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Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era: Lessons and Prospects

Tashi Rabgey and Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho



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List of Acronyms

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
NPC	National People's Congress
PRC	People's Republic of China
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region

Executive Summary

This paper analyzes the dialogue process in the Sino-Tibetan dispute, examining the relationship between Beijing and the Dalai Lama from their initial engagement in the early post-Mao years through the protracted stalemate of the 1990s and on to the current experimentation with direct contacts. In addition to drawing on lessons from the past, the study surveys the major factors that are likely to impact the future dynamics of engagement. It thereby provides an assessment of the current prospects for dialogue and for settling the longstanding dispute.

The authors question the view that important opportunities for negotiations were missed in the 1980s. Rather, they argue that even when Beijing appeared most inclined to enter into dialogue, the gap between the parties was too wide for meaningful engagement. Thus, for example, Deng Xiaoping's historic gesture toward reconciliation in 1979 was made on the basis of strategic miscalculations of the political stakes. The PRC had assumed its position in Tibet to be secure, but the exiles' fact-finding missions exposed the nationalist sentiment among Tibetans in the region, causing Beijing to reassess its strategy toward both Tibet and the Dalai Lama. The formal talks of the early 1980s thus proved fruitless, and by 1984 the door to dialogue was no longer open. In September 1988, Beijing's interest in direct talks was rekindled following the Dalai Lama's success in raising the profile of Tibet in international forums. The Chinese openness to dialogue was indeed greater than it had been during the talks

of 1984. However, internal Chinese politics undermined this initiative. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown, those in Beijing who had been promoting talks were shut out of power.

A bitter standoff between the parties prevailed through most of the 1990s, fueled both by Beijing's hard-line policy on Tibet and by the exiled Tibetan leadership's uneven commitment to engagement. But as Beijing regained its political confidence and as Sino-US relations moved to the center of China's foreign policy, some in the Chinese political elite began to reconsider the strategy of isolating the Dalai Lama from the Tibet policy. In early 1997, direct channels between Dharamsala and the Chinese leadership were quietly re-established. After three rounds of informal meetings, Jiang Zemin publicly acknowledged in 1998 that contacts with the Dalai Lama were underway. However, within weeks of the announcement the channels of communication broke down. Jiang's exploratory initiative was derailed by institutional resistance to talks and by political rivalry within the Chinese leadership. Chinese openness to dialogue soon regained momentum, and, in 2001, in the wake of the highly visible departures of Arjia Rinpoche and the young Karmapa—both key figures in the PRC's Tibetan elite—the official policy of excluding the Dalai Lama was formally overturned at the Fourth Work Forum on Tibet. Since then, the parties have again been experimenting with talks. Within months of this decision, direct contacts between the parties had been re-established, and delegations of Tibetan exiles have been invited to visit China.

The experimentation remains tentative, however. While the exiled Tibetan leadership has been cautiously optimistic about the significance of their recent visits, Beijing has been sending mixed signals. For instance, though Beijing demonstrated uncharacteristic flexibility on the membership of the Tibetans' delegations, it has declined to acknowledge publicly that discussions are even taking place. In light of this public ambivalence, how should the PRC's shifting stance on Sino-Tibetan engagement be understood? Several factors favor increased engagement. Pressure to renew contacts with the Dalai Lama has come not only externally from international sources, but also internally from domestic critics. The willingness of Chinese scholars and strategic analysts, in particular, to criticize the prevailing hard-line policies suggests that the move toward talks is motivated not just by short-run political goals but also by a reasoned and sober consideration of China's long-term interests. As well, there are growing concerns about the longer-term effects of the accelerated economic develop-

ment program. Not only has economic development come at an extraordinarily high cost, but, contrary to expectations, the rapid economic expansion in Tibet appears to be creating a heightened sense of ethnic cleavage and dispossession among the Tibetans.

Other developments have more complex implications for the dialogue process. China's changing global position, shifts in the regional strategic balance, and the changing role of religion are among the complicating factors. One of the most striking developments has been the institutional restructuring of Beijing's decision-making process for managing the Tibet issue. China has created an elite "leading small group" on Tibet, drastically expanded the Tibetan units in the United Front (the Party organ charged with establishing alliances with non-Party interest groups), and overhauled the key personnel dealing with Tibetan policy and administration. These developments have made Beijing's institutional management of Tibetan affairs more complex and considerably less predictable.

In many ways, prospects for Sino-Tibetan engagement are better now than they have ever been. Greater access to information, increased professionalization, and two decades of experience with hit-and-miss talks have prepared both parties for the development of more informed and serious relations. Nevertheless, prospects for a negotiated solution are still limited, as it is unlikely that the two sides can overcome their differences on the substantive issues. The Dalai Lama's Strasbourg proposal of 1988 conceded Tibet's right to independence by calling for the "genuine autonomy" of a unified Tibet within the framework of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It seems improbable that the Tibetan exiled leaders would be willing to make further concessions. As for Beijing, current political realities militate against acceding to Dharamsala's demands for meaningful autonomy. Unless the Tibet issue should erupt as a violent conflict, the factors pushing Beijing to negotiate are likely to be regarded as insufficiently compelling to justify the risks entailed. On the other hand, if the current talks break off, Beijing will be going it alone as it manages the chronic threat of ethnonationalist discontent.

Thus the new round of talks involves complex issues for both sides. As the Chinese leadership defers addressing its problem of legitimacy in Tibet indefinitely into the future, the push for greater autonomy and local rule is likely to intensify on the plateau. This, no doubt, is being contemplated in Beijing, as the window of opportunity to negotiate a lasting solution draws to a close. Under the present unpromising circumstances, the chal-

lenge for the exiled Tibetan leadership will be to determine whether it makes sense for Tibetans to bargain seriously with Beijing instead of preparing for a better day to strike a deal. For the time being, the two sides are most likely to continue simply talking about talks. The current dialogue process provides Beijing a risk management strategy for the region, while presenting exiled Tibetan leaders a new opportunity to play a role in the deliberations over issues facing contemporary Tibet. Whether the opportunity will also be used to push for the creation of conditions more conducive to substantive negotiations remains to be seen.

Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era: Lessons and Prospects

In September 2002, an official envoy of the Dalai Lama arrived in Beijing to take part in what has become the most serious round of Sino-Tibetan talks since the early 1980s. Eighteen days later, the Tibetan delegation returned to its headquarters in Dharamsala, India, where it gave a positive appraisal of the attitude of its Chinese hosts. Since then, the Dalai Lama's representatives have undertaken two further trips to meet with counterparts in China. In a formal statement following the third visit, which took place in September 2004, special envoy Lodi Gyari described the meetings as "the most extensive and serious exchange of views" between the parties to date. Yet while the exiled Tibetan leadership has sought to characterize the recent exchanges as serious talks, Beijing has yet to acknowledge that discussions with representatives of the Dalai Lama are even taking place. Furthermore, the Dalai Lama remains conspicuously *persona non grata* in China and the mere possession of his image is deemed a political offense across the Tibetan plateau. These contradictions have raised concerns about China's intentions and motivations in the current dialogue process. What are the political significance and implications of

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the latest Sino-Tibetan discussions? How and why was the acrimonious standoff of the 1990s suddenly brought to an end? To what extent has the new initiative improved the prospects for a negotiated settlement to the longstanding dispute?

This paper seeks to address these questions through an analytical account of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue process. The inquiry begins by tracing the relationship between Beijing and the Dalai Lama from the early years of reform through the protracted stalemate of the 1990s and on to the current phase of experimentation with direct contacts. After formal talks faltered in the early 1980s, the Tibetan government-in-exile began a systematic campaign to marshal international pressure for renewed engagement with Beijing. This campaign appeared for a while to bring a softening of Beijing's stance in the late 1980s, but the renewed public interaction between the two parties quickly declined into a long and often formulaic exchange of offers, counter-offers, and, not infrequently, recriminations. Then, during the Sino-US summit of June 1998, Jiang Zemin publicly disclosed that the Chinese leadership had again established channels of communication with the Dalai Lama. By 2001, a new round of talks had begun.

As it traces the roots and trajectory of a process that proceeded in fits and starts over more than two decades, this study draws on lessons from the past to illuminate the most recent round of discussions. It suggests that the specific dynamics of the intermittent dialogue can only be fully understood within the wider context of China's underlying political environment. The first half of the paper provides an analytical history of those exchanges. The second half provides a framework for understanding recent developments by surveying the major factors likely to impact future interactions. The study closes with an assessment of the current prospects for negotiations toward a lasting settlement of the Sino-Tibetan dispute.

Deng's Initiative

The death of Mao in 1976 opened the door to a new era in relations between Beijing and the exiled Tibetan leadership.¹ Soon after his emergence as paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping set new dynamics in motion by signaling an interest in normalizing relations with the Dalai Lama. Following the release and rehabilitation of former Tibetan officials, prominent figures such as the Panchen Lama began publicly announcing that the Dalai Lama's return would be welcomed by Beijing. By late 1978,

Deng had initiated contact with Tibetan exiles and begun an exchange that would give new shape to the Sino-Tibetan dispute. Through representatives in Hong Kong, a unilateral gesture toward reconciliation was made by inviting the Dalai Lama's elder brother, Gyalo Dondup, to visit Beijing. During that visit, which occurred in March 1979, Deng indicated a serious interest in opening talks with the exiled Tibetan leader. In a gesture of good faith, he agreed to allow fact-finding missions from Dharamsala to investigate the conditions in Tibet. In these first heady days of Deng's leadership, it seemed that discussion of anything short of Tibet's political status might be possible.² Given the remarkable political resolve signaled by Deng's initiative, why then did the talks of the early 1980s fail to lead to substantive dialogue between Beijing and the Dalai Lama?

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of the early 1980s
fail to lead to
substantive dialogue*

No doubt Deng's initial offer of engagement demonstrated an unambiguous interest in normalizing relations with the Dalai Lama. But, however promising this initiative might have appeared on the surface, it soon became apparent that there was in fact little basis for substantive talks. At this early stage, the gap in expectations between the two parties was too wide to contemplate serious dialogue. For Beijing's part, the boldness of the new Tibet policy had been founded on a miscalculation of China's stakes in its new engagement with the exiled Tibetan leadership. The Chinese leadership was concerned in part to bring to an end the Dalai Lama's rogue existence in exile and to enhance the legitimacy of Chinese rule in Tibet. But the decision to court the exiled Tibetan leadership was also prompted by strategic considerations. In particular, the Chinese sought to preempt the possibility of the Dalai Lama falling under the Soviet Union's influence.³ Indeed, there is evidence that Beijing perceived a military threat from special forces believed to be under the Dalai Lama's command, and it assumed that they were backed by India and the Soviet Union (Takla 1995: 141). The Dalai Lama's return to the fold was thus seen in Beijing as potentially accruing strategic benefits to China while entailing little, if any, political costs.

In an important respect, Deng's effort to mend relations with the Dalai Lama was part of a wider campaign to rehabilitate fallen political figures and normalize political life in China. Underlying this effort was the assumption that the ills of contemporary China had been wrought by the

excesses of Mao's leftist policies. With the passing of that era, it seemed reasonable to expect that the exiled Tibetan leader could be persuaded to return to the posts he had held in the 1950s. However, this assumption underestimated the consequences of twenty years of political exile. Within

*the mutual
insularity...rendered
both incapable of
understanding...their
counterparts*

the exiled Tibetan constituency, the political consensus secured by the 1951 Seventeen Point Agreement had been entirely discredited, either because of the condition of duress under which it had been established, or because of its fundamental breach as the 1950s wore on, a breach that had culminated in the 1959 Tibetan uprising. This viewpoint had hardened during the Tibetan exiles' two decades of isolation from

China, and as a consequence it had become unfeasible to contemplate a return to a 1950s-style framework. Thus, the mutual insularity of Beijing and the Tibetan exiles rendered both incapable of understanding the contexts and constraints within which their counterparts were caught.

