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Brigadier V Mahalingam (Retd), commissioned in the Madras Regiment is a defence and strategic analyst. He commanded a Mountain Brigade and was the Force Commander of the National Security Guard.

The Making of China's Foreign Policy

V Mahalingam

If you thought that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the People's Republic of China is the principal player in the making of the country's foreign policy, you may be mistaken. The reality is best explicated by two out of place incidents which occurred in late 2012.

The provincial government in Hainan, the home to one of China's major naval bases, authorized¹ its maritime law enforcement agency's vessels to interdict and search foreign vessels illegally operating in the islands waters which according to China include much of the intensely disputed South China Sea.¹ In an interview to Reuters, Wu Shicun, a senior official in the province's foreign affairs office confessed that since he was not a part of the People's Congress he couldn't say for sure if Beijing had, in fact, even seen the new rules before they became official. The fact that a provincial government can

Key Points

- China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) does not formulate major foreign policies or decisions but implements them.
- The Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) and the Politburo of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (FALSG) are the principle players connected with the crafting of China's foreign policy.
- The Central Policy Research Office, the General Office and the International Department (CPC/ID), the three departments under the CPC Central Committee have a major role in the official foreign policy mechanism in China.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is a body under the State Council headed by the Prime Minister, but owing to its relative position and authority within the system, the Party controls China's Foreign Policy.
- Diplomats and foreign policy professionals handling China can no longer deal with a single agency and hope to impact and sway foreign policies.

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unilaterally make rules on one of China's most sensitive diplomatic problems ignoring the country's foreign ministry highlights the helplessness of the Chinese MFA and the frailty of the system.

In yet another case in 2012, China's map printed in its newly revised passports claimed ownership of the entire South China Sea and Taiwan enraging its neighbours.² China's official maps have long included Taiwan and the South China Sea as its territory, but reproducing this on passports could be seen as a provocation since it requires other countries to tacitly endorse the claims by affixing their official seals to the documents. The passports meant for ordinary citizens, were issued by China's Ministry of Public Security (MPS). Commenting on the issue, Zhu Feng, at Peking University's Center for International and Strategic Studies said that the MPS had probably acted in this manner to show their support for China's sovereign claim.³ China's former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was, however, described as being 'furious' upon hearing the news.⁴ Obviously, the Foreign Ministry was not consulted on this decision.

According to a report published by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in early 2012, no fewer than 11 government entities from the tourism administration to the navy, play a role in the South China Sea.⁵ All, the ICG said, have the potential to take action that could cause diplomatic fallout.

Who then are the actors relevant to the making of China's foreign policy?

The Official Policymakers

Today far too many actors have a role in the crafting China's foreign policy. Principal amongst them include the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) of the Communist Party of China (CPC), though none in the PSC is specifically in charge of foreign policy.⁶ The Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (FALSG) is yet another major player.⁷ FALSG, headed by the General Secretary (Xi Jinping), is a committee consisting of a number of PSC members and other leading CPC officials meant to advise the leaders on how they should proceed on any given issue of interest. The most important LSGs are attached to the Central Committee and report to the PSC. Decisions affecting foreign policies are also deliberated in, among others, the Taiwan Affairs LSG (TALSG) and the Financial and Economic Affairs LSG.

Departments Under the Communist Party of China Central Committee

Three bodies under the CPC Central Committee have a major role in the official foreign policy mechanism in China, namely, the Central Policy Research Office, the General Office, and the International Department (CPC/ID).⁸

The Policy Research Office conducts research, provides advice, and drafts policy documents ahead of major decisions. The General Office controls flow of information to decision-makers and manages their schedules besides providing administrative support to the Politburo. The heads of these offices are very intimately connected with diplomacy at the highest levels. For example, when Xi Jinping travels abroad, the heads of General Office and Central Policy Research Office, namely, Li Zhanshu and Wang Huning, (Politburo member), respectively act as his advisors.⁹ Being senior in rank, they are placed higher in protocol and treated accordingly than the highest ranking foreign affairs professionals, namely, Yang Jiechi the State Councillor in-charge of Foreign Affairs or Wang Yi the Foreign Minister.

The CPC/ID is an active organ under the control of the Central Committee of the CPC that furthers the geopolitical and foreign policy interests of the Party.¹⁰ The set up has played a crucial role in strengthening China's position in problem areas such as the South China Sea and Taiwan, pushing projects such as One Belt, One Road (OBOR) and influencing the next generation of foreign leaders through youth exchange programmes.¹¹ As a long-term measure, CPC utilizes the department to develop friendly relationship with rising foreign politicians and influencers in cases where the relationship with the country is troubled.¹²

State Council and Foreign Policy

The State Councillor Yang Jiechi and the Foreign Minister Wang Yi are part of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, the executive organ of the China's central government headed by the Premier Li Keqiang. State Councillor ranks immediately below the Vice-Premiers and above the Minister.

