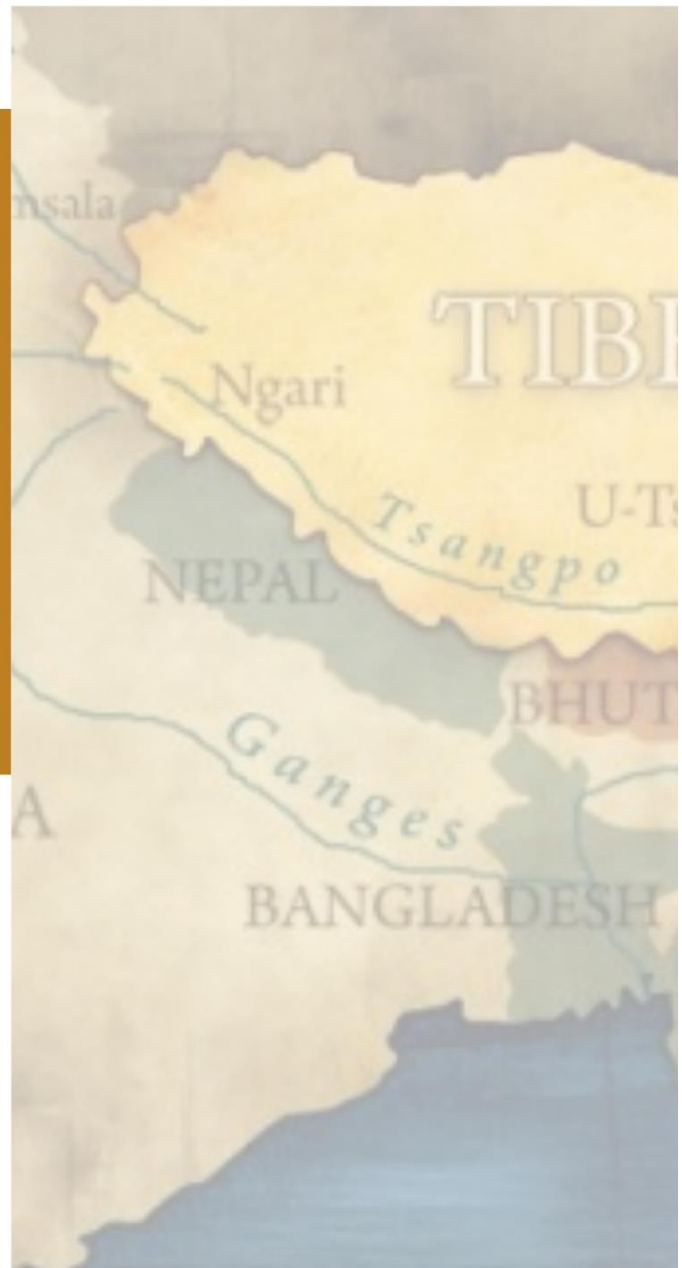


TIBET IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS: THE NEED FOR A POLICY REAPPRAISAL

-A REPORT-

Papers presented at a
Webinar held in 2021



FOUNDATION FOR NON-VIOLENT ALTERNATIVES (FNVA)

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Tibet in Sino-Indian Relations: The Need for a Policy Reappraisal

A Report of a webinar organised by The Foundation for Non-violent Alternatives (FNVA) IN 2021

INTRODUCTION TO THE WEBINAR

KRISHAN VARMA, TRUSTEE FNVA

CHAIR

AMBASSADOR GAUTAM BAMBAWALE

*India's High commissioner To Pakistan and
Ambassador to Bhutan and the PRC*

PANELLISTS

GENERAL J.J. SINGH

*PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd.), Former
Governor of Arunachal Pradesh and COAS*
From Younghusband's Expedition to
Present Day Tibet: A Historical and
Geopolitical Perspective

Dr. MICHAEL VAN WALT VAN PRAAG

Professor in International Law
The Need for a Principled Policy

DR. LOBSANG SANGAY,

*Sikyong, Tibetan Government-in-Exile
(2011-2021)*

The Need for a Policy Reappraisal: A
Tibetan Perspective

THE EXPERT PANEL

KRISHAN VARMA

Strategic Affairs Analyst, Trustee FNVA, Emeritus Resource Faculty Rashtriya Raksha University, Visiting Fellow Chennai Centre for Chinese Studies, former Special Secretary to Govt of India

Mr. Krishan Varma has invaluable experience dealing with international, regional, and national security issues, global economic and science and technology related developments. He gained expertise on these subjects particularly pertaining to the Far East, South East Asia region, and India's neighbouring countries. He has served in politically and socially fragile regions in India, which have been affected by militancy, insurgency, and terrorism, like J&K and India's Northeast region. He has also served in diplomatic assignments in important neighbouring countries and the US. He is an expert on China and proficient in Mandarin. He has been a frequent guest speaker and panellist on subjects related to national security, connectivity in India's North East region and China. He has received several coveted awards and commendations from the Government of India in recognition of his meritorious and distinguished service to the country over the years. Post retirement, he has been actively involved in corporate, academic, and social work, and is the Trustee of the Foundation for Nonviolent Alternatives (FNVA).

AMBASSADOR GAUTAM BAMBAWALE

Gautam Bambawale Joined the Indian Foreign Service in August 1984. He studied Mandarin Chinese and served in the Indian missions at Hong Kong and Beijing from 1985 to 1991. Upon his return to the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi, he served as the first Desk Officer for China. From 1993 to 1994, he was the Director in the Americas Division of the Ministry. From 1994 to 1998, he was the Director of the Indian Cultural Centre in Berlin where he dealt with Public Diplomacy. From March 2001 to June 2002, Mr. Bambawale worked at the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi as the Staff Officer to the Foreign Secretary of India. Subsequently, he functioned at the Prime Minister's Office in New Delhi as the Deputy Chief in the Division of National Security Affairs, Defence, and International Policy.

Mr. Bambawale was the Minister (Political) and Head of the Political Wing at the Indian Embassy in Washington, D.C. from July to September 2007 during the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal. From September 2007 to December 2009, he served as India's first Consul General in Guangzhou. From December 2009 to July 2014, he was the Joint Secretary (East Asia) at the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. In this position, he was responsible for relations with Japan, China, and South Korea amongst other countries. He served as the Indian Ambassador to Bhutan from August 2014 to December 2015 and the High Commissioner of India to Pakistan from January 2016 to November 2017 and then India's Ambassador to China from 2017 to 2018.

Ambassador Bambawale is an acknowledged expert on China. He is fluent in Chinese and German. He has an M. Phil in Economics from the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune.

Gen. JJ SINGH

A thinking General who has distinguished himself as a hands-on professional who leads from the front. With over 48 years of contribution to nation building with the distinction of being the Chief of Army Staff and later Governor of Arunachal Pradesh. The General rose to be Chief of Army Staff and commanded the second largest Army of the world from 31 Jan 2005 - 30 Sept 2007. During 2007 he held the appointment of Chairman Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces. During his tenure General JJ Singh, refined operational planning by co-opting the battle winning role of revolution in military affairs and provided focussed direction based on the 'Doctrine of the Indian Army' having earlier been its architect. He has handled an army of 1.2 million soldiers. He has the distinction of having taken all the professional courses to include Defence Services Staff Course, Senior Command, Higher Command and National Defence College Courses and holds a master's degree in Defence Science. He has also had the privilege of being the first Indian Defence Attache in Algeria. The General served as Governor of the State of Arunachal Pradesh from 2008-2013. He was instrumental in implementing the Prime Minister's development package of Rs 20,000 crores

for development of the state in major infrastructural projects related to road, rail, air connectivity and power. His autobiography 'A Soldiers General' was published in 2012 by Harper Collins, India. The book has been translated into several Indian languages. His subsequent book 'The McMahon Line' deals with India-China relations and the boundary issue and was launched in June 2019. The book has been well received and has been described as a seminal work on Indo- Sino relation. He was honoured with an Achievers Award by the Punjab State Government in 2019 on 550th Prakash Diwas of Guru Nanak for his meritorious contributions in the Indian Army. He is an achiever against odds and was recently conferred the "Legion d 'Honneur" one of the highest decorations by the President of France.

