

American

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“Profound” U.S. Disappointment with Burmese Junta, Envoy Says

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The senior U.S. envoy to East Asia warned Burma’s ruling military junta that upcoming elections will lack international legitimacy, urging the junta to open up the election process in the time remaining before the vote, and praised the leadership of the now disbanded National League for Democracy (NLD) for its two decades of struggle on behalf of the Burmese people.

Speaking in a May 10 press release from Rangoon, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell said he had met with Burmese government ministers, ethnic and political leaders outside the government, and diplomatic and nongovernmental organization leaders during his two-day visit to the country.

“The key objective of my trip to Burma was to underscore the purposes and principles of our engagement, and to lay out the reasons for our profound disappointment in what we have witnessed to date,” Campbell said.

He said he had outlined a U.S. proposal for “a credible dialogue among all stakeholders” to Burmese senior leaders, but that the military regime had decided to unilaterally move ahead with an election at an as-yet unspecified date in 2010 without consulting key stakeholders in the country.

“As a direct result, what we have seen to date leads us to believe that these elections will lack international legitimacy. We urge the regime to take immediate steps to open the process in the time remaining before the elections,” Campbell said.

The Burmese regime has “detained many of Burma’s brightest and most patriotic citizens” who could contribute toward a more prosperous future for the country, and has dispersed them to remote locations around the country “where the generals hope they will be forgotten. They are not,” he said.

The assistant secretary met with NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party won Burma’s previous elections in 1990. She was prevented from taking power and has served much of the past 20 years under house arrest. Campbell said he was moved by her commitment to the Burmese people and “a more just and benevolent” country. “It is simply tragic that Burma’s generals have rebuffed her countless appeals to work together to find a peaceable solution for a more prosperous future,” he said.

Campbell praised the NLD, which decided to disband May 7 after the junta’s election laws prevented Suu Kyi and thousands of other pro-democracy dissenters from participating.

“Although having been denied a legal framework in which to operate by the regime’s own flawed rules, its leadership remains committed to working on behalf of and for the Burmese people,” he said. “The United States will continue to stand behind all those working to support Burma’s people, including the National League for Democracy, however it may constitute itself in the future.”

He said he understood the difficulty of the decisions Burmese political parties have had to make about participating in the elections, and said the United States respects their choices.

Ahead of the elections, the regime has also increased pressure on Burmese ethnic groups, forcing many innocent civilians to flee, he said.

“Burma cannot move forward while the government itself persists in launching attacks against its own people to force compliance with a proposal its ethnic groups cannot accept. The very stability the regime seeks will continue to be elusive until a peaceable solution can be found through dialogue,” Campbell said.

The Obama administration has decided to pursue a policy of “pragmatic engagement” with the regime, having determined after an extensive review that neither sanctions nor engagement pursued in isolation has influenced the military junta to change its practices. Campbell said the United States has approached its engagement “with goodwill,” but has not lifted economic sanctions. They remain in place due to continued human rights and democracy concerns.

Campbell said that along with pressing the Burmese leadership to improve prosperity, human rights, and the democratic participation of its people, the Obama administration has been urging it to fully comply with U.N. Security Council Resolution 1874, which imposes economic sanctions on North Korea in response to its nuclear activities.

The United States has questioned Burma’s commitment to the resolution. Campbell urged Burma’s leadership to establish a “transparent process” to assure the international community that it is abiding by its commitments. “Without such a process, the United States maintains the right to take independent action within the relevant frameworks established by the international community,” Campbell said.

Assistant Secretary Campbell's Remarks on Visit to Burma

Campbell consults Burmese leaders, underscores purpose, principles of trip

U.S. Department of State
Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell
Rangoon, Burma
May 10, 2010

I have just completed my second trip to Burma. During my two-day trip, I met with a wide variety of stakeholders inside the country. In Nay Pyi Taw, I held consultations with the Minister of Science and Technology, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Information and the Spokes Authoritative Team, the Union Election Commission, the Labor Minister, and the head of the USDA.

In Rangoon, I met with a number of community leaders of ethnic minority groups, the National League for Democracy, key members of the diplomatic corps, NGOs, a variety of political players, and Aung San Suu Kyi.

