

Research Report

General Assembly 4 The question of Tibet

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Forum	GA4
Issue:	The question of Tibet
Student Officer:	Gabriela van Leersum
Position:	Chair

Introduction

In March 2008, the news was filled with pictures of monks walking the streets of Tibet. They were engaged in passive protest as they have been suppressed for over half a century now. The conflict in Tibet has its roots in the beginning of the early 20th century, when Tibet sought their independence. China, her neighbouring country, felt however that Tibet was a subordinate state and considered it to be part of China.

China eventually invaded Tibet, affirming its sovereignty over this small country. Notwithstanding its size and dependence on other countries, Tibet still wants its autonomy. Meanwhile, Chinese government policies in Tibet have fed the conflict. These include: attempts to change the demographics of the region; its borders; restrictions on cultural and religious freedoms of Tibetans; an unwillingness to open dialogue with Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

Definition of Key Terms

Vassal state

A vassal or "puppet" state is any state that is subordinate to another. In many cases, being a vassal state implies providing assistance to the dominant state.

Suzerain

A state exercising political control over a dependent state.

Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama is a spiritual leader, and exerts much influence over the Tibetan population. He also has political authority over Tibet.



General Overview

The question of Tibet dates back to the early 20th century, after the Qing dynasty.

Historical events leading up to 1950

In the years preceding 1910, Tibet and China had a stable connection essentially born from common beliefs as a result of their shared devotion towards the tenets of Buddhism. Tibet, in exchange for their religious guidance, sought seldom protection from the Chinese Emperor. However, to China, in their natural urge for expansion, Tibet was but a vassal state. This is when legitimate apprehension arose in Tibet.

After the last Manchurian Emperor of the Qing dynasty abdicated, the establishment of the Republic of China took place. Chinese troops were expelled from Lhasa, Tibet's capital, after she declared her independence under the thirteenth Dalai Lama, who proclaimed Tibet a "small, religious, and independent nation." This snapped all sentimental and religious bonds with China. However, China claimed suzerainty over Tibet a few years later. It was then, in 1914, that Britain, China and Tibet met to negotiate Tibet's borders. The Simla accord gave secular control of the area of Qinghai - east Tibet - to China. However, China refused to sign this treaty because Britain would give a part of south Tibet to British India. Tibet's independence thereby resumed de jure status.

Tibet under the People's Republic of China

Once China was formally declared to be the People's Republic of China in 1950, Tibet broke all formal relations with the nation, foreseeing complications due to divergent creeds. Tibet agreed to negotiate on friendly terms with China, however during the negotiations in New Delhi in October 1950 Tibet was invaded by 40,000 soldiers of the People's Liberation Army of China. After the invasion, China affirmed its sovereignty over Tibet.

The problem with this state is simple: Chinese claimed Tibet as a part of China yet Tibetans feel that racially, culturally, and geographically, they are not part of the Chinese. This leads to several riots due to oppression by the Chinese.

1950 - Present

After Tibet signed the Seventeen-point agreement in 1950, which affirmed China's sovereignty over Tibet, yet assured the retention of the autonomy of the Dalai Lama-ruled Tibetan area known as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), traditional Tibetan culture continued to function unchanged. However, on the Eastern border in 1956, Tibetans began

to revolt as much land from monasteries was redistributed to serve several other purposes including humiliation and torture. Eventually these riots spread to Lhasa, which led to the 1959 Tibetan Uprising.

Dalai Lama's exile and the 1959 Tibetan Uprising onwards

The 1959 uprising began on the 10th of March with thousands of Tibetans surrounding the Dalai Lama's residence after hearing rumours that the Chinese communist military would abduct Him. A few days later, protesters appeared on the streets of their capital requesting their independence. On March 16th, 1959, Chinese artillery was being moved to sites within range of Lhasa and particularly the Norbulinka, the Dalai Lama's summer residence. By nightfall Lhasa was certain that the Dalai Lama's palace was about to be shelled. On the night of March 17th, fearing His own life, the Dalai Lama marched out of Norbulinka wearing a soldier's uniform with a gun slung over his shoulder to disguise Himself and sought safety in India.

"... when the Chinese guns sounded that warning of death, the first thought in the mind of every official within the Palace, and every humble member of the vast concourse around it, was that my life must be saved and I must leave the Palace and leave the city at once. There was no certainty that escape was physically possible at all... If I did escape from Lhasa, where was I to go, and how could I reach asylum? Everything was uncertain, except the compelling anxiety of all my people to get me away before the orgy of Chinese destruction and massacre began".

The 14th Dalai Lama in his autobiography, *My Land and My People*

Three days later, China shelled Norbulinka, prompting the full force of the Uprising. However, it only lasted for a few days, as Tibetan forces were greatly outnumbered and poorly armed.

It was also during this period when Tibet suffered tremendously from Mao's 'Great Leap Forward'. Tibet never had food shortages until this specific period, when Mao aimed to transform China's agrarian economy into a communist society through industrialisation. It led to famine and starvation in the entire country, especially Tibet.

2008 unrest

Again in March 2008 there were a series of riots, demonstrations and protests started in Lhasa. It began as an annual commemoration to Tibet's Uprising, which led monks to demonstrate on the streets, and later escalated to violent protests. The violence

was mostly expressed towards the Han Chinese. This has earned its international spotlight, however there is still little awareness of the issue around the world.

The main underlying issue is not only the difference in ethnicity and culture, but also several other factors that justify Tibet's desire for independence. One of these is the constant violation of human rights. Chinese communist authorities have violated Article 3, 5, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26 and 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Tibet. This includes 1.2 million deaths (and several hundred missing) since 1950 due to indirect causes such as torture and famine. A report prepared by the ICJ's Legal Inquiry Committee, composed of eleven international lawyers from around the world, accuses the Chinese of the crime of genocide in Tibet. China, however, denies these facts.

