

CHINA'S TIBET POLICY: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

SANA HASHMI

China's policies towards Tibet, and, more importantly, the rising discontent among the Tibetans against China have been among the most vexed political issues of recent times which have caught the attention of the international community. China has controlled Tibet for over 60 years now. It invaded Tibet on October 7, 1950, when 40,000 People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops from the southwest military region crossed the Dri Chu river and captured Tibet.¹ Since then, there have been numerous incidents of human rights abuses and environmental degradation in Tibet by China. The plight of the Tibetans can be gauged from the fact that despite the Chinese claim that Tibet is being developed and affairs in Tibet are spic and span, thousands of Tibetans have fled Tibet and are now living in other countries of the world, especially India, as refugees. The Tibet issue has generated significant interest in the West and other nations as well.

The Tibetans keep looking for a platform to raise their voices and bring to the world's attention the plight of their brethren in their motherland. At the same time, the Chinese authorities leave no stone unturned to assert that Tibet is, and has been, an integral and inalienable part of China and is an internal affair in which no interference from other countries will be accepted. The Chinese often use their power and stature in world politics to get things

Ms **Sana Hashmi** is a Research Associate at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

1. Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (NY: Penguin, 2000), p. 43.

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done their way. They claim that their projects in Tibet are proof of the fact that China considers Tibet as its own part and is developing it at the same pace as the Chinese nation. China argues that the idea of Tibet being a free and independent country was the brainchild of the Western imperialistic powers who had their vested interests in Tibet and China, and it was these interests, which led to the Simla Agreement of 1914, which China categorically rejects, as it stressed on the British claim that China has “suzerainty” over Tibet and not “sovereignty”.²

For the Tibetans, the growth and developmental work carried out in Tibet by the Chinese government is not for the development and prosperity of Tibet and the Tibetans, but for its own selfish motives. China is using the Tibetan region as a military base and has ravaged its natural resources to sustain its own growth and its increasing demand for natural resources and minerals such as uranium, lithium, chromites, coal, iron, cobalt, copper, gold, and so on. It is estimated that Tibet holds 40 percent of China's mineral resources that include probably one of the world's largest deposits of uranium.³ The Tibetans believe that China is, slowly and stealthily, trying for ‘Hanisation’ of Tibet, by its policy of population transfer. Lakhs of Chinese nationals have settled in Tibet and they have already outnumbered the Tibetan populace in Tibet. This is China's ploy to eliminate the Tibetan culture and religion.

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

2. <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/tibet/9-2.htm>, accessed on March 15, 2012.

3. http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-04-30/news/31508366_1_tibetan-plateau-india-china-tawang-monastery, accessed on May 2, 2012.

motherland, it has been ushered into an era of harmony and growth.⁴ At the same time, for the Tibetans, before the Chinese invasion, Tibet was a peaceful and religious country, with people living in peace and contentment. However, after the Chinese occupation, the fundamental rights of freedom and independence were snatched away and the Tibetans were turned into prisoners in their own motherland. The Chinese definition of Tibet is very different from that of the Tibetans. For China, only the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) comprises Tibet, but for the Tibetans, 1/4th of the area of China is Tibet.

The Sino-Tibetan imbroglio is not only problematic for China and Tibet but is a bone of contention and has proved awkward for India which bears several direct implications for it as India is the immediate neighbour of China and a large number of Tibetans are living in India in exile. Maintaining an equilibrium between the Tibetans living in India and its relations with China sometimes proves convoluted and thorny for India.

GROWING RESENTMENT AMONG TIBETANS

The Tibetans assert that China's Tibet policy is based on grasping with both hands, deepening economic development and increasing political restrictions. From time to time, the Tibetans have tried to raise this issue at the international level—as recently as during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Before the Olympics began, Tibetans and pro-Tibetan groups staged demonstrations all across the globe to persuade countries to boycott the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Chinese responded with a severe crackdown on the Tibetans' protests in their own country and urged other nations not to get affected by the Tibetan tactics. Owing to the immense influence that China has on the world economy and power politics, no nation dared to defy the Chinese.