Not only did the Chinese leaders miscalculate the political sentiments of the Tibetan exiles, they also misunderstood the political conditions inside Tibet itself. The extent to which they failed to appreciate the domestic circumstances was pointedly demonstrated by the unexpected outcome of the Dharamsala fact-finding missions. Confident in the effectiveness of their rule in Tibet, the Chinese leadership had agreed to allow visits by four Tibetan delegations from India. As a signal of their flexibility, the Chinese accommodated not only the Tibetan exiles' demands regarding the itinerary and composition of the delegation, but also their unwillingness to travel on overseas Chinese passports. Confident that they had transformed the region politically, the Chinese officials were more concerned to prevent open displays of hostility against the Dalai Lama's representatives than they were about potential displays of support, and for this reason local Tibetans were instructed to restrain themselves from physically attacking the visiting exiles.⁴ Beijing was consequently caught off-guard when the first delegation, which arrived in the summer of 1979, was greeted by ecstatic crowds numbering in the thousands and expressing their devotion to the Dalai Lama. To Beijing's alarm, calls were even made openly for Tibetan independence.⁵

The Tibetan reaction abruptly drew the Chinese leadership's attention to its policy failures in Tibet. The outpouring of nationalist sentiment made

it clear that the state of affairs inside Tibet was far different from what top officials in Beijing had been led to believe. A major reassessment of domestic Tibet policy began in April 1980, when a high-level working group chaired by newly appointed party secretary Hu Yaobang was convened in Beijing.⁶ Soon thereafter, Hu undertook his own fact-finding trip to Tibet. At the end of his nine-day tour, he delivered a landmark speech that indicted the Party's failures in Tibet and signaled a new period of reform for the region (Wang Yao 1994: 288). Hu's ambitious reform agenda had immediate consequences, including the removal of Ren Rong from the top post of first secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The reform package included measures that radically impacted the region's political economy and addressed the need for changed attitudes toward Tibetan culture and ethnicity.

The enthusiastic welcome given to Dharamsala's fact-finding missions also prompted the Chinese leaders to reassess their stance toward the Dalai Lama. While it was still believed to be in China's interest to normalize relations with the exiled leadership, the implications of the Dalai Lama's return were now far less certain. Would his presence serve to legitimize China's rule of Tibet, as was hoped, or would it re-ignite latent aspirations for Tibetan separatism? A period of internal discussion ensued, during which the Chinese leadership became increasingly circumspect in their engagement with the exiled Tibetan leader. By October 1980, Deng Xiaoping was signaling a retreat from engagement by pointedly identifying the Dalai Lama as a separatist.⁷

The growing Chinese reticence to enter into meaningful engagement with the Dalai Lama was evidenced in its tighter control of the remaining fact-finding delegations.⁸ It also failed to respond to a formal letter, sent by the Dalai Lama in March 1981, that criticized the conditions in Tibet, while applauding Hu Yaobang's efforts to remedy the situation and his acknowledgment of past errors.⁹

The Chinese government made it clear that it was not interested in discussing the political status of Tibet.¹⁰ On July 28, 1981, Hu Yaobang presented to the Dalai Lama's elder brother, Gyalo Dondup, the following five-point proposal:

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*By October 1980,
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engagement*

1. Our country has already entered a new stage of long-term political stability, steady economic prosperity, and unity and mutual assistance among the nationalities. Since the Dalai Lama and his followers are smart, they should have confidence in this. If they doubt these changes, they can wait and see for a few more years.
2. The Dalai Lama and his representatives should be frank and sincere, and not beat around the bush. They should not bargain as if doing business. There should be no more quibbling about past history, namely the events of 1959. Let us disregard and forget this.
3. We sincerely welcome the Dalai Lama and his followers to return to settle. This is based on our hope that they will contribute to upholding China's unity and promote solidarity between the Han and Tibetan nationalities (and among all nationalities), while making a contribution to achieving the Four Modernizations.
4. The Dalai Lama would enjoy the same political status and living conditions as he had before 1959. The CCP will be able to recommend to the National People's Congress (NPC) that he be reappointed as Vice-Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee. Also, through consultation, he can hold the position of Vice-Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference...*But he should not return to Tibet* [emphasis added]. He should not concurrently hold positions in Tibet, because young Tibetans have already taken office and they are doing their jobs well! Of course, he can return to Tibet often to observe conditions. His followers need not worry about their work and living arrangements. These will only be better than before, because our country has developed.
5. When the Dalai Lama returns, he can issue a brief statement to the press. He can decide the contents of the statement himself. He should give us notice of the year, month, and date of his return. If he plans to arrive in Hong Kong and travel overland through Guangzhou, we will send a ministry-level cadre to the border to receive him and issue a press release. If he plans to arrive by air, we will organize a ceremony of proper scale to welcome him and issue a press release.¹¹

Hu's five-point policy's primary interest in pursuing talks was simply to secure the return of the Dalai Lama. It also outlined the specific conditions under which his return would be acceptable. The restrictive nature of the terms regarding where he might be permitted to live (point 4 specified that he should not live in Tibet) indicated concern about the unpredictable effects of the Dalai Lama's presence in the region. The fifth point permitting the Dalai Lama to issue a press statement also seemed, despite its ostensible offer of free speech, to suggest that the Dalai Lama's activities would be tightly monitored after he returned to China.

The Chinese leadership apparently hoped that such a sharply defined political framework would reduce the effects of the Dalai Lama's presence. Thus, even prior to the formal talks of 1982 and 1984, the Chinese leadership had begun to reconsider its rapprochement with the Dalai Lama.

Nevertheless, in 1982 there was still some interest within the PRC leadership in pursuing the Dalai Lama's return, albeit on narrowly defined terms. Representatives of the Dalai Lama were accordingly received in Beijing to discuss the matter formally.¹² The Tibetans were disappointed by Hu Yaobang's five-point policy, as it reduced the scope of discussion to simply the terms of the Dalai Lama's return. Nonetheless, the delegates were bolstered by the overwhelmingly positive reception given to the fact-finding missions in Tibet, believing that reception had increased their leverage in the discussions. Moreover, they placed their hopes in Deng Xiaoping's initial assurance that, apart from independence, all matters could be discussed. Consequently, despite the issuance of the five-point policy, the three-member Tibetan delegation still sought to discuss the Dalai Lama's vision for the political future of Tibet.¹³ Specifically, it proposed that all Tibetan-inhabited areas be incorporated into a single administrative unit whose political future would then be under discussion. The delegation also requested that Tibet be given the same special status that had recently been offered to Taiwan. Beijing, however, maintained that the only basis for negotiations would be Hu Yaobang's five-point policy.

Over the next two and a half years, no further progress was made. Instead, Beijing turned its attention to reforms in Tibet itself, convening in 1984 the Second Work Forum on Tibet, which launched the implementation of an open-door policy to the region. While these plans to integrate

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Tibet into China's market economy were getting underway, a perceptibly negative shift in Chinese attitudes toward the Dalai Lama was taking place. The conservative Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) party secretary, Yin Fatang, publicly accused the Dalai Lama of treason,¹⁴ while moderate national reformers such as Hu Yaobang began to characterize the Dalai Lama as an opponent whose influence in the region must be countered through rapid economic development. This shift in public discourse signaled a growing disinterest in normalizing relations with the Dalai Lama.

Thus, when in October 1984 the Tibetan delegation returned to Beijing for a second round of talks, the mood had become considerably less hospitable. The Tibetans announced the Dalai Lama's rejection of Hu Yaobang's five-point policy. They proposed instead a demilitarized zone of peace in a unified Tibet that would have a high degree of autonomy in association with the PRC.¹⁵ From the Tibetan point of view, the Dalai Lama's proposal represented an important compromise, as it relinquished Tibet's claim to independence. They sought to present this proposal as meeting Deng's 1979 terms for discussion, but much had transpired in the intervening five years, and the Chinese were now resolute in their commitment to the narrow terms of Hu Yaobang's five-point policy. Accordingly, Beijing categorically refused to consider the discussion of any issues other than that of the Dalai Lama's return.

By this time, the PRC recognized that it faced serious problems in Tibet, but it did not regard the Dalai Lama as necessary to the solution. Rather, Beijing understood the Tibet issue to be primarily about the need for modernization and economic development. Later, the Sino-Soviet rapprochement in 1986 would give further impetus to disengagement. With the elimination of the Soviet concern, the Dalai Lama no longer appeared to be a low-cost solution to an outstanding strategic concern, but was rather a destabilizing factor in what turned out to be a quagmire of ethnic tension.

Forces at the national level also conspired to favor disengagement. The initial Chinese overture toward the Dalai Lama had been made in the first heady days of Deng Xiaoping's leadership, which coincided with the watershed reforms of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee. These reforms had the effect of overturning many of the ideological foundations of Mao's leadership. But political tensions soon surfaced, as the sweeping reforms led to an overheating economy, a weakened social welfare system, and rampant corruption. The new social pressures

created by the reforms made the liberal factions of the Chinese leadership vulnerable to attack from conservative elements within the Party. By the mid-1980s, the environment was no longer conducive to risk-taking leadership.¹⁶ At the same time, Deng Xiaoping was retreating from the liberal reform agenda, attacking “bourgeois liberalism” in 1986 and purging Hu Yaobang in January 1987. After Hu’s removal, there was no one left in the senior leadership who was willing to push for engagement with the Dalai Lama. Moreover, the reformist agenda, which had created the conditions for rapprochement, was in a precarious situation. With the spirit of reform giving way to an atmosphere of apprehension, the first window to Sino-Tibetan dialogue came to a close.

The Dalai Lama’s Turn to the International Community

When the Chinese leadership lost interest in pursuing talks with the Dalai Lama, the basic asymmetry in the relations between the disputing parties was made fully apparent. On their own the Tibetan exiles had no way of forcing the PRC to continue talks. The exiled Tibetan leadership sought to address the imbalance by turning to the international community for support. This turn to the international community was timely. The question of Tibet was developing a higher profile as the Dalai Lama became more visible through his travels in the West. Now, with this shift in Tibetan strategy, the Dalai Lama would begin to make explicitly political appeals to the international community. The first major initiative of the new strategy was launched on September 21, 1987. In an address to the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the Dalai Lama announced that he was compelled to appeal to the international community because of the Chinese refusal to negotiate. In a strongly worded speech that described Tibet as an “independent state under illegal occupation,” the Dalai Lama pointed out that the PRC had reduced the question of Tibet to a discussion of his own personal status “instead of addressing the real issues facing the six million Tibetan people.” He then proposed a five-point peace plan for Tibet:

the Dalai Lama would begin to make explicitly political appeals to the international community

1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace;
2. Abandonment of China’s population transfer policy;

3. Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms;
4. Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and the dumping of nuclear waste;
5. Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and on relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

American reaction to the Dalai Lama's plan was mixed. While congressional supporters applauded his effort, the US State Department registered its strong disapproval of the speech and sought to clarify the US government position on the status of Tibet. In October 1987, at a Senate Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on the question of human rights in Tibet, a State Department spokesman complained that the Dalai Lama had been engaging in activities inconsistent with his status as a religious leader. The spokesman also explicitly disavowed the administration's support for his five-point peace plan. Though US support for human rights was "unwavering," the spokesman also asserted that it was not in the interest of the US to link the issue of human rights in Tibet to any particular political program.

The immediate PRC response to the five-point peace plan was to issue a detailed rejection.¹⁷ Though this was the first public announcement of Dharamsala's proposal, Beijing was already familiar with its essential features from the talks of 1984. What heightened the significance of the Dalai Lama's new initiative was not only the manner and venue of its presentation, but also the sudden eruption of a pro-independence protest in Lhasa less than a week after the Dalai Lama's speech. Four days after this protest, there was an even larger demonstration that ended with police firing into crowds. Beijing was unnerved by these developments, both because of their timing and because they appeared to confirm the Dalai Lama's claims about the abuse of human rights in Tibet. The Chinese reacted by accusing the Dalai Lama of instigating and planning the Lhasa demonstrations. In a memorandum dated October 17, 1987, Yan Minfu, the head of the United Front (the Party organ responsible for the institutional management of Tibetan affairs), accused the Dalai Lama of raising an outcry for Tibetan independence by promulgating the five-point peace plan. The memorandum concluded, nonetheless, that the Dalai Lama was

still welcome to return under the terms of Hu Yaobang's five-point policy.

The Dalai Lama presented a further elaboration on his five-point peace plan when addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg on June 15, 1988. The Strasbourg proposal called for the establishment of a "self-governing democratic political entity . . . in association with the People's Republic of China" that would include all Tibetan-inhabited areas and whose government would have "the right to decide on all affairs relating to Tibet and Tibetans." Foreign policy would remain the responsibility of the Chinese government, but Tibet itself would become "a genuine sanctuary of peace through demilitarization." The Dalai Lama further proposed that the government of Tibet be founded on a "constitution of basic law" that "should provide for a democratic system of government."

