

American

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President Obama, China's President to Hold Major Talks During State Visit

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington – President Obama and President Hu Jintao of China will discuss global and regional security concerns, economic and trade issues, human rights and related bilateral issues during a one-day state visit January 19 at the White House.

This will be the eighth face-to-face meeting between Obama and Hu, says a senior White House official, and the president also has met three times with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. These meetings reflect a pace and intensity of engagement with Chinese leaders that illustrates the depth, breadth and importance of the U.S.-China relationship, he added.

The official said the first part of the talks between the two world leaders will focus on the U.S.-China relationship – where there is cooperation and where there isn't, and where the relationship will develop over the next 10, 15 and 20 years. These talks are related to the U.S. presence in East Asia as well as China.

"We are absolutely determined ... to meet our commitments and obligations to the countries in the region; to be a reliable partner; to have the resources [present]; to be able to support our obligations and relationships with those countries," he said. "We are an important source of security and balance in that region."

"We are engaged in how to best pursue a positive, cooperative and contemplative relationship with China, pursuing our interests and pursuing interests we think are in the interest of the globe on so-called cross-cutting issues," he said.

North Korea and its recent provocations will lead talks on security and political issues, the official said. The United States and China have worked on various sanctions regimes on North Korea, and have been working closely on encouraging the North Korean regime to cease provocations while trying to keep things in a diplomatic framework.

A second significant security issue will be Iran's nuclear weapons development program, the official said. The United States and China have worked closely on sanctions regimes against Iran to move it away from a weapons development program, he said.

The Chinese have also worked closely on Sudan and the recent Southern Sudan referendum, which was part of the larger Comprehensive Peace Agreement. "The Chinese

had referendum observers, and we continue to talk to the Chinese about how to handle the events after the North-South referendum," the official added.

In addition, the United States and China have been working closely to restore military-to-military relations. Defense Secretary Robert Gates completed a five-day visit to China, Japan and South Korea January 9-14, and spent a significant amount of time with Chinese military and defense leaders.

"We have re-established that conversation at the highest level, and we'll continue to work with the Chinese towards establishing a more regular dialogue on [military-to-military] relations," the official said.

President Hu, in answering questions sent from the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal, said both nations stand to gain from a sound relationship and lose from confrontation.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said at the same press briefing that trade and export concerns will be a significant part of the discussions. Coupled with that will be concerns about China's currency valuation. Geithner said that China's currency – the yuan – is still undervalued, and further adjustments will be necessary.

Hu arrives on the evening of January 18 in Washington and will be greeted by Vice President Biden and a U.S. delegation before traveling to the White House for a private dinner with President Obama, the White House official told reporters at a January 14 briefing. On January 19, Hu will be received at the White House in the morning, followed by a small meeting between the two leaders in the Oval Office and then an expanded meeting after that.

Obama and Hu will then attend a meeting with U.S. and Chinese business leaders in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, which is adjacent to the White House.

Hu will also meet with members of the U.S. Congress and make a speech to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, the U.S.-China Business Council and several other organizations, the official said. Hu will stop in Chicago before returning to China.

Conduct of Sudan Referendum Inspiring, Obama Says

Washington – President Obama says the peaceful and orderly conduct of Southern Sudan's weeklong referendum on self-determination was "an inspiration to the world." Obama also commended the voters as well as Southern Sudanese institutions and international organizations for their work in overseeing a process that most international observers have declared to be credible.

"The sight of so many Sudanese casting their votes in a peaceful and orderly fashion was an inspiration to the world and a tribute to the determination of the people and leaders of south Sudan to forge a better future," Obama said in a January 16 statement.

The president congratulated the Sudanese people and urged them to continue to show restraint as northern and southern Sudanese officials work to complete the implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

"The United States will continue to assist the parties amid the tough challenges and historic opportunities that lie ahead," Obama said.

The January 9-15 vote could lead to the partition of Sudan by establishing an independent state in the south. The Sudanese government in Khartoum has said it will accept the outcome of the vote. Official results are not expected to be released until sometime in February.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a January 17 statement that the vote was "a historic step" toward the full implementation of the CPA.

"The United States commends the millions of Southern Sudanese people who participated in this historic process, and applauds both northern and southern leaders for creating conditions that allowed voters to cast their ballots freely and without fear, intimidation, or coercion," Clinton said.