Synonymous with the issue of Tibet is the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet and Tibetans. The current Dalai Lama, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, Nobel Peace Laureate, has been fighting

4. Sana Hashmi, "Between the Dragon and the Elephant: The Geostrategic Importance of Tibet," *Defence and Security Alert*, vol.3 issue 6, April 2012, pp. 69-71.

for the cause and liberation of Tibet all his life. He has met many famous world leaders and has won their respect and sympathy. The Dalai Lama, considered an apostle of a peaceful resolution to the issue, came up with the famous “Middle Way Approach”. This approach is based on greater autonomy for Tibetans in internal matters like culture, religion, education and environment, with defence and foreign affairs remaining in China’s control. The crux of the approach is to have “genuine autonomy” within Chinese control, not gaining independence. Unfortunately, neither is the Central Tibetan Administration (Tibetan government-in-exile) recognised by the Chinese nor do they pay any heed to the Middle Way Approach advocated by the 14th Dalai Lama.

China rejected the Middle Way Approach, and, for that matter, paid no attention to the Five-Point Peace Plan⁵ and Strasbourg Proposal⁶ by claiming that these are only attempts to split China.

The Dalai Lama has, time and again, stated that a belligerent and violent approach by the Tibetans is neither in favour of humanity nor a feasible way, considering China’s might. Recent self-immolations are the perfect example of the growing resentment among the Tibetans: 33 Tibetans have resorted to self-immolation within and outside Tibet. Most of them left a note stating that they wanted to see Tibet as an independent and liberated state and the Dalai Lama to return to their homeland. The Tibetans assert that such acts of self-immolation are a result of the repressive policies in Tibet by the Chinese government. They have been resorting to this method in order to pressurise Beijing and the international community and letting the world know about the sufferings of the Tibetans in Tibet since March 2011. However, their voices remain unheard. It is obvious that there is

5. The Five-Point Peace Plan was proposed by the Dalai Lama in 1987 for the restoration of peace, tranquillity, human rights and preservation of the environment, culture and religion of Tibet. The five principles of the proposal were: transformation of Tibet into a peaceful and demilitarised zone; dereliction of China’s policy of population transfer into Tibet; respect for the human rights and democratic freedom of the Tibetan people; protection of the environment and natural resources of Tibet and denuclearisation of Tibet; and initiation of negotiations on the future status of Tibet and relations between Tibet and China and their people.
6. The Strasbourg Proposal was an amplification of the fifth point of the Five-Point Peace Plan which called for negotiations between China and Tibet and was proposed in 1988 at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. But, in 1994, the proposal was withdrawn due to China’s non-responsiveness.

a striking variation between the ideologies of the older and younger generations of Tibetans-in-exile. The older people want to stick to the Middle Way Approach and their demand of autonomy within China's control, whereas the younger generation is resorting to peaceful demonstrations and tactics like self-immolation and suicide to see Tibet as an independent state, and if independence is not a prospect, then greater autonomy is what they demand. This difference in ideologies might prove hazardous for the Tibetan cause.

China has often stated that the Tibetans living in Tibet are content and satisfied with the current situation there but many people, both Tibetans outside Tibet and non-Tibetans who support the Tibetan cause, stress on the fact that if the Tibetans are content with the policies of China towards the Tibetans in Tibet, then what is the Dalai Lama, along with lakhs of Tibetan refugees, who are spread across 35 settlements, doing in India for the past 53 years and why don't they go back?

China has repeatedly claimed that it is developing Tibet at par with the rest of China, with massive and gigantic projects related to hydro-power, rail and road networks, and so on. However, the Tibetans claim that all such projects related to infrastructural development have hidden motives. They argue that the 1,118-km-long railway track between Golmud and Lhasa and other major road and air infrastructural projects in Tibet have concealed, self-centred, expansionist and militaristic motives behind them, as such projects on such a huge scale for a population of just two-three million raise many doubts and questions.⁷ The Tibetans have alleged that China has transformed Tibet into a military base with lakhs of the PLA troops and missile bases present in Tibet and since the time of the Chinese occupation, the Tibetans have become a minority in their own land due to the huge influx of people from the Chinese

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7. V. P. Malhotra, *Tibetan Conundrum* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publications, 2006), p. 85.

