

The United States, Tibet, and the Cold War

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U.S. policy toward Tibet has operated on two levels. At the strategic level, the United States has consistently supported the Chinese position that Tibet is part of China. At the pragmatic or tactical level, Washington has been opportunistic in its dealings with Tibet and has been prone to wide fluctuations, ranging from the provision of financial and military aid to Tibetan guerrilla forces in the 1950s and 1960s to neglect and almost no official contact in the 1970s and 1980s.

The first phase of the U.S.-Tibetan relationship encompassed the period from World War II to the fall of the Guomindang government in China in 1949. During these years, Tibet was de facto an independent state. China had exercised no authority in Tibet since 1913, and Tibet controlled not only its internal affairs but also its territorial defense and foreign relations.

The first statement of U.S. policy toward Tibet appeared in July 1942 in a memorandum to the British government:

For its part, the Government of the United States has borne in mind the fact that the Chinese Government has long claimed suzerainty over Tibet and that the Chinese constitution lists Tibet among areas constituting the territory of the Republic of China. This Government has at no time raised a question regarding either of these claims.¹

At about the same time, the United States established direct contact with Tibet, sending two reconnaissance specialists from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the wartime intelligence agency) into Tibet to travel overland to China and assess the potential for construction of roads and airfields. The U.S. government first asked its close ally, the Chinese Nationalist leader Jiāng Jièshì, to arrange this visit, but he was unable to do so because of the lack of Chinese control over Tibet. Hence, Washington asked the British (who had a representative in Lhasa) to secure permission from the Tibetan government.

1. Aide-mémoire from U.S. State Department to the British Embassy, 13 July 1942, FO371/35756, British Foreign Office Records, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (UKNA).

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After British envoys assured the Tibetan authorities that this was an official U.S. mission that could benefit Tibet, the Tibetan Foreign Affairs Bureau granted transit permission to the two OSS officers. They entered Tibet from India carrying presents and a letter from President Franklin Roosevelt to the 14th Dalai Lama asking him to assist the officers. Dated 3 July 1942, the letter read:

Your HOLINESS:

Two of my fellow countrymen, Ilya Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan, hope to visit your Pontificate and the historic and widely famed city of Lhasa. There are in the United States of America many persons, among them myself, who, long and greatly interested in your land and people, would highly value such an opportunity.

As you know, the people of the United States, in association with those of twenty-seven other countries, are now engaged in a war which has been thrust upon the world by nations bent on conquest who are intent on destroying freedom of thought, of religion, and of action everywhere. The United Nations are fighting today in defense of and for preservation of freedom, confident that we shall be victorious because our cause is just, our capacity is adequate, and our determination is unshakable.

I am asking Ilya Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan to convey to you a little gift in token of my friendly sentiment toward you.

With cordial greetings
Franklin D. Roosevelt²

Following this visit, the United States sent several wireless radios to Tibet, also without going through China.

These contacts, however, did not amount to government-to-government relations, at least from Washington's perspective. Although U.S. officials were dealing directly with the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government, the Roosevelt administration did not regard this as in any way legitimizing Tibetan claims to independence from China. William Donovan, the director of OSS, explained this point to President Roosevelt at the time: "This letter is addressed to the Dalai Lama in his capacity of [sic] religious leader of Tibet, rather than in his capacity of secular leader of Tibet, thus avoiding giving any possible offense to the Chinese Government which includes Tibet in the terri-

2. Letter from President Roosevelt to the Dalai Lama, 3 July 1942, in U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1942, Vol. VII, p. 113 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers). See also Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 392.

tory of the Republic of China."³ The United States, however, refrained from mentioning this interpretation of Tibet's status to the Tibetan authorities.

In July 1948, the situation was reversed when the Tibetan government sent an official trade delegation to the United States. The U.S. State Department informed its embassy in New Delhi that because the United States did not recognize Tibet as a country the trade mission could be received only on an informal basis. Moreover, rather than referring to Chinese "suzerainty" over Tibet as in 1942, the State Department at this point used the more anodyne term "sovereignty":

It should be recalled that China claims of sovereignty over Tibet and that this Government has never questioned that claim; accordingly it would not be possible for this government to accord members of the projected mission other than an informal reception unless the missions enjoyed the official sanction of the Chinese Government.⁴

Nevertheless, at the tactical level, the United States was again willing to deal with Tibet independent of China and in fact tried to ensure that the Tibetan trade delegation's visit enjoyed a modicum of success. For example, under strong pressure from China, the State Department insisted that the Tibetans could not meet President Harry Truman unless they were accompanied by the Chinese ambassador to the United States. But when the Tibetans refused, the Truman administration allowed them to meet with Secretary of State George C. Marshall without being accompanied by the Chinese ambassador.

The rapid disintegration of the Guomindang regime in the first half of 1949 pushed the Tibet question into the realm of Cold War politics. In April 1949 the U.S. embassy in New Delhi urged the State Department to conduct a review of U.S. policy toward Tibet. The embassy suggested that if the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) succeeded in taking control in Beijing, the United States should be prepared to treat Tibet as an independent country. The embassy concluded that keeping Tibet friendly to the United States and other Western countries was useful so long as it did not "give offense" to the sensibilities of Jiǎng Jièshì and his government on Taiwan:

1. It is believed to be clearly to our advantage under any circumstances to have Tibet as a friend if possible. We should accordingly maintain a friendly attitude toward Tibet in ways short of giving China [the Guomindang] cause for offense. We should encourage so far as feasible Tibet's orientation toward the West rather than toward the East.