DR. MICHAEL VAN WALT VAN PRAAG

Professor of international law, specialising in the resolution of intrastate conflicts. He has been the legal advisor to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile since 1984. He is Executive Chairman of Kreddha, an international non-governmental organisation he founded in 1999 for the prevention and resolution of violent intra-state conflicts. He was advisor to a delegation from the government of Abkhazia during the peace talks between Georgia and Abkhazia between 1994 and 1996. He was then advisor to a delegation from the government of Chechnya during the negotiations between the Chechen Republic and the Russian Federation between 1995 and 1997. He was also legal adviser during the Bougainville peace talks between 1995 and 1996. He was a consultant for the United Nations Development Program between 1995 and 1996. He was appointed Visiting Scholar, Institute of International Studies of Jawaharlal-Nehru University, in 1999. He was also a Legal Advisor, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor between 2001 and 2002. He was also a member of the Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO) between 1997 and 2007. He has also been a member of the International Commission of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Between 2011 and 2014, he was Visiting Professor of the Institute for Advanced Study where he was professor of politics and international law at the Institute of Advanced Studies of Princeton. He has been awarded knighthood by the Dutch government, with Royal distinction of Commander in the Order of Orange-Nassau (a Knighthood), one of the highest civilian distinctions given by the Dutch government for 'exceptional service to society with a global impact' and one rarely bestowed, in recognition of "his

life-long dedication and commendable achievements in support of the unrepresented and oppressed nations and peoples of the world; his tireless mediating activities to resolve intrastate conflicts through the non-profit organisation Kreddha; as well as his academic pursuits.”

SIKYONG LOBSANG SANGAY (2011-2021)

On 27 April 2011 Dr. Lobsang Sangay was elected Kalön Tripa of the Tibetan Government-in- Exile and became the first elected political leader after His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama's devolvement from political leadership in 2011. He took the oath of office, succeeding Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche as Kalön Tripa. In a statement at the time, the Dalai Lama referred to Lobsang Sangay as Sikyong; and the title was officially changed from Kalön Tripa to Sikyong in September 2012. In his role as Sikyong, Dr. Sangay has emphasised the importance of seeking a peaceful, non-violent resolution of the Tibet issue. He has supported His Holiness the Dalai Lama's call for a "Middle Way" approach "that would provide for genuine autonomy for Tibet within the framework of Chinese constitution." Dr. Sangay has been recognised with numerous honours and awards including the Leadership Award by the Regional New England Amnesty International; the Peace and Justice Award by the Peace Commission of the City of Cambridge; and membership on the Advisory Board of the Asian American Civic Association. He was awarded the Gold Medal for Outstanding Contribution to Public Discourse from the Historical Society of the Trinity College; The Presidential Medal by Salisbury University, Takasu Award by the Takusu Foundation; Rataan Samman by Hansraj College and Bharatiya Chatra Sansad (Indian Student Parliament) award for inspiring youth and strengthening democracy. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) conferred Dr. Sangay with a citation award recognising and honouring the democratic institution of the Central Tibetan Administration as envisioned by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In 2004, he became the first Tibetan to earn a S.J.D. degree from Harvard Law School and was a recipient of the 2004 Yong K. Kim' 95 Memorial Prize for excellence for his dissertation, *Democracy in Distress: Is Exile Polity a Remedy? A Case Study of Tibet's Government-in-exile*. In 2006, Dr Sangay was selected as one of the twenty-four Young Leaders of Asia by the Asia Society. Funded by Hao Ran foundation, Sangay was a Senior Fellow at the East Asian Legal Studies Program at Harvard Law School through 2011. He is an expert in Tibetan law and international human rights law.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS



KRISHAN VARMA,
TRUSTEE FNVA

Before I delve into the details of our five webinars, let me provide a brief introduction to FNVA for those who may be joining us for the first time. Approximately a month ago, we embarked on this webinar series, starting with an insightful discussion led by Ambassador Vivek Katju on "China's Expansionist Policies." This webinar shed light not only on China's southern expansion, which includes areas now under the control of Pakistan, but also delved deeply into Xinjiang, with two distinguished speakers. Furthermore, we explored the Central Asian perspective, expertly provided by Professor Siddiq Wahid.

Our second webinar focused on Tibet, examining contemporary developments in the region. Professor Srikanth Kondapalli delivered introductory remarks, and we were privileged to have three accomplished scholars offering profound insights into Tibet's current state.

The third webinar centered on international support for Tibet's freedom. Chaired by the eminent jurist Professor Michael van Walt, this panel featured distinguished speakers, including Bhuchung Tsering and Dolma la, who provided valuable perspectives on this topic.

Our fourth panel, titled "Reaffirming the Status of Tibet," was chaired by Ambassador Kanwal Sibal and featured the esteemed presence of Dr. Michael van Walt, Kelsang Gyaltzen, and Tsering Topgyal.

Now, for our fifth webinar, we are honored to have Gautam Bambawale, former Ambassador for Pakistan, and China, as our session chair. General JJ Sing, former Chief of Army Staff, and former governor of Arunachal Pradesh, brings unparalleled expertise to today's seminar, having extensively worked along the border regions. Dr. Michael van Walt will once again provide historical insights into Tibet. Finally, we are privileged to welcome Sikyong Dr. Lobsang Sangay, a key figure in the Tibet issue, who will share his insights within the broader theme of "Tibet in Sino-Indian Relations: The Need for a Policy Reappraisal."

Before we dive into these discussions, I would like to offer some context about FNVA's recent efforts. In the past few years, we have organized a series of dialogues involving eminent scientists from India, China, and the wider region, focusing on critical issues impacting our immediate neighbourhood. Topics have included Tibetan Plateau Ecology, Transboundary River Waters, Infrastructure Development Policies and Tibet, Security Implications for India, Socio-Economic Policies for Tibet, and their impact on Tibetan communities in India, Regional Security, Language, Education, and Culture, as well as China and Asia.

FNVA, established in 2009, has made significant strides in the past 11 years. In 2011, we convened a groundbreaking Transboundary River Water Conference that brought together scholars from China, Tibet, and the region to discuss mutual concerns. In 2013, we published a well-received paper reevaluating India's Tibet policy, a topic we continue to revisit. In 2014, we organised a conference on the

state of ecology on the Tibetan Plateau. Additionally, we conducted a two-year project on Tibet's relationship with the Himalayas, led by Professor Siddiq Wahid, culminating in policy recommendations and a publication. This project spanned locations in Leh, Gangtok, and Itanagar.

Thank you all for being a part of FNVA's journey, and we look forward to engaging in today's discussion on Tibet and Sino-Indian relations.



AMBASSADOR GAUTAM BAMBAWALE

INDIA'S HIGH COMMISSIONER TO PAKISTAN AND

AMBASSADOR TO BHUTAN AND THE PRC

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the Foundation for Nonviolent Alternatives (FNVA) for not only hosting this seminar but also for inviting me, my fellow panellists, and today's distinguished speakers. The topic of our discussion today is "Tibet in Sino-Indian Relations: The Need for a Policy Reappraisal." Before I pass the floor to our esteemed speakers, I would like to provide an overview of the current situation on the India-China border in Ladakh and why we find ourselves in a position where a reset or reappraisal of India's China policy is imperative.