State Council is similar to the Council of Ministers in other countries but CPC exercises strict control over the Council. The Prime Minister is elected by the

National People's Congress (NPC) on nomination by the President. That explains the relative importance of the MFA within the system.

Other Government Bodies

China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and other government bodies such as the People's Bank of China (PBC), the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), an agency under the State Council, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of State Security regularly attempt to get the better of the MFA in the formulation of China's foreign policy. This has resulted in implicit discord between the MFA and other foreign policy actors.

The Ministry of Commerce regulates the overseas activities of companies through trade organizations such as the China International Contractors Association (CHINCA), engaged in promoting the development of China's foreign investment, international project contracting, labour service co-operation, and other international economic and technological co-operation.¹⁴ MOFCOM also allocates the majority of Chinese foreign aid, a perennial issue of contention with the MFA.

The PBC's influence on foreign policy stems from its power as the China's Central Bank to dictate domestic monetary policy, reflecting China's growing connect with foreign economies and international markets.

The NDRC is a foreign policy actor in areas that has an effect on China's economic development, especially in the energy sector. Its influence is most apparent in its authority over Chinese climate change policy. It has a role in ensuring access to critical resources, such as oil and natural gas.

The Ministry of Finance has a say in the international programmes of other government ministries because of its control over the national budget. It is also responsible for tariffs and China's limited contributions to multilateral aid.

The People's Liberation Army

The People's Liberation Army has historically been a player in Chinese foreign policymaking. However, its role has been brought to a near end following the reform process initiated by Xi Jinping. Since then, military commanders have

been kept away from the decision-making process in the civilian domain.

Other Foreign Policy Actors

The other actors who influence foreign policy include the business sector, financial institutions, energy companies, import cartels, local governments, research institutions, and academia.

In countries where China's relationship is dominated by economic ties, commercial motives have a greater impact on policies. The overseas activities of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) too have become a consideration in the formulation of China's foreign policy. China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) has played a major part in territorial disputes with South-East Asian countries and Japan over the Spratly Islands and the East China Sea, respectively because of the untapped oil and gas reserves and connected commercial interests. China Iron and Steel Association (CISA), an import cartel responsible for negotiating favourable annual benchmark prices for import of iron ore, has its place in influencing foreign policy.

The government controlled Export-Import Bank of China (Eximbank) and the China Development Bank (CDB) play a key role in supporting the overseas outreach of Chinese businesses. Eximbank is tasked with expanding Chinese trade while the CDB seeks to promote Chinese economic and infrastructure development.

What is the Status of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China's Foreign Policy?

In China, the formal rank and authority of different bodies are relatively well-established which are determined according to one's position in the Communist Party. The State Counsellor Yang Jiechi who is in charge of the day-to-day management of China's diplomacy and Foreign Minister Wang Yi are mere members of the 204-member Central Committee, the third-level power structure of the Party, below the PSC and Politburo indicating the level of importance of the MFA amongst the institutions linked to China's foreign policy.

The status and importance of the MFA as a policymaker has declined over the past decade. China's expanding

international role and the growing complexity of global issues have compelled the MFA to depend on other agencies for expertise resulting in its loss of influence. In the process the foreign policy decision-making entities have proliferated. Today, China's MFA does not make policy but merely implements them. However, in the case of states considered less important, MFA determines policies in accordance with China's larger policy framework. MFA is also the central agency in respect of China's relations with the European Union (EU) with the exception of France and Germany.

In international negotiations, the MFA has traditionally been the lead organization even though other ministries may have provided the expertise on specific issues under discussion. At the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference both the head and deputy head of the Chinese delegation were MFA officials, while PLA officers representing the General Armaments Department and General Staff Department were delegation members.

This has changed. Of late, the MFA which had all along been heading the Chinese team in international negotiations has been forced to take a back seat. For example the NDRC headed the Chinese delegation at the 2009 Climate Summit in Copenhagen, and the MFA's participation was limited to an embarrassing status of delegation members. Towards the end, Premier Wen Jiabao arrived in Copenhagen and took charge of the Delegation for negotiating at the final stages of the Summit. At that point in time, the views within the Delegation fluctuated on China's final position. To avoid China being branded 'agreement spoilers' MFA officials were inclined to make compromises to accept changes to China's earlier position of not being in favour of fixed targets for both developed and developing countries. The NDRC, on the contrary, stuck to its initial position. Finally at a crucial meeting with key summit participants, which included Brazil, India, South Africa and the United States, Wen Jiabao who favoured MFA's position was opposed by the senior NDRC representative in the delegation and consequently, no compromise was reached, the west labelling the incident the 'Copenhagen fiasco'.¹⁵