3. Memorandum from OSS Director Donovan to President Roosevelt, 1 July 1942, in *FRUS*, 1942, Vol. VII, p. 115.

4. Tibet/8-2147, Dispatch No. 46, 28 October 1947, 693.0031, Record Group (RG) 59, U.S. National Archives (NARA).

2. For the present we should avoid giving the impression of any alteration in our position toward Chinese authority over Tibet such as for example steps which would clearly indicate that we regard Tibet as independent, etc. . . . We should however keep our policy as flexible as possible by avoiding references to Chinese sovereignty or suzerainty unless references are clearly called for and by informing China of our proposed moves in connection with Tibet, rather than asking China's consent for them.⁵

Despite this recommendation, the State Department ultimately decided not to change the U.S. position. In late December 1949 the Tibetan government requested permission to send a special delegation to the United States to seek aid and support against the victorious CCP. The State Department turned down the request and instructed the U.S. ambassador in India to dissuade the Tibetans from sending such a delegation.⁶

Events on the ground changed quickly after the inauguration of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1949. The CCP promptly set out to "liberate" Tibet—that is, to incorporate Tibet into China. In October 1950, after the Chinese had tried but failed to persuade the Dalai Lama to negotiate Tibet's "liberation," the PRC invaded Tibet's easternmost province. The Dalai Lama shifted his residence from Lhasa to a town near the Indian border so that he could easily flee into exile if the Chinese pressed further with their military occupation, and he appealed for help from the United States, Western Europe, and the United Nations (UN). When none was forthcoming, he sent a delegation to Beijing to negotiate Tibet's return to China. In May 1951 the two sides signed what became known as the "Seventeen-Point Agreement" (Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet), a document that for the first time formally recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

The Dalai Lama himself, however, had not signed the agreement, nor was he even aware of its terms when it was signed. Consequently, the U.S. government urged him to declare the accord invalid and to flee into exile. This effort was unsuccessful, and the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa to try to live under the terms of the Seventeen-Point Agreement and Chinese rule. At the heart of his decision was his perception that the United States, though it might express sympathy for Tibet and offer some limited support, was unwilling to endorse Tibetan independence and would not provide substantial military aid or political backing for a government-in-exile headed by the Dalai Lama that would aspire to independence. In September 1951, after the Dalai Lama had

5. Tibet/1-849, Dispatch No. 108, 12 April 1949, 693.0031, RG 59, NARA.

6. Goldstein, *History of Modern Tibet*, p. 631.

already returned to Lhasa to live under the terms of the new agreement, the U.S. government sent the last, and most forthcoming, of a series of messages to the Tibetan leader. The message called on him to flee Lhasa and stated that if he left Tibet, publicly disavowed the Seventeen-Point Agreement, and agreed to cooperate in opposing Communist aggression, the United States would officially adopt the position that the Dalai Lama is the "head of an autonomous Tibet" and would "support your return to Tibet at the earliest practicable moment as the head of an autonomous and non-communist, country."⁷

Thus, even at this late juncture, the U.S. government was unwilling to accommodate the Dalai Lama's fundamental desire to gain international support for Tibetan independence. Consequently, the Tibetan leader opted to remain in Lhasa as part of the PRC, dashing U.S. hopes of enlisting him in its anti-Chinese Communist crusade.⁸

Tibet remained in this uneasy situation for the next five years, lacking any further contact with the United States. But in 1956 the U.S. government again became actively involved in Tibet when a series of revolts broke out in Kham, the areas of western China inhabited by ethnic Tibetans. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) immediately made contact with the resistance leaders and by 1957 had begun to train and provide weapons to Tibetan guerrilla forces.⁹

Over the next three years, the situation within Tibet proper deteriorated, culminating in an uprising in Lhasa in March 1959 that sent the Dalai Lama into exile in India. The United States now had achieved what it so energetically sought without success in 1950-1951. Faced with this unexpected turn of events, U.S. officials had to decide how to proceed.¹⁰

7. Message from State Department to Dalai Lama, 7 September 1951, 793B.00/9-1851, RG 59, NARA; quoted in Goldstein, *History of Modern Tibet*, pp. 808-810.

8. Although the Dalai Lama did not want to leave Tibet for exile, he did not completely sever contact with the United States. In June 1952, Princess Cocoola of Sikkim (Mrs. Phunkhang) told the U.S. consul in Calcutta that the Dalai Lama had sent an oral message to the U.S. government via his brother-in-law, Pakla Phüntso Tashi. The Tibetan leader had asked her to convey the same message. The four main points were: (1) "The Dalai Lama appreciated greatly the U.S. Government's feelings and attitudes toward him personally and toward his Tibetan subjects"; (2) "He sincerely hopes that when the time is propitious for the real liberation of Tibet from the Chinese, the United States will find it feasible and possible to lend material aid and moral support to the Tibetan government"; (3) "The Tibetan people have not changed; they are not pro-Chinese; they are Tibetans first and last"; and (4) "He hopes to get a written message 'down' soon." Cited from "Memorandum of Conversation between Consul Garrett Soulen and Princess Cocoola of Sikkim," 24 June 1952, in 7936.00/7-252, RG 59, NARA. The Dalai Lama, however, denies having sent such a message. See Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. II: 1951-1955, in press.

9. The CIA did this without seeking the approval of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government.

10. A case can be made that U.S. active involvement in the 1950s, particularly from 1956, played a significant role in destabilizing Tibet and inadvertently fostering the uprising in 1959, but that will have to be the topic for another article.

At the operational level, the CIA continued its covert support for a Tibetan guerrilla force and received high-level approval to set up a new training base in northern Nepal for resistance fighters who could be infiltrated into Tibet. The CIA also provided funds and other forms of non-military support for the Dalai Lama.¹¹ With regard to the international status of Tibet, however, the United States was much less forthcoming.