Mainland.⁸ Most Tibetans hold the view that they have been treated like outsiders in their own country and due to this reason, lakhs of them have taken refuge in other countries, while many more living in Tibet are suffering from injustice and atrocities under the Chinese rule. One of the major reasons for discontent among the Tibetans in Tibet is that around 90 percent of the positions in public offices in Tibet are occupied by the Chinese, and the Tibetans are mostly engaged in rural or low income jobs. The Tibetans claim that they are paid lower salaries/wages than the Chinese in Tibet, and while Tibet is prospering, the Tibetans are not. Their major grievance is that they are not allowed to display even a photograph of their religious leader, the Dalai Lama, openly. In fact, photographs of the Dalai Lama have been replaced by portraits of Mao Zedong, first Chairman of the People's Republic of China (PRC), in almost all the monasteries. The Tibetans are neither allowed to wear their traditional attire nor allowed to eat Tibetan food. Furthermore, it is compulsory for Tibetans to learn and speak Mandarin and live their lives according to the Chinese customs. The Chinese government has made Mandarin the medium of instruction in almost all the schools in Tibet. The more appalling trend is that among all the ethnic minorities in China, the literary level among the Tibetans is the lowest. The Chinese government has boycotted the 'Losar', the Tibetan New Year, and asked the Tibetans not to celebrate it. The Chinese are, slowly and steadily, endeavouring to wipe out the Tibetan culture and even the Tibetan people from Tibet.

The Tibetans are against the transformation of Tibet into a military base. They uphold that before the occupation, Tibet was a sanctum of Buddhism and peace but after the invasion, it has become a militarised zone which is increasingly affecting the environment, leading to environmental degradation.

China refuses to acknowledge that there is a crisis in Tibet. Instead of allaying the grievances of the Tibetans, which is the need of the hour, China

8. India-Tibet Coordination Office, *Handbook on Tibet* (New Delhi: India-Tibet Coordination Office, 2008), p. 63.

is on a mission to demonise the Dalai Lama. Whenever, the Tibetans protest, the Chinese start accusing the “Dalai group”. China’s refusal to address the causes for the unrest in Tibet, and its policy of demonising the Dalai Lama is not going to do any good; China will never be able to win the hearts of the Tibetan people if it continues doing so. It would be advisable for China to focus on Tibet’s future instead of the Dalai Lama—the Tibetans believe that as long as the Chinese government policy does not change in Tibet, there won’t be an end to the unrest. The Chinese government needs to give a fresh impetus to the resolution of the Tibetan issue and accept the fact that a problem exists in Tibet.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Tibet is a vital feature when it comes to Sino-Indian relations and the problems between the two Asian giants cannot be discussed without involving it. Many strategic analysts hold the view that India committed a blunder by reiterating the “One China Policy” and recognising Tibet as a part of China. However, it has been ages since Tibet was surrendered for the sake of Sino-Indian relations. In 1950, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, tried his best to prevent a Chinese military occupation of Tibet, and advocated peaceful resolution of Sino-Tibetan tensions but ultimately sacrificed Tibet for the sake of Sino-Indian friendship.⁹ Unfortunately, that sacrifice by India did not prove to be advantageous for India and tensions between India and China continued to escalate.