Conclusion

The authority and jurisdiction over foreign policy formulation in China has slipped out of MFA's hands over a period of time. The MFA does not

put together major policy decisions or formulate major policies, but implements them. With the top foreign ministry officials not finding a place in the PSC or the Politburo, the Foreign Ministry lacks the political authority and standing resulting in it sliding low down on the pecking order. Consequently, a number of competing departments and agencies headed by senior ranking officials and some having influence over economic issues have started prompting important foreign policy decisions and have encroached upon MFA's domain. Some of these agencies do have domain interests but one-upmanship, the necessity to prove their loyalty to the country and to its leadership, and the ego needs to demonstrate one's authority may also be the contributing factors for the ingress into MFA.

The MFA has failed to keep pace with the growing intricacies of global issues and China's increased involvement in world affairs. Essential structural changes to cope with the new situation and the requirements for crafting and exercising effective control over the implementation of its foreign policy had also not been put in place. It has failed to remain on top professionally to dominate China's foreign policy scene. The lead role accorded to party functionaries over professional government entities has also contributed to MFA losing its clout.

Diplomats and foreign policy professionals handling China can no longer deal with a single agency and hope to impact and sway policies. The existence of multiple agencies exercising influence over China's policies is a reality. Country's representatives and negotiators need to be aware of the interests, stakes, and relative influence of various agencies as well as the competition and rivalries between competing departments to be able to manage foreign policies effectively. The need to make necessary structural changes to the foreign policy establishments at various levels to meet the challenges arising out of the proliferation of agencies and personalities shaping foreign policy in China should not be lost sight of.

India needs to factor in the larger context of the changes that are taking place in the region and sound the appropriate agencies and individuals in Beijing's policymaking loop to be in a position to leverage China's attitude and policies favourable to India. If handled appropriately this may be an opportune moment to extract concessions from China on the border issue and to force China to control Pakistan's

policies towards India. This needs an understanding of the larger situation in play in the region.

With Russia and Iran expressing their willingness to join the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a part of China's grander vision of OBOR, China's aims to exploit the Corridor as a pivot around which its own economy can be integrated with that of the economic blocks of the region, namely, the Russian led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), SAARC, and Iran. It hopes to develop Xinjiang as a dry port and a trading centre for the combine besides providing a rationale to the restive Uighur Muslim population in Xinjiang to join the main stream. It views Pakistan as the catalyst to facilitate the process. Consequently, China-Pakistan relationship is likely to grow much stronger in the near future.

At a time when Beijing is making efforts to increase its influence in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Myanmar by investing heavily in their infrastructure projects, more than one country failing to attend the Regional SAARC Summit in Pakistan accusing Pakistan of sponsoring terrorism and interfering in their internal affairs is a major setback to China's larger ambitions. It needs the co-operation of these countries for the success of its OBOR project.

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor has gained importance as a major factor in Beijing's foreign policy. It is aware of the advantages of India participating in the CPEC project. It is also deeply concerned about the risks to the project which may include terror threat to the CPEC, disturbances in Baluchistan, escalating terror menace and instability in Afghanistan, the consequences of Pakistan meddling in Afghan affairs and above all, the United States ability to exploit allegations of corruption presently haunting Pakistan to engineer a 'colour revolution' whose contours were clearly visible during the 'Azadi March' blockading Islamabad's Red Zone in August 2016. These issues can seal China's economic ambitions as well as its ability to advance its influence in the region in a major way.

With these concerns in view, China will make every effort to get the 'terror sponsor' tag off Pakistan's back which has isolated Pakistan amongst the countries of the world and SAARC countries in particular. Its effort to prevent Masood Azhar being designated by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a terrorist, not naming Pakistan sponsored Afghan Taliban or Haqqani network as terror outfits, destabilizing Afghanistan besides its decision to adopt a 'flexible approach to delisting Afghan individuals from the UN sanctions

lists' in the gathering held on December 26, 2016 in Moscow are part of the larger intent.

China will make all efforts to equate Pakistan with India and sponsor the country in international negotiations to boost its status to be able to play its new found role. Blocking India's entry into Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and inclusion of Pakistan in December 2016 meet held in Moscow on Afghanistan are part of the scheme. India's protests regarding its territories being violated in the process of developing CPEC are likely to fall in deaf ears.