As many of you are aware, in early May 2020, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) deployed a significant number of troops, numbering in the tens of thousands and involving several divisions, to the region of Ladakh. In response, the Indian army mirrored this build up, leading to a face-off along the tense border. The critical question is, what are the Chinese attempting to achieve with this military movement in Ladakh?

What messages are they trying to convey?

In my view, and one shared by many in India, the Chinese actions serve two primary purposes. First, on a tactical level, they seek to advance their ground positions unilaterally, effectively pushing what they perceive as their Line of Actual Control with India further. It's essential to remember that India and China do not share a unanimous agreement on the precise location of this Line of Actual Control. The Chinese are attempting to redefine it independently by bringing in a substantial number of troops. Second, strategically, China aims to assert itself as the preeminent power in Asia, making it clear that it holds an overwhelming advantage in terms of economic, military, and comprehensive national power over India. This message is not directed solely at India but extends to all of Asia and the global community.

India's response has been to move its military forces in strength, blocking Chinese military objectives to some extent. We have communicated our rejection of unilateral determination of the Line of Actual Control and our disagreement with China's assertion as the dominant power in Asia. To reinforce these signals, the Indian government has taken policy measures in two key areas.

In the economic domain, India has banned several Chinese mobile applications, including TikTok. This action has had a ripple effect, prompting other countries, such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan, to contemplate similar steps against TikTok. India's economic measures demonstrate that it possesses leverage over China.

Moreover, India has tightened its foreign direct investment rules to scrutinize investments from countries like China and Hong Kong more closely. We have also implemented measures to prevent Chinese companies from securing contracts, even if they submit the lowest-cost tenders. Additional measures are expected.

On the political front, India has strengthened partnerships with the United States, Japan, Australia, and other regional countries through initiatives like the Quadrilateral Security Initiative (Quad). We are enhancing our relations with ASEAN nations and Russia. These actions underscore our position that if there is no peace on our borders with China, the overall relationship will deteriorate further.

In this context, the India-China relationship is undergoing a reset and recalibration. Key questions revolve around whether India has leverage over China regarding Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan. Some argue that India lacks leverage on Tibet, but I disagree. India possesses leverage on China through the Tibet issue. It is essential to recognize that we do not always need an ace of spades to win a hand; a lower card can suffice. If we have a card in our hand, we should not give it up.



GEN. JJ SINGH

PVSM, AVSM, VSM (RETD.), FORMER
GOVERNOR OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH AND COAS

**From Younghusband's Expedition to Present Day Tibet: a Historical and Geopolitical
Perspective**

Thank you very much, Gautam and Krishan Varma, for your introductory talks and for setting the stage for this panel discussion. Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. I consider it a great privilege to share my views on Tibet in the 20th century, its historical and geopolitical perspective with these eminent people on the panel who are experts in their fields and the august virtual gathering of participants in India and all over the world. And I thank the FNVA for requesting me, for inviting me to come and speak to this august body.

Now, we all sympathise, at least I do, with Tibet and the people of Tibet, because they have been used like a pawn in international affairs, at least from the time when the British were interested in opening this hidden paradise or the sacred land of Tibet. It would be apt to commence my address with words of the present 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. He said, I quote, "When Tibet was free, we took our freedom for granted. We had little sense that it was something we had to prove or even defend because we were unaware that it was under threat."

Geography isolated Tibet from the world, and its history was a construct thereof till in 1951 when the Chinese assimilated Tibet with brutal force when the situation called for it. Tibet witnessed either periods of independence or some form of vassalage to the Chinese kingdom, depending upon the waxing and waning of imperial China. Tibetans have been acclaimed as a race of ferocious warriors and were militarily aggressive. In fact, Tibet was an important military power in Asia until the seventh century. During brief periods in its history, it even held sway over large parts of not large but some parts of China, Turkestan, Mongolia, and Hindustan.

It was on account of the advent and spread of Buddhism from the 5th to the 8th century that the Tibetans commenced their transformation into a pacific society. Ancient Tibetan history is shrouded in obscurity. Tibetans believe in their mythological origin from the Union of a Divine Male Monkey, reincarnation of Chenrezi an avatar of Avoloketeshwara the Buddhist of compassion, and a mother Cliff ogress, and their six offspring were believed to be the first inhabitants of Tibet. There is some evidence to show that human settlements existed in this elevated plateau from Palaeolithic times. Civilization as the world understands began in Tibet with the founding of a large Tibetan Empire during the reign of Tsong Tsen Gampo, the king who was the most powerful king in the 7th century. He overran Burma and western China and forced the Chinese emperor to humiliating peace. As part of the terms of this peace with China,

in AD 640, he received a Chinese Princess Wencheng in marriage. Reportedly his first wife was Brikuthi, a Nepalese princess. Both wives happened to be zealous Buddhists and were able to prevail upon their husband to adopt Buddhism and spread this way toward Tibet.

In my adventures in China, when I was driving up towards Lhasa from Xining, I came across a very interesting feature that where the road bifurcates, one goes toward the Hongo Valley and one which goes up to Lhasa Garmo railway line and the pipeline, there was a huge statue of Princess Wencheng with hands folded like 'Namaste', welcoming any visitor into this area, and going beyond. So that tells us how much the influence of Buddhism had on Tibet and Tibetans have openly said, for us Buddhism comes first and ideology of communism comes next. So, this does not seem to gel well with the Chinese.

Buddhism got established as a state religion under the subsequent kings. As the new religion prevailed despite great resistance from the Bon faith, which is the ancient faith associated with the Zhangzhung culture. Buddhism, which permeated across the Himalayas, was instinctively customized by the Tibetans to suit their local conditions. This resulted in the evolution of a modified version of Buddhism, one that is deeply treasured by all Tibetans. While their spiritual needs were met from India, they looked mainly to China for their material requirements. However, as compared with their association with the Chinese, the Tibetans had a closer and special relationship with Mongolia because of Buddhism. Interestingly, a unique Cho-yon or a priest-patron relationship, as a security shield, came into being first between the Tibetans and the Mongols in the mid-13th century when it was established between a Sakya group and Kublai Khan, the Mongol prince, in 1254, and later between the Tibetans and the Chinese.

A reformist movement in Tibetan Buddhism, the yellow hat sect, was founded by Tsongkhapa, a famous Buddhist teacher. This period, the 14th century, witnessed the founding of three famous monasteries of Lhasa, Sera, the Wild Rose Fence, Gaden, the Joyous located about 26 miles from Lhasa, and Drepung, the largest in the world. Tibet's relations with China deteriorated time and again, resulting in conflicts. There is significance that the treaties were signed in the year 783 and 821. And they were inscribed bilingually on pillars and tablets. The 8821 treaty has even broadly demarcated the border between China and Tibet. It is very important for us to understand that between Tibet and China, the boundary was fluctuating between the Mekong and the Salween rivers. As you know, Mekong is to the east of Salween and East of Mekong is the Yangtze. And at one place geographically, it is almost miraculous how nature has made these three, four rivers, including the Irrawaddy flow 50 kilometres apart and with mountains of 14 to 15 thousand feet in between, ranges which are also running parallel North to South. Now, you can imagine the enormous difficulties for traversing this route coming from China towards the West to Lhasa. And many things come from such geographical geo-strategic compulsions, which forced China to adopt an aggressive posture to annex Aksai Chin firstly and now also claiming Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet. There is a new name given it was never there before in any earlier correspondence, but therefore they also know how hollow it is. They had never been in Arunachal Pradesh which they call South Tibet ever.

Even their ancient forefathers never had entered Arunachal Pradesh, except for one or two patrols which came in the year 1911 and 1912 just to check and then they went back because they could not stay there, the tribes were very hostile to anybody coming there. Now, I want to mention that because of these treaties, there is a boundary which by and large, which was accepted between Tibet and China, was the mountain range between the Mekong and the Salween. This means east of this range was China and west of this range was Tibet. Yet there were many Tibetan places, Tibetan inhabited towns and villages which were on the east of Mekong between Mekong and Yangtze.