In late April 1959, just after the Dalai Lama fled into exile, he sent a message to the U.S. government that was summarized in a memorandum from Under Secretary of State C. Douglas Dillon to President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The Dalai Lama asked that "the United States recognize the Free Tibetan Government and influence other countries to do so. In this connection, he [the Dalai Lama] emphasizes his determination to work for complete independence, regardless of the time required for ending the opposition of India, and declares that autonomy is not enough."¹² The memorandum addressed this issue succinctly:

Recognition is a political act and we could grant recognition when publicly asked if such a step is in the national interest. In response to previous approaches from the Dalai Lama in 1949-51 we refrained from committing ourselves to recognition of Tibet as an independent state. We continue to recognize both the claim of the Republic of China to suzerainty over Tibet and Tibet's claim to de facto autonomy.¹³

Dillon was averse to making any change in this policy. He warned Eisenhower that the United States must "avoid taking a position which might appear to encourage the Dalai Lama to seek international recognition."¹⁴

In subsequent months, the Eisenhower administration reexamined its policy vis-à-vis the Dalai Lama and Tibet but decided once again not to advocate Tibetan independence. Nonetheless, U.S. officials did offer stronger support for Tibet by starting to refer to it as an autonomous "country" under Chinese "suzerainty" and by also indicating that if unspecified conditions occurred in the future that made self-determination possible, the United States would support this. These nuances were made explicit in September 1959:

As to the position which the U.S. government takes with regard to the status of Tibet, the historical position of the U.S. has been that Tibet is an autonomous

11. In 1964, for example, the CIA provided a total of \$1,735,000 in support, including \$500,000 for the support of 2,100 Tibetan guerrillas in Nepal; \$180,000 as a subsidy for the Dalai Lama; \$225,000 for equipment, transportation and training; and \$400,000 for covert training in Colorado. See "Memorandum for the Special Group," 9 January 1964, in *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXX, p. 731.

12. This was cited in a memorandum from the Acting Secretary of State Dillon to President Eisenhower, 26 April 1959, in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol. XIX, p. 763.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, p. 764.

country under Chinese suzerainty. However, the U.S. government has consistently held that the autonomy of Tibet should not be impaired by force. The U.S. has never recognized the pretension to sovereignty over Tibet put forward by the Chinese Communist regime.¹⁵

The revised U.S. position was laid out even more clearly in a memorandum from Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs J. Graham Parsons to Secretary of State Christian Herter dated 14 October 1959:

That you inform him [the Dalai Lama] that, while the United States cannot accord recognition to the Dalai Lama's government under present circumstances, it

- (a) fully supports the right of the Tibetan people to have the determining voice in their political destiny,
- (b) would be prepared to consider appropriate assistance to this end should a change in the situation make this practicable, and
- (c) would be prepared to make a public statement, after completion of the [U.N.] General Assembly consideration of the Tibetan item, affirming our support of Tibetan self-determination.¹⁶

A few months later, on 20 February 1960, Herter conveyed this message in a letter to the Dalai Lama.¹⁷

These indications of greater political support for Tibet were carefully couched. On the one hand, U.S. officials wanted to placate Tibetan sensibilities and assist the Tibetans in keeping their cause alive; on the other hand, they wanted to avoid any change in the international political status of Tibet as part of China. Consequently, rather than launching a campaign to secure international recognition of Tibet as an independent state (as the Tibetans themselves hoped to do), the Eisenhower administration actually constrained the Tibetans from presenting a political case to the United Nations (UN) that would have accused the PRC of aggression against an independent country. Instead, the United States pressured the Dalai Lama to refer to the suffering of the Tibetan people and human rights issues when making his case against

15. U.S. Information Agency (USIA), Official Text, 14 September 1959 (statement read to reporters on 11 September 1959). Contrary to the USIA statement, the use of the word "country" was not the historical U.S. position. On 3 November 1959 the director of the U.S. State Department's Office of Chinese Affairs and the assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs sent a joint note to George Yeh, the ambassador in Washington of the exiled Chinese Nationalist government, informing him that "the United States had made a decision to go somewhat beyond its previous position with regard to Tibet, namely that it is an autonomous country under the suzerainty of China." See "Memorandum of Conversation," in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol. XIX, p. 801.

16. Memorandum from Assistant Secretary Parsons to Secretary Herter, 14 October 1959, in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol. XIX, p. 794.

17. Secretary of State Herter to the Dalai Lama, 20 January 1960, FO371 150710, UKNA: quoted in Goldstein, *History of Modern Tibet*, p. 56.

China. This distinction was emphasized by CIA Director Allen Dulles at a meeting of the U.S. National Security Council (NSC) on 10 September 1959. The notes from the meeting indicate that "Mr. Dulles then took up Tibet. . . . The U.S. has felt that he [the Dalai Lama] should not, in his presentation to the U.N. emphasize aggression, since Tibet was for many years a part of China. In our view, his case is stronger on a human rights basis."¹⁸ The same point was conveyed by Secretary of State Herter to the Dalai Lama in a letter dated 6 October 1959: "Consultation with other United Nations Members on this subject [the record of Chinese Communist activities in Tibet] have confirmed our view, made known to you earlier, that wider support can be obtained for a hearing of Tibet's case if the suppression of human rights aspects of it are stressed rather than matters relating to sovereignty."¹⁹

For the Dalai Lama, this was a crucial issue. Two days after the Tibetan leader received Herter's letter, Gyalo Thondup (the Dalai Lama's older brother who had led a Tibetan delegation to the UN headquarters in New York to lodge an appeal with the UN General Assembly) met with the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge. The Tibetans' lawyer, Ernest Gross, left no doubt that "Thondup had arrived with instructions . . . to raise question of independence."²⁰ Lodge reported to the State Department that Gyalo Thondup "questioned US repeatedly as to whether action on human rights basis would in some way affect adversely cause of Tibetan independence. He clearly continued hope GA [General Assembly] might address itself to question of Tibetan independence."