The Tibetan issue has gained importance over the last decade or so since the issue is not restricted to Tibet but also concerns the countries which border Tibet and which are dependent on Tibet’s waters. Tibet under Chinese control has several implications, mostly for India. With Tibet under its complete domination, China now finds itself militarily and strategically in a stronger position vis-à-vis India; diplomatically too, it is in a favourable environment, with considerable scope for diplomatic manoeuvring to its advantage.¹⁰ China and India are two ancient civilisations, that share a long,

9. Dawa Norbu, *China’s Tibet Policy* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), p. 284.

10. Dawa Norbu, “Strategic Development in Tibet: Implications for its Neighbours,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 19, no. 3, March 1979, pp. 245-259.

porous border. Prior to 1950, Tibet acted as a natural buffer between India and China. It was quite vital, given that distance is an important factor in maintaining healthy and cordial relations.

One of the most crucial facets of this problem is the issue of water security. Tibet is said to be the “water reservoir” of India. It has one of the greatest water systems in the world, and its rivers supply fresh water to 65 percent of Asia’s population and to approximately 30 percent of the world’s population.¹¹ Most of the major rivers that flow through South Asia and Southeast Asia originate in Tibet. Apparently, China has embarked on a huge programme of dam building and the alleged river diversion projects, mainly on the Brahmaputra (called Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet). With Tibet under its control, China has the status of being the upper riparian for the major rivers like the Brahmaputra, Indus, Mekong, and Salween, with control over the water of all these rivers. As there is no water treaty between India and China, the methods and approach adopted by China go unnoticed and unscrutinised. It is quite clear that China’s policies could lead to severe water scarcity for countries like India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Cambodia.¹² The water scarcity will have a direct impact on the human and growth aspects of these countries. China has, time and again, maintained that all these projects are meant for the development of Tibet and fulfilling the requirements of the Chinese people, and are just the usual hydro projects. It also rejects the claims that these projects will have any adverse effects on the lower riparian countries like India, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar and Bangladesh.¹³ China has unquestionable control over the waters as Tibet is under its occupation and India, being a lower riparian country, is highly dependent on the water of Tibet for its water security. The water issue is bound to have an adverse effect on relations between China and other lower riparian countries, especially India.

Tensions between India and China have also escalated owing to China’s control over Tibet. The already estranged relations between India and China

11. Malhotra, n.7, p. 89.

12. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/beijings-threat-indias-water-security>, accessed on January 22, 2011.

13. www.china.org.cn/e-white/20011108/3.htm, accessed on January 13, 2011.

are bound to get worse with China controlling Tibet and claiming many areas in India as its own territories. This has severe territorial and strategic implications for India and the better infrastructure in Chinese controlled territories does not help the Indian cause. India, according to many experts and strategic analysts, has committed numerous mistakes in its policies vis-à-vis China. It has not learnt lessons from the Sino-India War of 1962 and is still not assertive enough to counter the Chinese claims on its territories, especially Arunachal Pradesh, which China labels as “Southern Tibet”.

India’s policy towards Tibet is also not clear, as before the Chinese occupation of the country, it recognised Tibet as an independent country, but later, it accepted and recognised the Chinese claims, even when the Tibetan government-in-exile is situated in Dharamsala, in India. The PRC could establish full legal claims over Tibet only after Nehru recognised Tibet as a part of China in 1954 and once this occurred, China began officially to claim territory along the Indo-Tibetan border, using the provisions of the 1954 Treaty as its rationale.¹⁴ Had Tibet not been under China’s control, there would not be a boundary question between India and China. Before the Chinese so-called “peaceful liberation” of Tibet, India did not have to spend so much on enhancing defence and infrastructure along the northern and northeastern borders of India but it is now compelled to spend a huge amount of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence.

The threat to Indian territory from China has aggravated considerably since the unresolved boundary question grants China the desired leverage.¹⁵ Interestingly, India is the only country with which China has not been able to settle its border dispute. The antecedent of the border dispute between India and China lay in the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950.¹⁶ With China controlling Tibet, it was much closer to the Indian mainland than before as China and India shared a common border after the Chinese occupation of Tibet. It also fuelled China’s ambitions of restoring its sovereignty over

14. Norbu, n.10, p. 286.

15. <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/geopolitics/Threat-Perception-of-India.html>, accessed on April 27, 2012.

