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SECTION 1 OF 2

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/***** THIS IS A COMBINED MESSAGE *****/

BODY

SUBJ: MYANMAR, THE UN, AND ASEAN - 008-08

1. THE FOLLOWING OPEN SOURCE REPORTING IS PROVIDED FOR YOUR

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INFORMATION:

2. MYANMAR, THE UN, AND ASEAN
HASEENAH KOYAKUTTY I NOVEMBER 16, 2007
EDITOR: EMILY SCHWARTZ GRECO

FOREIGN POLICY IN FOCUS

UNITED NATIONS ENVOY IBRAHIM GAMBARI'S LATEST ROUND OF INTENSE SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY SINCE SEPTEMBER'S "SAFFRON REVOLUTION" PRODUCED NO MAJOR BREAKTHROUGHS IN YANGON. IT MERELY CONFIRMED THE SUSPICIONS OF CLOSE MYANMAR WATCHERS THAT THE MILITARY JUNTA HAS NO INTENTIONS TO CHANGE ITS WAYS OR COMPROMISE WITH ANYONE.

THE REGIME, KNOWN OFFICIALLY AS THE STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (SPDC), MOVED TO EXPEL THE UN'S TOP RESIDENT DIPLOMAT CHARLES PETRIE EVEN BEFORE GAMBARI SET FOOT IN MYANMAR FOLLOWING HIS SIX-NATION TOUR FOR DIPLOMATIC CONSULTATIONS. (THE UN'S SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, PAULO SERGIO PINHEIRO, WHO HAS BEEN BARRED FROM MYANMAR SINCE 2003, HOWEVER, RETURNED THERE ON NOV. 11 AS SCHEDULED).

THE SPDC ALSO REJECTED GAMBARI'S OFFER OF TRIPARTITE TALKS BETWEEN THE UN, RULING JUNTA, AND OPPOSITION LEADER AUNG SAN SUU KYI. WORST OF ALL, GAMBARI WAS REBUFFED BY THE JUNTA LEADER SENIOR GENERAL THAN SHWE, WHO HAD KEPT GAMBARI WAITING FOR THREE DAYS DURING HIS PREVIOUS VISIT. THIS TIME, THE SELF-EFFACING DIPLOMAT ENDURED A SCOLDING BY INFORMATION MINISTER BRIGADIER GENERAL KYAW HSAN, WHO ACCUSED THE UN OF BEING PRO-WEST AND IN FAVOR OF THE SANCTIONS IMPOSED BY THE UNITED STATES, EUROPEAN UNION, AND AUSTRALIA.

ASEAN MEETINGS

MYANMAR'S GOVERNMENT IS COUNTING ON ITS ASEAN ALLIES TO SHORE UP SUPPORT AT THE UPCOMING ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) MEETINGS IN SINGAPORE. THE GOVERNMENT THREW OPEN ITS DOORS TO WELCOME ASEAN JOURNALISTS EARLIER THAN PLANNED. A GROUP OF 18 REPORTERS WENT ON A CHAPERONED MYANMAR JAUNT AND STOPPED-OVER AT NAYPITAW--THE FAIRY TALE CAPITAL CITY--IN THE HOPES THAT ASEAN WILL APPROVE OF THE REGIME'S VERSION OF "FLOURISHING DISCIPLINE." AND MYANMAR'S NEW PRIME MINISTER THEIN SEIN SOUGHT OUT FRIENDS IN SOCIALIST LAOS AND VIETNAM ON A RECENT VISIT BILLED BY THE JUNTA AS INTRODUCTORY COURTESY CALLS.

SINGAPORE, THE CURRENT ASEAN CHAIR, WILL HOST BOTH THEIN SEIN AND GAMBARI AT THE EAST ASIA SUMMIT ON NOVEMBER 21. BARRING LAST MINUTE

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CHANGES, IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE CRISIS BEGAN IN AUGUST THAT A SENIOR MYANMAR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WILL PARTICIPATE IN HIGHLEVEL TALKS WITH ALL MAJOR PLAYERS WITH A DIRECT STAKE IN RESOLVING IT. THE NEXT STEPS FORWARD COULD EMERGE FROM THESE MEETINGS EVEN THOUGH AMERICA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION ARE TECHNICALLY EXCLUDED FROM THE SUMMIT.

THE IMMEDIATE GOALS BY ALL THE INTERNATIONAL PARTIES CONCERNED CAN BE SUMMED UP AS THIS:

A GENUINE, BROAD-BASED AND SUBSTANTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE SPDC, AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY PARTY, AND ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS; REAL, VERIFIABLE PROGRESS TOWARD NATIONAL RECONCILIATION; AND A LIFTING OF RESTRICTIONS ON AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS. IN SHORT, THERE SHOULD BE NO RETURNING TO THE UNSUSTAINABLE STATUS QUO, AS GAMBARI PUT IT.
UN MAY BREAK DEADLOCK

WHETHER THE ONGOING DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS WILL EVENTUALLY YIELD A PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY AND CIVILIAN-LED RULE REMAINS TO BE SEEN. WHAT'S CRITICAL FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS TO BRAINSTORM STRATEGIES IN THE SAME COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT THAT RESULTED IN THE RECENT UNANIMOUS UN SECURITY COUNCIL STATEMENT DEPLORING THE MYANMAR GOVERNMENT'S VIOLENT RESPONSE TO PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS. IN HAVING CHINA SIGN ON TO THE CRITICISM, THE STATEMENT WAS UNPRECEDENTED.