A few days later, on 14 October 1959, Assistant Secretary of State Parsons sent a memorandum to Herter summarizing the conclusions of a policy review undertaken by the Far Eastern Affairs division (FE). Parsons recommended that no change be made in the long-standing U.S. strategic position on Tibet:

Our Embassy in India has reported that the Dalai Lama has requested United States support for hearing the Tibetan case in the United Nations on the basis of aggression and that the Tibetans are pressing for recognition of the independent sovereign status of Tibet. . . . FE has completed a study . . . of the question of United States recognition of the independence of Tibet in which the considerations both for and against such action are examined in detail. Taking these factors into account, we have concluded that on balance the arguments against recognition of Tibetan independence under present conditions are stronger than

18. "Notes from NSC Meeting," 10 September 1959, in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol. XIX, p. 784.

19. Letter from Secretary of State Herter to the Dalai Lama, 6 October 1959, in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol. XIX, p. 790.

20. Telegram from UN Delegation to State Department, 8 October 1959, in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol. XIX, pp. 790-791.

those in favor. I consider this conclusion valid from the standpoint of both the United States national interest and from that of the Tibetans. We share with the Tibetans the objectives of keeping the Tibetan cause alive in the consciousness of the world and maintaining the Dalai Lama as an effective spokesman of the Tibetan people. I believe that United States recognition of the Dalai Lama's government as that of an independent country would serve neither purpose well.²¹

Consequently, despite the Cold War and the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile, the U.S. government continued to believe that American interests were best served by adhering to the position that Tibet was part of Communist-controlled China. The United States at the tactical level supported a Tibetan insurgency force and financially assisted the Dalai Lama, but it would not support the Tibetans' political aims. Moreover, U.S. officials repeatedly exhorted the Dalai Lama to shift the main focus of his campaign against the PRC, basing it not on the question of Tibet's independence but on issues of human rights violations. The public U.S. expressions of support for Tibetan self-determination if conditions ever became appropriate were, therefore, mainly an attempt to placate the Dalai Lama in the face of Washington's refusal to support his requests for help on the political front. Parsons acknowledged the gap between rhetoric and reality in his memorandum to Herter:

The Tibetans will probably be unhappy at our failure to go all the way toward recognition of Tibetan independence. Nonetheless, I think Thondup could be made to see that recognition under present conditions would not serve the best interests of the Tibetan people and that in offering to state publicly at an appropriate time in the future our support of the right of the Tibetans to self-determination we are moving in the direction he desires us to take. However, so long as the Chinese Communists occupy Tibet self-determination is not practicable and the struggle of the Tibetan people for control of their own political destiny is likely to be a long one.²²

The rapprochement between the United States and Communist China in the early 1970s changed U.S. Cold War strategy and created a new set of foreign policy conditions that quickly marginalized the U.S. government's "pragmatic" interest in Tibet. Consequently, for more than a decade after the restoration of U.S.-China relations in 1969-1971, Tibet remained an obscure issue in U.S. foreign policy. The United States halted all remaining support for the Tibetan guerrillas and ceased to use terms such as "autonomous country."²³ U.S. officials also stopped talking about vague support for the Tibetans'

21. "Memorandum of 14 October 1959," in *FRUS*, 1958-1960, Vol. XIX, pp. 792-793.

22. *Ibid.*

23. The cessation of support for the Nepal-based Tibetan guerrilla force was a symbolic blow but did

right to self determination if conditions changed. Although the Cold War continued, Tibet ceased to be a part of it and faded into the shadows.

The early record of U.S. involvement with Tibet is thus relatively clear. Despite rhetoric about promoting freedom and democracy, the United States was unwilling in the case of Tibet to compromise its larger interests in China and Asia. Although in one sense the United States was clearly a friend and supporter of Tibet, in a more basic sense it was not a "good friend" and might even be described as a cynical and deceptive friend.²⁴ Tibet's quest for independence ran up against the pragmatic side of U.S. foreign policy. On this issue, the triumph of realpolitik over what Henry Kissinger called America's "pursuit of its historic moral convictions" is particularly striking when we compare U.S. support of Tibet with the Soviet Union's support of Mongolia.²⁵ Although Tibet and Mongolia were of a politically equivalent status at the time of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911–1912, Mongolia has long been an independent state and a member of the UN. The reason is simple: At the Yalta conference in early 1945, the Soviet leader Josif Stalin persuaded Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to support a plebiscite for Mongolia, a demand that the Chinese Nationalist government was forced to accept. Mongolia was heavily dependent on the Soviet Union for decades but is today an independent country.

Tibet and the United States in the Deng Xiaoping Era

From the time of the Dalai Lama's flight into exile in 1959 until the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s, the Tibetan government-in-exile had no official contact with the Chinese authorities. The situation changed in 1978 after Deng Xiaoping initiated a new Chinese external and internal ini-

not affect the concrete political or military situation in Tibet. During the thirteen years of active U.S. support for the resistance, the guerrilla operations had no significant impact in Tibet.