Another issue is the violation of political agreements. In the Seventeen-point agreement, it is stated that Tibet should have its autonomy. However, China violated this agreement from 1959 onwards as explained previously.

A major reason for dispute is the religious suppression Tibet is undergoing. Most things in Tibet revolve around its religion. Tibetan Buddhism emphasises realizing truths through personal contemplation and analysis. These views clash with the communist view China holds. During the Cultural Revolution in China (a social-political movement that took place in the People's Republic of China from 1966 till 1976), out of the 6,259 monasteries in Tibet before the Chinese occupation, only eight remained in 1976. Not only has China restricted religious freedom in Tibet, but it is also unwilling to open dialogue with Tibet's exiled religious leader.

Other than the demolition of monasteries, the introduction of secular education has infuriated many Tibetans, including the 14th Dalai Lama, even to the point that they are of the opinion that "the ultimate Chinese aim with regard to Tibet seems to attempt the extermination of religion and culture and even the absorption of the Tibetan race..." (Dalai Lama). A less extreme idea is that Chinese policies are "directly aimed at undermining Tibet's cultural integrity in the next generation." This is an example of what is called sinification – a process whereby a non Han Chinese is eventually assimilated to one.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Tibet

Tibet was not always part of China. In fact, from 1913-1950, Tibet behaved like a de facto independent state. They want to be separated from China and become their own state again as their views are contradistinctive.

However, arguments against this are also present. Firstly, Tibet could be considered to be reliant upon China's fast growing economy. And secondly, it is presupposed that Tibet is unable to defend or maintain itself.

China

China has always wanted Tibet for a number of reasons. One of these is its strategic military position. Tibet is located in a high plateau, with a view to Bhutan, Myanmar and China. Tibet is a valuable asset to China as it is the centre of Asia as shown in the adjacent picture. In the unlikely situation where a nation attacks from the west, Tibet's position has great potential.



Fig.1. Tibet's Location in China

Digital image. *Tibettravelplanner*. Tibettour.com, n.d. Web. 20 June 2014. <<http://www.tibettravelplanner.com/mapsoftibet/location.htm>>.

Another reason why the acquisition of Tibet has led to international desire is its resources. The Himalayan Mountains in Tibet contain great resources of minerals and rare earth metals not so deep beneath the surface. Not only does Tibet have the biggest uranium reserve on Earth, but also 10 million tons of copper, 6,000 tons of coal, 27,000 tons of zinc and lead, and possibly much more, is hidden and easily extractable.

In addition to that, China has power over Taiwan and Inner Mongolia, who are also striving to gain autonomy or independence. Allowing Tibet to gain independence or even granting them greater autonomy would likely encourage increased pressure from Taiwan and Mongolia.

No third parties have played a consistent role in this conflict. However, the USA was involved in the 1950s-1960s with the CIA as it was trying to destabilize Communist China.



Timeline of Events

In the general overview, the historical events have been described. They are listed below in a concise manner.

Date	Description of event
Thirteenth century	Contemporary religious and political disputes start, after China claims Tibet has been an inalienable part of China under the Yuan dynasty.
1903 – 04	British invasion
1911-12	Tibetan independence
1914	Simla treaty was signed
1950	Communist People’s Republic of China formed and invaded Tibet
1950	Seventeen-point agreement which affirmed China’s sovereignty over Tibet
1959	Tibetan Uprising and the exile of the 14 th Dalai Lama
1960-1962	Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” led to famine
2008	Tibetan unrest

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

There is little UN involvement in this respect mainly due to China’s veto power, but resolutions have been written stating that Tibet deserves its autonomy.

- Simla Convention, 1914
- Seventeen-point agreement, 1950
- Appeal by His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet to the United Nations. UN document A11549 – 11 November 1950
- Dalai Lama XIV, 5 Point Peace Plan Presentation to U.S. Congress. 9-21-1987



Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Although the 14th Dalai Lama has had to seek asylum in India, He tried to resolve the issue. He set up a Five-Point Peace Plan asking for: “1.) Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace; 2.) Abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people; 3.) Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms; 4.) Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste; 5.) Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

The Dalai Lama suggested negotiating with China. Nonetheless, China refused to consider the plan. By 2008, the Dalai Lama expressed frustration and called the talks “difficult and disappointing”. Meanwhile, demonstrations and unrest have continued.

There is a lack of agreement from both sides, even on historical facts. Peace talks have generally been unproductive. The latest meeting began in 2002, when the Dalai Lama's brother succeeded in convincing Chinese officials to meet groups of Tibetan delegates for discussion. Although hopes were high in the beginning, the talks quickly stalled and the delegates were unable to agree on even the smallest policies to enact.

As one of the problems is little international awareness of the issue, there have been small projects to raise awareness about it. Websites have been set up and have provided an overview of the problem. However this has not delivered any direct or rapid aid to Tibetans.

Possible Solutions

A possible solution could be that China keeps its sovereignty over Tibet, yet gives it more autonomy, meaning it would have more political self-determination and the right to preserve its cultural values. This includes introducing the Tibetan language as the official language and even allowing the teachings of the Tibetan culture and religion in schools. If China wants to keep Tibet under control, it must respect its values.

Better governance is a key factor to solve a part of the issue. Reducing poverty-diminished marginalization may ameliorate the problem.

Neutral third party involvement to mediate the conflict is also a debatable solution, seeing as both sides of the story would be heard and explored, almost forcing both Tibet and the rest of China to come to a political agreement. This means that effective diplomacy should be accomplished.

As to the Dalai Lama, he plays a key role in any peace building process in Tibet as he may be the only actor who can convince Tibetans to choose to remain under Chinese sovereignty.

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