

RELEASE IN PART
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From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, March 30, 2012 2:25 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Meeting with Cui Tiankai

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----- Original Message -----

From: Martin Indyk [REDACTED] B6
Sent: Friday, March 30, 2012 12:47 PM
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Cc: Fuchs, Michael H; Strobe Talbott [REDACTED] >; Kenneth Lieberthal [REDACTED] >; Martin Indyk [REDACTED]
Subject: Meeting with Cui Tiankai

Ken Lieberthal and I met with Vice-Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai for two hours at the Foreign Ministry in Beijing on Tuesday, March 27. What follows are the highlights of an open and substantive exchange.

1. On Obama's "rebalancing" strategy: Cui thought that it was "sensible to do so." But he expressed skepticism that the U.S. would be able to shift its attention from the Middle East to Asia. He listed the following reasons:
-- the U.S. will still have a strategic interest in Israel and "if Israelis are worried you will be worried too."
-- the U.S. will still have an interest in stability to ensure the free flow of oil to its Asian and European allies.
-- to rebalance toward Asia would affect the calculations of America's key Arab allies -- would the U.S. be willing to lose influence with them?
-- in Asia, when people see the U.S. shifting its attention and resources they may become suspicious of American intentions.
-- there are so many uncertainties in the Greater Middle East -- Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan -- that it will be difficult to avoid paying it attention.

2. On the attitude of other Asian powers to U.S.-China relations: "They want us close enough so that each of them is comfortable and does not have to choose between us. If we are too far apart they will be torn. And if we are too close together they will be squeezed."

3. On high level U.S.-China dialogue:
-- There have been more frequent meetings but he fears that the mutual understanding is decreasing.
-- Tom Donilon hasn't visited China for two years. He promised to come but he never made the trip. Instead he has visited Saudi Arabia and Israel. "This shows that the Middle East is not more significant, but it is more urgent."
-- He hopes Secretary Clinton comes to Beijing again before the end of the year, noting that this would be her last substantive discussion with Deng Baiguo before they both retire. He thought that she and Deng should call on both sides to review the usefulness of the mechanisms they had put in place "and give us good advice on how to proceed in the future."
-- Perhaps the strategic and economic dialogues should be separated. There should be smaller group discussions; we should combine the formal with the informal.
-- We should discuss cybersecurity in the next round of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue and ensure that the military have more time to engage.
-- the three rounds of discussions with Kurt Campbell on Asia/Pacific issues have been useful.

4. On President Obama:

-- "The President has the right mix of idealism and realism but I'm not sure he understands the complexity of China today. It was easier before when we were all poor and we could agree to get rich together. Now we have strong interest groups and it's much harder to get consensus on reforms. Some of the very rich are resistant."

-- VP Xi told President Obama that China will continue the path of reform and peaceful development and that China wants the United States as a friend and a partner.

-- Reform and opening up will be the decisions of the Party Congress.

-- We need a better understanding from the President about our need to strike a balance within Chinese society.

Comment: This was my first meeting with Cui Tiankai. He's obviously super-intelligent, a quick study, and thinks conceptually, flexibly, and with considerable subtlety. He seemed to have all the time in the world, perhaps occasioned by the fact that his bosses were all in Seoul. He brought that up, noting that even though he had made all the preparations, President Hu had wanted to keep the delegation small and he had not made the cut. He seemed quite philosophical about his apparent loss of influence.

Martin

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