DR. MICHAEL VAN WALT VAN PRAAG

PROFESSOR IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

The Need for a Principled Policy

We are experiencing a time of multiple and potentially major changes in the world, including with respect to global power distribution and balance. And one development that is, of course, of relevance in the discussion that we are having today is the change of attitude towards China. And by that, of course, I mean the government of the PRC. And this change of attitude opens the way and perhaps even necessitates a reconsideration of our government's policy debate. I refer not only to the policies of the government of India, but of several other countries as well. The formulation of policies on Tibet must, in my view, be based on two pillars. They must be principled as well as grounded in an appreciation of the true nature of China's presence in Tibet on the one hand, and they must recognize the relationship between that presence and Beijing's ambitions and behaviour elsewhere in the region on the other. So, I first would like to address the nature of China's presence in Tibet and how the international community's response to it has, in fact, emboldened Beijing to aggressively pursue its territorial expansion with. Next, I will speak to the rights of the Tibetan people and the obligations of states and the obligations of our governments under international law. And finally, and considering the foregoing, I will argue that there is an urgent need to course correct government policy on Tibet. And in discussing all of this, I wish, of course, to pay special attention to India, its relationship to Tibet and the importance to India.

China has occupied Tibet against the will of the Tibetan people now for nearly three generations. Its sovereignty claim to Tibet has no legal basis and rests solely on a self-serving historical narrative. This narrative by which, among other things, the Chinese appropriate the great empires of the Mongols and the Manchus. It is Sino centric, inaccurate, and highly misleading. But it is so persistently and forcefully pushed by Beijing that the world has gradually bought into it. And today largely treats Tibet. As China's internal affair and beyond its own, beyond the international purview. We have become passive bystanders to an unfolding tragedy, and because of our government's appeasement on Tibet, China has become an entitled bully, aggressively pursuing strategic territorial expansion elsewhere. And this is the crux of the matter. My colleague Miek Boltejs and I discussed all of this in the new book called Tibet Brief 2020. That is currently in production at the publisher and will be available in November. This book is the result of 10 years of collaborative research and explores Tibet's historical relationship with its neighbours and the region with an eye to answering these questions, whether Tibet was at any point in time a part of China and whether the PRC has a legitimate sovereignty claim to Tibet today. Now, the Dalai Lama stated in his five-point peace plan speech in 1987, and I quote, "The real issue is the PRC's illegal occupation of Tibet". And of course, this is not only the root cause of the ongoing Sino Tibetan conflict, it is in fact its very essence human rights abuses, cultural and religious repression, and environmental mismanagement, of course, they need urgent attention. But we should not lose sight of the fact that they

are mere symptoms which will not go away until the illegitimacy of Chinese rule in Tibet is addressed. For a variety of reasons, the essence of the Sino Tibetan conflict has mostly disappeared from the discourse on Tibet. We have started to wonder whether maybe Tibet was a part of China at some point in the past. Entertaining the possibility that this might give the PRC the right to rule Tibet today. This is because the PRC has been successful at changing the discourse in its favour based on historical claims, but it is difficult to assess as they require extensive research of historical source materials from centuries ago. And as a result, many people have started to doubt that it is as black and white as the Dalai Lama's characterization of illegal occupation. They are trying to make sense of Beijing's masterfully crafted historical claims, but fit nicely in a Sino centric rendition of Asian history that goes largely unchallenged. And people have difficulty finding solid evidence to prove that Beijing's claims misrepresent historical reality. And let us be clear, that is all that Beijing needs to maintain the status quo in Tibet. But contrary to Beijing's claim. Tibet was historically never a part of China. And this does not mean, as I have said on other occasions, that Tibet was historically always an independent state, certainly not in the modern sense of the term. To be sure, Tibet's relations with the Mongol, Manchu and British empires entail different forms of dependencies, but none of those relations ever entailed the incorporation of Tibet into China.

I can't enter into details in the time available for me today, but my confidence on the subject comes from 10 years of solid research and engagement with about 100 scholars, starting with the rise of the Mongols and the Genghis Khan, eight centuries ago. And we studied everything up to the early 20th century because we started with Genghis Khan, because that was a period which Beijing claims Tibet first became a part of China and most of the actors. And my colleague that I mentioned earlier, systematically assessed all the claims he makes regarding China's alleged historical sovereignty over Tibet. And find that none of them hold water. Now, if you and it is in the book you read, we are publishing. The Chinese claims I debunked, we do that one by one in the book based on both historical and legal analysis. In summary, Tibet was not a part of China during the Mongol Empire and did not, in fact, become a part of the Yuan Dynasty. It was not ruled by the Chinese Ming dynasty. And the Manchu Qing relations with the Dalai Lama and Tibet never resulted in Tibet and cooperation with China. Now, these conclusions are historically accurate. They are all corroborated and contemporaneous Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese sources. And then as far as the Republic of China is concerned. It claimed Tibet as part of the republic from its inception, but was entirely unable to establish any authority in or over Tibet, leaving its unilateral claim contradicted by the facts of Tibetan independence at the time completely empty.

So remains the question, why is this relevant today, 17 years after the Chinese army seized Tibet? Well, that Tibet is not historically part of China is important because it affects the Tibetan people's rights today. It affects the legitimacy of Chinese rule in Tibet today. It affects the obligations of the PRC under international law. And finally, it affects the obligations of the international community. But are all our governments towards Tibet, the Tibetans, and the PRC? So being clear and speaking up about the deceitfulness of Beijing's historical narrative and the resulting baseness of its sovereignty claim over Tibet is very important because how the world's decision makers and influencers perceive the status of Tibet and act on that greatly affects the prospects of China's leaders being motivated to resolve the Sino Tibetan conflict on lines acceptable to the Tibetan people. But also, China's aggressive expansionist behaviour about which we have heard already today. Especially in recent years, and its bullying, accompanied by a sense of entitlement, are directly related to how the international community has treated and still treats China's invasion and occupation of Tibet. So, if you thought that China's incorporation of Tibet is water under the bridge, you may want to reconsider. Let me now get to the issue of the rights and obligations under international law. Tibet today is an occupied country. PRC's presence in Tibet is illegal because its armed invasion of Tibet in 1950, 51 violated one of the most fundamental

norms of modern international law. That prohibition of the use of force against another state. Tibet was not a part of China when the PLA invaded it, and under international law, the state cannot acquire sovereignty over territories seized by force or threat of force. That is, in fact, that simple.

