

## **Congressional Executive Commission on China Hearing**

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Hearing: “Tibet: Barriers to Settling an Unresolved Conflict”

Thursday 23. 2022, at H-313 of the Capitol Building

“Chinese- Tibetan Relations in the 20th Century - Including Efforts Towards a Resolution Through Dialogue”

Testament by Tenzin N. Tethong

Hon. Chairman,

It is my distinct honor to offer testimony this morning at this hearing on “Tibet; Barriers to Settling an Unresolved Conflict” and to speak briefly on Tibetan-Chinese relations in the 20th century, including efforts towards a resolution of the Tibet issue.

Tibet remains an unresolved conflict ever since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. One of Mao Zedong’s earliest declaration was his intention to “liberate” Tibet from the West, and the Tibetan people from a backward and oppressive society.

The Tibetan government protested to the new Chinese state citing Tibet’s historical independence from the time of Tibetan Kings to the rule of the Dalai Lamas, from the Tang to the Manchu Qing dynasties. With equal urgency, Tibet appealed to the United Nations and the global community, especially to India, the United Kingdom and the United States. Unfortunately, China did not heed Tibet’s protests and the global community did not come to Tibet’s defense.

The People’s Liberation Army marched into Tibet in 1950 easily overwhelming the Tibetan army and militia. China knew right then that rhetorical justification for such an invasion was not enough and called for negotiations to formalize an agreement. Tibetan representatives negotiated in Beijing, but disregarding any proper ratification process, were forced to sign what is called the “The 17 Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet”.

Nevertheless, for the next nine years, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government tried to work within the broad confines of the agreement which promised no change in the status of the Dalai Lama or the Tibetan government. However, the Chinese did not live up to their commitments nor to the personal assurances the Dalai Lama had received from Mao Zedong.

Tibetan dissatisfaction was widespread during these years and protests against the Chinese finally culminated in the uprising in Lhasa on March 10, 1959, which led to the escape of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and thousands to India and neighboring countries.

For the next twenty years Tibet was completely shut off from the rest of the world. An extreme overhaul of Tibetan life from its traditional Buddhist roots to Chinese Marxist socialism was introduced, which in the later years were consumed by the madness of the Chinese Cultural revolution.

However, in early 1979, China deemed the Tibetan issue important enough to be revisited. Deng Xiaoping invited the Dalai Lama's older brother to Beijing and declared that short of separation, everything could be discussed, meaning that short of granting Tibetan independence, China would be open to all Tibetan concerns and aspirations.

This breakthrough meeting led to renewed dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government, and four delegations of exile leaders were able to visit Tibet extensively, to see and learn what had transpired in the two decades of Chinese rule.

By 1984, representatives of the exile government were in deliberations with Chinese officials to address the larger issues related to Tibet. However, in 1987, Hu Yaobang, Party General Secretary and the main proponent of change in their Tibet policies died. This was soon followed by the Tiananmen students protests and the massacre. China stepped backwards and the Tibet issue also retreated.

In 2001, however, communication with China was restored, and Envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama began meeting in Beijing, and the Tibetan side presented the Dalai Lama's Middle Way policy seeking genuine autonomy for Tibet within the framework of the PRC. The envoys met many times, even after the unprecedented 2008 Tibet-wide protests that called for greater freedom for the Tibetan people. However, the Envoy's last meeting was to be in 2010 when the Chinese ended the dialogue process.

This brief overview of Tibetan-Chinese relations should show that even at the most challenging of times, China has seen the need to address the legitimacy of their rule in Tibet. And that there is perhaps now a realization of the shortcomings of their rule. China has also repeatedly initiated direct communication with His Holiness the Dalai Lama demonstrating the obvious need to find a meaningful resolution to these outstanding issues.

Ever since the exile delegation visits to Tibet in the 1980s, to the later meetings of the Dalai Lama's Envoys in Beijing, the Chinese leadership has been made much more aware of Tibetan perspectives of their rule in Tibet, and of the unvarnished aspirations of the Tibetan people, both of which contradict the official Chinese narrative.

Worldwide attention to Tibet has been an important part of creating greater awareness of the Tibetan issue even within China, allowing for more liberal and reasonable views of the Dalai Lama and of Tibetan hopes and demands to have some standing.

There is little doubt that public support for Tibet, through the person of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and concerns for the cultural and human rights of the Tibetan people have been important factors in the U.S. government's attention to the issue, one which has been sustained to a large degree by individual members of Congress.

The continued efforts of the United States will only help remove barriers to this unresolved conflict, and it will advance the Tibetan people's desire for greater freedom and democracy.

Thank you.