16. David M. Malone and Rohan Mukherjee, “India and China: Conflict and Cooperation” *Survival*, vol. 52 no. 1, February-March 2010, pp. 137-158.

the so-called “lost territories”, since Tibet could now act as a launching pad for its power and economic growth. With Tibet under its control, it becomes easier for China to use its cards against India whenever the need arises. China not only commands authority over Tibet but has also been laying claim over the Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim provinces of India. It is deemed that occupation of Tibet was one of the main steps to open the gates for China to enter India, Bhutan, Nepal, the Indian Ocean and Central Asia. In 1949, as soon as the PRC was established, Mao Zedong proclaimed, “Tibet is the palm of China and Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and North-Eastern Frontier Agency-NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) are its fingers”. He knew that with Tibet in their grip, the Chinese could work on their expansionist policies and claim parts of Indian territory. George Ginsburg and Michael Mathos, in their book *Communist China and Tibet: The First Dozen Years*, have stated, “He who holds Tibet dominates the Himalayan piedmont; he who dominates the Himalayan piedmont, threatens the Indian subcontinent; and he who threatens the Indian subcontinent, may well have all of South Asia within his reach, and with it, all of Asia”.¹⁷

The implications are not restricted to the northeastern border of India – the northern border is equally affected. The effects of Chinese control over the Aksai Chin region are far-reaching. It brings China inside Ladakh, a part of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), on which there is already a dispute between India and Pakistan. So now, India has to deal with two troublesome neighbours on the J&K front at the same time. The Sino-Pakistan alliance is also of grave concern for India, as the increased level of alliance on the military and development fronts between China and Pakistan is a cause of strategic and military problems for India. Pakistan, an all weather ally of China, has gifted 5,180 sq. km. of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) to China, which was under its control when the ceasefire was declared in 1947 after the war between India and Pakistan. China uses its alliance with Pakistan as a front for waging asymmetric warfare on India, with its military and economic support to Pakistan.

17. George Ginsburg and Michael Mathos, *Communist China and Tibet: The First Dozen Years* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 210.

Infrastructural development in Tibet is a major concern for India in this era of competition. China has been developing efficacious infrastructure along the areas bordering India which, at times, discomfits India. The rail-road network in Tibet is far more developed than on the Indian side of the border. In Tibet, China has reportedly constructed 14 air bases and an oil pipeline from Golmud to Lhasa. At present, China has in Tibet, 17 secret radar centres, 8 stations for Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), 70 medium range and 20 short range missile sites—India, Nepal and Bhutan will be easy targets from these missile sites in Tibet.¹⁸ According to another source, one quarter of China's nuclear missile force is deployed in Tibet, which includes medium and intermediate range missiles at Nagchuka and ICBMs at Nyingtri, Kongpo and Powo Tramo, and some of these missiles could primarily be aimed at India.¹⁹ As per one report, China had deployed 5,00,000 soldiers on the Tibetan plateau and half of them are based on the Sino-India border.²⁰ The process of transforming Tibet into a military base is not only hazardous for Tibet but will have a severe impact on the entire eco-system, as Tibet is the water tower of Asia and about two billion of the world's population is dependent on Tibet's water. Tibet is a source of 11 major rivers but nuclearisation of Tibet is polluting the waters which, in turn, is affecting the countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia. Though China has, time and again, elucidated that all the infrastructural and other related projects in Tibet are only meant to modernise Tibet and for the prosperity of the Tibetans, the latter have a different story to narrate. They claim that all the projects in Tibet are intended to annihilate the Tibetan culture from the roots and to encircle India on the northeastern frontier. China, in India's neighbourhood, means more ominous implications for India rather than benefits. India, like any other nation, desires to have a peaceful and amicable neighbour rather than an assertive and aggressive one. Moreover, there have been reports of China supporting various

18. Lt. Gen. O. P. Kaushik (Retd), "China Bridgehead in Tibet: Targets in India," *Defence and Security Alert*, vol.3 issue 6, April 2012, pp. 48- 51.

