

Viewing cable 08BEIJING125, MFA AND SCHOLARS DESCRIBE CHINA'S EFFORTS ON BURMA

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/CM, EAP/MLS, P, DRL

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SUBJECT: MFA AND SCHOLARS DESCRIBE CHINA'S EFFORTS ON BURMA

REF: 07 BEIJING 7197

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

1. (C) Summary: China has made great efforts to improve the situation in Burma, stretching the boundaries of its policy of non-interference, MFA and Chinese think tank interlocutors told HFAC and SFRC staff members January 10-11. MFA says China is contemplating next steps to address the current "standstill" in Burma, but Chinese scholars said domestic events and other international issues will draw China's attention away from Burma. MFA officials and the scholars continue to encourage direct talks between the United States and the Burmese regime. End summary.

2. (SBU) MFA Asia Department Counselor Yang Jian and Ministry of State Security-affiliated China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) Asia scholars Zhai Kun and Zhang Xuegang met HFAC professional staff members Eric Richardson and Dennis Halpin and SFRC professional staff member Frank Januzzi on January 10-11.

"Bold Measures" Necessary to Prevent Further Turmoil

3. (C) Counselor Yang Jian told the HFAC and SFRC staff members January 11 that China would like to see the Burmese Government take "bold measures" to improve the livelihood of the Burmese people and achieve national reconciliation through dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and democracy supporters as well as ethnic minority groups. Counselor Yang stated that the Chinese accept the Burmese regime's so-called "roadmap" to democracy as the best route to democracy and national reconciliation in Burma. CICIR scholar Zhai said the Burmese government exerts control over society only on the surface and the potential for "lots of trouble" persists. Zhai said the regime's inept handling of the economy costs it legitimacy. Even if the Burmese generals and Aung San Suu Kyi undertook a healthy

dialogue, economic problems could throw the country into turmoil.

Encouraging Signs but Current Standstill

14. (C) Yang said despite the potential for further trouble, the Chinese government is encouraged by a number of developments since the disturbances in August and September, including the visits of UN Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari, the appointment of Labor Minister Aung Kyi (who Yang believes is "close to the core" of the Burmese regime) as a liaison with Aung San Suu Kyi, and the release of detainees. Yang said that during VFM Wang Yi's November 2007 visit to Burma (reftel), Wang shared with senior Burmese leaders China's analysis, again suggesting more attention to the livelihood of the Burmese people, dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, and more interaction with ASEAN. Yang said that, based on the regime's positive language about the dialogue, China had been optimistic it would succeed. In light of the current "standstill" in Burma, however, China is thinking about what other steps now to take with the regime.

China's "Extraordinary" Efforts

15. (C) Yang recounted China's efforts to improve the situation in Burma. She said that after China and Russia in January 2007 vetoed a UN Security Council resolution condemning Burma, State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan traveled to Burma in February to hold "extraordinary" discussions with the regime's senior leaders. Tang suggested that Senior General Than Shwe and other Burmese leaders improve Burma's domestic and international situation. Yang said lower level Burmese officials, hesitant to approach senior leaders with critical advice, were pleased with China's approach to Than Shwe.

16. (C) Scholars Zhai Kun and Zhang Xuegang January 10 separately echoed the view that China is making great efforts to influence Burma positively while adhering to its policy of non-interference. Zhai said China has delivered indirect but clear signals to Asian countries and the United States on the need for greater openness in Burma. Zhai highlighted Premier Wen Jiabao's November 19 speech at the National University of Singapore. (Note: Wen's speech included the following: "Only an open and inclusive nation can be strong and

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prosperous; cutting off contacts with the outside world can make a country backward.")

Direct U.S.-Burma Dialogue

17. (C) During the Wang Yi visit, Burmese leaders expressed interest in more discussions with the United States. Noting that USG officials have suggested Burmese officials contact our Embassy in Rangoon, Yang said Burma preferred the format of the June 2007 talks in Beijing. China views the June meetings between the Burmese delegation and State Department officials as a "bilateral confidence building measure," Yang said.

Continued Support for Gambari

18. (C) Yang said China will continue to support UN Special Advisor Gambari's mission, though she noted that the Burmese Government is unhappy with Gambari because Burmese leaders believe they followed Gambari's suggestions during his first visit but then received only further opprobrium. Yang said Burmese leaders are unhappy about the UN "Group of Friends" on Burma. While China is open to multilateral means to address the situation in Burma, China believes Burma's acceptance of these means is the key to success. For example, China would like ASEAN to play a more constructive role, Yang said, but ASEAN is divided over how to address Burma. Older ASEAN member countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, favor a hard-line approach. Newer ASEAN members, such as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, support a more moderate stance towards Burma.

No Sanctions

19. (C) MFA's Yang reiterated that China remains opposed to additional sanctions,

which she said will not spur further dialogue, but instead make the regime look further inward and give it an excuse for hard-line policies. Despite China's opposition to sanctions, Yang stressed that the United States and China have similar goals for Burma, including stability, democracy and development. Therefore, China and the United States should show unity, particularly in the UN, in addressing the situation in Burma. CICIR scholar Zhai said that because China foremost values stability in Burma, China does not wish to see a sudden change in the Burmese regime. In that light, China fears the pressure of more sanctions may only bring further civil unrest.

China's attention drawn away from Burma

¶10. (C) CICIR's Zhai said China would like to see ASEAN play a larger role on Burma partly because domestic events in China, including the National People's Congress in March and the Olympics in August, are increasingly consuming China's attention. Zhai said recent protests in Vietnam over the South China Sea and the turmoil in Pakistan have also drawn China's and international attention away from Burma.

Including democracy supporters slows down roadmap

¶11. (C) Zhai said that including the democratic opposition and ethnic groups in the so-called roadmap to democracy at this stage would slow down the process, yet Zhai asserted that "if Senior General Than Shwe is rational," he will include the democratic opposition to increase the legitimacy of the current regime.

USG should assure safe future for Burmese generals

¶12. (C) CICIR's Zhang said that the United States should "play two hands" with the Burmese Government. Zhang said the United States has been sufficiently critical of the regime and now should send messages, via China if necessary, to reassure Burmese military leaders that their personal security would not be imperiled in a democratic transition. Zhang said that guaranteeing the safe future of the current military leadership is the key to "unlocking the deadlock."

¶13. (U) HFAC and SFRC staff members did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

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