WHILE THERE WILL ALWAYS BE COMPETING STRATEGIC INTERESTS BY THE VARIOUS PLAYERS, IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE FOR SOME--THE UNITED STATES, UK, CHINA, SINGAPORE, THAILAND, AND MALAYSIA--TO HIJACK THE PROCESS FROM THE UN. GAMBARI, A NIGERIAN, IS A SEASONED NEGOTIATOR WITH A TRACK RECORD TO MATCH THE MYANMAR MILITARY'S 40-YEAR REIGN, AND HE REMAINS THE BEST HOPE TO BREAK THE POLITICAL DEADLOCK THAT HAS SPANNED TWO DECADES.

GAMBARI HAS NOT FULLY SPELLED OUT HIS POLITICAL BLUEPRINT FOR MYANMAR YET, THOUGH HE CLAIMS THERE WILL BE INCENTIVES TO PERSUADE THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE MEANINGFUL CONCESSIONS. SO FAR, THAILAND HAS PROPOSED FOUR POWER TALKS THAT INVOLVE THE UN, CHINA, ASEAN, AND INDIA. YET OTHERS WANT TO FORM A "CORE GROUP" CONSISTING OF THE FIVE PERMANENT SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERS, JAPAN, INDIA, SINGAPORE, AND NORWAY THAT HAS LONG TAKEN A TRADITIONAL INTEREST IN MYANMAR.

MISSING FROM ALL THIS IS THE INDONESIAN MODEL, WHICH HAS RECEIVED TOO LITTLE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION SO FAR. GAMBARI'S DISCUSSIONS WITH THE AUTHORITIES IN JAKARTA COULD FORM THE BASIS OF FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS.

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THE INDONESIAN MODEL REPRESENTS AN IN-HOUSE PROTOTYPE FOR POLITICAL TRANSITION AND REFORMS THAT COULD MOST INFLUENCE THE JUNTA, WHICH IS AVERSE TO "NEOCOLONIALIST" INTERVENTION. INDONESIAN MODEL

INDONESIA AND THE FORMER BURMA FRATERNIZED IN THE ASIAN-AFRICAN BANDUNG CONFERENCE OF 1955 AND THE COLD WAR'S NONALIGNED MOVEMENT. BEFORE THAT, BURMA'S NATIONALIST HEROES SMUGGLED ARMS TO JAKARTA TO HELP IT DEFEAT THE DUTCH. JAKARTA CAN AND SHOULD REPAY ITS OLD FRIEND.

THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DESTINIES OF THE TWO NATIONS COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE DIFFERENT, BUT THEY ARE ALSO THE SAME. THEIR ECONOMIC BASE IS LARGELY AGRARIAN, THEIR SOCIETIES ARE LARGE AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE, THEIR CULTURAL ETHOS IS PARALLEL, AND BUDDHISM AND ISLAM ARE MAJOR MORAL FORCES IN THEIR POLITICS. THE SYMMETRY IN POLITICS GOES BEYOND THE AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM AND CAN BE SEEN IN THEIR PERSISTENT STRUGGLES WITH REBELLIOUS PROVINCES AND EVEN MORE REBELLIOUS PEDIGREED DAUGHTERS OF THE OPPOSITION. THEY ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN.

INDONESIA'S REFORMASI MOVEMENT OF 1998 CAME TO PASS BECAUSE IT HAD

/***** BEGINNING OF SECTION 2 *****/

WHAT MYANMAR LACKED IN 1988 AND IN SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR: A UNITED STUDENT MOVEMENT, SEVERAL COURAGEOUS LEADERS, A SAVVY OFFICER CORPS, A VIBRANT MIDDLE CLASS AND MEDIA, A FUNCTIONING PARLIAMENT, AND MASS SOCIAL-WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS THAT COULD FILL THE INSTITUTIONAL VACUUM DURING THE TURMOIL AND AFTER SUHARTO'S DOWNFALL. INDONESIA'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY WAS NOT PERFECT BUT IT WASN'T A FAILURE EITHER. THE 1999 ELECTIONS THAT FOLLOWED SUHARTO'S OUSTER, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, WERE FREE AND FAIR; AND THE 2004 POLLS--ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST COMPLEX MARATHON ELECTIONS--WERE UNANIMOUSLY DECLARED PEACEFUL BY INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS.