24. It is interesting to note that Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's older brother who oversaw the Tibetans' activities with the CIA in the 1950s and 1960s, has a similar view. In a phone interview with me in April 1994 he said, "After 1956 the Americans gave us lots of empty promises. They said that after the Dalai Lama comes into exile they will help Tibet get its independence. These were said in secret talks with me by various American organizations. All these things were betrayed. The Indians betrayed the Tibetans and the American also did so." The available documentary evidence does not support Gyalo Thondup's claim that the United States ever promised to help Tibet gain independence. One possibility is that a CIA officer in the field made an unauthorized statement to this effect. Another possibility is that higher-level authorization for such a statement was issued but is contained in documents not yet released by the State Department and the CIA. A final possibility is that Thondup misunderstood something that was said or attached undue significance to a comment that did not actually depart from previous U.S. positions.

25. Henry Kissinger. *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 18.

tiative to resolve the Tibet question. The external initiative sought to induce the Dalai Lama to return from exile. Deng invited the Tibetan leader to send delegations from India to observe the situation in Tibet, and these overtures quickly led to secret face-to-face meetings in Beijing in 1982 and 1984.

At the same time, Beijing launched a parallel strategy to reverse the policies of the Cultural Revolution and meet Tibetans' ethnic sensibilities by making the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) more Tibetan in overall character. This initiative, led by Hu Yaobang, essentially gave the green light for a revitalization of Tibetan culture and religion, including the reopening of monasteries, permission to recruit new monks, greater leeway to use written Tibetan, and the replacement of large numbers of ethnic Chinese cadres with Tibetans. Deng Xiaoping also sought to foster accelerated economic development in Tibet that would rapidly improve the inhabitants' living standards.

Despite these promising signs, the reconciliation talks between Beijing and the Dalai Lama's representatives were unsuccessful. The Chinese authorities wanted to persuade the Dalai Lama and his officials in exile to set aside past animosities and exhibit a new friendship toward China—an acceptance of being part of the "motherland" and being loyal citizens of China. To achieve this, Deng was willing to allow a substantial degree of cultural autonomy, but he was unwilling to yield any real political power to the Dalai Lama or his officials. The CCP under the new initiative would remain in power in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The Tibetans quickly realized that Beijing was not even going to consider granting them independence. With that overriding goal still out of reach, the key question in Dharamsala was how much less than independence—if anything—they were willing to settle for. After considerable discussion, the Dalai Lama's government in 1984 proposed that China should grant Tibetans in all parts of China complete internal political autonomy—in essence self-rule. Tibet could then adopt a political system different from that in the rest of China, presumably something closer to a Western-style democracy. This proposal was along the lines of the "One Country Two Systems" offer the CCP had been floating for Taiwan. But in Beijing the Tibetan proposal met a hostile reception. The Chinese authorities argued that the two situations were not comparable because Tibet, unlike Taiwan, was already an integral part of the PRC. The talks collapsed because the Dalai Lama's bottom line was far above what China was willing to contemplate.

The Launching of the Pro-Tibet International Campaign

As officials in both Beijing and Dharamsala assessed these failures, the PRC increased its effort to stimulate economic development in Tibet in the hope of

winning over ordinary Tibetans who would be induced to accept limited autonomy. The Dalai Lama, for his part, launched an international campaign to win worldwide support and assistance for his cause. The Tibetan leader realized that he needed new sources of leverage if he was to have any hope of prying the concessions he wanted from Beijing. A full-scale international campaign, he believed, was the only means by which he could gain the requisite level of support.

The U.S. government was central to this new international campaign. Of all the Western democracies, the United States had provided the most extensive support for Tibetans during the difficult times of the 1950s and 1960s. However, the U.S. relationship with Tibet had changed a great deal in the 1970s when the U.S.-PRC rapprochement made the Dalai Lama and the Tibet question an issue that ranked low among U.S. foreign policy priorities. The exiled leader's new campaign, therefore, sought to regain U.S. attention and support by working through the backdoor of U.S. foreign policy—Congress. The key innovation in this strategy was that the Dalai Lama for the first time carried his political message to the United States and the world. Prior to this the Dalai Lama had traveled and spoken only as a religious leader.²⁶

With the help of Western supporters and donors and of sympathetic members of the U.S. Congress and their aides, the Tibetans launched a campaign in the United States to gain support for the Dalai Lama's cause, in essence recasting the Tibet question not in geopolitical terms but in terms of the U.S. commitment to freedom and human rights. The goal was to highlight China's human rights violations in Tibet and to present the Dalai Lama as a champion of Western values.²⁷

In 1987, the campaign achieved several major breakthroughs. In June, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a bill that condemned human rights abuses in Tibet, instructed the president to express sympathy for Tibet, and urged China to establish a constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama.²⁸ In September the Dalai Lama was invited to speak to the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in Washington, DC. In his speech, the first he had given

26. In fact, he was not able to visit the United States until 1979, having previously been denied a visa for ten years. See Thomas A. Grunfeld, "The Internationalization of Tibet," unpub. ms.

27. The parallel program in Europe will not be discussed here.

28. *News Tibet*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (May–August 1988), p. 8. The Tibetan exiles received their first explicit support from the U.S. Congress in July 1985 when ninety-one representatives signed a letter to Li Xiannian, president of the PRC, expressing support for continued direct talks and urging the Chinese government to "grant the very reasonable and justified aspirations of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his people every consideration." See Point 14 of Section 1243 of Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989, cited in *Congressional Ceremony to Welcome His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 13.

in the United States, he argued that Tibet had been "fully independent" at the time of the Chinese invasion in 1950. The Dalai Lama claimed that the invasion had begun China's "illegal occupation of the country" and that "although Tibetans lost their freedom, under international law Tibet today is still an independent state under illegal occupation."²⁹ The speech also raised human rights charges in provocative terms, referring twice to a "holocaust" against the Tibetan people.