Zhang Gaoli, the Vice Premier and a member of the PSC, Wang Huning, a Politburo Member and the Head of the CPC's Central Policy Research Office, Vice Premier, and a Politburo Member Wang Yang, are constituents of the OBOR Leading Group's leadership. They are also members of the Central Financial and Economic Leading Small Group (CFELSG) and Central *Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (CDRLSG)* which is headed by Xi Jinping. Li Zhanshu, the Head of the General Office of the Communist Party's Central Committee and a Politburo member has a day-to-day working relationship with the Xi Jinping. CPC/ID headed by Song Tao which furthers the geopolitical and foreign policy interests of the Party besides NDRC headed by Xu Shaoshi and MOFCOM led by Minister Gao Hucheng, may be some of the institutions and officials who may have the necessary clout to assist India to leverage China's India policy.

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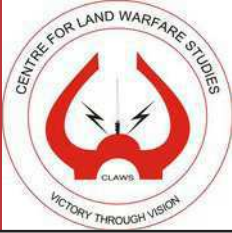


CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010

Tel.: +91-11-25691308, Fax: +91-11-25692347, Email: landwarfare@gmail.com

Website: www.claws.in



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Praggya Surana is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi. She completed her BA, LLB (Hons.) from National Law School of India University, Bangalore. Her research interests include Chinese military modernization and political strategy.

Securing Tibet: The Dragon Way

*To govern the nation, we must govern our borders;
to govern our borders, we must first stabilize Tibet.*

Xi Jinping¹

Annexing Tibet in 1951 and dictating the Seventeen Point Agreement was relatively easy for China, but despite six decades of Chinese control, the assimilation of Tibet into mainland China has been much harder. Tibetan identity questions the very root of China's One Country, One Language, One Religion philosophy. The initial annexation (or liberation as the Chinese like to call it) was to use the large Tibetan landmass as a buffer, but over the years it has not been the asset it was envisaged as. Taking a more aggressive stand on Tibet allows Xi Jinping, the current Chinese President to give the impression of a strong nation and be seen as a leader proactively fulfilling the 'Chinese dream' of 'great rejuvenation of the

Chinese nation'. There have been developments on various fronts to secure China's control over Tibet in recent times. This article explores the extent of their success.

Impact of Military Reforms on Tibet

China has raised the political rank of the Tibetan Military Command and put it under the direct jurisdiction of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) ground forces. After the 2016 military restructuring, most of the provincial military commands are under the control of the newly established National Defense Mobilization Department of the Central Military Commission. Their focus will be on the regional militia reserves and local conscription. 'The Tibet Military Command, on the other hand, is under the leadership of the Chinese ground forces, which suggests that the command may undertake some kind of military combat mission in the future.'² Tibetan Military Command falls under

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the Western Theatre Command, headquartered at Chengdu. During the military restructuring, the Lanzhou military region and the Chengdu military region were integrated to form the larger Western Command.³ This will allow greater coordination within China for potential disputes along the Sino-Indian border. China has also been militarizing the shared borders further, both on the Tibetan side and the Pakistan side.⁴ ‘We have noticed an increase in capability and force posture by the Chinese military in areas close to the border with India’, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for East Asia, Abraham M Denmark told reporters during a news conference after the Department of Defence submitted its Annual Report to the US Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China.⁵ China disputed this, relying on the old party line of being committed to safeguarding peace and tranquility in the region and peaceful settlement of disputes with India.⁶

China has also implemented a new border regulation for the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), expanding the scope of the earlier regulation which has been in force since 2000. The designated border areas under the new regulation now include land ports, trade zones, and scenic spots. Wang Chunhuan, the Deputy Director of the Theoretical Marxism Institute of the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences (TASS) who participated in the amendment was quoted as saying the following:⁷

The update of border regulation provides a legal foundation to combat potential terrorist activities in the future brought by the further opening-up of Tibet as the Belt and Road initiative has positioned Tibet as a gateway to South Asia, even though the border areas do not face severe terrorist challenges at present in general.⁸

This can potentially be used against Tibetan separatists in the future.

China is the largest importer of energy worldwide, importing over 60 per cent of its demand and this number is only set to grow. It is dependent on the South China Sea route for around 83 per cent of its oil imports. The

One Belt One Road provides China with a shorter route for imports from Central Asia and West Asia. Investing in this land route will reduce Chinese dependence on the important sea lanes of navigation which pass through the busy Malacca Straits and South China. As a keystone in the Chinese vision for the next century, Tibet plays an unparalleled role. Tibet is strategically located to support China’s increasing foray into South Asia. It can act as a convenient entry point for both the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) corridor, linking them to its lesser developed hinterland. Tibet reported a total trade volume of more than 5.66 billion yuan (US\$ 815 million) in 2015, engaging in bilateral trade with 77 countries and regions.⁹ The increased militarization is the direct result of the Chinese desire to protect its heavy infrastructural investments. ‘Military capability in the region must be stiffened so as to “absolutely not allow any person, at any time, in any way, to separate out any part of Tibet”’, Wu Yingjie, the region’s Communist Party Chief said, echoing the increasing party focus on Tibet.¹⁰