She also said the success of the process is a credit to the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission, the Southern Sudan Referendum Bureau and the more than 40 countries and international organizations that assisted and oversaw the process.

"As we await the official results of the referendum, we reaffirm our commitment to remain a steadfast partner to both parties as they continue to work toward full implementation of the CPA and to develop their post-CPA relationship," she said.

Northern and Southern Sudanese can forge a "durable peace" and build positive relationships with the international community, Clinton said, adding that she hopes that both sides will "seize this moment."

At the United Nations Security Council in New York, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice reported positive preliminary reports from election observers, including the Secretary-General's Referenda Monitoring Panel, the European Union, The Carter Center, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Arab League and the African Union, which

called the referendum "free, fair, and credible."

In her January 18 remarks, Rice said there is a "challenging and promising road ahead" for Sudan. She urged both sides to resume negotiations on outstanding CPA issues such as the future of the Abyei region, border demarcation, citizenship and the sharing of natural resources and debt.

Rice also expressed concern over violence that occurred in Abyei during the referendum and said the security forces of the Sudanese government in Khartoum had also arrested, detained and harassed human rights activists and journalists.

"We urge council members to join us in calling on the government of Sudan to release those who have been imprisoned unjustly, including those jailed for exercising such basic rights as freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly," Rice said.

The unity of the U.N. Security Council on Sudan has "gone a long ways towards supporting the parties as they have stayed on the path of peace," she said.

The council should continue monitoring implementation of the CPA, Rice said.

"As progress is made, we should welcome it and offer continued encouragement. But, just as importantly, we need to be prepared to insist upon and to support full and final implementation of the CPA on such issues as protection of minorities and rejection of proxy militias, and other threats to peace and security in Sudan," she said.

U.S. Calls on Tunisian Interim Government to Meet Popular Demands

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The State Department says it hopes that Tunisia's interim leadership will chart a new, more democratic course for their country in the wake of former President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali's departure after holding power for more than 20 years.

"There is change under way" in Tunisia that needs to broaden and deepen, State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley told reporters January 18. "The government needs to find ways to engage elements of Tunisian society and respond to what it hears."

Ben Ali's January 14 departure came after a month of unrest, reportedly sparked on December 17, 2010, when a young man set himself on fire in protest after local officials in the town of Sidi Bouzid prevented him from

selling vegetables on the street.

On January 17, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi announced an interim coalition government and named Tunisian parliamentary leader Fouad Mabazza as the country's acting president.

The United States wants to see political reform occur in the region and to help governments create more political, social and economic opportunities for their people, Crowley said.

"There is a process under way inside Tunisia, and we will be watching and ... looking to see if there are ways in which we can provide support," he said.

"We want to see a free, fair, open, transparent political process. But the choice of who governs Tunisia in the future belongs to the people of Tunisia."

Crowley said the current period offers "an important opportunity for the government to meet the aspirations and demands of the Tunisian people," including "an end to violence by security forces against nonviolent civilians, truly free and fair elections, respect for basic human rights, including freedom of expression and assembly, and an accountable, transparent, just government."

He said the Obama administration hopes that the interim government takes the current opportunity to include "all peaceful and democratic forces" in Tunisia's political process through open and fair elections and allows an investigation into "the abuses of the past."

Through their protests, the Tunisian people are telling the interim leadership their collective desire for a "free, fair and credible election process," and Crowley said so far the steps the government has taken are "in the right direction."

He said the interim government has begun the process of reform by "opening up space for the media to actually report on what's going on," and by bringing opposition leaders into the government.

"But clearly a lot ... needs to be done," Crowley said. "We want to see an open process, significant dialogue between the government and ... the significant groups that want to play a role ... in Tunisia's future."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton telephoned Tunisian Foreign Minister Kamel Morjane January 16 to express her support for the Tunisian people "as they and their government go through a period of significant transition," according to a January 16 statement.

Clinton told Morjane that the Obama administration is

encouraged by remarks from both Prime Minister Ghannouchi and Interim President Mabazza in which they indicated "a willingness to work with Tunisians across the political spectrum and within civil society to build a truly representative government."

The secretary offered U.S. assistance in helping Tunisia meet its challenges and assured Morjane that "the United States will stand with Tunisia as it moves forward to address them," the statement said.

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