The Dalai Lama called on China to resolve the Tibet problem through five specific steps:

1. transforming the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace—this would include not only Tibet proper but also ethnographic Tibet (the ethnic Tibetans in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan) and would require the withdrawal of all Chinese troops and military installations;
2. abandoning the policy of forced population transfers, which, according to the Dalai Lama, threatened the very existence of the Tibetans as a people;
3. respecting the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms (the Dalai Lama asserted that Tibetans are "deprived of all basic democratic rights and freedoms [and] exist under a colonial administration in which all real power is wielded by Chinese officials of the Communist Party and the army");
4. restoring and protecting Tibet's natural environment and halting China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste; and
5. holding negotiations about the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.³⁰

The speech was received well in the United States, and three weeks later, on 6 October 1987, the U.S. Senate passed its version of the earlier House bill. On 22 December 1987, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the *Foreign Relations Authorization Act* for fiscal year 1989, which contained a sense of the Congress resolution affirming that

- (i) the United States should express sympathy for those Tibetans who have suffered and died as a result of fighting, persecution, or famine over the past four decades;
- (ii) the United States should make the treatment of the Tibetan people an im-

29. Office of Tibet, *Tibet Briefing: His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Spring Visit to USA* (New York: Office of Tibet, 1994), p. 19.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–22.

portant factor in its conduct of relations with the People's Republic of China;

(iii) the Government of the People's Republic of China should respect internationally recognized human rights and end human rights violations against Tibetans;

(iv) the United States should urge the Government of the People's Republic of China to actively reciprocate the Dalai Lama's efforts to establish a constructive dialogue on the future of Tibet;

... [and]

(viii) the United States should urge the People's Republic of China to release all political prisoners in Tibet.³¹

The resolution also contained a provision about the sale of defense-related articles to the PRC, indicating that the United States should take into consideration "the extent to which the Government of the People's Republic of China is acting in good faith and in a timely manner to resolve human rights issues in Tibet." Finally, it authorized funding for fifteen scholarships that would allow Tibetans to attend American universities.³²

After the Cold War ended, congressional support for Tibet grew. In 1990, Congress authorized the creation of a Tibetan-language broadcast unit at the Voice of America, and in 1991 Congress included a number of tough though non-binding provisions on Tibet in a State Department authorization act that was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush later that year. The provisions described "Tibet, including those areas incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai," as an "occupied country" and declared that the Dalai Lama and the government-in-exile were "Tibet's true representatives."³³

Although the pro-Tibet statements in the legislation were only a non-binding "sense of Congress" resolution, they were seen in Dharamsala as a major victory and the start of a congressional move to establish a new policy that would actively pursue a settlement favorable to the Dalai Lama and his government. In that sense, the United States was again actively involved in Tibetan affairs, albeit primarily through Congress rather than the executive branch.

The Impact of the Pro-Tibet International Campaign

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the pro-Tibet sentiment in Congress was supported by the growth of a number of Tibet lobbying groups such as the

31. *Congressional Ceremony to Welcome His Holiness*, pp. 95-96.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

33. *Tibet Press Watch*, Vol. 3 (1), No. 17 (1991), pp. 1-2.

Washington-based International Campaign for Tibet, the Tibet Justice Center, Students for a Free Tibet, and broader human rights groups like Asia Watch and Amnesty International. As the Cold War drew to an end, policy vis-à-vis Tibet had to be made with an eye not just to U.S. global and economic interests but also to domestic political concerns.

The Dalai Lama himself became a major public advocate for his cause. On 15 June 1988, nine months after his successful speech to the U.S. congressional caucus, he spoke explicitly about political issues when he addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg. In the speech he set forth, for the first time publicly, his conditions for settling the Tibet question and for his return to Tibet. The main points were:

The whole of Tibet [political and ethnographic Tibet] . . . should become a self-governing democratic political entity founded on law by agreement of the people for the common good and protection of themselves and their environment, in association with the People's Republic of China.

The Government of the People's Republic of China could remain responsible for Tibet's foreign policy. The Government of Tibet should, however, develop and maintain relations through its own Foreign Affairs Bureau, in the fields of religion, commerce, education, culture, tourism, science, sports and other non-political activities. Tibet should join international organizations concerned with such activities.

The Government of Tibet should be founded on a constitution of basic law. The basic law should provide for a democratic system of government. . . . This means that the Government of Tibet will have the right to decide on all affairs relating to Tibet and Tibetans.

As individual freedom is the real source and potential of any society's development, the Government of Tibet would seek to ensure this freedom by adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the rights to speech, assembly, and religion. Because religion constitutes the source of Tibet's national identity, and spiritual values lie at the very heart of Tibet's rich culture, it would be the special duty of the Government of Tibet to safeguard and develop its practice.

The Government should be composed of a popularly elected Chief Executive, a bi-cameral legislative branch, and an independent judicial system. Its seat should be Lhasa.

The social and economic system of Tibet should be determined in accordance with the wishes of the Tibetan people, bearing in mind especially the need to raise the standard of living of the entire population.