This trip comes as part of a process the Obama Administration launched last year. In February 2009, Secretary Clinton announced that we would undertake a review of our Burma policy, stating clearly that neither sanctions nor engagement, when implemented alone, had succeeded in influencing Burma's generals. Over the course of the seven months of the policy review, we consulted widely and deliberately in order to seek the best ideas from around the world and at home. The result of that extensive review was to launch a policy of pragmatic engagement with Burma's leadership. We have engaged in senior-level dialogue with the regime. Yet we have not lifted sanctions, nor have we abandoned our commitment to the people of Burma. Our strategic goal for Burma remains unchanged: we wish to see a more prosperous, democratic Burma that lives in peace with its people and with its neighbors. The United States has approached this engagement with goodwill. We continue to consult and coordinate closely with key countries, including those within ASEAN, the European Union, with India, Japan, China and others, and a number of players outside governments seeking a more positive future in Burma.

The key objective of my trip to Burma was to underscore the purposes and principles of our engagement, and to lay out the reasons for our profound disappointment in what we have witnessed to date.

During various discussions with Burma's senior leadership, we have outlined a proposal for a credible dialogue among all stakeholders in Burma that would

allow all sides to enter into such a dialogue with dignity. Unfortunately, the regime has chosen to move ahead unilaterally – without consultation from key stakeholders – towards elections planned for this year. As a direct result, what we have seen to date leads us to believe that these elections will lack international legitimacy. We urge the regime to take immediate steps to open the process in the time remaining before the elections.

We have also asked for greater respect for human rights and the release of political prisoners. The regime has detained many of Burma's brightest and most patriotic citizens, citizens that could contribute greatly to ensuring a more prosperous future for their country. Instead the regime has silenced them, dispersing them to remote locations throughout the country where the generals hope they will be forgotten. They are not.

We have raised our persistent concerns about the increasing tensions between Burma's ethnic minorities and the central government that have resulted in violence along the country's borders. The regime has ratcheted up the pressure on Burma's ethnic groups in preparation for this year's elections, forcing countless innocent civilians to flee. Burma cannot move forward while the government itself persists in launching attacks against its own people to force compliance with a proposal its ethnic groups cannot accept. The very stability the regime seeks will continue to be elusive until a peaceable solution can be found through dialogue.

Finally, we have urged Burma's senior leadership to abide by its own commitment to fully comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1874. Recent developments call into question that commitment. I have asked the Burmese leadership to work with the United States and others to put into place a transparent process to assure the international community that Burma is abiding by its international commitments. Without such a process, the United States maintains the right to take independent action within the relevant frameworks established by the international community.

Although we are profoundly disappointed by the response of the Burmese leadership, I remain inspired by those outside the government with whom I met. I admire the resolve of Burma's ethnic groups that wish to live in peace and to have a representative stake in the future of their own country. I respect the difficult decision Burma's political parties have taken regarding the upcoming elections. Some have decided to participate, some will not. It is the right of a free people to make those decisions for themselves, and the United States respects their decisions.

I would like to take a moment to applaud the leaders of the National League for Democracy – a political party that

has struggled for more than two decades to improve the lives of the Burmese people – with whom I held a lengthy meeting. Although having been denied a legal framework in which to operate by the regime’s own flawed rules, its leadership remains committed to working on behalf of and for the Burmese people. The United States will continue to stand behind all those working to support Burma’s people, including the National League for Democracy, however it may constitute itself in the future.

Finally, I was again moved by the perseverance and the commitment Aung San Suu Kyi has shown to the cause of a more just and benevolent Burma and to the Burmese people themselves. She has demonstrated compassion and tolerance for her captors in the face of repeated indignities. It is simply tragic that Burma’s generals have rebuffed her countless appeals to work together to find a peaceable solution for a more prosperous future. The strength and resilience of those who struggle continue to inspire us. The United States stands by the Burmese people in their desire for a more democratic, prosperous, and peaceful nation.

Ambassador Expects Improved U.S.-Afghan Alignment After Talks

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – As Afghan President Hamid Karzai and his delegation of ministers and senior officials prepare to meet their U.S. counterparts, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan says the two governments have “never been better aligned and had such seriousness of purpose in trying to reach our common objectives” of improving Afghanistan’s security, governance and economic development.

Speaking at the White House with General Stanley McChrystal, who commands the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Afghanistan, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry said there will be “serious dialogues in the days ahead” between leaders from both countries, acknowledging that there are “daunting challenges” to reaching their shared objectives.

“Our two governments will frankly address these challenges in the next few days, with an eye on developing common solutions and with confidence that we have now the necessary resources, the appropriate strategy and the national will to make continued progress,” Eikenberry said.