The Strasbourg proposal was received positively by the international community, but many of the Dalai Lama's constituents in exile were stunned. The proposal was the first public acknowledgment that the exiled Tibetan leaders were prepared to relinquish claims to independence in exchange for political autonomy within the framework of the PRC. For many Tibetan exiles, this was a dramatic concession that amounted to a betrayal of their trust. In contrast, the Chinese leadership was familiar with the broad outline of the proposal because it had already been presented to them in the formal talks of 1984. Nevertheless, the Chinese considered the proposal unacceptable, as in their view it would grant Tibet "semi-independent" status and leave the Chinese limited authority in Tibet's affairs.

Despite the Chinese opposition to the Strasbourg proposal, Beijing nevertheless showed a renewed interest in talks. The rejection of autonomy and the openness to dialogue were both expressed in the formal Chinese response, which was delivered by the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi on September 23, 1988:

We welcome the Dalai Lama to have talks with the Central Government at any time. The talks may be held in Beijing, Hong Kong, or any of our embassies or consulates abroad. If the Dalai Lama finds it inconvenient to conduct talks at these places, he may choose any place he wishes. But there is one condition, that is, no foreigners

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Lama's constituents in
exile were stunned*

should be involved. We are ready to designate one official with certain rank to have direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

There are two points which need to be clarified:

1. We have never recognized the “Kashag Government” (Tibet government-in-exile) which has all along indulged in the activities of the independence of Tibet. We will not receive any delegation or fact-finding group designated by the “Kashag Government.”
2. The “new proposal” put forward by the Dalai Lama in Strasbourg cannot be considered as the basis for talks with the Central Government because it has not at all relinquished the concept of the “independence of Tibet.” If the Dalai Lama is sincere in improving relations with the Central Government and really concerned for the happiness of the Tibetan people, for the economic development and prosperity of the Tibetan nationality, he should truly give up the “idea of independence.” The Dalai Lama should place himself in the great family of the unified motherland and join the Central Government, the People’s Government of Tibet and the Tibetan people in discussing the major policies concerning Tibet.¹⁸

While the offer to resume talks was welcome, the parameters outlined in this message were disappointing to the exiled Tibetan leadership. The position taken here was considerably more rigid and formalistic than it had been during the early 1980s. At that time, the Chinese had talked directly with Dharamsala’s representatives, but now Beijing was declaring its unwillingness to deal with the Tibetan government-in-exile.¹⁹ In addition, Beijing was now specifying that the involvement of foreigners would not be permitted, which was a new restriction. Furthermore, while Hu Yaobang’s five-point policy was not specifically mentioned, this latest proposal was well within its parameters. In line with that approach, the message and invitation were addressed personally to the Dalai Lama, which implied that the talks would consider only matters personal to him.

The Tibetan leaders responded to this offer by announcing publicly that formal talks would take place in Geneva in January 1989. They also proceeded to name the members of the Tibetan negotiating team and appeared to disregard the terms of Beijing’s invitation by listing a Dutch

lawyer as part of the team, albeit as an advisor. To add to Beijing's disappointment, the formal Tibetan reply was conveyed to the Chinese government only after these announcements had been made, being transmitted on October 25 by Ala Jigme, a senior member of the Tibetan government-in-exile, to the Chinese embassy in New Delhi.

The PRC took the delayed formal response as a sign of insincerity and bad faith, especially since the Tibetans had already announced the date and venue of the talks. Moreover, the Tibetans had apparently done so knowing that their negotiating team would not be acceptable to the Chinese. On November 18, the PRC formally expressed its disappointment in a message sent through its embassy in New Delhi. In addition to disapproving of the manner in which the Tibetans had publicized the date and venue of talks, Beijing also rejected all six members of the negotiating team—on the grounds of their engagement in “splittist” activities—as well as the involvement of the Dutch lawyer. The message reiterated a desire to have direct talks with the Dalai Lama, though it also expressed a willingness to meet with a “trusted representative” such as his elder brother Gyalo Dondup. Furthermore, while the earlier message had invited the Tibetans to name the time and place for the talks, the new one suggested that Beijing would be the most suitable venue. Thus, while the PRC claimed to be open to talks, it was in fact increasingly rigid in its approach to the Dalai Lama and his representatives.

In its response of December 5, the Tibetan government-in-exile defended its choice of delegates and insisted that the Strasbourg proposal provided the most appropriate basis for discussions. No formal reply to this message was forthcoming, as the two sides appeared to reach an impasse over what Dharamsala would later characterize as “procedural issues.”²⁰

For the Chinese leadership, the question of how to manage their engagement with the Dalai Lama was put on hold as the situation in Tibet rapidly deteriorated throughout the following weeks. A new pro-independence demonstration erupted, leading to the police firing at unarmed monks. Alarmed at the seething ethnic turmoil, the Chinese leaders adopted a harder line. In a move that indicated the hardening Chinese attitude, in early January 1989 the liberal-minded Wu Jinghua was dismissed from his post as first party secretary of the TAR and was replaced by Hu Jintao. Wu's dismissal marked a significant change of course. While national officials had been asserting that the political unrest was simply a product of

outside instigation, Wu had contended otherwise. His approach to handling the situation had even included “heart to heart” meetings with representatives of the major monasteries to hear their grievances. Wu’s dismissal signaled a rejection of his moderate approach and indicated that Beijing sought to assert more direct control over the region.²¹

While these changes were underway, the Panchen Lama unexpectedly died in Shigatse, just days after delivering a speech highly critical of China’s policies in Tibet. In the wake of his death, the Chinese leadership unexpectedly invited the Dalai Lama—ostensibly through the state-sanctioned Chinese Buddhist Association—to participate in a memorial ceremony for the Panchen Lama. This invitation represented a singular opportunity to break the impasse in formal talks, for Beijing intimated that while the visit would officially be religious in nature, the occasion would allow the Dalai Lama to begin informal discussions with senior officials on the question of Tibet. Such a visit would have sidestepped some of the issues that had stalled earlier attempts to meet. However, the exiled Tibetan leaders proved unprepared for this sudden Chinese overture. After intense internal discussion, they asked for assurances that the Dalai Lama would be able to visit at least one Tibetan area and have a direct meeting with Deng Xiaoping.²² Beijing responded negatively, and this brief window of opportunity passed.²³

Stalemate

Its conditions for the Dalai Lama’s visit having been rejected, Dharamsala sought to return to the original terms for reopening talks. On April 19, 1989, a message was sent to the Chinese leadership indicating that the Dalai Lama’s representatives would be willing to meet in Hong Kong, one of the places mentioned in the Chinese message of September 1988. But Beijing was no longer responsive. Lhasa was now tightly controlled under martial law, and Beijing’s attention had turned to the political crisis unfolding much closer to home. Furthermore, the instability engendered by the Tiananmen crackdown in June triggered a reorganization of the PRC leadership, including the removal of those who had been key to promoting talks with the Dalai Lama through the late 1980s. One of them was Yan Minfu, a protégé of Hu Yaobang, who was ousted from his position as head of the United Front because he had supported Zhao Ziyang during the Tiananmen demonstrations. An outspoken critic of the government’s antagonism toward the Dalai Lama, Yan had been instrumental

in engineering the 1989 invitation for the Dalai Lama to attend the Panchen Lama's funerary ceremonies.²⁴ Just as Hu Yaobang's efforts to pursue talks with the Dalai Lama had been undermined in 1987 by the larger struggle with conservative critics opposed to Hu's national reform agenda, Yan's attempts to reopen talks during his tenure as head of the United Front were also superseded by larger internal power struggles.

While factional party politics were redrawing the Chinese political landscape in 1989, the world itself was being transformed. The Berlin Wall came down and the eastern European communist regimes fell in rapid succession. Meanwhile, this same year, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Dalai Lama, further raising his international visibility and prestige.

Toward the end of this turbulent year, the Chinese authorities reached a turning point in their approach to the Dalai Lama. At a meeting of the politburo on October 19, 1989, it was decided that the recent turmoil in Tibet had been caused by the relaxing of political controls since liberalization. The meeting—which became known in official discourse as “the turning point”—endorsed a hard-line approach on the enforcement of social stability while reaffirming rapid economic development as the centerpiece of its strategy. The meeting also determined that the moderate approach of seeking a rapprochement with the Dalai Lama had been ill conceived, and it adopted the official line that China's problems in Tibet could be managed without his involvement.²⁵ This turning point meeting marked a definitive shift in the Chinese leadership's previously equivocal position on talks with the Dalai Lama. The tentative interest in engagement signaled in the immediate aftermath of Strasbourg had come to an end.

*“the turning point”—
endorsed a hard-line
approach*

While Beijing steered away from the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan leadership shifted the focus of its international campaign onto human rights abuses in Tibet. This shift aggravated the differences between the two sides. The international opprobrium that followed Beijing's handling of both Tibet and Tiananmen coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of newly independent states, and the PRC had reason to fear a similar fate. The heightened public sympathy and political support for Tibet after 1989 tapped into longstanding Chinese fears of a Western imperialist conspiracy to undermine the rise of China. This persistent undercurrent of “victimhood”²⁶ fueled a growing sense of Chinese nationalist resentment and obscured the real Tibetan

interests at stake in the dispute. With Chinese suspicions of Western motives reaching new heights, Beijing's distrust of the Dalai Lama grew along with its perception of his increasing alignment with the West. The Dalai Lama made a series of public gestures toward breaking the stalemate,²⁷ but in the inhospitable international climate of the early 1990s, Beijing had steeled itself against any movement that could be perceived as legitimating the exiled Tibetan leader. A modicum of communication between the parties was maintained through the intermediary role of Gyalo Dondup,²⁸ but Beijing remained unyielding in its position. As for the Tibetan side, the Strasbourg proposal was formally withdrawn in 1991 in the face of Beijing's disengagement.

In 1993, a new wave of protests broke out in central and northeastern Tibet, and the Chinese response was to take an even harder line in the region and against the exiles.²⁹ On May 24, 1993, a thousand Tibetans gathered in the streets of Lhasa to demonstrate against grievances caused by the rapid economic reforms. What began as an economic protest against food prices ended six hours later in calls for independence. This incident was followed by an outbreak of political protests in rural Tibetan areas stretching from the Lhasa valley to southern Qinghai province. In addition to protesting food prices, the demonstrations expressed resentment against the recent influx of Chinese settlers and their growing control of the local economies. These developments indicated that the problem of political allegiance in Tibet was more pervasive and deep-seated than the Chinese leadership had believed.

Realizing that new approaches were necessary, senior leaders convened in Beijing for the Third Work Forum of July 1994, the first national work meeting on Tibet since 1984. In addition to reaffirming the existing policy of rapid economic development, the Third Work Forum signaled high-level endorsement of increased political repression and instituted an aggressive new campaign to monitor ideological views. Control was tightened not only over religious institutions—known to be hotbeds of nationalist aspiration—but, more significantly, over Tibetan cadres. From this point on, Tibetan party members, officials, bureaucrats, and administrators were closely monitored for signs of political deviance. Leading cadres, in particular, were prohibited from keeping not only photos of the Dalai Lama, but also generic religious objects such as rosaries. In addition to intensifying the scrutiny of Tibetan cadres, the meeting also declared that more non-Tibetan cadres and demobilized military personnel should be

transferred to Tibetan areas.

The Third Work Forum expressed a further hardening of Chinese attitudes toward the Dalai Lama. Bitter over recent American efforts to link US trade policy to human rights issues, senior leaders formally endorsed the view that the Dalai Lama was an agent of hostile Western forces, led by the US, whose goal was to undermine China's stability and territorial integrity. With this public denunciation, the Chinese leadership provided high-level authorization for an intensive campaign against the Dalai Lama, the first such campaign since the beginning of liberalization in 1978. In this campaign, which was publicly launched in January 1995, vitriolic attacks on the Dalai Lama inside Tibet reached levels unprecedented since the Cultural Revolution, prompting observers to comment that rapprochement was now further away than ever.