. . . A regional peace conference should be called to ensure Tibet becomes a genuine sanctuary of peace through demilitarization. Until such a peace conference can be convened and demilitarization and neutralization achieved, China

could have the right to maintain a restricted number of military installations in Tibet. These must be solely for defense purposes.³⁴

The Strasbourg proposal did not seek complete independence, but it also did not accept limited autonomy within the Chinese political system. Rather, it called for Tibet to have a new status as a kind of autonomous dominion that conceivably could even field its own sports teams in international competitions. The Dalai Lama would accept being part of the PRC, but the Chinese authorities would have little authority over affairs in Tibet, and the Communist Party would not rule Tibet. Because this proposal had in essence been presented to Beijing at the secret 1984 talks, it did not represent anything new to the Chinese. But it did seem new to everyone else because it was the first time that the Dalai Lama had openly stated his willingness to settle for something less than independence. The proposal was well received around the world, solidifying the Dalai Lama's reputation as a leader who was reasonable and seeking a compromise solution.

In subsequent years the international campaign for Tibet did, in one sense, enjoy extraordinary success. It generated new visibility and sympathy in the West for the Dalai Lama's cause, made the Tibet question a part of U.S. domestic and international politics, and helped the Dalai Lama win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. In the process, he became an international symbol of peace and justice and a powerful spokesman for Tibet.

The Dalai Lama's international campaign also had an enormous impact in China. Tibetans in Lhasa knew about the Dalai Lama's visit to the United States in 1987 because of foreign short-wave broadcasts and because of attacks on the Dalai Lama's visit that appeared in the official Chinese media. As a result, less than a week after the Dalai Lama's first speech in Washington, a small group of nationalistic monks from Drepung monastery in Lhasa staged a political demonstration supporting Tibetan independence and the Dalai Lama. The monks were arrested, but four days later a second demonstration that was held to demand the release of these monks ended in a full-scale riot, killing several people.

Although China had liberalized its religious policies and allowed monasteries to reopen in Tibet, thousands of average Tibetans by this point were angry enough to face death and prison by rising up against Chinese rule in Tibet. The Dalai Lama's international campaign had stirred up Tibetan nationalist sentiment and focused it on the Dalai Lama and the West as the answer to Tibet's problems. Many Tibetans saw the visible U.S. support for the Dalai Lama as a sign that a turning point had been reached in Tibetan history and that this was the time to support the Dalai Lama's efforts by engag-

34. Office of Tibet, *Tibet Briefing*, p. 24.

ing in active political dissidence. Two further riots erupted in Lhasa in 1988, and on 5 March 1989 a fourth riot occurred in the Tibetan capital. The Dalai Lama's international initiative had successfully turned the tables on China, placing Beijing on the defensive both internationally and within Tibet. In March 1989, three months before the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the Chinese authorities imposed martial law in Tibet, a status that lasted more than a year.

The martial law declaration signaled a shift by the PRC to a more repressive, integrationist policy in Tibet. In Beijing, hardliners who gained ascendance after the Tiananmen Square massacre were able to make the case that China had to stop "coddling" Tibet lest matters get completely out of hand. Many officials in Lhasa and Beijing had believed from the start that liberalizing the practice of religion and allowing the reopening of monasteries in Tibet would only increase nationalistic and separatist sentiments, and their view now prevailed.³⁵

Beijing's new policy in Tibet led to more effective security measures that prevented further riots. At the same time, the hardline policy constrained institutions that could potentially strengthen Tibetan ethnic identity, notably language and religion. To be sure, the Tibetan language and Buddhist religion were not prohibited, and Tibetans still spoke their own language and studied it in primary school. Moreover, monasteries and nunneries remained open. Nonetheless, the new policy placed increasingly sharp restraints on how such institutions could operate and develop. In particular, it shelved a number of plans to increase the Tibetanization of Tibet. These reversals angered many Tibetans who, for example, wanted Tibetan to be the language used not only at home but also in government and higher education (including science) and who wanted monasteries and nunneries to be free of government limits on the number of monks and nuns they could have and the age of boys and girls who could enter. In addition, many Tibetans were offended by the tone of the new campaigns and their demeaning comments about Tibetan religion and culture, particularly by a wave of personal attacks on the Dalai Lama.

The new Chinese policy also accelerated the existing program of rapid economic development in Tibet, including much closer economic integration of the region with the rest of China. This was accomplished by further opening up Tibet for commercial development and resulted in a growing influx of non-Tibetan (Han Chinese and Hui Chinese Muslim) entrepreneurs and laborers, who were eager to receive some of the massive funds being poured into

35. On the leftist, pro-CCP orientation of officials in Lhasa in the 1980s, see the biography of Phüntso Wangye, the founder of the first Tibetan Communist Party, by Melvyn C. Goldstein, Dawei Sherap, and William Siebenschuh, *A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phüntso Wangye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 285-306.

Tibet and to take advantage of new economic opportunities. These non-Tibetans were not colonists in the normal sense of the term, inasmuch as their official residency permits did not refer to Tibet and they were expected eventually to return to their home areas. They were temporary migrants, or what is known in China as the "floating population." Nevertheless, their numbers and increasing ability to take control of Tibet's growing economy sparked widespread resentment.

A bittersweet joke making the rounds of minority officials in Lhasa conveyed these popular sentiments by sarcastically summarizing four periods of Tibetan history under the PRC:

In the first 10 years [1950–1960] we lost our land [*i.e.*, *Chinese troops entered and took control of Tibet*];

In the second ten years [1960–1970] we lost political power [*i.e.*, *the traditional government was replaced by a Han dominated Communist government*];

In the third ten years [1970–1980] we lost our culture [*i.e.*, *the Cultural Revolution destroyed religion and other traditional customs*];

In the fourth ten years [1980–1990] we lost our economy [*i.e.*, *the open door economic policy allowed non-Tibetans to dominate the autonomous region's economy*].