As a result, Tibetans have the right today not only to a restitution of their independence. But the entire Tibetan people has the right to exercise full self-determination under international law. I am not dwelling on the right to self-determination. We do address it in detail in Tibet brief 20/20, but I do want to state that, however restrictively one interprets the scope of the right to self-determination and the peoples who are entitled to exercise it, Tibetans unquestionably possess the right to self-determination, which was in fact recognised by the international community, including India. In the U.N. General Assembly resolutions of No.1723 and 2079 of 1961 and 1965 respectively and this entitled Tibetans to determine their own political status and economic and cultural development. The corollary of Tibetan rights are the obligations of the PRC, under international law. All states do have such obligations. All our governments have the duty not to recognise the illegal annexation of Tibet by China and not to cooperate or assist Beijing in any way in maintaining or consolidating its unlawful rule in Tibet or in exploiting Tibet's natural resources. Resources which under international law belong solely to the Tibetan people. This is not only a moral or political imperative, it is a legal duty, it is an obligation under international law that states are bound by. Unfortunately, many governments have violated all international law, which in fact forbids, as I just said, states from recognising an acquisition of territory using force. But India has a very special reason for not recognising the PRC annexation of Tibet and for not taking any actions that directly or indirectly help Beijing consolidate or legalize its position on Tibet. From a legal standpoint, India's treaty relations with Tibet are of particular importance since the conclusion of these treaties indisputably entailed recognition of Tibet's status. Recognition of Tibet's statehood, international personality and treaty making capacity, and I refer to the Shimla Agreements of 1914 that General Singh spoke about a moment ago. India stated its position clearly in 1947 in a communication to the Foreign Office of Tibet. Soon after Indian Independence in which it conveyed the intention to treat Tibet as it did all other countries with whom India had inherited Britain's treaty relations, and 13 years later, Delhi reminded the government of the PRC that Tibet had full treaty making capacity in 1948. And that this has been recognized not only by Britain, but also by the Chinese government. The Indian government pointed out at the time. That the three governments in Shimla met on equal status and pointed out China to the PRC. That Tibet had treaty making capacity, also evidenced by other valid treaties that Tibet had concluded with Nepal and Britain in the 19th and early 20th century. The well-established legal principle of estoppel prevented and still prevents India from subsequently withdrawing its recognition of Tibet's independence because India and before it, the British derived benefits from the three bilateral agreements concluded with Tibet at Shimla, including the cession of previously Tibetan territory to India.

But legal obligations are not the only reasons. Governments do well to course correct their Tibet policy, besides legal and moral imperatives. It's the international community's and India's own best interests to effectively address the Sino-Tibetan conflict. Not doing so and looking the other way has emboldened Beijing to assert expanding territorial claims and influence. Beijing's reignited territorial claims in the South China Sea. In northern India, in Bhutan, its exertion of undue influence in Nepal and Mongolia, as well as its violations of Hong Kong's guaranteed autonomy. And the mass incarceration of Uighurs cannot be treated as unrelated to the years of international appeasement of Beijing as concerns its unlawful seizure and occupation of Tibet and its implementation of oppressive policies of integration and assimilation there. Let me take this whole argument put forward by Beijing to support its claim to sovereignty of Tibet, namely the self-serving historical narrative propagated as a prime example for a moment. Failure to challenge Beijing on that largely fabricated version of history when it comes to Tibet makes it difficult to challenge Beijing's use of similar and related narratives to claim sovereignty of islands

in the South China Sea and Indian territory. It also results in Beijing's sense of entitlement in its relations with other countries in the region, such as Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Korea, Vietnam, and other countries. Turning to India, taking a principled stand consistent with international legal obligations is of critical importance. I need not remind us here of the fact the Chinese armies would not be at India's borders, just as General Singh said. And even in India's territory, if China had been prevented from invading and occupying Tibet. The so-called Indo-Chinese border does not legally exist so long as China does not lawfully possess sovereignty over Tibet and it is not something China has to negotiate about. What does legally exist is the Indo Tibetan border, about which India has binding treaty relations with Tibet, a country under Chinese occupation. The validity of the PRC's claim to parts of India particularly to parts of Arunachal Pradesh is directly and solely tied and dependent on the validity of Beijing's claim to sovereignty, indeed historical sovereignty over Tibet and of its contention, the Tibetan 1949 lacked the capacity to enter broader trade and political treaties with Britain, treaty relations to which India succeeded in 1947. India cannot lawfully recognize that Tibet is part of China. Because as you saw earlier, it stopped from doing so due to the benefits that accrued from a strategic Tibet, that it will also be directly harmful to India to do so. Taking the position that Tibet is legally part of China today would imply one of two things. Either that the government of India maintains that Tibet was already a part of China in 1914 at the time, with Shimla agreements with the inevitable consequence that this legitimizes Beijing's claim to the territory Tibet ceded to Britain and therefore to India. Or that implies that India recognizes the PRC's unlawful invasion and annexation of Tibet 70 years ago, which clearly violates international law and harms India's own position on other issues, such as Pakistan's occupation of Kashmir. It would seem to me, therefore, that it would be in India's prime interest to work with other like-minded states to bring about course correct on the lines I am about to propose as soon as possible. India's place is also particularly important because other countries look carefully at India's position and policies about Tibet because of its long-standing relationship with that country. And this brings me to the last part of this presentation, to end the occupation of Tibet and achieve a negotiated resolution, the Sino-Tibetan conflict.

Certain things need to be in place for which the international community's engagement is imperative, the engagement called for is entirely in line with the legal obligations and responsibilities of states. It does not constitute impermissible interference in internal affairs, but it does require a significant course correct. Because it requires a government, one, desist, stop from stating that Tibet is part of China or the PRC. Refraining from making such statements would be the first step to rekindle incentive for the PRC to obtain the legitimacy to rule Tibet from those who possess the Tibetans and would bring governments of different countries of the world in compliance with international law regarding their obligation not to recognize China administration. Two, refrain from stating that that governments oppose or do not support independence for Tibet, which some governments have done. And this is not a position that India has taken. Because not only is making such statements contrary to international law, including the Tibetans right to self-determination, but it is not their prerogative to decide Tibet's status. Three, treat the situation in Tibet, Sino- Tibetan relations and Sino-Tibetan conflict is falling squarely within the international communities and therefore every government's purview and responsibility and not as China's internal affairs. Four, endorse the Tibetan people's right to self-determination, as called for by the U.N. General Assembly and speak out against the denial by the PRC of its exercise. Five, use language, language is important, use language reflective of the true situation, instead of adopting PRC terminology, which is widely being used now when it comes to Tibet. Tibetans must be referred to as a people and not a minority or ethnic group of China. Tibetans are not a minority, but the people under alien subjugation and domination. Adopting the PRC's minority terminology denies the Tibetan people its proper status and implicitly also rights to self-determination. Similarly, the use of euphemisms such as "the Tibet issue" to refer to the ongoing occupation of Tibet and the Sino-Tibetan conflict is unhelpful. It diminishes the

seriousness of the situation, and it hides the international character of the conflict, as well as the international community's responsibility and obligations to address it. Six, actively engage with both parties on engaging in dialogue and initiating substantive negotiations to resolve the conflict in ways that can satisfy the needs and interests of both parties. Both should be urging to enter negotiations with the Tibetan leadership without preconditions and impress upon the PRC that it can only be through that process or by means of a free and fair referendum. That the PRC can achieve the desired legitimacy and resolve its conflict with Tibet. Seven, reject the poor interest trap that China has put many countries in. And with it, the imposition by the PRC of rules of behaviour to dictate what governments must believe, what officials must say, who they should or should not meet and who they should engage with. Be guided instead by facts and law, including international legal principles and norms. It refrained from explicitly or implicitly endorsing the PRC's false or misleading historical narrative on Tibet, which is part of its own annexation strategy. Importantly, accepting or not contesting this narrative also has, as I just discussed, repercussions beyond Tibet, since it validates Beijing's territorial claims in northern India and makes it very hard to challenge related narratives deployed by Beijing to lay claim to other countries such as those in the South China Sea. And finally, prohibit and sanction business arrangements that aid the PRC in maintaining, strengthening, entrenching, or profiting from its presence and exercise of power in Tibet and its suppression of the Tibetan people's right to self-determination.