Increased Infrastructure Development for Better Connectivity to the Mainland

Enhanced connectivity has played a pivotal role in fulfilling Chinese ambitions of greater economic prosperity. The Chinese government has emphasized rapid development of the transport system ever since the modernization post-Cultural Revolution. After the rapid growth that accompanied development in central and southern region, the emphasis shifted to connecting the more far flung areas. China’s Tibetan policy seeks to modernize Tibet’s economy and people, increasing their income and reducing their isolation by inextricably linking Tibet’s economy with the rest of China.¹¹

China created large, urban centres like Lhasa and Shigatse in Tibet and developed the infrastructure considerably, increasing effective control over the region.¹² The 2012 National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CCP) decided to accelerate

the development of a comprehensive modern transport system further. Tibet secured its first highway, the Motuo highway in 2013. The construction of the Qinghai-Tibet highway and the Qinghai-Tibet railway were subsequently completed, overcoming geological challenges like plateau permafrost and desert land.¹³ The Sichuan-Tibet railway project, which will reduce the journey time between Lhasa and Chengdu by over 17 hours, is also scheduled to be completed within the current Five Year Plan (2016-20) (Map 1).¹⁴

its plans to connect to both the OBOR in the West and BCIM in the South. Moreover, Tibet is geographically contiguous to Xinjiang, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan—key provinces for the Belt and Road initiative which is focusing on the lesser developed interior regions of China. Crucial strategic projects like the Chengdu-Lhasa highway have been sanctioned. China also wants to leverage Tibet's strategic geographical location to extend its influence in Nepal. The rail and road cargo link between Nepal and Tibet was operational by the end of December 2016 and the first batch of trucks



Map 1: Rail Lines in Western China

Source: 'Taming the West, The Communist Party Deepens Tibet's Integration with the Rest of the Country', *The Economist*, 21 June 2014, available at <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21604594-communist-party-deepens-tibets-integration-rest-country-taming-west>; accessed on 8 January 2017.

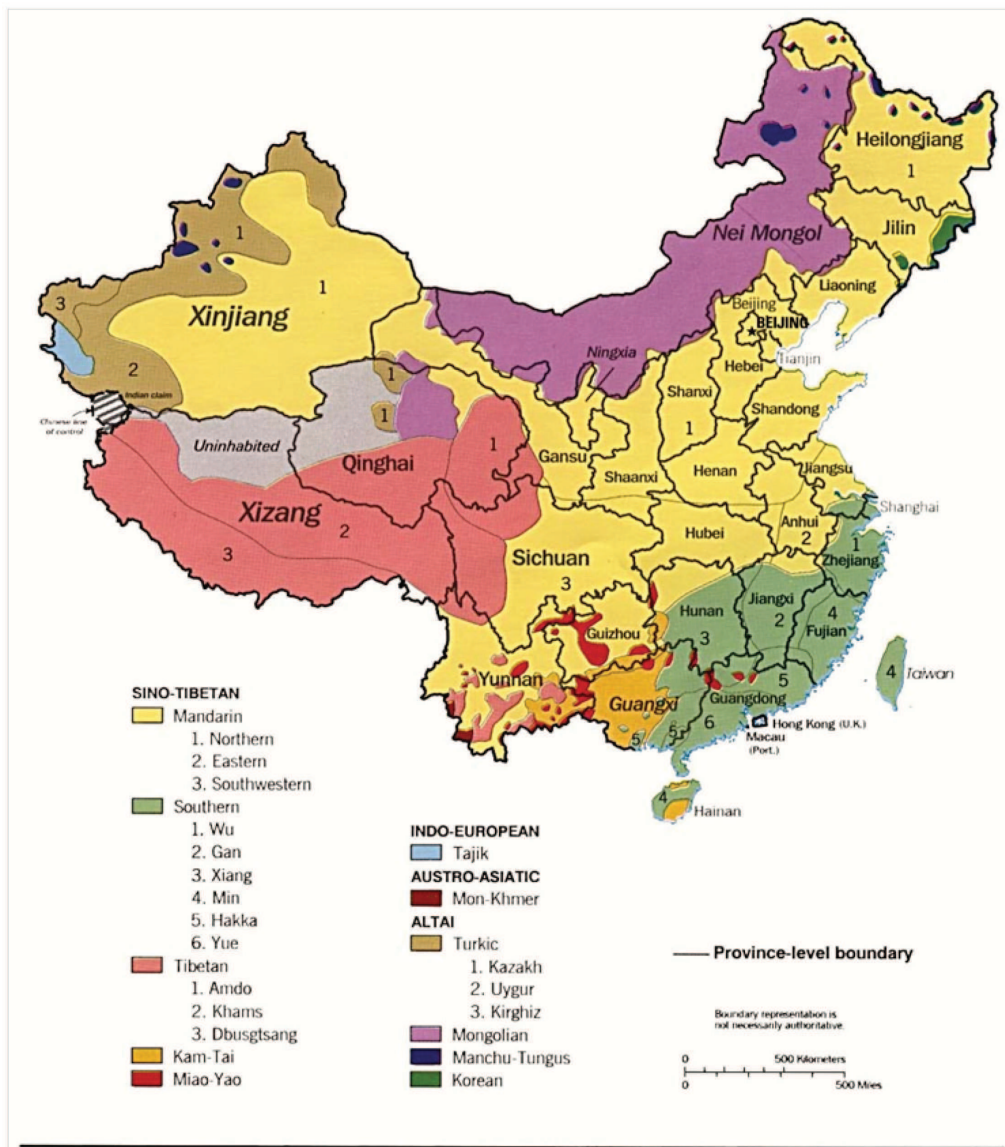
Despite gradual increase in Chinese development in Tibet over the years, announcement of the One Belt One Road initiative has led to an unprecedented increase in Chinese activity in the Tibetan plateau. Tibet is the starting point for the planned China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a major route envisaged under the Belt and Road initiative. It is a crucial gateway into Central Asia as well. The Tenth Tibet People's Congress announced