The new political campaigns were rooted in a growing distrust of the Dalai Lama himself. While Beijing initially appears to have believed that an accommodation with the Dalai Lama could reasonably be reached, it lost confidence as throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the exiled Tibetan leadership displayed what appeared to be uneven commitment to serious talks. Beijing had taken offense at the premature announcement of the date and venue of the 1988 talks and the naming of a foreigner to the Tibetan negotiating team. The Dalai Lama's failure to visit Beijing in 1989 reinforced the perception that the exiled Tibetan leadership was not firmly committed to seeking a negotiated solution with Beijing. This perception was exacerbated in the early 1990s when the Dalai Lama began predicting that the PRC would soon go the way of the Soviet Union. Taken together with his strong intimation that the Strasbourg proposal had conceded too much to the Chinese,³⁰ his comments gave hardliners in Beijing further reason for accusing the Dalai Lama of insincerity. Chinese distrust of the Dalai Lama reached new heights in 1995, when he preemptively recognized Gedun Choekyi Nyima as the reincarnation of the tenth Panchen Lama.³¹ From Beijing's point of view, this attempt to exclude the Chinese authorities from the succession was an aggressive political act that signaled the Dalai Lama's disregard for the principles of dialogue and reconciliation.

Exploratory Talks, 1997–98

While the Chinese-Tibetan polemics were escalating, the US government was taking a more serious interest in the Tibet issue. In contrast to the CIA

involvement in the region during the 1950s and 1960s, the new US interest was propelled by a groundswell of public support for Tibet. Grassroots campaigns had been effective in mobilizing strong bipartisan support in the US Congress and in pressuring the Clinton administration to raise the issue directly with Beijing. By May 1994, the new administration had jettisoned the strategy of linking trade to human rights, but it continued in other ways to press for accommodation with the Tibetans. From his first meeting with Jiang Zemin in November 1993, Clinton urged the Chinese leader directly to open dialogue with the Dalai Lama. In the mid-1990s, momentum grew within Congress to take further steps to promote dialogue. In July 1997, the administration announced the establishment of a special coordinator for Tibet policy within the State Department, whose mission would include promoting substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

This entrenchment of the Tibet issue within the United States' China policy took place at the same time as Jiang Zemin was moving Sino-US relations to the core of his own foreign policy. With Tibet frequently appearing on the agenda of the US and other foreign governments, Jiang began to take a personal interest in the issue. In early 1997, after years of Tibetan efforts to establish direct communication, the highest echelons of the Chinese leadership responded to one of the numerous informal channels that were being pursued by the Dalai Lama. Three rounds of face-to-face meetings ensued between representatives of the Dalai Lama and Chinese officials close to Jiang Zemin. These meetings laid the groundwork for what was hoped to be a breakthrough in the impasse. The contacts became public knowledge when, during the Sino-US summit of June 1998, Jiang announced that direct channels of communication with the Dalai Lama had already been established.

This public acknowledgment of the ongoing informal talks stunned the Chinese domestic audience while generating high expectations among the exiled Tibetan leadership. However, these expectations were quickly deflated, as Beijing gave no further indication of interest in engagement. In an attempt to move things along, in late October and early November the Tibetan government-in-exile indicated to the foreign press that during the Dalai Lama's November visit to Washington, a major statement would be made that could clear the way for the next stage in dialogue. It was also made known that the Dalai Lama was considering a December trip to Wutaishan, an important Buddhist pilgrimage site in China.³² However, despite the flurry of press reports, the promised statement was never made.

Instead, a week after the Washington trip, Xinhua reported that Jiang Zemin had accused Tibetans of using discussions about the contacts to “deceive public opinion.”³³ In early December, the Dalai Lama publicly acknowledged that all channels of communication had broken down.³⁴

The collapse of the initiatives of 1998 pointed to a lack of consensus within the Chinese national leadership. Though the decision to open informal talks with the Dalai Lama had been made at the highest level, it evidently lacked broad support within the leadership. In particular, the initiative was taken without the involvement of the CCP Central Committee’s United Front Work Department, the institution within the Party formally charged with managing Tibet policy. The involvement of the United Front would have made the initial exploratory talks intractable, if not impossible, given its conservative position on the Dalai Lama.³⁵ However, it was also counterproductive to sideline the United Front from the process altogether. Moreover, the institutional resistance to Jiang Zemin’s initiative apparently found high-level political support in Li Ruihuan, the Politburo member whose portfolio encompassed the United Front. Li has been regarded as relatively liberal, but in this case his personal rivalry with Jiang Zemin is believed to have played a role in putting an abrupt end to the dialogue process. The bottom line was that the exploratory talks were inconsistent with the official policy of isolating the Dalai Lama. Objections to Jiang’s initiative could therefore have been made on both procedural and political grounds.

The abrupt shutdown of the channels suggests that Jiang Zemin had either insufficient authority or too little political commitment to overcome the opposition to his contentious initiative. Instead of pushing on with it, Jiang formally reversed his position at a high-level party meeting in late 1998, where he signaled his retrenchment from engagement by stating that the Dalai Lama was not trustworthy. Pointing to the recent visits of several world leaders, all of whom raised the Tibet issue in precisely the same way, he reiterated the established official line that the entire matter was a Western conspiracy. With this statement, Jiang’s first exploratory initiative came to an end.

Though the 1998 dialogue process was stillborn, it was nonetheless the first unambiguous signal that there was some willingness within the

the institutional resistance to Jiang Zemin’s initiative apparently found high-level political support

senior leadership to reconsider the prevailing Chinese opposition to talks with the Dalai Lama. Yet even while the high-level exploratory talks were underway, political repression in Tibetan areas continued to intensify. This basic incoherence suggests not only a lack of clear vision in Beijing's policies on Tibet, but also a degree of disjointedness in the outlooks of the national and regional elites.

Renewed Engagement, 2001

In the wake of Jiang Zemin's abortive talks, China moved to soften its stance on Tibet. The move was preceded by the defection of two prominent figures in China's Tibetan religious elite. In the summer of 1998, one of China's most trusted and highest-ranking Tibetan Buddhist leaders, Arjia Rinpoche, had quietly defected to the US. A key member of the state-sanctioned religious establishment, Arjia Rinpoche's departure was a serious loss for the Chinese leadership.³⁶ It was followed in January 2000 by the dramatic flight of the 14-year-old Karmapa to Dharamsala. Having been recognized by both the Chinese authorities and the Dalai Lama as the legitimate leader of one of the most powerful lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, the young Karmapa's collaboration had been one of China's best hopes for legitimizing its rule over Tibetans. These two highly visible departures indicated that the assiduous Chinese efforts to control the Tibetan religious elite had been unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, new steps were being taken in the US Congress to institutionalize US support for Sino-Tibetan dialogue. The Tibetan Policy Act was introduced to both houses of Congress on May 9, 2001, a date coinciding with the Dalai Lama's visit to the US. Among the range of issues addressed by the bill, which was signed into law the next year, was the codification of the position of the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues at the State Department. As such, the bill offered practical support from the US in favor of Sino-Tibetan negotiations.

In this uncertain political context, China's senior leaders convened in June 2001 for the Fourth Work Forum on Tibet. Outwardly, the meeting projected confidence in the existing policy of rapid economic development combined with the reinvigoration of the Party structure throughout Tibetan areas. But the occasion was also used to readjust the official policy on engagement with the Dalai Lama. While the formal polemics remained unmodified, the senior leadership reversed its 1989 decision, formalized at the 1994 Third Work Forum, to isolate the Dalai Lama from

its Tibet policy. Instead, it now began a process of engagement. Within months, the Chinese leadership established direct contacts with the Dalai Lama's representatives. China also released six high-profile political prisoners and published a detailed article reviewing the history of Sino-Tibetan negotiations. While the by-lined article reiterated formulaic attacks on the Dalai Lama's sincerity, it also renewed calls for his return to China.³⁷ As a further sign of Chinese outreach to Tibetans, Gyalo Dondup was invited to make a return trip to Tibet in July 2002.

After a year of preliminary discussions, the two sides agreed to schedule a formal visit of the Dalai Lama's representatives for September 2002. On this visit, the first visit of its kind since 1984, a team of two envoys and two aides traveled to Beijing to meet with senior Chinese officials of the United Front. The tour also included a visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and meetings with top-ranking ethnic Tibetan officials, including a senior provincial official from Sichuan. In a statement issued on September 29, Lodi Gyari, the head of the Tibetan delegation, gave a cautiously optimistic assessment of the trip, praising the "dedication and competence" of the Tibetan officials they had met, as well as the progress and development evident in the Chinese cities they had visited. Comparing contemporary Chinese leaders favorably to those of the early 1980s, the statement observed that there was "much greater flexibility" displayed now in their "mental attitude." The Tibetans' statement emphasized that the purpose of the mission had been to create an atmosphere conducive to a continuing dialogue process. In a further signal of the Tibetan government-in-exile's commitment to engagement, a circular was issued on September 30 by the office of the prime minister, Samdhong Rinpoche, calling on all Tibetans and Tibet supporters to refrain from public protest during Jiang Zemin's impending visit to the US and Mexico.

In contrast to the Tibetans' open and strenuously decorous handling of the new engagement, Beijing refused to confirm its existence at all, acknowledging only that there had been a private visit of expatriate Tibetans returning to see their relatives.³⁸ Furthermore, when speaking to the foreign press, the Chinese officials involved in the contacts professed ignorance of the mission's purpose. For example, on the second day of the visit, foreign ministry spokesperson Kong Quan stated that it was a private

the purpose of the mission had been to create an atmosphere conducive to a continuing dialogue process

affair and denied knowledge of the visitors' identity. Similarly, when confirming his hour-long meeting with Gyari, TAR chairperson Legchog insisted on the private nature of the exiles' visit and also denied knowing that they were representatives of the Dalai Lama.³⁹ Beijing's refusal to publicly acknowledge the visit's political nature reinforced fears among Tibetans that the nascent dialogue process was a sham.⁴⁰ It even prompted suggestions that Beijing had extended the invitation only to preempt the possibility of unseemly protests spoiling Jiang Zemin's final tour abroad as head of state.⁴¹ In light of Jiang's 1998 attempts to explore informal talks, this narrow reading of Chinese motives seems improbable. Nonetheless, the public resentment of Samdhong Rinpoche's moratorium on protests increased pressure on the exiled Tibetan leadership to produce signs of progress in the dialogue process.

The Tibetan delegation's second visit to Beijing occurred on May 25, 2003. Hosted once again by the United Front, the two-week mission included visits to Buddhist holy sites and meetings with high-ranking Chinese Buddhist leaders. The second visit's itinerary did not include a visit to the TAR, but the delegation's request to visit a southeastern Tibetan town in Yunnan's Dechen Autonomous Tibetan Prefecture was readily accommodated. Most significantly, this visit included the first meeting with the United Front's new senior officials since the accession to power of the PRC's fourth generation leadership. Once again, the Tibetan delegation was cautiously optimistic. In a statement released three days after the mission's return, the Tibetan envoy commended the new officials for their "attention and candor." In an indication that a degree of confidence-building had been achieved, the statement continued, "Both sides agreed that our past relationship had many twists and turns and that many areas of disagreement still exist."

The inchoate process has evidently continued to progress. In September 2004, the Tibetan delegation returned from their third visit with a more circumspect, yet still positive, assessment. In a formal statement issued on October 13, they acknowledged that there were "major differences on a number of issues, including some fundamental ones." Nevertheless, the latest round of discussions were said to be "the most extensive and serious" to date. Signaling an intention on both sides to continue the process, the statement read, "[b]oth sides acknowledged the need for more substantive discussion in order to narrow down the gaps and reach a common ground." Commending once again the competence and

dedication of the Tibetan officials with whom they had met, the statement's conciliatory tone signaled the exiled Tibetan leadership's commitment to continue the ongoing process of informal talks.

Prospects

The recent breakthrough in Sino-Tibetan dialogue has unfolded in an unprecedented context. In contrast to the political miscalculations accompanying Deng Xiaoping's overture of 1979, the Chinese have initiated the new engagement fully cognizant of the Dalai Lama's significance to the Tibetan population. Furthermore, in contrast to 1988–89, the initiative is neither prompted nor complicated by the spectacle of large-scale outbreaks of ethnic unrest. China's policy of accelerated economic development combined with harsh political controls appears, on the whole, to have achieved stability throughout the Tibetan region. Over the past decade, large-scale political protests have disappeared and the occasional isolated incidents of unrest have been swiftly crushed. The economy of the TAR is now growing at double-digit rates, and there are visible signs of affluence in urban centers. With Tibet effectively under control and with the multi-billion-dollar Great Western Development campaign now well underway, many observers question why the Chinese authorities would even choose to renew direct contacts with the Dalai Lama.