Now some people feel that such a course of such a change in policy is not realistic and fear retribution from Beijing. What is not realistic, in my view, is to maintain the present policy of appeasement on Tibet and believe that this will somehow encourage the PRC to negotiate with the Tibetans of genuine autonomy or to stop its repressive assimilation policies on the ground in Tibet, in Xinjiang, East Turkestan, Inner Mongolia, and most recently also in Hong Kong. What is also not realistic is the belief that not standing up when it comes to Tibet will cause the PRC to abandon its highly strategic territorial ambitions, whether it be in northern India, in the South China Sea or elsewhere. Let us take a cue from the Czech political leaders who have for long advocated a principled approach to China, Tibet and Taiwan and have taken this time of great changes today to make their move. Earlier this month, the speaker of the Czech parliament visited Taiwan, addressed the Taiwanese parliament, and expressed his and Czech people's support for Taiwan. Beijing immediately threatened punishment. But was swiftly rebuffed not only by the Czech foreign ministry, but by Germany and France as well. And this is surely a sign of the new times we are in. Small country and the outspoken European supporter of the PRC in the past decade has become an ardent critic of Chinese hegemony. The same politicians who were scoffed at by the Czech government for disrupting China relations out of misplaced and naive idealism are in fact today showing that they are not the pro Beijing politicians such as the President of the Czech Republic are the realists and were the realists all along. They are also demonstrating, but when it comes to China policy, principled policy is realist policy. What was misplaced was the belief that countering to China's leaders and silencing criticism of Beijing would bring prosperity and greater independence to the Czech Republic or would in times of China improve its behaviour in Tibet and elsewhere, besides the Czechs; Germany, France, Australia, the USA and of course, India are all demonstrating a preparedness today to confront PRC, but this is therefore a unique opportunity to launch a new, bold and principled Tibet policy and engage others to do the same. Such an opportunity does not come frequently, nor will it last.



DR. LOBSANG SANGAY

*SIKYONG, TIBETAN GOVERNMENT-IN- EXILE
(2011-2021)*

The Need for a Policy Reappraisal: A Tibetan Perspective

Your profound understanding of Tibetan affairs shines through, and it is a distinct honour to participate in a panel under your able moderation, introduced by Krishan Varma Ji. It is indeed heartening to connect with familiar faces in this virtual gathering.

Let us underscore the context of our virtual presence; it is a consequence of the global disruption brought about by the Wuhan-originated pandemic. This pandemic has had far-reaching repercussions geopolitically, economically, and socially across the world. We should remain mindful of these ongoing impacts. Sharing this panel with luminaries like General JJ Singh and Sir Michael van Walt is a privilege I deeply appreciate.

It is an honour to be associated with such distinguished individuals.

Now, turning our attention to the central theme: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's recent statement, "Either we change China, or China will change you," mirrors my assertion in 2008. I emphasised that either we lead China toward transformation or allow it to shape our destiny. My message in 2017 during visits to European nations reiterated that I was not there to champion Tibet's cause; instead, I urged them to safeguard their own interests. China's influence was spreading well beyond its borders then, and this holds true today.

Reviewing history, we find that most Indian Prime Ministers, except for Lal Bahadur Shastri, preferred cooperation with China, hoping for mutual gains over confrontation. However, the results of this cooperative approach leave much to be desired. India's trust in China's reciprocation of goodwill has been met with limited success. In contrast, Washington and several European nations have shifted from cooperation to competition with China. It is now India's turn to make a similar choice, informed by its own experiences: verify before trust, and prioritise competition over cooperation.

Furthermore, nations worldwide are scrutinising the Indian and Chinese models to decide between development with democracy or development without democracy. China's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" essentially implies development without democracy, posing an ideological challenge. India's success as a democratic nation with robust economic growth positions it as a model for others. India should proactively engage with fellow democracies and lead such initiatives.

India should also empower its representatives and experts in various United Nations forums, including the Human Rights Council, to express their perspectives objectively on the Tibet issue. Human rights violations continue to plague Tibet, and India should lend its support to impartial discussions. In 1986, His Holiness the Dalai Lama acknowledged India's recognition of Tibet as part of China in a letter to Rajiv Gandhi. However, the geopolitical landscape has changed drastically since then, particularly in the aftermath of incidents like Doklam and the Galwan Valley clash. It is time for India to categorise Tibet as a core issue in its engagement with China and initiate meaningful dialogue. The Tibet Swaraj Committee in 1965 proposed recognising the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, advocating the Tibet issue at the United Nations, and launching a cultural campaign against Chinese-occupied Tibet. These ideas merit revisitation and inclusion in India's Tibet policy.

It is essential to acknowledge that no government or nation has done more for the Tibetan people than the Indian government and its people. Nonetheless, we must glean lessons from recent experiences and adopt a more resilient Tibet policy. This encompasses nurturing Tibetan studies and the Nalanda tradition within Indian universities to impart knowledge about Tibet to the younger generation.

It is imperative that India incorporates the study of Nalanda tradition and Tibetan studies into the curricula of its universities. This initiative aims to ensure that the younger generation of Indians gain a comprehensive understanding of Tibet, its culture, and its historical significance. Without this knowledge, critical events such as the Galwan tragedy may be misunderstood or oversimplified. For instance, during the Galwan tragedy, media frequently asked why Chinese troops were present at the border. To provide clarity, it is essential to recognise that terminology matters. Referring to it as the Indo-China border implies a shared boundary, whereas referring to it as China's border legitimizes their presence. Moreover, while the dispute may seem to revolve around a small piece of land, the larger issue lies in India's prior acknowledgment of Tibet as part of China. This acknowledgment extends to the border situation, as China claims the border because India acknowledges Tibet as Chinese territory. Thus, when India says it's China's border, Chinese troops consider it their own.

The reference to a 1947 telegram from the Tibetan government to Pandit Nehru regarding the border issue underscores the necessity of historical context. It is crucial to acknowledge that in 1914, the Simla Convention and the McMahon Line were mutually agreed upon, providing a documented demarcation of the border. Despite India's official non-recognition of this document for six decades, the question arises of why a telegram is acknowledged while a written document remains unacknowledged. The year 1956 is pivotal in this context. The Dalai Lama came to India and stayed for several months, with the hope of a peaceful resolution and the granting of autonomy to Tibetans. Zhou Enlai, representing the Chinese government, visited India three times, assuring autonomy for Tibet through peaceful means and consultations. However, these promises remained unfulfilled. India's role in this historical context is significant, as these assurances were made to the Indian government. Despite subsequent assurances by various prime ministers, including Rajiv Gandhi, these commitments were not honoured.

India should take proactive steps to strengthen its ties with fellow democracies and engage in forming alliances. There already exist various alliances that uphold democratic values. A recent example highlights the need for India's leadership in such endeavours: a prominent NGO released a report exposing labour camps in Tibet, reminiscent of the situation in Xinjiang. Sixty-three parliamentarians from the Alliance for Democracies in China issued a statement condemning these camps. This collaboration among parliamentarians from different countries demonstrates the power of alliances built on shared principles. Given India's remarkable success as a democratic nation that has also achieved significant development, it should not only participate actively but also take a leadership role in these democratic alliances. India's

position as a leading example of democracy with economic progress positions it to guide and influence such alliances effectively. Moreover, India can further contribute by allowing its representatives and experts to express their views on the Tibet issue in various United Nations forums, including the Human Rights Council. The ongoing human rights violations in Tibet necessitate international attention and discussion. By facilitating these discussions, India can help shed light on the situation and advocate for a just resolution. This would align with India's principles and its commitment to democratic values and human rights.

Given this background, it is now imperative to reevaluate past policies and rectify past mistakes regarding the Tibet issue. In a notable development, a petition signed by 200 members of parliament calls for His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be awarded the Padma Ratna, the highest civilian honour in India. Former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao also expressed support for this idea. This groundswell of support among the Indian populace reflects the deep respect and affection that the people of India have for His Holiness. His Holiness, who proudly identifies himself as a son of India, occupies a unique position as an ambassador of Indian culture and civilisation. Even during meetings with global leaders like President Barack Obama, he passionately discusses India. This deep love and admiration for India should be acknowledged, whether through formal awards or otherwise. His Holiness is not merely a spiritual leader but also a symbol of the enduring bond between the Indian and Tibetan peoples. Therefore, recognising him would resonate with the sentiments of both Indians and Tibetans, symbolising the enduring connection between these two great cultures. His Holiness, who proudly identifies himself as a son of India, holds a unique place as an ambassador of Indian culture and civilisation. Even during meetings with global leaders like President Barack Obama, he passionately discusses India. This love and admiration for India should be acknowledged, with or without formal awards. His Holiness is not just a spiritual leader but also a symbol of the strong bond between the Indian and Tibetan peoples. Therefore, recognising him would resonate with the sentiments of both Indians and Tibetans, signifying the enduring connection between these two great cultures.