19. <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/geopolitics/Threat-Perception-of-India.html>, accessed on April 27, 2012.

20. Air Vice Marshal A. K. Tiwary (Retd), "PLAAF Against India: Attrition Through Tibet," *Defence and Security Alert*, vol.3, issue 6, April 2012, pp. 30-33.

insurgents group like the Nagas and providing them with arms, weapons and funds in the northeastern states of India via Tibet.

Furthermore, India is, slowly and steadily, moving towards the status of a world power, with close ties with other major powers of the world. This might lead to a shift in the balance of power in the world, which is not acceptable to China. It leads to growing uneasiness in the Chinese government, thus, it has embarked upon a strategy to destabilise India through continued border disputes, environmental issues and even by tying up with the arch-rival of India, Pakistan, by using its Tibet card. China is acting as a true expansionist power and is trying to push India onto the defensive. The criticality of Chinese control over Tibet is aptly summed up by the views of an Indian analyst, P. C. Chakravarti, who said, "Any strong expansionist power, entrenched in Tibet, holds in its hands a loaded pistol pointed at the heart of India."²¹

TIBETANS IN INDIA: ASSET OR LIABILITY FOR INDIA?

The self-immolation in New Delhi by Jamphel Yeshe, a Tibetan-in-exile, during Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to New Delhi during the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) Summit, caught the attention of civil society and the international community as a whole. It led to the preventive arrest of 300 Tibetans during the BRICS Summit, and created trouble not only for Tibetans living in New Delhi but also for the Tibetan look-alike Indian citizens of northeast India. Three colonies, particularly of "refugees" in New Delhi – Majnu Ka Tila, Buddha Vihar and Tibetan Refugee Camp – had been turned into police camps during that period.²² This event led to the issue of prejudice faced by Indians hailing from the northeastern region, predominantly from Manipur, in Delhi. This kind of racial profiling has become the stereotype for those from the region and has been for decades, which just goes to show how difficult it is to combat, let alone destroy, prejudice. As one young professional from Manipur said to a reporter, "I have lived in Delhi for four years, why is my 'Indianness'

21. P.C. Chakravarti, *India-China Relations* (Calcutta: Firma K.L Mukhopadhyay, 1961).

22. http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2012-03-29/news/31254550_1_brics-summit-tibetans-shame, accessed on April 10, 2012.

being questioned?"²³ It implies that the Indian police didn't want to take any chances and cracked down on the protests, even if they had to do it at the cost of hurting the citizens of their own country.

Now the question that arises is: do these protests by the Tibetans and inferences on Tibetans, make them a liability or trouble for India, as the Dalai Lama has been an honoured guest of India since 1959 and has been provided refuge? There is a belief among certain sections of the people in India that the Tibetans living in India comprise one of the major causes for the strained Sino-Indian relations which might prove perilous for India's security. Many believe that the Chinese government has its agents inside India for espionage. With over a lakh Tibetans living in India, a few may turn out to be pro-Chinese and, thus, help China with critical and confidential information. In 2011, the drama over the 17th Karmapa Lama, Ogyen Trinley Dorjee, ruffled feathers and raised doubts in India. In an investigation over a *benami* land deal that had the Tibetan government-in-exile as a party, foreign currency worth crores was recovered from the residence of the Karmapa Lama. According to the central government, the currency included Chinese currency as well. Investigating agencies like the Enforcement Directorate, suggested that the Karmapa was acting for the Chinese government and had received the huge amount of money to establish Chinese control over all the Indian monasteries in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.²⁴ However, these allegations were later proved to be baseless and insignificant.

Another problem with the Tibetans living in India is that India has become the pivot of the Tibetan struggle as a majority of these refugees are living in India, with only a miniscule number living in other countries, which sometimes lands India in complicated situations.

Despite all the difficulties faced by India due to the Tibetans living in there, the exiled Tibetan community, in many ways, is an asset to India, as they are different from illegal immigrants from other neighbouring countries and are economically self-sufficient, giving a further boost to the Indian

23. <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/analysis/tibetans-carry-the-torch-despite-china-and-delhi>, accessed on April 29, 2012.