“Over the next several days, I think we're going to emerge with even better alignment,” he said.

The ambassador praised President Karzai’s recent moves to carry out his administration’s commitments to governance reform, including appointing a panel of officials to oversee the September parliamentary election, and giving new powers to the High Office of Oversight, which is the Afghan government’s chief anti-corruption body.

The office now can “act with more autonomy,” Eikenberry said, adding, “We’ve recently seen high-profile public corruption trials taking place in Kabul.”

These are “promising signs,” but more remains to be done, and ultimately the customer that must be satisfied is the Afghan people, who have placed the issue of good governance high on their agenda, the ambassador said.

General McChrystal said ISAF has placed its strategic priority on the development of Afghanistan’s national army and police forces, which will be playing a greater role in operations and will ultimately be responsible for securing the country. He said ISAF’s operational priority currently is to clear southern Afghanistan of insurgents, specifically in Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

Afghan and international forces have been working on a renewed effort to secure central Helmand since February and will expand to Kandahar as additional forces arrive, he said.

“This effort is being led by the Afghans and will focus on the complex political and governance aspects of Kandahar. These dimensions are at the heart of the problem, and their solution will ultimately be decisive,” McChrystal said.

“Our efforts in Afghanistan are ultimately about changing the perceptions of people. Afghans long impacted by conflict and struggle believe more of what they see than what they hear. Only when they experience security from coercion, and only when they benefit from better governance, will they begin to believe in the possibilities of the future,” he said, warning that the process will take time and there will be increased violence as it proceeds.

The State Department’s assistant secretary for public affairs, P.J. Crowley, said May 10 that the four-day visit by Karzai and his delegation will formally begin with a May 10 dinner with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and General James Jones, who serves as President Obama’s national security adviser.

Crowley said Secretary Clinton will host a series of roundtable meetings between the Afghan leaders and their U.S. counterparts at the State Department May 11.

Obama administration officials said previously that President Karzai and President Obama will hold three hours of talks at the White House May 12, and the Afghan delegation will also have an opportunity to meet with U.S. congressional and policy research organization specialists May 13.

Mideast Peace Talks Are Serious, Wide-Ranging

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have engaged in “serious and wide-ranging” indirect talks with U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell in a process designed to resolve critical issues so that negotiators eventually can begin face-to-face negotiations, State Department spokesman Philip Crowley says.

“Both parties are taking some steps to help create an atmosphere that is conducive to successful talks, including President Abbas’ statement that he will work against incitement of any sort and Prime Minister Netanyahu’s statement that there will be no construction at the Ramat Shlomo project for two years,” Crowley said in a prepared statement released May 9 in Washington. Crowley was referring to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“They are both trying to move forward in difficult circumstances and we commend them for that,” Crowley added.

Mitchell, who returns to the region during the week of May 10 for more talks, met first with Israeli negotiators in Jerusalem before heading to the West Bank town of Ramallah for talks with Palestinian officials. During his meetings, he met separately with Abbas and Netanyahu, Crowley said.

“We have received commitments from both sides, and we have made assurances to both sides, that are enabling us to move forward,” Crowley said. “The full scope of these discussions will remain private.”

Mitchell met with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton May 10 before preparing to return to the region.

“As both parties know, if either takes significant actions during the proximity talks that we judge would seriously undermine trust, we will respond to hold them accountable and ensure that negotiations continue,” Crowley’s statement said.

Crowley, the assistant secretary of state for public affairs, said Mitchell during his meetings emphasized the importance of making progress to enable the parties to move to direct negotiations that will result in a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For a brief period in March, former Senator Mitchell, the U.S. special envoy for Middle East peace, brokered an agreement between Palestinians and Israelis to begin indirect talks, a phased approach to full resumption of negotiations. But those talks were stalled almost as quickly as they were announced after the Israelis announced new settlement construction of 1,600 homes in East Jerusalem.

The United States, working with the Quartet for Middle East Peace — which is the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and Russia — has supported and promoted a two-state solution to the current Arab-Israeli conflict under which Israel and a new Palestinian state live at peace side by side.

The meetings mark the first return to negotiations in 17 months and are part of a four-month period of indirect negotiations called “proximity talks.” Some of the critical issues to be resolved include the status of Jerusalem, the return of Palestinian refugees and what the final borders of a Palestinian state will be.

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