It is of utmost importance that India integrates the study of the Nalanda tradition and Tibetan studies into the curricula of its universities. This initiative is aimed at ensuring that the younger generation of Indians gains a profound understanding of Tibet, its rich culture, and its historical significance. Without this knowledge, critical events such as the Galwan tragedy may be misconstrued or oversimplified. It is imperative to introduce Such initiatives would help educate the younger generation of India about Tibet and its rich cultural heritage. By promoting the study of Tibetan history, language, and culture, we can foster a more informed and nuanced discussion of regional affairs, including the complex issues surrounding Tibet and its relationship with neighbouring countries like China and Bhutan. During the Doklam incident, numerous experts appeared on Indian national television to discuss the situation. However, a minor yet revealing confusion emerged – the meaning of the term "Doklam." In Tibetan, "Doklam" can be interpreted in different ways: "Doklam" signifies the Nomad's Road, "Dhoglam" denotes a Difficult Road, and "Dolam" simply means a Road. This linguistic ambiguity underlines the necessity for a deeper understanding of the region's culture and language when addressing sensitive geopolitical issues. The broader issue at hand is the absence of comprehensive Tibetan studies programmes in major Indian universities. In contrast, institutions in the United States, Europe, and other parts of the world, such as Harvard, Berkeley, Virginia, Columbia, Oxford, Cambridge, and several Ivy League universities, offer well-established Tibetan studies programs with dedicated professorships. Regrettably, Indian universities lag in this regard.

Given this historical backdrop, it has become imperative to reevaluate past policies and rectify previous mistakes concerning the Tibet issue.

Discussion

QUESTION:

Does the Government of India need to anticipate and be adequately prepared for a post-14 Dalai Lama era?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay

I am a Tibetan and a devoted follower of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness has himself expressed his intention to live beyond a century, precisely 113 years. This means we have more than two decades, or a quarter of a century, before that milestone is reached. During this period, it is important to note that all the current Chinese leaders will have come and gone. In fact, His Holiness has already outlived several generations of Chinese leaders, and he will continue to do so.

Given this relatively extended timeline, there is no urgency to rush into decisions at this stage. That said, in November of last year, we convened a gathering of Tibetan leaders from across the world, encompassing both secular and religious figures. We collectively emphasized that the matter of reincarnation is distinctly Tibetan. The concept and practice of reincarnation originate from our culture, and we maintain full copyright and patent rights over it. While Chinese factories may be proficient at producing duplicates, it is crucial to acknowledge that duplicates can never equal the authenticity of the originals.

Furthermore, reincarnation is a fundamental matter of religious freedom. It is imperative that communist parties or any external entities refrain from interference. In a somewhat ironic vein, it is worth noting that if the Communist Party of China is so keen on reincarnation, they might consider applying it to Mao Tse-tung, Chao Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping.

On a positive note, the U.S. government has issued statements supporting the idea that the determination of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation should rest solely with His Holiness and the Tibetan Buddhist leaders. Many European countries have also expressed similar support. It is possible for the Indian government to make a statement affirming its belief that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama is a matter solely within His Holiness's purview. India has a longstanding tradition of not interfering in religious affairs, whether it concerns the Dalai Lama or other spiritual leaders.

In conclusion, while we are mindful of these matters, it is important to reiterate that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will remain with us for an extended period. The Indian government can uphold its principle of non-interference in religious matters by affirming that the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama is exclusively his own prerogative. Thank you.

Dr. Michael van Walt

I fully endorse what Sikyong Lobsang Sangay just said. But in addition, I would just like to make the point that clearly the Tibetan issue is not all about or only about His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as the Chinese would like to have that presented. As you know, every time the Chinese said the negotiations or discussions can only be about Dalai Lamas private and his family and his return to the great motherland and so on, trying to reduce the issue to form a conflict between two states, between a people and a government, to a dispute between an individual, even of the stature of His Holiness and the Chinese government. So, I think what India should do is move to ensure that it frames the its policy on Tibet

appropriately as an issue, as a political, as a strategic, as a military issue, as a legal issue, so that when so that it becomes very clear that that the problem is not going to go away, whether his holiness is actively involved or not. And again, a principled policy will ensure that it is not dependent on his holiness.

QUESTION:

“Given the great tensions in the international environment at the present time, particularly between the great powers, I guess that is the US and China, given the rather precarious location in which Nepal is situated, if you were a Nepali leader, what would be your course of action at this point of time? And in two respects. One is as far as the Sino-Indian relationship is concerned, and secondly, from the aspect of the concerns of the Tibet issue. So, what is your reaction and your response to that?”

General JJ Singh

Firstly, I would like to address the historical context surrounding the 13th Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatso. He fled from Lhasa due to concerns about the British Younghusband Expedition, which might have apprehended him and sought accountability. Consequently, he sought refuge in Mongolia. During his absence, when Chinese forces entered Lhasa and later during his second exile to India, prompted by the Chinese searching for him at the palace, the Chinese authorities posted denunciatory messages about the Dalai Lama on the walls of houses in Lhasa. Remarkably, these posters were often defaced with cow dung and yak dung, as the local people held deep reverence for the Dalai Lama. This reverence continues for the current Dalai Lama. As for the future, it is prudent to let Tibetan traditions and culture guide the path forward, as Dr. Sangay mentioned.

Regarding Tawang's significance, it is a Buddhist area in the Arunachal Pradesh of India, primarily inhabited by people who migrated from Eastern Bhutan. Some may also have originated from Tibet. Tawang has a historical connection to the sixth Dalai Lama within the Buddhist tradition. Concerning the complex process of selecting a Dalai Lama, it is indeed intricate and fascinating. When the Oracle makes pronouncements in the Tawang region, which has its monastery and a precedent related to the Dalai Lama, the Chinese express an interest in claiming Tawang. However, India maintains that Tawang belongs to a distinct population, and it is a settled matter. The McMohan line clearly places Tawang on our side, whereas Sona Zhong falls within Chinese territory, on the Tibetan side. This background is essential to emphasize.

Moving to Nepal, the country faces a challenging situation, navigating a delicate balance between two major neighbouring nations. As the saying goes, "When two elephants fight, the grass gets trampled." Therefore, I believe it is in Nepal's best interest to remain neutral in this scenario. Maintaining a policy of neutrality will help Nepal avoid becoming entangled in the tensions between these two giants. Survival and stability are paramount for Nepal in the current climate, where there is significant tension between these two major powers. However, we can hope for wisdom and good sense to prevail, leading to peaceful resolutions of border disputes and the restoration of peace and tranquillity in the region.

QUESTION:

How has the state's response to covid in Tibet been? And are local Tibetans happy with that, with that effort? How is the nature of state intervention during this period? Has the local leadership managed to win hearts and minds in Tibet?” Could I address this to you, Sikyong?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay

When the same government claims that Tibet was peacefully liberated, they assert that Tibetans welcomed the Chinese army into Tibet. However, it's essential to approach their statements on Tibet, as well as other matters like the pandemic, with a critical perspective. Up until March 18th, there was some data available. Remarkably, they reported that 106 Tibetans were infected with COVID-19, and all of them miraculously recovered without any fatalities. However, this information contradicts the reality on the ground, as we later learned that a dozen Tibetans had tragically lost their lives in just one county.