The mixed signals sent during the recent visits reinforce questions about Chinese intent. On one hand, there have been clear indications that the Chinese authorities want to be accommodating toward the exiled Tibetan leadership. Key among these signals was the Chinese acceptance of Lodi Gyari as the lead envoy of the Tibetan delegation.⁴² As the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy in Washington, D.C. and the key figure in the exiled Tibetan leadership's US strategy, Lodi Gyari had in the past been expressly excluded from participation. Likewise, the acceptance of the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy in Europe, Kesang Gyaltzen, also represented a conciliatory measure. The Chinese authorities also overlooked that one of the aides was a leading official in the Tibetan government-in-exile, which under the 1988 preconditions would have caused him to be excluded. Moreover, the second visit followed quickly on the first—notably, within the deadline set in prime minister-in-exile Samdhong Rinpoche's moratorium on active protests, enabling the Tibetan leaders to legitimize the dialogue process to their constituency in exile. And that was not all. During the visits themselves, the Tibetans were given a courteous welcome not

only in Beijing, but also in Lhasa, where they were greeted by Tibetan officials who are regarded as particularly hostile to the Dalai Lama. Also, in contrast to the early 1980s, the Chinese did not object when the Tibetan delegation released public statements upon their return to India. Instead, a lengthy interview with Lodi Gyari was published in *Dagong Bao*, a Hong Kong-based newspaper closely affiliated with Beijing. Finally, some noteworthy departures in Beijing's statements to the international press suggest a willingness to entertain modifications in its approach to the Tibet issue. For example, in formal remarks made in Paris in January 2004, Hu Jintao pointedly left out Jiang Zemin's precondition that the Dalai Lama recognize Taiwan's status as a province of China.⁴³

But aside from these important conciliatory gestures, there has been little indication that the Chinese leadership is interested in a serious dialogue process. This was made apparent with the downplaying of the significance of the delegations by calling them "private" and denying knowledge of the visitors' status as official envoys of the Dalai Lama. Moreover,

there has been no clear indication of any change in China's policies in Tibet

there has been no clear indication of any change in China's policies in Tibet. The inflammatory public rhetoric denigrating the Dalai Lama has continued unabated throughout the region, while the political campaign to ban his image has reached new heights in eastern Tibetan areas. Not only has there been no relaxation of political con-

trols inside Tibet, but the Chinese authorities have also become increasingly belligerent in their conduct toward Tibetan refugees in Nepal.⁴⁴ Furthermore, they objected forcefully to the Dalai Lama's September 2003 meeting with President Bush and to his presence at an international Tibet support group meeting in Prague the following month.

These unpromising developments have led to widespread speculation that the new dialogue initiative is no more than a tactical maneuver to blunt international criticism of China's Tibet policy. For some, this suspicion is reinforced by the memory of Hu Jintao's tenure as first party secretary of the TAR in 1988–92, a time when Beijing reasserted tight control over the region through the implementation of martial law and violent crackdowns on political demonstrations. But while Hu was clearly responsible for sanctioning the hard-line measures of the period, his actions as TAR party secretary are not necessarily predictive of his policy views today. When he was transferred to Tibet, the TAR was already rocked by politi-

cal turmoil and controlled in significant ways by a military establishment, while Hu himself was a forty-six year old civilian Party official. Moreover, though Hu's subsequent rapid rise within the Party leadership has not been distinguished by policy innovation, his early links to Hu Yaobang and the Communist Youth League suggest an inclination toward reform. There is therefore considerable uncertainty surrounding the intentions of the Fourth Generation leadership that he heads. This is, moreover, underscored by the fact that the initial decision to reverse the 1989 policy to isolate the Dalai Lama was made under Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin.

Thus, while the fourth generation Chinese leadership has yet to demonstrate a serious interest in initiating substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama, it would be imprudent to dismiss the entire process as a sham aimed at thwarting China's international critics. To provide an assessment of future prospects, the following survey reviews the major factors that are likely to affect the engagement between Beijing and the Dalai Lama.

Factors Favoring Dialogue

One of the key factors influencing the relationship between Beijing and the Dalai Lama has no doubt been international pressure. Ever since the exiled Tibetan leadership first turned to the international community for support in 1987, foreign pressure has been a critical aspect of the Tibetan political strategy. In 1988–89, until the turmoil of Tiananmen intervened, the Dalai Lama's Strasbourg proposal, issued in an international forum, appeared to be compelling Beijing to consider direct contacts with Dharamsala. Likewise, in 1997–98, it was the weight of US support for dialogue on the Tibet issue that prompted Jiang Zemin to engage in informal exploratory talks. Yet while international pressure has been a necessary factor in the recent move to renew talks, it seems unlikely to have been a sufficient one. The most important effect of the international opprobrium has been to draw the senior leadership's attention to the far-flung region and to raise its importance on China's crowded national policy agenda. Had there not been other Chinese interests favoring renewed engagement, it is doubtful that the senior leadership would have taken the next step and initiated the recent contacts with the exiled Tibetan leadership. Given Beijing's sensitivity to foreign influence on its domestic affairs, it would be impolitic for any Chinese leader to pursue talks with the Dalai Lama solely because of Western censure. Furthermore, international criticism of its Tibet policy is for the most part but a low-level irritant in China's relations

***international pressure
on Beijing to engage in
talks must continue***

with foreign governments. Nonetheless, foreign criticism strikes an important nerve in the Chinese leadership. Thus, in order for the process of dialogue to continue and progress, international pressure on Beijing to engage in talks must continue. In the case of the United States, the robust legislative efforts that have enabled the codification of political support for negotiations through the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 indicates that US pressure on China is unlikely to diminish in the short run.⁴⁵

Another important factor affecting the Chinese leadership's decision to open the door to talks with the Dalai Lama is uncertainty about the sustainability of current conditions inside Tibet. The stability of the Tibetan region has been secured at an extraordinarily high cost, and Beijing is aware that this politically driven investment has unleashed a complex set of social and economic forces whose repercussions are yet unknown. Chinese economists observed in the 1980s that the regional economy was dependent on soaring state subsidies to meet the high cost of annual expenditures (Wang and Bai 1986). Since then, this pattern of "blood transfusion" has been exacerbated, leading one Chinese critic to describe the ostensible signs of development as "a pretense of modernization" (Wang Lixiong 1998: 398–404). Moreover, there are indications that the cost of maintaining this artificial prosperity has increased over time. For example, a Chinese research study found that the fixed capital cost of increasing workers in Tibetan areas had increased 7.5 times in just ten years. In the 1980s, the cost to add one worker to the economy was 3,508 yuan, while in the 1990s it was 29,510 yuan (Wang Tianjin 1998: 94). The recent launch of the Great Western Development campaign appears to have reinforced these patterns. In 2001, for example, it was estimated that for every yuan the economy grew, government spending increased by two yuan. The massive increase in state spending—75% in 2001 alone—has been used disproportionately for the construction of large-scale state projects, such as the Gormo-Lhasa railway, and to expand the government and Party administration (Fischer 2004b).

The rapid economic growth fueled by this spending has widened social inequality throughout the region and increased the potential basis for ethnic discontent. In particular, the startling increase in government expenditure has created unprecedented affluence among Tibetan cadres, administrators, and other salaried government workers. But the dramatic

rise in living standards among these elite, predominantly urban, Tibetans has underscored the impoverishment of the overwhelming majority of Tibetans, who remain rural, illiterate, and without access to rudimentary healthcare or primary education.⁴⁶ The growing sense of dispossession engendered by the widening disparities in wealth is exacerbated by the continuing influx of Chinese migrants into Tibetan areas.⁴⁷ With their new skills and greater access to capital, Chinese migrants have been better able to take advantage of opportunities afforded by the new economy. The increasing prosperity of Chinese migrants has further heightened awareness of ethnic differences and has provoked ethnic tension throughout the Tibetan region. These conditions could eventually lead to instability as a new generation of dispossessed Tibetans turns to more radicalized forms of nationalism. Thus, while the current strategy of combining rapid economic growth with harsh political controls has been successful in the short run, it might prove ineffective in maintaining stability over the longer term.

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ing stability over the
longer term*

Concerns about the sustainability of stability have been reinforced by the pervasive Chinese view that even the most elite Tibetans do not appreciate the state largesse generously bestowed upon them. The suspicion is long standing. An acerbic remark circulating in official circles through the mid-1990s, and commonly attributed to senior leader Li Ruihuan, had it that the central government could only trust two Tibetans: Raidi, the highest ranking Tibetan Party official in the TAR, and Gyaincain Norbu, the TAR's governor. The validity of this remark seemed to be borne out at the end of the decade with the 1998 defection of Arjia Rinpoche, one of the most trusted Tibetan Buddhist leaders in China's political hierarchy, and the 2000 flight of the young Karmapa, once thought to be key to legitimizing China's rule in the next generation. The departures of these two public figures, both of whom had been carefully groomed for leadership, signaled a major breakdown in the Chinese political strategy for Tibet. They showed not only that Beijing had yet to resolve the underlying problem of political legitimacy, but also that, even after the aggressive political and economic campaigns of the 1990s, Tibet still remained an unpredictable—and potentially unstable—region.

These public signs of policy breakdown have coincided with calls from

various groups within the PRC for rethinking the official Chinese position on the Dalai Lama. Advocates of a new approach include members of the first generation of Tibetan communists, a group with considerable prestige and a degree of political capital. Alarmed by the growing repression in Tibet through the 1990s, these retired Tibetan communist elders began to complain in the late 1990s that, unlike previous campaigns, the Third Work Forum reforms had created a tense and inhospitable environment for Tibetan cadres and Party members. Also supporting renewed engagement are senior military officials of the 18th Army, who, for political and historical reasons, have long been critical of the hard-line approach toward the Dalai Lama. In their retirement, some of these officials have become increasingly critical of the policy to isolate the Dalai Lama. One recent document circulating among Party officials states, “anyone who thinks the Tibet issue should be dragged on until after the death of the fourteenth Dalai Lama is naïve, unwise, and [supporting] the wrong policy.” The document argues that it is in China’s long-term strategic interest to resolve the issue in dialogue with the current exiled Tibetan leader, and that it must do so while the historic opportunity still exists.

Calls for rethinking Beijing’s policy on the Dalai Lama are also coming from the wider Chinese public. While no doubt there is still a strong aversion to the Dalai Lama in China, commentaries and discussions on the Chinese-language Internet nonetheless indicate a growing interest in engaging in talks to resolve the dispute. Chinese radio call-in shows on foreign broadcasts such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia also reflect this trend. The most prominent public advocate of dialogue with the Dalai Lama has been Wang Lixiong, a Beijing-based writer whose provocative essay, *The Dalai Lama is the Key to the Tibet Problem*, has been circulated within the Party.⁴⁸ In his argument for a negotiated solution, Wang contends that the situation in Tibet is potentially more volatile now than during the unrest of the late 1980s, because resentment against Chinese rule has spread to the Tibetan cadres and state workers. Predicting the failure of China’s rapid economic development policy in Tibet, Wang calls on the Chinese leadership to find a lasting solution in partnership with the Dalai Lama, and he urges this be done while his offer to relinquish the goal of independence is still on the table. Intellectuals such as Wang are clearly outside the policy-making process, yet their views are reaching a larger audience as Chinese political discourse becomes more plural and diverse.

