



WOULD TIBET BECOME CASUALTY OF GLOBALIZATION?

*By Wg Cdr Raj Mongia,
Research Fellow, CAPS*

When United States President Barack Obama met the Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, China promptly conveyed its displeasure by summoning a top American diplomat on 22 February 2014 and expressed its strong indignation over so called interference in its domestic affairs. The United States on its part did try to pacify China by stating that Mr. Obama met the Dalai Lama in the White House in the latter's capacity as a cultural and spiritual leader.¹ Washington meeting of President Barack Obama and exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama on 21 February 2014 perhaps set the tone for the subsequent events.



U.S. President Barack Obama met the Tibetan leader Dalai Lama in Washington on 21 February 2014.

On 21 February 2014 night Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui summoned the deputy chief of mission of U.S. Embassy in Beijing. According to Xinhua news agency Mr. Zhang summoned Mr. Daniel Kritenbrink and lodged solemn representations. Mr. Zhang told him the meeting seriously undermined relations and seriously violated the U.S. commitment of not supporting Tibetan independence. He said that Tibetan issue was “the domestic affair of China” and the U.S. bears no right to interfere.”² Interestingly Tibetan and Chinese have radically different views of status of Tibet and circumstances under which Tibetan territory was taken over by Chinese administration.

The Chinese Version: Even before signing of 17 point agreement between China and the Tibetan local government Tibet has always been an integral part of China. The marriage of the Tibetan king Songsten Gampo with princess Wen Chung of mainland China culminated in consolidation of power during the Tang period (618-907). Enormous parts of Asia were ruled by Mongol and Manchu emperors under the aegis of Yuan dynasty. The Yuan dynasty during the period 1271-1368 AD had been in total control of Tibet along with mainland China. Wen Chung because of her acumen over political matters acquired lot of influence in Tibet. The Yuan government had total authority over Tibet. Imposition of duties, levying of taxes and implantation of residence registration in Tibet was done by Yuan government. The Yuan dynasty was replaced by Ming dynasty during the period 1368-1644 AD. The right to rule Tibet was also inherited by Ming dynasty. The saga of Qing army entering Tibet on a number of occasions to protect it from external forces is immortal. In 1951 when 17 point agreement was signed in 1951

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for peaceful liberation it was 14th Dalai Lama Tenzing Gyatso himself who supported the liberation. He also acknowledged that Tibet is one part of China.

The Tibetan Version: The period quoted by Chinese scholars has actually witnessed Tibetan domination in battles with Tang dynasty. The political alliances were often strengthened by marriages. The connotation of marriage of princess of Wen Chung and King Gampo has to be taken as part of a strategic treaty. The understanding, peace and co-operation between China and Tibet definitely flourished during this period. Respect for each other's territorial sovereignty and non interference were the key principles on which the treaty between China and Tibet was based. How can one forget the great Mongol leaders Genghis Khan? He conquered most of Eurasia including China. Perhaps it is Mongolia which should stake its claim to rule Tibet and China both!³

The claims and arguments of the Chinese and Tibetans are totally in contrast to each other. The Chinese maintain that Tibet has always been a part of China, and due to imperialistic influence and feudal exploitation, had become a living hell where the false notion of independence prevailed. According to China, after Tibet was 'liberated' and merged with the Chinese motherland, it has been ushered into an era of harmony and growth.

Reflecting on the recent development it is worth mentioning the chronology of interactions between President Obama and spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. Mr. Obama first hosted the Dalai Lama in February 2010. Washington on its part appeared to attempt to appease Chinese anger by playing down the meeting. The meeting was conducted not in the official and symbolic Oval Office but in the Map room. There was no limelight provided to the complete affair. Mr. Obama's second meeting with the Dalai Lama came more than a year later, in July 2011. This meeting took place amid perceptions that the U.S. which was deepening engagement and seeking Chinese cooperation on a range of issues from trade to North Korea was not giving enough emphasis to Tibet related issues than in the past. Meeting of 21 February 2014 also took place in the Map room with the White House again appearing to tone down the affair.⁴

The sobriquets “Camouflage and Deceit” are used by Xinhua news agency for Dalai Lama’s middle way approach in their criticism. “Ahimsa” –Non violence is considered as the bedrock of Tibetan Buddhism. Dalai Lama has been able to inspire millions worldwide with his firm belief in the twin values of compassion and wisdom. In no way the Chinese takeover of the country six decades ago can be justified.. Although Dalai Lama’s fervent I appeals for autonomy has evoked sympathetic responses time and again, considering of the fact that China is today a formidable political and economic power on the planet would Tibet remain in world’s political agenda?. Dalai Lama is growing old and China in all probability would intervene in the selection of Tibet’s next spiritual leader. Now it is anybody’s guess whether world would see a resurgence of Tibetan cause or it would become a casualty of globalization!

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

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End Notes

1. Ananth Krishanan, “China Summons U.S. diplomat”, The Hindu, 23 February 2014, p. 17.
2. Ibid.
3. Raj Mongia, “Air Power” Journal Jul-Sep 2013 issue, Vol.8, No.3, pages 67-92.
4. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/china-summons-us-diplomat-over-obamadalai-meeting/article5716555.ece>) accessed on 23 February 2014.