After March 18th, there was a complete blackout of information. It later became evident that the entire pandemic had been exacerbated because they had delayed sharing crucial information, including with the World Health Organization, by three to six weeks. According to experts and major international organizations, had the Chinese government been more forthcoming and transparent early on, they could have potentially prevented up to 95% of the pandemic's impact. Their practice of withholding information, particularly regarding Tibet, has been consistent.

They have consistently tried to portray that they have provided comprehensive healthcare and that Tibetans are well taken care of. However, it is exceptionally challenging to place trust in these assertions given the track record of information manipulation and withholding.

QUESTION:

What is preventing world governments, including, of course, the government of India, to recognize Tibet as an occupied country?

Dr. Michael van walt

Fear? I believe it is a combination of fear of retribution and, to some extent, well-founded concerns. The Chinese government has demonstrated a willingness to punish governments that do not align with its demands on various occasions. However, it is also important to note that those countries that have taken a firm and clear stance have faced fewer consequences. For instance, consider the United States, which has consistently maintained a policy of meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This stance has not significantly harmed U.S.-China relations.

One aspect of this fear is the perception of insecurity and vulnerability in a government's position, leading China to exploit it to the fullest. Another factor is an unwillingness to deviate from established policies. When you speak with European governments, for example, you find very quickly that the Europeans will say this is an EU policy, and when you talk to the E.U., they say this is a government policy for the governments of all the European countries. In other words, everybody likes to respond to the question on recognition of Tibet simply by saying others are doing it and therefore we are not exceptional. We are just doing what the rest of the world is doing, what we're doing, what the rest of Europe is doing, instead of, again, taking a principled position based on the reality of the nature of China's presence in Tibet. Take the case of Britain, for instance; its policy should be based on its own treaty relations and historical record with Tibet.

For Britain, for example, it should be based on their own treaty relations and their own past record with Tibet and my hope is that this will change, but it can only change if there are enough governments and it can be three or four, but there must be more than one that jointly realize that the time is ripe to make a change in policy. And that change in policy does not necessarily have to be an immediate recognition of the Tibetan government in exile or an immediate recognition of Tibet as an occupied country cannot express it. It can be a cessation, an end to this constant repetition of the mantra that the Chinese government wants everybody to repeat, which is Tibet is part of China, Tibet is part of China. At every

occasion that the Chinese government asks another government to do, when there is a summit between two leaders, when and on other occasions, they wish the other governments to repeat this mantra, the first step is to stop complying. There is no reason to make that statement. I do not know of other examples where countries are being pressured to constantly repeat the same territory as part of another country. It is only China that requires this. This should stop as a first step; the second step is to raise the level and nature of government relations between various governments and the Tibetan government in exile. As a factual matter, without necessarily changing the protocol of it, but intensifying those traditions and raising the level of it, and the third stage, in my view, should be one of the more explicit recognition of Tibet's status as an occupied country, which is to know the US Congress has recognised in the past and the European Parliament has recognised in the past that there is no reason not to reaffirm that simply and other countries and other parliaments hopefully will reaffirm that as well, so that we don't forget what this is all about, so that we are reminded of an occupation, as you know, and international law is a temporary situation. It cannot become permanent. And therefore, if we recognize Tibet as an occupied country, it becomes very clear to everybody that this is a conflict that needs resolution. And that, I think, is important for us to remember.

QUESTION:

What is India doing to fend off these moves by China to move ever closer to India?

Ambassador Gautam Bambawale

Regarding India's approach to its South Asian neighbours, except for Pakistan, India has forged extensive partnerships encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. It is essential to note that India's engagement in the region does not seek to engage in a direct, dollar-for-dollar competition with China, given the vast disparity in the size of their economies. Instead, India leverages its unique advantages, including deep historical, cultural, and familial ties between Indian and neighbouring populations. Moreover, India excels in areas such as personnel training and human resource development, where it has a competitive edge. Collaborative efforts with neighbouring countries in these domains remain a priority for India. Despite China's assertiveness in India's neighbourhoods, I firmly believe that India will emerge from this competition in a position of strength.

QUESTION:

What are the steps and contributions made during Sikyong's student years to promote Tibetan studies at Indian universities.

Lobsang Sangay

First and foremost, we have established a Tibet Policy Institute here in Dharamsala. This institute houses accomplished MPhil and doctorate degree holders who actively engage in networking with other think tanks and universities across India. We foster partnerships, co-organize conferences, and support various initiatives in collaboration with academic institutions.

Moreover, I have personally visited numerous universities, delivering a series of talks to emphasize the significance of Tibetan studies and Tibetan programs. This ongoing effort aims to raise awareness about the importance of these academic pursuits.

The Tibet Policy Institute has also extended its reach globally, establishing connections with think tanks and research centres across the world, particularly in Europe and America.

In addition to these efforts, we have worked closely with institutions like Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and others to designate a Tibet day, during which we invite experts to share their insights on Tibet. These endeavours collectively contribute to the promotion and advancement of Tibetan studies.

In summary, our activities encompass the establishment of the Tibet Policy Institute, networking with academic institutions, personal engagements by myself, and global outreach efforts.

QUESTION:

Are there any re-education/concentration camps in Tibet, as is the case in Xinjiang?

Lobsang Sangay

A recent report from a prominent international organisation has brought to light the existence of numerous labour camps in Tibet, resembling those seen in Xinjiang. You can find the detailed report on our website, Tibet.net, and I encourage you to read it to gain deeper insights.

Notably, 63 members of parliament from various democratic nations around the world have issued a joint statement condemning the human rights violations in Tibet and calling for a thorough investigation into these concerns.

It is worth highlighting that the party secretary of Xinjiang, who played a significant role in the establishment of labour camps or concentration camps in Xinjiang, previously held a leadership position in Tibet Autonomous Region. He implemented similar measures during his tenure in Tibet. This includes the use of advanced algorithms, extensive technological surveillance, neighbourhoods watch programs, and the development of labour and concentration camps, all of which later emerged in Xinjiang.

In a historical context, as far back as the 1960s, Harry Wu, a former political prisoner and democracy activist, attested to the presence of labour camps in Tibet. He himself experienced incarceration in Qinghai, where he spent many years. Harry Wu's testimony underscores the existence of labour camps or gulags in Tibet, a situation that persists to this day.

Concluding Remarks



Mr. Krishan Varma

The question regarding our neighbourhood has underscored the significant costs associated with seeking friendship with China. We have witnessed land acquisitions and territorial disputes in Nepal, Bhutan, and other countries in the region. These nations, though small, hold their pride and nationalistic values dearly. They are not for sale, and their resolve is firm.

Dr. Michael van Walt presented a remarkably well-structured analysis of fiscal policies and strategies that we should adopt. It is a rare and objective perspective that we should seriously consider and further explore.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have carefully curated this entire program. We have covered various aspects, from China's expansionism to Tibet, and upcoming sessions will delve into topics such as Buddhism in the Himalayas, Xinjiang, Mongolia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Our aim is to provide our audience with a comprehensive understanding of China from different angles.

You beautifully described China as holding the "ace of spades," but sometimes, even "two clubs" can outmanoeuvre an ace of spades, depending on how you play your cards. We have a deck of cards, and the letters represent democracies. With the right strategy and cooperation among democracies, we can effectively navigate the challenges posed by China.

I want to express my gratitude to the audience, our esteemed panellists, and both of you for your time, insights, and the opportunity to delve into this crucial topic. It has been a long and enriching session. I have had a longstanding association with this subject, having undertaken various expeditions, including visits to some of the notorious gulag areas. As we continue our series of webinars, we will share more about these experiences.