Most importantly, Chinese analysts and scholars of foreign affairs and

international studies have in recent years begun pointing out the long-term strategic advantages of renewed contacts with the Dalai Lama. In particular, it has been argued that Tibet constitutes a weak link in China's political system that will remain vulnerable to manipulation by hostile forces until it is resolved. Constructive engagement with the Dalai Lama, it is argued, would remove an irritant in China's foreign relations while opening the possibility of resolving the Tibetan issue itself. Thus, for example, it was argued by academics from Beijing University at the Fourth Work Forum of 2001 that rapprochement with the Dalai Lama would reduce China's strategic risks in the volatile region of the Indian subcontinent. These pragmatic considerations contrast sharply with the conservative political discourse of the mid-1990s, a time when considerable optimism was projected about the "post-Dalai Lama period." Throughout the mid- and late-1990s, officials of the United Front routinely asserted at large meetings that China's problems in Tibet would disappear after the Dalai Lama's death.⁴⁹ Now, however, PRC policymakers increasingly predict that by isolating the Dalai Lama, China could miss an historic opportunity to permanently resolve the Tibet issue. Instead of ending the issue, the Dalai Lama's death would simply eliminate Beijing's primary scapegoat for its problems in the region.⁵⁰

Tibet constitutes a weak link in China's political system

Complicating Factors

This growing support for engagement is balanced by other factors whose implications for the prospects of dialogue are less certain. First, China's global position has shifted significantly. In contrast to the post-Tiananmen isolation that prevailed through the early 1990s, China has become an active participant in the international community, expanding its role in multilateral organizations and deepening its bilateral relationships both regionally and worldwide. This development had been taking place gradually over the entire past decade, but the transformation accelerated dramatically in the aftermath of September 11. After years of Sino-US tensions fueled by differences over Taiwan, the Kosovo war, and the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, China has emerged as a strategic partner in the new international order, a role underscored by its diplomatic leadership in managing the North Korean nuclear crisis. While these changing global conditions could make Beijing even more impervious to

international opprobrium, they may also lead to a change in the PRC framing of the Tibet issue. For example, China's growing international stature has prompted calls from Chinese strategists and public figures to abandon the narrative of victimhood that has long served as the dominant Chinese filter for viewing their place in the world in favor of a "great power mentality."⁵¹ Until now, the narrative of Chinese victimization has impaired the Chinese ability to view the Tibet issue objectively on its own terms. It is possible that a transformation in Chinese attitude could potentially create a political climate more conducive to Sino-Tibetan dialogue.

Also complicating matters are the ongoing shifts in regional strategic balance. In particular, India's growing prominence in south Asia is likely to affect China's strategy on Tibet. Following the establishment of the Tibetan government-in-exile in India in 1959, Tibet's significance in Sino-Indian relations increased dramatically, setting off a serious border conflict in 1962. While India has long recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and has repeatedly given formal assurances that it will not allow "anti-China political activities" in India, the presence of the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala nevertheless gives India some leverage in its relationship to China. The Sino-Indian Joint Declaration of 2003 was therefore hailed by Chinese analysts as a formal undertaking by India not to use the Tibet card against China's interests. But even as the Sino-Indian relationship has been improving,⁵² India's position as a regional power has also been steadily growing. India's position was particularly improved in the aftermath of September 11. While China's traditional strategic nexus with Pakistan has shown signs of weakening, an unprecedented strengthening of US-Indian relations has begun, leading to suggestions of a new strategic alliance.⁵³ India's growing stature has led to a reappraisal in Beijing of China's strategic position in south Asia. Despite the recent expansion of Sino-Indian diplomatic, military, and commercial links, these two nations are increasingly competing for political, economic, and strategic preeminence in the region.⁵⁴ Whether India allies with the US "in the cause of democracy" against China,⁵⁵ or with China in a "de facto geostrategic alliance to counterbalance the West,"⁵⁶ it is clear that the changing relationship between the two regional competitors will take center stage in the coming decade. As it does, the need for Beijing to find a long-term resolution to the Tibet issue is likely to increase.

Another complicating factor is the growing prestige of Tibetan Buddhism among the Chinese. Religion has long been a source of consid-

erable ideological awkwardness in the present Dalai Lama's relationship to Beijing. It became an even more complex problem through the 1990s as the growing overseas Chinese interest in Tibetan Buddhism catapulted the Dalai Lama to new prominence in the Chinese cultural world. This overseas phenomenon coincided with a new interest in Tibetan Buddhism—and in religion and spirituality more generally—inside China itself. By the late 1990s, wealthy Chinese tycoons as well as members of the emerging middle-class began to gather around charismatic Tibetan lamas for spiritual instruction. Unnerved by this growing trend, Chinese authorities ordered crackdowns on those Tibetan religious institutions that attracted ethnic Chinese devotees.⁵⁷ In fact, according to one Chinese source, the reason China rejected the Dalai Lama's proposal to visit Wutaishan in December 1998 was because Jiang Zemin feared his religious charisma could have unpredictable effects not only on Tibetans but on ethnic Chinese as well.⁵⁸ Until religion is normalized in the PRC, the question of the Dalai Lama's return will continue to be complicated by concerns about the potential impact of his religious authority. There are nonetheless outspoken voices within the Party, such as Pan Yue, who are calling for a rethinking of the Party's approach to religion.⁵⁹ If this were to happen, then the Dalai Lama's religious prestige could play a positive role in the development of dialogue.

members of the emerging middle-class began to gather around charismatic Tibetan lamas

Institutional factors are likely to play a major role in shaping and circumscribing the process of dialogue. The management of the Tibet issue has become increasingly complex and institutionalized over the past twenty years. Many more stakeholders are now involved in the process of determining Beijing's Tibet policy. The decision-making process involves interaction among a broad range of institutions, including the military, the foreign ministry, the Ministry of National Security, and the State Council Information Office. The involvement of these various institutions has brought the development of a more comprehensive information gathering system. Consequently, the PRC leadership's access to information about the Dalai Lama and the Tibet issue in general has increased exponentially. There has also been a diversification of the sources of policy analysis outside the government, as new research centers and think tanks have begun to provide specialized opinions on Tibet. The effect of this increasing complexity has been to make the decision-making process more decentralized

and plural. As a broader range of interests has come to be represented, Chinese official perspectives on the Dalai Lama and the Tibet issue have become more varied and competing interests have emerged.

In addition, the United Front's bureaucratic infrastructure for managing Tibetan affairs has become significantly more complex. As the Party organ formally charged with the task of establishing broad alliances with non-Party organizations and interest groups, the United Front is responsible for managing the affairs of all national minorities. Despite this formal mission, Tibetan affairs is being accorded an extraordinary share of the United Front's institutional attention and resources. For example, within the Nationalities and Religion Bureau, also known as the "Second Bureau," four of the six departments deal exclusively with Tibetan issues, while the interests of the remaining fifty-four minority nationalities are combined in a single department.⁶⁰ This prioritization of Tibetan affairs shows the extent to which resources are being channeled toward Tibet, while also pointing to the increasing bureaucratization of the official handling of the Tibet issue. The institutional expansion suggests an increased professionalization of Beijing's approach to the Tibet issue, yet it may also create greater bureaucratic impediments to change and innovation. Despite the attention Tibet is receiving, procedural rigidity and institutional resistance to initiative could exert a conservative force over the United Front's handling of the Dalai Lama.

Above the United Front, a "leading small group" has been established to coordinate high-level management of Tibetan affairs. The creation of this interagency coordinating body further highlights the importance of Tibetan affairs for the PRC leadership.⁶¹ Presently, the leading small group for Tibet is headed by the chairperson of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). It includes not only the head of the United Front, but also the Minister of Public Security, indicating the significance of the Tibet issue for national security. In 2003, the foreign minister was also added to the group, a move that underlined the Tibet issue's significance in China's foreign policy. The establishment of this leading small group suggests that the PRC leadership intends to manage the issue through an institutionalized process of broad and formal consultation. Yet, while this new form of high-level coordination increases official attention given to the Tibet issue, it is possible that, as with the expansion of the United Front's bureaucratic structure, this development might also allow for less flexibility in the decision-making process on engagement with the

Dalai Lama.

The Effects of Personnel Changes

In addition to this increased complexity in the policy-making process, uncertainty has also been heightened by the significant overhaul in personnel that took place after the Sixteenth Congress. In one of the major surprises of the Tibet-related personnel shifts, the director of the Second Bureau, Zhu Xiaoming, was transferred to a post at Beijing's Socialist University. The move was formally a promotion, but it effectively ended Zhu's influence on Tibet policy. This is significant, because Zhu had played a key role in formulating the official Chinese policy toward the Dalai Lama through the 1990s. In particular, he had taken the lead in outlining the basis for rejecting the Dalai Lama's Middle Way doctrine, which advocated genuine Tibetan autonomy as opposed to political independence.⁶² A highly effective and articulate policymaker with close links to the TAR military establishment, Zhu had been widely expected to become a deputy head in the United Front with responsibility for Tibetan affairs. The transfer of Zhu Xiaoming follows on the earlier retirement of Jiang Ping, the deputy head who had been in charge of Tibetan affairs for well over a decade. A rigid and conservative old-school communist, Jiang was widely perceived as particularly insensitive toward Tibetan concerns during the first round of Sino-Tibetan talks in the early 1980s.

With the departure of these two key figures, an entirely new team has been assembled to manage Tibet policy. Following the Sixteenth Party Congress, Liu Yandong, a highly competent and skilled administrator with links to Hu Jintao, has been promoted to the head of the United Front. Zhu Weibi, an outside official known to have strong connections to former senior leader Li Ruihuan, has been appointed as a deputy head with responsibility for Tibet. Zhu Xiaoming was replaced as director of the Second Bureau by Chang Rongjun, an official of the United Front formerly responsible for relations with intellectuals. Importantly, neither Zhu Weibi nor Chang Rongjun has any direct background in Tibet policy. This new team suggests the possibility of a new institutional environment for the handling of Tibet issues.

But while the United Front itself may have become more hospitable toward dialogue, key personnel shifts elsewhere have been sending a more mixed message. Thus, for example, Chen Kuiyuan, the former first TAR Party Secretary and one of the leading architects of the hard-line policies

of the 1990s, has recently been promoted to the position of vice-chairperson of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and has also been appointed president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Furthermore, the five members of the powerful leading small group on Tibet includes Jia Qingling, chairperson of the CPPCC; Zhou Yongkang, the minister of public security; and foreign minister Li Zhaoxing. While their specific views on dialogue with the Dalai Lama are largely unknown, these officials are widely perceived as unlikely to be proactive in advancing the Tibet issue. It therefore remains

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to be seen how these numerous personnel changes will affect the prospects for continued engagement.

On the Tibetan side, Dharamsala has also made some important modifications. In 1979, having been caught off guard by Deng Xiaoping's overture, the Tibetan exiles apparently dispatched

their fact-finding missions to Tibet without first developing a comprehensive strategy for their engagement. A decade of sporadic contacts later, the Tibetan leadership's indecisiveness in dealing with Beijing indicated that the exiles were still ill prepared for serious talks. This was pointedly demonstrated by the uncertainty of their response to Beijing's 1989 invitation to the Panchen Lama's funeral. Furthermore, over the years there has been controversy within the exile community over the handling of contacts with China. Throughout the 1980s and most of the 1990s, the key Tibetan figure in those contacts was Gyalo Dondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother and chosen conduit for Deng Xiaoping's initial outreach. Educated in Nanjing and closely linked to the CIA in the 1950s and 60s, Gyalo Dondup brought extensive experience and a forceful personality to his role as intermediary. But while he was able to maintain the lines of communication with Beijing, his strong will created controversy within the exile community, eventually undermining his effectiveness. The problem was not limited to Gyalo Dondup, as Dharamsala itself was criticized by its exiled Tibetan constituency for lack of transparency in the pursuit of talks with Beijing.

In contrast to the highly personal nature of its earlier contacts with Beijing, the exiled Tibetan leadership has, over time, become considerably more systematic and professionalized in its approach to engagement. Throughout the 1990s, in particular, Dharamsala sought to develop a

more disciplined and consistent mechanism for pursuing channels of communication with the PRC leadership. These efforts included the express designation of Lodi Gyari as the principal person authorized to act on the Dalai Lama's behalf in pursuing formal talks with the Chinese government.⁶³ In addition, a high-level task force was established to coordinate matters relating to the process of engagement. Yet while these efforts have no doubt served to clarify and formalize Dharamasala's decision-making process—as much for the Tibetans' own constituency as for their Chinese counterparts—it remains to be seen whether these new institutional arrangements will bring greater effectiveness in the pursuit of substantive negotiations.

Issues

Over more than two decades of intermittent talks, Beijing and Dharamasala have remained in fundamental disagreement about what is—or should be—in dispute between them. The exiled Tibetan leadership has consistently forwarded two key demands: the unification of all Tibetan-inhabited areas and “genuine autonomy.” For its part, Beijing has been publicly adamant that there is no “Tibet issue” for discussion. Rather, they have characterized the dispute as solely a matter of the Dalai Lama's personal return.⁶⁴ Beijing's stance is, to be sure, consistent with the general Chinese pattern of negotiations (Cheng 1999). In the short run, however, it is likely that the differences between the parties will preclude the possibility of substantive talks. To assess longer-term prospects, it is necessary to examine the issues raised by Dharamasala in light of recent Sino-Tibetan history and contemporary politics.

