

Poking the Dragon: Trump to Meet With Dalai Lama

Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama said on Wednesday that he would visit U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, a meeting that would infuriate Beijing which views the Nobel Peace Prize-winning monk as a dangerous separatist.

Speaking during a visit to Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar and asked about the U.S. election, the Dalai Lama said he had always considered the United States a “leading nation of the free world.”

“I think there are some problems to go to United States, so I will go to see the new president,” he told reporters, without elaborating.

President Barack Obama met the Dalai Lama at the White House in June despite a warning by China that it would damage diplomatic relations. It was Obama’s fourth White House meeting with the Dalai Lama in the past eight years.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said the Dalai Lama traveled the globe seeking audiences with foreign leaders to try to damage relations between them and China.

“We hope the international community can further see clearly the anti-China, separatist essence of the Dalai Lama, and appropriately and cautiously handle Tibet-related issues,” Geng told a daily news briefing.

The Dalai Lama, speaking in English, brushed off some of the U.S. election campaign rhetoric.

“Sometimes I feel during election the candidate has more freedom to express. Once elected, having the responsibility,

then they have to tell you their sort of vision, their works according to reality.”

China regards the Dalai Lama as a separatist, though he says he merely seeks genuine autonomy for his Himalayan homeland Tibet, which Communist Chinese troops “peacefully liberated” in 1950.

China has been angered by Mongolia’s decision to allow him to visit, though Mongolia’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement to the Montsame news agency that the government had nothing to do with the trip, which they said was arranged by Mongolian Buddhists.

After the Dalai Lama’s visit to Mongolia in 2006, China briefly canceled flights between Beijing and Ulaanbaatar.

Beijing frequently expresses its anger with countries that host the Dalai Lama, who fled to India in 1959 following a failed uprising against the Chinese.

Rights groups and exiles accuse China of trampling on the religious and cultural rights of the Tibetan people, charges strongly denied by Beijing, which says its rule has ended serfdom and brought prosperity to a once backward region.

(Writing and additional reporting by Ben Blanchard in Beijing; Editing by Nick Macfie)

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