INDONESIA IS TODAY THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST DEMOCRACY AND IT HAS SCORED A HISTORIC PEACE DEAL IN SEPARATIST ACEH. THOUGH THE COUNTRY ISN'T ATTRACTING THE KIND OF FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IT NEEDS, ITS ECONOMY IS ENJOYING ITS SIXTH STRAIGHT YEAR OF EXPANSION THANKS TO ROBUST OIL PRICES AND SOUND MACRO-ECONOMIC POLICIES. THE SWEEPING REFORMS HAVE NOT ALL BEEN FAR-REACHING, AND SECURITY CHALLENGES REMAIN, BUT THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN TITANIC DID NOT SINK AS WIDELY FEARED WHEN SUHARTO WAS SUNK.

MYANMAR IS STILL A LONG WAY OFF FROM INDONESIA'S LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1998'S REFORMASI, BUT JAKARTA IS CERTAINLY WELL PLACED TO OFFER ITS EXPERTISE, AND IT HAS. SUSILO BAMBANG YUDHOYONO IS A RETIRED ARMY GENERAL WHOM THAN SHWE HAS LISTENED TO IN THE PAST. IN

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EARLY 2005 SOON AFTER YUDHOYONO WAS SWORN IN AS INDONESIA'S FIRST DIRECTLY ELECTED PRESIDENT, HE VISITED YANGON TO PERSUADE THAN SHWE TO RECEIVE ASEAN'S EMISSARY WHOM THE GOVERNMENT HAD PERIODICALLY STONEWALLED. YUDHOYONO SUCCEEDED. THE SUBSEQUENT ASEAN NEGOTIATIONS WITH MYANMAR FALTERED BUT JAKARTA'S ROLE SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED AGAIN.

FEARING INTERVENTION

MYANMAR FEARS WESTERN INTERVENTION, ITS ARMY FEARS NATIONAL DISINTEGRATION, AND THAN SHWE AND HIS FAMILY FEAR REVENGE. INDONESIA'S FOREIGN MINISTER HASSAN WIRAJUDA LABELS THIS CONDITION "PSYCHOLOGICAL INSECURITY." JAKARTA SHOULD KNOW; IT EXPERIENCED THE SAME FEARS. YET, JAKARTA'S REFORM PROCESS IS ENTIRELY HOME-GROWN, ITS TRADITIONALLY INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY HAS SOMETIMES PUT IT AT ODDS WITH THE WEST, AND THESE ARE ITS SELLING POINTS IN ITS DEALINGS WITH MYANMAR'S JUNTA.

WHAT'S MORE, YUDHOYONO WAS ALSO A KEY ARCHITECT OF MILITARY REFORMS AND THE INDONESIAN MILITARY'S GRADUAL RETURN TO THE BARRACKS. DOUGLAS RAMAGE OF THE ASIA FOUNDATION DESCRIBES THE INDONESIAN ARMED FORCES' SWIFT AND QUIET EXIT FROM PROMINENCE IN NATIONAL POLITICS AS "ONE OF THE STAND-OUT TRANSFORMATIONS IN INDONESIA ."

YUDHOYONO'S RISE TO THE PRESIDENCY IS A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF WHAT A PROFESSIONALIZED AND CIVILIANIZED MILITARY CAN ACHIEVE IN A DEMOCRACY.

MYANMAR'S JUNTA MUST BE PERSUADED TO SEE THAT IT NEED NOT FEAR LOSING ITS POWER.

IN TRUTH, THE JUNTA ONCE TOYED WITH EMULATING INDONESIA'S ECONOMIC AND THEN POLITICAL CHANGES, BUT FOUND THEM TOO MESSY SO IT TURNED INSTEAD TO THE SINGAPOREAN MODEL OF "FLOURISHING DISCIPLINE" ACCORDING TO ASEAN DIPLOMATS. GAMBARI'S CHALLENGE IS TO TAKE THE BEST LESSONS FROM THE INDONESIAN MODEL WITH THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YUDHOYONO, WHO RECENTLY TOLD AL JAZEERA TELEVISION THAT HE IS COMMUNICATING WITH THAN SHWE. THE BLUEPRINT CAN BE PROMOTED AS A JOINT UN-ASEAN AFFAIR.

WHAT'S UNKNOWN IS HOW THAN SHWE WILL RESPOND. AS GAMBARI'S LATEST MISSION HAS SHOWN, THE GENERAL DISLIKES HIGH-LEVEL MULTILATERAL TALKS THAT INFRINGE ON MYANMAR'S SOVEREIGNTY. THE UPSIDE IS THAT AUNG SAN SUU KYI HAS FINALLY RELEASED HER POLITICAL STATEMENT OF RECONCILIATION THROUGH GAMBARI, AND PRELIMINARY "NEGOTIATIONS" HAVE BEGUN BETWEEN THE SPDC AND THE OPPOSITION.

IF GAMBARI, INDONESIA, AND ASEAN CAN COME UP WITH A FACE-SAVING

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SOLUTION THAT WILL ENSURE A SOFT LANDING FOR MYANMAR, THE RULING STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MIGHT JUST AGREE TO A TRANSITIONAL MECHANISM TO SHARE POWER THAT WOULD ULTIMATELY PRODUCE A REAL PEACE.

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