carried goods worth over US\$ 2.8 million.¹⁵ Further extensions from the strategic Tibetan border town, Gyirong into Nepal has also been agreed upon. An extension of the existing Qinghai-Lhasa highway is envisaged. Feasibility studies are being conducted to extend a rail link from Lhasa to Nepal.¹⁶

Greater Economic and Cultural Integration of Ethnic Tibetans

China’s approach towards ethnic Tibetans has been twofold; first, greater integration economically by greater development in the region and second, culturally by increasing restrictions on personal liberty, especially religious freedoms. The promotion of Han migration into the TAR to change the demographic profile of the area is ancillary but has its own role to play in the Chinese scheme of things.¹⁷

The Tibetan population is divided across the TAR and three provinces in China.¹⁸ This 1965 administrative division failed to divide the Tibetan movement for autonomy. While Tibetans are a minority in all provinces except the TAR, many small, remote villages in these three provinces have retained some degree of local autonomy by virtue of their isolation and the lack of Han settlers.¹⁹ The movement for autonomy is strong across the entire Tibetan population (Map 2).



Map 2: Linguistic Groups in China

Source: Available at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/china_ling_90.jpg, accessed on 7 January 2017.

The brutal suppression of Tibetans in 2008 marked a turning point in China's policy towards Tibet. The *taoguan yanghui* era has definitively ended now. President Xi Jinping has never used this phrase which roughly translates to hiding one's strength and biding one's time. Security restrictions which were tightened after the 2008 popular uprising in the TAR are still

government has responded by arresting the family members of the 'activists'. It is interesting to note that the majority of these self-immolations took place in the Tibetan populated regions outside the officially demarcated TAR (Map 3).

The 2016 border regulation also empowers the government against terrorists. There has been no



Map 3: Tibetan Self-immolations 2009-16

Source : 'International Campaign for Tibet, Map: Tibetan Self-immolations From 2009-2016', 2 March 2016, available at <https://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/map-tibetan-self-immolations-from-2009-2013/>, accessed on 7 January 2017.

in place.²⁰ They have even been extended to Tibetan populated regions outside TAR as well.²¹ There has been a crackdown on lawyers, human rights activists, and journalists. Internet access is severely restricted in Tibet, far greater than in other regions of China. Freedom House, a think tank working on democratic rights, has reported waves of self-immolation by Tibetans protesting CCP rule. According to the International Campaign for Tibet, there have been 144 known immolations since 2009.²² The Chinese

history of terrorist activity in the region, and the term is probably a euphemism for 'separatists'. The broader powers given to the border police under this regulation can potentially be misused in the future. This is keeping in line with the harsher stand being taken against Tibetan activists. Despite vowing to implement the rule of law, China continues to blatantly disregard it. Thousands of Tibetan monks were forcefully evicted from their homes at Larung Gar in eastern Tibet, in complete disregard for their right to religious freedom.²³ There are intrusive