24. www.ibnlive.in.com/news/tibetan-leader-karmapa-linked-to-china/141801-3.html, accessed on February 25, 2012.

The Dalai Lama's presence adds to India's standing in the global community as a democratic country, given the Dalai Lama's innumerable powerful supporters around the world.

economy. There is no evidence or history of Tibetans engaging in any unlawful activity. Even by self-immolating themselves, they are inflicting harm on themselves, not doing any harm to the country. Given the graphic and painful nature of the personal sacrifice, self-immolation is just a way to attract significant attention to a cause without harming others.²⁵

One of the greater benefits of having Tibetans living in India has been the rejuvenation of Buddhism in India which, in turn, has led to a high influx of Buddhist tourists to the Buddhist destinations in India. The Tibetans are the fundamental reason why Western and, increasingly, Eastern Buddhists are coming to India. It would be very interesting to look at how the Dalai Lama has contributed to security in India. While it is true that Sino-India relations, sometimes, get strained because of the presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans, India should not forget that their presence in India comprises leverage which can be used to put diplomatic pressure on the Chinese. Furthermore, the Dalai Lama's presence adds to India's standing in the global community as a democratic country, given the Dalai Lama's innumerable powerful supporters around the world, which strengthens India's credentials for offering political asylum to democratic leaders escaping and fighting oppressive authoritarian regimes.²⁶

Some of the Tibetans are also a part of the Special Frontier Force, also known as Establishment-22, which had been used in the Kargil War and now in Siachen. Another important advantage of having the Tibetan community in India is that India can use Tibet as a bargaining chip with China to solve the border dispute. The very presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan community in India should be seen as a 'stipulating factor' while dealing with China. Due to the aggressive policies of the Chinese, the Tibetans view

25. <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/china-significance-tibetans-self-immolations>, accessed on May 4, 2012.

26. <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/geopolitics/Indias-Tibet.html>, accessed on April 25, 2012.

India as more benevolent than China or for that matter any other nation, which further improves India's image in the world fora.

INDIA NEEDS TO ALTER ITS POLICIES

Many scholars still think that India needs to revise its policies towards Tibet and to some extent towards China as well, as the Tibet issue has a direct link with India's problems with China. Some would even argue that India still tries to appease China and needs to get out of its 'appeasement policy'. India has not taken much advantage of the presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans in India for the past 53 years. It is observed on many occasions that India too, like China, does not want to make its people aware that Tibet is a political issue. What is disturbing is that the situation of the Tibetans in India is vulnerable and based on the whims and fancies of the policies of the Indian government. Some Indian officials have, on many occasions, emphasised that the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans should remember that they are honoured guests and should remain here as guests. The Dalai Lama usually describes India's position on Tibet as "over-cautious" and in his view, New Delhi seemingly wants to play the Tibet card to please Beijing in the hope of warming up ties between the two countries.²⁷ The Dalai Lama has, time and again, warned India about China's presence in Tibet and its intentions against India. Even during the March 2008 uprising in Tibet, the monk made an indirect appeal to New Delhi to take the initiative on the issue, saying that China and India cannot forge a friendship based on trust until "they solve the Tibetan problem because of which China maintains a huge army on the plateau". He also remarked that "*Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* is not possible without the resolution of the Tibetan issue."²⁸ Despite India's appeasement policy towards China and not using its "Tibetan card" against it, China continues to lay claims over Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh, and continues to show Arunachal Pradesh and Kashmir as disputed areas on its official maps. Moreover, it shows Arunachal Pradesh as "Southern Tibet" on the maps.

27. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LG17Df02.html, accessed on March 29, 2012.

28. Lt Gen R.K. Jasbir Singh, ed., *Indian Defence Yearbook 2009* (Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2009), p. 194.

