democratic process. However, given that these are "internal affairs," China is not in

favor of involving the UN Security Council on the Burma issue, and not supportive of sanctions. VFM Wang added that neighboring countries "share this view." China has a 2200-kilometer border with Burma, and 2.5 million ethnic Chinese reside in Burma, so China has "major interests" in Burma and does not wish to see chaos and turmoil. China opposes "external forces" changing Burma, he added. China wishes to remain in contact with the United States on the situation in Burma and stands ready to serve as a bridge between Burma and the United States.

Ambassador responds

¶17. (C) The Ambassador thanked VFM Wang for the read-out and promised to convey the information to Washington. He noted U.S. agreement with Wang's statement that Burma should speed up its national reconciliation efforts and transition to democracy, but stressed the need for concrete signs of progress. The United States did not agree, however, that the Burmese regime's violent suppression of peacefully demonstrating monks was simply an internal affair of Burma; rather it was clearly a significant matter of international concern.

¶18. (C) The Ambassador drew upon ref email points to:

- express disappointment that UN Special Envoy Gambari's briefing to the ASEAN and East Asia Summits had been obstructed;

- express strong U.S. support for ASSK's stated desire to begin a "meaningful and time-bound" dialogue with the regime;

- note U.S. skepticism that such a dialogue could occur with ASSK and other opposition leaders under arrest or detention;

- urge the PRC to use its influence with the regime to promote a genuine dialogue with democratic and ethnic minority groups;

- express concern that the "road map" process might move forward without ASSK or democratic and ethnic minority group participation; and

- point out that the regime's current policies make instability, not stability, more likely.

¶19. (C) VFM Wang responded that China had not wanted the turmoil and confrontations of August and September. The good news is that the Burmese Government sees the seriousness of the situation and has taken positive steps, such as the release of the vast majority of detainees. Wang noted that Burmese leaders told him some of the protesting monks were "fake" and some were persons with criminal records. The situation is better now and the society more stable. Burmese military leaders, VFM Wang claimed, are committed to returning government to civilian rule and taking off their

uniforms, so the international community should be encouraging rather than threatening. Talk of "regime change" only makes them nervous, VFM Wang added.

¶20. (C) The "road map" may not be perfect, VFM Wang continued, but it is a process worked out with wide participation in Burma, including by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy until it withdrew. The process may not have been democratic or representative of all views, but at least it is a process. Wang acknowledged it is unclear whether Aung San Suu Kyi can engage in meaningful dialogue while under house arrest, but the dialogue is continuing, so clearly she is adapting.

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¶21. (C) Regarding the Gambari mission to the ASEAN and East Asia Summits, Wang said China hopes ASEAN will play a role in the Burma question, but Singapore, in its haste to arrange a Gambari briefing, did not consult with Burma. As ASEAN works on a consensus basis, such a move was taboo. At the East Asia Summit, the Australians, "always eager to help whether others are ready to accept their help or not," put forward a three-part proposal calling for a boycott, a Foreign Ministers meeting and a strong statement criticizing Burma. This proposal made participating states unhappy. Asian countries, Wang said, prefer to accommodate the comfort levels of all participants, not play up issues. In the end, Wang offered, the actual outcome is good. A critical presentation on Burma by Gambari might have made it difficult for him to visit Burma again. The Australian proposal also might have made matters worse.

Special Envoy mission a one-off event

¶22. (C) Asked whether his trip to Burma as Special Envoy was a one-time designation or indicative of an ongoing role, VFM Wang said it was a one-time designation. Of course, if instructed to play the role again, he would. Asked if he had requested to meet with opposition representatives, VFM Wang said he did not, as such a request would have hindered his ability to meet with Burmese Government leaders.

RANDT

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