state controls on monasteries including ‘management committees’ run by the local or Communist Party and constant surveillance, age restrictions to become a monk and even those who become monks are subject to patriotic ‘re-education.’²⁴ A senior Communist leader has even asked them to behave in a ‘patriotic and law abiding’ manner.²⁵ In the Qinghai Province’s Malho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture distributed a document in early 2015 (prior to the Dalai Lama’s 80th birthday) outlining various activities that would be construed as support for Tibetan independence, outlining punitive punishments for these. This list included even benign activities like burning incense.²⁶ Despite such rigorous restrictions and efforts to brainwash, the popularity of the Dalai Lama has not dimmed. The Tibetan response to the Chinese White Paper on Tibet expressed their sentiment by stating that ‘His Holiness the Dalai Lama remains the irreplaceable jewel in the hearts and minds of the Tibetan people.’²⁷

The Chinese White Paper on Tibet published in 2015 went so far as to:

[H]ope that the Dalai Lama will put aside his illusions in his remaining years and face up to reality, adapt his position, choose the objective and rational path, and do something of benefit to overseas Tibetan compatriots in exile.²⁸

Brushing aside the Tibetan movement for genuine autonomy as a mere delusion, the Chinese narrative of history claims ‘that has been part of China since antiquity’ and any attempt for independence would be dividing the Chinese nation.

Recently, China has started taking an even more aggressive stand against the activities of the Tibetan government-in-exile, the Central Tibetan Administration. While China has always protested against meetings of world leaders with the Dalai Lama, it has now started isolating the Tibetans by flexing its economic muscle. The Pope refused to meet the Dalai Lama in December 2014 due to pressure exerted by the Chinese.²⁹ China imposed unilateral sanctions on the land-locked Mongolia for inviting the Dalai Lama, increasing tariffs, and cancelling scheduled talks for developmental aid. The Chinese government strongly protested a meeting

in December 2016 between the Indian President and the Dalai Lama held on the sidelines of the Laureates and Leaders for Children Summit organized by the Kailash Satyarthi Foundation.³⁰ Protesting the meeting with an Indian head of state, China warned India about not interfering with its ‘core interests’, a nebulous concept that has expanded over the years.

The Chinese government has also coerced over 7,000 Tibetan pilgrims holding Chinese passports to prohibit them from attending the Kalachakra festival presided over by the Dalai Lama in Bodhgaya, India.³¹ There have been reports of confiscation of Tibetan passports. Members of the Tibetan-government-in-exile also claim that some people were threatened with arrest of family members back home and other severe consequences if they did not return immediately. In keeping with past behaviour, China vehemently denies this claim, citing examples of some Chinese citizens who are attending as evidence to support their stand. China has also branded this religious ceremony as a ‘political tool’.³² Despite the Kalachakra being conducted smoothly in the past, it is speculated that China took such harsh action in 2017 since it was organized by the Central Tibetan Administration.³³

This increased opposition to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama can be linked to the Chinese attempt to control the future leadership of Tibet after his death. The Dalai Lama has made public his desire to not reincarnate. The Chinese administration wants to ensure that he not only reincarnates but also picks someone more favourably disposed towards the Chinese government.³⁴ If the Dalai Lama chooses not to reincarnate, the already divided Tibetan movement will lose a common figure head that all factions acknowledge, complicating any future negotiations. A moderate leader willing to toe party line will be ideal from the Chinese point of view. Instances from the past Chinese behaviour can shed some light on potential future action. The Chinese imprisonment of the candidate chosen as the Eleventh Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama since 1995; simultaneously choosing Gyaincain Norbu, their own candidate to fulfill the duties of the Panchen Lama could be one potential path.³⁵ Recognition of two candidates as the Dalai Lama

could also split support among the Tibetan population, and while there is speculation that China might use this as a means to split the Tibetan movement, it might actually make it harder for the Chinese to negotiate a single, widely accepted settlement. In such a scenario, another route China could take would be to engage Lobsang Sangay, the elected sikyong (Prime Minister) of the Tibetan government in exile who enjoys support across the political spectrum. His strategy, the 'five-fifty' is that the Tibetan political leadership will make efforts to gain autonomy within China within the current elected term but also prepare a long-term strategy for the next 50 years.³⁶ Autonomy within China is also the position taken by the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People which encapsulates the Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach. Lobsang Sangay proposes something similar to the 'one country, two systems' but suspects that Chinese mistrust of the Tibetans due to ethnic differences is acting as a roadblock for negotiations.³⁷