It seems China is not seriously considering a resolution of the Tibet issue or the border dispute with India and is simply buying time till the Dalai Lama passes away.

This is not the end to China's assertiveness. It further refuses to grant visas to officials of the Arunachal region, as it claims that Arunachal is a part of China and the people of that region do not require visas to travel to their own country. Moreover, China had repeatedly issued stapled visas to the citizens of J&K as, according to the Chinese, J&K is disputed territory. It is important not to forget the statement made by the Chinese Ambassador to India, H.E. Zhang Yan, in New Delhi prior to Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's last visit to India in 2010 that China-India ties are "fragile" and need special care, indicating the cautious Chinese attitude towards issues dividing India and China.²⁹

It seems China is not seriously considering a resolution of the Tibet issue or the border dispute with India and is simply buying time till the Dalai Lama passes away, after which it hopes the Tibetan movement would fizzle out which would also further weaken India's bargaining position on the border negotiations while, at the same time, gaining for China greater manoeuvrability.³⁰ It is high time that India realises that its soft policies and shying away will be of no help.

From the time of Pandit Nehru, India's policy has been to shut its eyes to what is happening in Tibet, to what the Chinese are doing in Tibet, to what the Chinese are doing towards India; and, in particular, to the military and infrastructure build-up in Tibet.³¹ India lost Tibet as a buffer in the 1950s. India should keep in mind the fact that if the Tibetans fight back and get Tibet, India will get back its buffer. This does not mean that India should encourage the Tibetans to protest to cause volatility in China. India's policies and approach should be as neutral and non-aligned as possible. It should buttress the exiled community economically and culturally and let them

29. <http://www.eurasiareview.com/30012012-china%E2%80%99s-double-speak-analysis/>, accessed on March 30, 2012.

30. Ibid., p. 196.

31. Arun Shourie, "Roof of the World," *Defence and Security of India*, vol 1 issue 5, pp. 22-34.

decide what course of action they want vis-à-vis China. One more point to be kept in mind is that most Tibetans of the younger generation were born in India and this gives them the rights of free speech and expression. Hence, India should deal with the Tibetans-in-exile with greater compassion as they have every right to hold peaceful demonstrations. India needs to devise an effective long-term policy so that the Tibetan movement does not affect Sino-India relations negatively.

Another policy recommendation for India while dealing with China would be that India should refrain from referring to Tibet in the joint statements until China accepts and mentions Arunachal Pradesh as a part of India, in order to put diplomatic pressure on China. This is important because while India accepts Tibet as an autonomous region of China, the Chinese continue to lay claims on Arunachal Pradesh, which is an integral part of India—a state of the Union of India. Hence, the need to put diplomatic pressure on China is a must for Indian foreign policy.³²

It needs to be noted that not only is the Beijing-Dharamsala issue not heading anywhere, but the Sino-Indian border talks also are not showing any progress. In this regard, India's policies need a serious review. It would be a better option if India and the civil society take a more serious note of it. It is not only our moral responsibility to highlight the Sino-Tibetan issue but it is in our vested interest to eliminate the persisting problems between the Chinese and Tibetans. Easing the tension in Tibet is a prerequisite for better and stabilised Sino-India relations. India needs to include the Tibet issue in talks with China as it is bound to be affected by any cataclysm in Tibet. India should urge China to resume talks with the Tibetan delegations and Sino-Tibetan dialogue must go on as the best time to engage in negotiations is when the current Dalai Lama is present and alive. India needs to build up military infrastructure in order to avoid a situation like the "1962 War". It would be suicidal for India to ignore the Chinese strategy in Tibet, which is, by and large, pointing towards India. India should remain more vigilant of Chinese actions. Not only does the

32. Sana Hashmi, "Military Infrastructure along the Northern Border of India," *Defence and Diplomacy*, vol 1, no 2, pp. 103-112.

Indian government need to redraft its policies but the Tibetans also need to review their strategy and approaches for dealing with the predicament. Together, they can make a change; a change for maintaining prosperity and tranquillity in the Asian region.