Beijing has been publicly adamant that there is no “Tibet issue” for discussion

Unification

Since the early 1950s, Tibetans have made a consistent demand for the unification of all Tibetan-inhabited areas into a single administrative and political unit. This has been a contentious claim, because much of the eastern and northeastern parts of the Tibetan region were outside Lhasa's political control when the communist Chinese forces first entered Tibet.⁶⁵ The PRC has, at various times, argued against unification not only on this historical ground, but also because of the vastness of the territory in question⁶⁶ and the different socioeconomic stages of the various Tibetan areas.⁶⁷ But while the Chinese authorities have been publicly dismissive of the uni-

Tibetans have made a consistent demand for the unification of all Tibetan-inhabited areas

fiction issue,⁶⁸ it is significant that throughout the intermittent process of Sino-Tibetan engagement the Dalai Lama's official representatives have consistently been permitted to travel to ethnic Tibetan areas outside the TAR. Knowing the exiled Tibetans' position on the issue of unification, it is unclear why Beijing would authorize such provocative visits unless some scope existed—however limited—for its discussion in the dialogue process.

If China were in fact to seek a resolution of the Tibet issue through dialogue, there would be some incentive to include all Tibetan-inhabited areas within that solution. Since Tibetans throughout the region share common concerns and political interests, it seems unlikely that a selectively applied solution could be a lasting one. This was in fact the historical lesson from the Tibetan national uprising of 1959. During the 1950s, central Tibet had been guaranteed a measure of political autonomy under the terms of the 17 Point Agreement, while the rest of the Tibetan region was incorporated into neighboring Chinese provinces. The discrepancy in the political and socio-economic conditions across the various Tibetan boundaries played a major role in precipitating large-scale ethnic dissent a few years later. In 1955–56, when revolts broke out against local land reforms in the eastern region of the plateau, many eastern Tibetans fled to central Tibet, where the discontent spread and eventually precipitated the uprising of March 10, 1959. The ensuing chaos effectively destroyed any hope of success for the 17 Point Agreement. Thus, if Beijing becomes open to a new Sino-Tibetan accommodation, it will have to consider that ethnic grievances are no more likely now than in the 1950s to stop at arbitrarily drawn internal borders.

While the issue of unification will no doubt remain highly contentious, there are indications that Beijing might not be as inflexible as is commonly assumed. The potential for flexibility was demonstrated, for example, by the significant revisions that were made in the administrative structure of Inner Mongolia in the early 1980s. In addition, there have recently been high-level discussions in the government and among influential academics about the possibility of revising the provincial administrative structure.⁶⁹ Of course, flexibility in administrative restructuring does not necessarily mean greater regional autonomy. Indeed, a revision of the current political structure might well be done in a way that further

fragments the Tibetan ethnographic region. Currently, the region is divided into a system of Tibetan autonomous administrative areas and units. Though the Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR have been distributed to the neighboring Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan, these smaller units have nominally been given special administrative status within those provincial structures. Thus, the entire region of ethnographic Tibet is already, in a sense, treated by the Chinese state as administratively distinct. In the liberal political climate of the early 1980s, Tibetan cadres and intellectuals began to formally propose consolidating the existing autonomous Tibetan areas into a single administrative entity.⁷⁰ It has been argued by Chinese-educated Tibetans that the political fragmentation of the Tibetan region is the legacy of an ill-conceived divide and rule strategy.⁷¹

These proposals for consolidation have coincided with a general impetus toward increased regional integration. In nearly every aspect of social, political, and economic life, the various Tibetan autonomous areas share far more in common with each other than with the Chinese provinces to which they have been assigned. At the administrative level, the policy challenge this has engendered has led to the development of the bureaucratic concept of *wushengqu* (“the five provinces and region”).⁷² Composed of representatives of the TAR and from the four provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan, ad hoc *wushengqu* bodies have facilitated the coordination and implementation of policies across the Tibetan region, particularly on matters concerning religion, culture, education, and the media. More recently, Chinese official discourse has increasingly used the concept of *shezang* (“involving Tibet”) to acknowledge the commonality of interests throughout the Tibetan autonomous areas. The emergence of these administrative concepts suggests that, from the standpoint of policy management, there is some basis for greater regional integration of the Tibetan autonomous areas.

Ironically, the integrative forces at work at the administrative level have been powerfully reinforced by the Chinese state itself in its drive to modernize and integrate Tibet with the rest of China. The revitalization and mobilization of Tibetan myths, traditions, and cultural symbols in service of the official minority policy has inadvertently created a momentum toward greater cultural integration. This process has been accelerated by the aggressive promotion of the tourism industry in the development of the regional economy. As the commodification of Tibetan culture has

proliferated and expanded to the furthest reaches of Tibetan-inhabited areas, shared ties to language, history, and religious culture have been strengthened throughout the region. Propelled by the engine of the media as well as by advances in technology and transportation links across the plateau, these forces have reinforced a pan-Tibetan identity and provided a new cultural logic for the concept of a “Greater Tibet.” This internal compulsion toward greater regional integration suggests that the question of Tibetan unification will remain a concern for the Chinese state regardless of the demands of exiled Tibetans.

Genuine Autonomy

While the idea of political independence is pervasive among Tibetans, the Dalai Lama firmly maintains that he seeks only “genuine autonomy” within the framework of the PRC. Over the protracted course of Sino-Tibetan engagement, the Dalai Lama has elaborated his political vision in various ways, but he has nonetheless remained committed to the core principle of

the Dalai Lama firmly maintains that he seeks only “genuine autonomy”

pursuing autonomy rather than outright independence. This position has raised the possibility of adopting the “one-country, two-systems” model in resolving the dispute. Ironically, a prototype of this formula was embodied in the 17 Point Agreement, the Sino-Tibetan accommoda-

tion forcibly imposed on the Tibetan government in 1951. Though the Dalai Lama repudiated the document after his flight to exile in 1959, it is still regarded in Beijing as an important legal milestone in Sino-Tibetan history. Thus, when the Dalai Lama’s representatives raised the “one-country, two-systems” formula during the 1982 exploratory talks, the Chinese distinguished the Tibetan case from that of Taiwan and Hong Kong on the ground that Tibet had already been “liberated” by the 17 Point Agreement.

Overseas Chinese commentators have subsequently suggested that the agreement should serve as the basis for prospective Sino-Tibetan talks on local autonomy.⁷³ This would likely be a politically untenable course of action for the exiled Tibetan leadership, since its constituency has long vilified the agreement as a compromise of Tibetan sovereignty. Nevertheless, having publicly pursued the limited goal of political autonomy since 1988, it would not seem entirely unfeasible for the Dalai Lama to draw on the agreement in some way as a means of advancing the dialogue process. The

real question is not whether exiled Tibetans might find reason to return to the 17 Point Agreement, but rather whether the PRC leadership could be persuaded to uphold its terms. The paradoxical situation at present is that while Beijing insists on the legitimacy of the 1951 agreement, it is unwilling to countenance the political arrangement embodied in its provisions. Indeed, despite the formally autonomous designation of the Tibetan ethnic areas, there is less autonomy in Tibet than there is in any other region or province of the PRC. To bring into being the high degree of autonomy promised by the 17 Point Agreement would require a major devolution of power, an unlikely prospect under current conditions.⁷⁴

*there is less autonomy in
Tibet than there is in
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At present, Beijing shows no interest in devolving regional power to Tibetans. Indeed, the State Council declared in its recent White Paper on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet that the existing framework for regional autonomy has long provided the Tibetan people equal rights within “the big family of the Chinese nation and [the] right to autonomy in Tibet.”⁷⁵ Issued in May 2004, the White Paper establishes in no uncertain terms that the current Chinese leadership is staunchly resolved against any discussions regarding the institutions of autonomy in Tibet. While the document acknowledges in passing that autonomy “needs to be improved and developed in the course of implementation,” it concludes forcefully that “[a]ny act aimed at undermining and changing the regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet is in violation of the Constitution and law, and it is unacceptable to the entire Chinese people, including the broad masses of the Tibetan people.”

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the larger question of the appropriate distribution of power between the center and the regions is now being raised on the margins of public discourse within China itself. Both scholars and policymakers have observed that in a political entity of the PRC’s size, a high concentration of power at the center is antithetical to the state’s long-term interests.⁷⁶ It has been pointed out that centralized decision making has led to inefficient management, due to the failure to take into account the diversity of interests in local areas. Because it overlooks “natural conditions, cultural traditions and economic interests,” the prevailing power configuration tends to trigger resentment against the state and fuel “local separatism.”⁷⁷ Policymakers have therefore been active-

ly exploring ways to revise the administrative structure to create a more reasonable distribution of power between the center and provinces.⁷⁸

If this drive for greater efficiency were to continue, it could eventually have the effect of reinforcing centrifugal forces in the Chinese political system. Some Chinese political theorists contend that in order to preserve the unity of a “mega-state” like the PRC, it is in fact essential to allow for greater power-sharing through a federal system of government.⁷⁹ If momentum toward federalization were indeed to develop, the prospects for a high degree of Tibetan self-rule could become favorable. Tibet would in fact present an ideal test case for the implementation of local autonomy within the PRC. Not only is the Tibetan region defined by geography, culture, and language, it is also the only region that had its own formal government prior to incorporation into the PRC. Tibetans are thus the only official minority group with whom the Chinese were compelled to conclude a formal agreement in order to validate the imposition of their rule. Moreover, in no other region does Beijing continue to confront a similarly consistent and cohesive challenge to the legitimacy of its rule. Distinguished by its history as a separate civilization-state emerging in tandem with but independently of the Chinese cultural world, Tibet is *sui generis* within modern China. If a measure of genuine self-rule cannot be developed for Tibet, it is difficult to believe that a principle of local autonomy can be meaningfully established for the rest of China.

Lessons

This study indicates that the conditions for Sino-Tibetan engagement are in many respects better now than during the first round of talks in the early 1980s or during the effort to restart discussions in 1988–89. In contrast to the earlier initiatives, there is now pressure from both international and domestic sources for entering into dialogue with the Dalai Lama. While in itself this pressure is unlikely to have been sufficient to account for Beijing’s recent overtures, it has nonetheless ensured that the chronic issue of Tibet has been kept on the crowded national policy agenda. Chinese policy makers are also increasingly concerned about the longer-term effects of the accelerated economic development program in the Tibetan region. Contrary to expectations, there are indications that the rapid economic expansion is giving rise to widening disparities in wealth while fostering a heightened sense of ethnic cleavage and dispossession among Tibetans.

At the same time, there are a number of factors—such as religion, the regional strategic balance, and China's role in the global order—whose effects are less certain. One of the most striking of these complicating factors has been the recent institutional restructuring of Beijing's decision-making process in managing the Tibet issue. While in some ways the recent changes suggest greater openness, in other ways they may have a negative impact on the progress of Sino-Tibetan engagement. Moreover, there are still fundamental differences between the two sides on substantive issues. Until this gap is narrowed, the prospects for a negotiated resolution to the Sino-Tibetan dispute appear daunting.

In view of these unpromising circumstances, many Tibetan exiles and international supporters have reacted to the recent Sino-Tibetan initiative with considerable skepticism. It is widely believed within these communities that the Chinese government is insincere in its efforts to restart discussions with the Dalai Lama. Moreover, it is believed that China is incapable of meeting Tibetan demands under the current political conditions. In this analysis, it makes more sense for the exiled Tibetan leadership to wait for a better historical moment to pursue a deal with Beijing. This option of disengagement turns on the assumption that fundamental change in China—whether through a transition to a new political system or through internal collapse—will have put Tibetans in a better position to bargain. Until then, it is argued, Tibetans should continue their international campaign to build momentum for future Tibetan self-determination. Political capital and resources should be concentrated not in advancing a half-hearted process of sporadic engagement but rather in marshalling international support and strategically preparing Tibetans to retake control of their homeland. By turning its back on Beijing altogether, the exiled Tibetan leadership could preserve its key asset—the legitimacy conferred by the Dalai Lama's return—for a better day and a better deal.