Another facet of economic development in the region is that it will invariably lead to job opportunities, resulting in migration to Tibet from other regions. This 'irresistible historic tide of development' in Tibet is being packaged as one that brings Tibet into the twenty-first century but this narrative brushes over the potential influx of migrants who will mostly be the Han Chinese.³⁸ This can change the demographic profile of the region permanently. Freedom House Report 2016 has cited an official plan which aims to increase the 'permanent urban population' of Tibet by approximately 30 per cent by 2020, with many new settlers likely to be ethnic Chinese.³⁹ However, despite rapid Han-ization of urban areas, the rural areas continue to be largely Tibetan. The theory that China is trying to reduce the dominance of ethnic Tibetans in the TAR to weaken the Tibetan identity and movement should therefore be taken with a pinch of salt.⁴⁰ TAR is too large and sparsely populated for ethnic profile change to be successful as a stand-alone policy. The Chinese policy towards Tibet is instead geared towards modernizing the ethnic Tibetan population by modernizing the region, homogenizing it instead of preserving its unique heritage.⁴¹

Tibet : A Constant Irritant in the Sino-Indian Relationship

Tibet shares a long border with India and any developments directly affect national security in India. After the 1959 Tibetan uprising, India gave refuge to the Dalai Lama and a large Tibetan population. As home to the Tibetan diaspora of over a lakh people, and the seat of power for the Central Tibetan Administration, India holds a unique position in the China-Tibet relationship. Even though India has never tried to use Tibet as leverage, refuge to the Tibetan population has been a constant irritant in India-China relations. While there have been some positive cross-border developments like an understanding in 2015 between China and India to step up collaboration in fields such as drug control and illegal immigration, the illicit arms trade and other cross-border crimes, it has had a rather limited impact.⁴²

The invitation to Lobsang Sangay, the head of the Tibetan government-in-exile to Indian Prime Minister Modi's swearing in ceremony in 2014 irked China to such a degree that in private meetings, India had to reassure that it recognizes Tibet as an integral part of China and does not support any separatist activity within its borders.⁴³ China lodged a protest when the Dalai Lama chose to visit Arunachal Pradesh, parts of which China claims as South Tibet. China also strongly protested Richard Verma, the US Ambassador to India's visit to Arunachal Pradesh.⁴⁴ An invitation to Losang Sangay by Richard Verma was again protested vehemently.⁴⁵ When China protested the Dalai Lama meeting the Indian president at the sidelines of an event organized for Nobel laureates and children, India justified it by classifying the event as a 'non-political'.⁴⁶

China's biggest concern regarding Indian support to Tibet is that it provides a platform to keep the Tibetan cause alive. China is relying on bullying tactics but India must hold its own as a responsibility to the large Tibetan population residing within India and as a regional power which is directly affected by developments in Tibet. India should rely on its democratic credentials and inextricably link the recognition of Tibet as an integral

part of China to genuine autonomy in the region.

The 'Chinese dream' of securing its status as a great power and regional pre-eminence can only be achieved after internal control of the party over China is secure. CCP is losing influence over the Chinese people, especially away from the centre of power. The Tibetan demand for autonomy and the perpetuation of their religious and cultural beliefs threaten party rule. It is the potential revolution of ideas that China is most afraid of since it goes to the root of one-party rule in the country. China follows a strict policy of brutal suppression of political ideas or religious beliefs, which challenge the party's authority and over the years, Tibet has been subjected to one of the most restricted regimes in the world. The Chinese government has praised the rich cultural heritage of Tibet, acknowledging its role in attracting tourists in the White Paper on Tibet. Ironically, it is trying to wipe out this unique cultural heritage through its actions.

Conclusion

China has used both the carrot and the stick but the Tibetan movement to preserve their identity continues to stay alive. Despite using numerous tools in its arsenal ranging from military reform and stronger anti-terror laws to greater economic integration and cultural repression, the process of Tibetan integration with mainland China remains incomplete. It is the perpetuation of CCP rule which is threatened by the cultural ideas and separate history of Tibet. China's actions indicate that it has increased efforts to silence dissent in Tibet. It is attempting to integrate the existing population of Tibet with the rest of the mainland to an extent that it becomes completely dependent on it. While this is an interesting strategy, Tibetans are a deeply religious society and economic interdependence coupled with religious repression will not be enough to obscure their distinct identity. China has also invested heavily in the development of Tibet and another uprising like the one in 1959 could have ramifications on the economic integration planned by China under the

Belt and Road initiative. A more liberal approach towards individual practices and beliefs as long as they do not threaten Chinese sovereignty is a more sustainable long-term approach for China to adopt.

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CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010
Tel.: +91-11-25691308, Fax: +91-11-25692347, Email: landwarfare@gmail.com
Website: www.claws.in