Despite much criticism both within Tibet and internationally, China's huge investment in rapid economic development in Tibet is having a major impact in rural Tibet, where the standard of living in recent years has increased markedly. At the same time, Beijing has been able to implement its hardline policy with impunity. Neither the United States nor the UN took any concrete steps, such as economic sanctions or diplomatic pressure, to try to compel China to moderate its policies in Tibet. In fact, a 1994 State Department report to Congress clearly reiterated the long-standing U.S. strategic position on Tibet:

Historically, the United States has acknowledged Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. Since at least 1966, U.S. policy has explicitly recognized the Tibetan Autonomous Region . . . as part of the People's Republic of China. This long-standing policy is consistent with the view of the entire international community, including all China's neighbors: no country recognizes Tibet as a sovereign state. Because we do not recognize Tibet as an independent state, the United States does not conduct diplomatic relations with the self-styled "Tibetan government-in-exile." The United States continues, however, to urge Beijing and the Dalai Lama to hold serious discussions at an early date, without preconditions, and on a fixed agenda. The United States also urges China to respect Tibet's unique religious, linguistic and cultural traditions as it formulates policies for Tibet.

Internationally revered for his spiritual and moral leadership, and honored with the Nobel Prize for Peace, the Dalai Lama has been a committed advocate

of nonviolent change and resolution of disputes. To show respect for his religious leadership and courtesy to adherents of Tibetan Buddhism, senior U.S. officials—including the President of the United States—have met from time to time with the Dalai Lama. In addition, administration officials at appropriate levels occasionally meet the Dalai Lama's representatives informally, to exchange views about conditions in Tibet. These informal meetings are a routine part of informal U.S. diplomacy, and do not imply recognition of the political goals of Tibetan exile groups.³⁶

Beijing therefore, in a sense, turned the tables back on the Dalai Lama. The triumphs won by the Dalai Lama's international campaign and its Congressional supporters looked more and more like pyrrhic victories. The international initiative won significant symbolic gains for the exiles in the West, and it spurred Tibetans in Tibet to demonstrate their support for the Dalai Lama, but it did not compel China to yield to its demands. To the contrary, it played a major role in precipitating the new hardline policy that the exiled leaders argued was destroying Tibet by changing the demographic and ethnic nature of the region. Ironically, by threatening China's political hold over Tibet, the Dalai Lama and his Western supporters provided the advocates of a hardline policy in China the leverage they needed to shift Beijing's Tibet policy away from the more ethnically sensitive approach pursued by Hu Yaobang in the early 1980s.

The Dalai Lama's international campaign, moreover, also heightened China's distrust of the Dalai Lama, who, it was felt, was not serious about ceasing separatist activities and making the kind of political compromises China could agree to. Many in China came to believe that the Dalai Lama was unnecessary and that the policy of rapidly developing and modernizing Tibet would solidify China's position there regardless of what the Dalai Lama or nationalistic Tibetans thought or did. The Chinese leaders were confident that a new generation of Tibetans would emerge who would be less influenced by religion and lamas and would genuinely consider themselves patriotic citizens of China.

Conclusion

From the time the United States first made contact with Tibet, in 1942, through the end of the Cold War, successive U.S. administrations consistently refused to accept Tibet's claim to independence and, after the Dalai fled Tibet in 1959, to regard him as the head of a government-in-exile. Consequently, although many in the West (and Tibet) viewed the United States as a friend of

36. Report mandated by Section 536(a)(2) of Public Law 103-236, Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994-1995: "Relations of the United States with Tibet."

Tibetans, U.S. policy in reality played a significant role both in undermining the Dalai Lama's case that Tibet was an independent state before 1950-1951 and in validating the legitimacy of China's dominion over Tibet. At the strategic level, U.S. policy remained constant, even at the height of the Cold War. Tibet was never seen as part of America's core national interests, and when American policy toward China changed in the early 1970s, the U.S. government abandoned its erstwhile tactical support for Tibetan guerrilla forces and exiled leaders.

The end of Maoism in China led to the normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the PRC in 1979 as well as the opening of a new chapter in Sino-Tibetan relations. These changes prompted the Dalai Lama to send delegations to hold secret talks in Beijing in 1982 and 1984. Optimism abounded that this renewal of face-to-face talks would yield a peaceful solution to the longstanding conflict. Unfortunately, it did not. Coming together to talk was far easier than making painful compromises to reach a solution, and by 1984 the talks collapsed. The Tibetan and Chinese objectives were too far apart to allow a settlement of the conflict.

This failure led the Dalai Lama and his supporters to launch an international campaign to try to secure U.S. and international support for Tibet in its dealings with Beijing. The campaign was successful insofar as it created a powerful, Congress-driven Tibet lobby that the White House could not ignore and that inserted Tibet into American domestic politics. The campaign successfully pressured the White House and State Department to criticize China's actions in Tibet and even, in the post-Cold War era, to take actions that treated Tibet as being partly separate from China (e.g., by having special Tibet reports and a coordinator for Tibetan affairs). Those successes, however, were essentially symbolic. They did not provide the Dalai Lama with leverage to force Beijing to make concessions or to moderate its hardline policy in Tibet.

The gains achieved by the international campaign had to be carefully crafted to appear responsive to Congress and the Tibet lobby without crossing a line that would threaten basic Chinese interests or the PRC's claim to sovereignty over Tibet. The international campaign and the Tibet lobby were able to restore Tibet as a component of Sino-American relations, but only as an irritant and only in terms of human rights issues. Moreover, the Dalai Lama's role in the international campaign had the unintended consequence of helping the hardline faction in China to implement its policies. The victories of the campaign were ultimately pyrrhic.

Even so, the Tibet question has not faded away. For the foreseeable future, this issue will likely remain an irritant to the Chinese in the international arena and a potential danger-point in Sino-American relations.