There are of course important risks inherent in this strategy. One is that, with the passage of time, the exiles will likely become further distanced from the reality of ordinary Tibetans inside Tibet. It is unclear how sustainable the political movement will be as the overseas Tibetans continue to become integrated into their host societies and further isolated from contemporary Tibetan politics. Second, after the passing of the current Dalai Lama, his role as the unifying force of the Tibetan movement will disappear with him. The nature of the Tibetan political campaign will change, becoming more decentralized and possibly fragmenting into com-

peting factions. In this scenario, there is likely to be—at least in the short run—no clear authority capable of providing leadership and effectively representing all Tibetans in seeking a better political deal with the Chinese. Moreover, the emergence of extremist groups promoting violent resistance to Chinese rule would not be implausible (Goldstein 1997: 116).

The second option for Tibetans is to continue the current policy of engagement regardless of the sincerity of China's interest in resolving the issue. By continuing the dialogue process, there is at least the possibility that Tibetans can become players in the deliberations over the future of contemporary Tibet. But it is widely feared that continued engagement would undercut the international movement, a key leverage for Tibetans

Uyghurs have continued to clamor for more substantial self-rule

in the dialogue process. Bolstering this fear is the widespread suspicion that Beijing has no intention of pursuing substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama and that the current process of intermittent talks is simply a ploy to buy time until his death.⁸⁰ If dialogue is still underway at the time of

the Dalai Lama's passing, Beijing would be in a better position to claim legitimacy in the race to recognize the next Dalai Lama. The fact that Beijing has already established a committee to begin preparations for identifying the fifteenth Dalai Lama suggests that Tibetan suspicions of Chinese motives are not unwarranted. The Dalai Lama's policy of engagement therefore carries a significant risk. If it fails, the idea of peaceful coexistence within the framework of a Chinese state will have been discredited, and the next generation of Tibetans may be less responsive to the moderate approach he has developed.

From the PRC standpoint, negotiations with the Dalai Lama may seem but one of the several options available for addressing the Tibet issue. Tibet is now firmly under Beijing's control and, under current conditions, the regional economy can be propped up for the foreseeable future. Politically, Beijing has both the will and the authoritarian system of government needed to maintain stability through force. Internationally, the criticism of China's Tibet policy represents only a mild irritant in its foreign relations. Under these relatively secure conditions, it would appear to the Chinese leadership that they are in a strong position to choose on their own terms how to manage the Tibet issue. However, viewed from a longer-term perspective, it is clear that Beijing is also faced with some difficult choices.

One option the PRC leadership is likely to be considering is to con-

tinue its current strategy of accelerated economic development in hopes that growing prosperity will erode nationalist sentiments and increase acceptance of Chinese rule. This strategy assumes that as Tibetans become more affluent, they will become assimilated to mainstream Chinese norms and grow increasingly averse to disruptions in the status quo. But there are strong reasons to doubt the prospects for success of this strategy. First, throughout China the effect of economic development has been to widen socio-economic disparities. In the Tibetan context, a fraction of the population has benefited while the vast majority of Tibetans has been sidelined in the expanding economy. Since Tibetans view the widening inequalities through an ethnic lens, the main effect of rapid economic growth has been to heighten ethnic cleavage and tensions. Second, any large-scale sinicization of Tibetans would require a serious investment of resources in expanding education throughout the entire region, an undertaking for which there has been little official interest. Since resources have thus far been concentrated on the education of a small elite, there are rural Tibetan communities throughout the plateau where, even after fifty years of Chinese rule, no fluent speakers of Chinese can be found. But even if education were improved dramatically throughout all Tibetan areas, there is no guarantee that a Chinese education would lead to a diminishing of Tibetan national sentiment. In fact, as Tibetans become more educated in Chinese, the tendency has been for a heightened sense of Tibetan identity to develop. There are indications that a new generation of Tibetans—bilingual and bicultural—is increasingly willing to publicly articulate Tibetan sentiments to a wider Chinese-language audience.

Alternatively, the Chinese leadership could be considering the option of demographically overwhelming the Tibetan population. This has been the dominant pattern of Chinese frontier expansion throughout history. The plausibility of the demographic solution for Tibet is frequently bolstered by the analogy to the European settling of America. However, in contrast to the Europeans, who were obliged to cross an ocean to settle America, the Chinese have inhabited land adjoining the Tibetan plateau for millennia. That the Chinese began migrating onto the Tibetan plateau only in recent decades points not only to the region's inhospitable geography, but also to the natural limits on its potential for productive econom-

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ic activity. A more illuminating analogy would be not America but the Soviet settlement of Siberia.⁸¹ In both Siberia and Tibet, political motivations have driven the settlement of large numbers of people into a harsh, distant region where market forces would never have brought them. In the case of Tibet, the influx of migrants has been driven by the massive state-

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subsidization of economic activity in the region. Indeed, since these Chinese migrants essentially provide services for the expanded and newly affluent government and Party administration, it is unclear what productive activity would be possible for them in the absence of state largesse.⁸²

The Soviet example suggests that the prosperity drawing migrants to the area is an artificial one that entails both short-term and long-term costs to the region and the state. Recent Chinese research makes a similar point, indicating that a massive increase in population would have devastating consequences for both the region's environment and economy. The example of Inner Mongolia suggests that in order to demographically overwhelm the Tibetan population, it would be necessary to induce many million more non-Tibetans to settle on the Tibetan plateau. Yet recent research has pointed out that in some Tibetan areas the sustainable population capacity has already been surpassed and is causing irreversible environmental damage (Wang Tianjin 1998).

Despite their likely long-term costs, Beijing is likely to regard the above two options as the most rational and expedient strategies available. The alternative of a negotiated settlement with the Dalai Lama would require the PRC leadership to take seriously the Tibetan demand for a degree of genuine self-rule within a consolidated ethnic homeland at a time when China's system of one-party rule appears to preclude the possibility of any real devolution of power to regional authorities. Beijing's likely path is a risky one, for the economic and demographic approaches to its Tibet problem would require a considerable length of time, possibly generations, to succeed. In the meantime, a host of unpredictable factors could destabilize the region, either directly by strengthening Tibetan nationalism, or indirectly by weakening the central Chinese leadership. Either way, the door to ethnic unrest would remain open, and the plateau's vulnerability could be a drag on China as it seeks to rise to a position of international preeminence.

Therefore, while a negotiated resolution to the Sino-Tibetan dispute

appears to be out of reach for now, Beijing might well seek to engage the Dalai Lama in dialogue as a part of its overall effort to avoid and contain conflicts over the Tibetan region. As a moderate leader who brings both international prestige and the weight of history, the Dalai Lama's involvement could transform both Tibetan and world perception of China's rule in the region. Moreover, the devotion he commands would ensure that the high-risk enterprise of dialogue does not spiral out of control, but rather proceeds systematically with the consent of the Tibetan population. It is likely that the real question is not whether the Chinese leadership is aware of this singular opportunity, but rather whether it is willing to accept the risks involved. The inertia and conservatism currently pervading the Chinese political system suggest that the leadership will be averse to taking these risks. But while Beijing can perhaps afford to put off other high-risk political issues, the Dalai Lama's lifespan concretely defines the window of opportunity for developing a political solution for Tibet.

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If Beijing and the Dalai Lama are to seriously pursue dialogue, both parties must become fully committed to the process. At present, Beijing is evidently pursuing a dual strategy of talking directly with the exiled Tibetan leadership while maintaining a high degree of political repression inside Tibet. This strategy has peculiar consequences, such as the contradiction between the United Front's self-proclaimed duty to "oppose the Dalai Lama" and its role as host to the exiled leader's official representatives. The continued repression inside Tibet is driven primarily by Beijing's fears that a relaxation of control could lead to renewed ethnic unrest, just as it did in the 1980s. But the repression inevitably reinforces China's negative international image and triggers new waves of condemnation. This in turn has the effect of discrediting the dialogue initiative among Tibetan exiles and undermines the Dalai Lama's efforts to seek a negotiated solution.

To break out of this cycle, Beijing would have to send clear signals of its commitment to a dialogue process. The first step would be to normalize the Dalai Lama in public discourse by ending the officially sanctioned political campaigns against him. This would require an official reversal of the formal condemnation of the Dalai Lama in the mid-1990s. A second preliminary measure would be to legitimize the dialogue process by publicly acknowledging its existence. Only under these conditions would it be

possible for the Dalai Lama to play a constructive role in building domestic Tibetan support for a new political solution.

If, as might be expected, something less than meaningful autonomy were to result from a dialogue process, it is clear how Beijing would benefit. It is less apparent, however, what Tibetans would stand to gain. Indeed, one of the challenges facing the exiled Tibetan leadership is to provide its constituents a convincing rationale for pursuing talks with Beijing under the present circumstances. While Dharamsala has pursued the goal of dialogue with tenacity and discipline, it has yet to publicly articulate a conceptual framework for the dialogue process itself. In other words, it has failed to provide a political vision for how a limited dialogue process can be expected to advance its longer-term interests. In the absence of a coherent theory for its current political project, the exiled Tibetan leadership will likely find itself in an increasingly awkward position as the dialogue progresses. Thus, for instance, if, as is widely hoped, the Dalai Lama were to make a symbolic visit to China as an interim measure in the dialogue process, Dharamsala would likely find itself hard-pressed to explain to the Tibetan public precisely what Tibetans had gained from the exchange. With Tibetan self-rule still nowhere near within reach, the Tibetan leadership would, at minimum, have to identify other forms of *quid pro quo* for its part in the process.

If Dharamsala were to continue with the current strategy of engagement, one possible interim goal might be the expansion of an open public space inside Tibet. This would entail Beijing's alleviating repression in the region by relaxing legal measures and adjusting the local political mechanisms that keep the repressive conditions in place. Relieving the pervasive

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sense of fear among Tibetans would enable them to legitimately voice local interests and raise questions about greater local autonomy in normal public discourse. With these concerns no longer being driven underground, it might then be possible to involve local Tibetan officials, policymakers,

community leaders, educators, researchers, scholars, and other stakeholders in a broad conversation on the pressing concerns of Tibetans across the plateau. These could include issues ranging from language protection, land rights, and education, to urban development, the sustainability of rural economies, and the control of local resources. By providing a mechanism for systematically identifying these needs, the dialogue

process between Beijing and the Dalai Lama could then become not only a risk management strategy for the Chinese leadership, but also a structuring activity for substantive negotiations on Tibet's autonomous future.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the two sides will see fit to seriously pursue the process of give-and-take bargaining. In light of the unpromising conditions for earnest negotiations, it seems more likely that the parties will continue to talk about talks for the time being. This would not be without real benefits. For over two decades, the prospect of formal talks has provided a means and structure for the two parties to develop a better understanding of each other's positions and constraints. Indeed, the open-ended process of talking about talks has enabled Beijing and Dharamsala to explore the risks and reduce the uncertainties of engagement without, for the most part, the pressure of public scrutiny. The question surely being asked on both sides is how to make the most of the latest round of talks. For Tibetan exiles, the key question is whether they will be able to credibly maintain their political leverage—the legitimacy conferred by the Dalai Lama's return—if and when the talks run aground. This would become particularly important if the Dalai Lama were to pass away while talks were actively in process. For Beijing, the conundrum is whether to start taking real political risks on a problem that has yet to even manifest. The alternative, of course, is to risk the possibility of ethnic unrest in a post-Dalai Lama Tibet. While it is too soon to speculate on the consequences of the most recent discussions, there is no doubt that the prospect of dialogue will continue to play an important role in shaping not only the relationship between Beijing and the Dalai Lama, but also the character of the Sino-Tibetan dispute itself.

Endnotes

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1. For detailed historical accounts of this period, see Shakya (1999) and Smith (1996). For the dialogue process in particular, see D. Norbu (2001) and Goldstein (1997). Allen Carlson's study of Beijing's Tibet policy also provides an account of this period; see Carlson (2004).
2. According to D. Norbu, the condition was stated as follows, "The basic question is whether Tibet is part of China or not. This should be kept as criteria for testing the truth...So long as it is not accepted that Tibet is an integral part of China, there is nothing else to talk about" (D. Norbu 2001: 316). This condition has been widely interpreted as being: "anything, apart from independence, can be discussed."
3. While the Chinese questioned the Dalai Lama's interest in developing relations with the USSR, they nonetheless took the position that it was necessary to preempt any such relation from developing. See Takla (1995: 140), Rabgyal (1990: 10–13), and D. Norbu (1991: 3).
4. See, for example, Khetsun (1998).
5. See Ngapo (1988); Smith (1996: 565–68, 570–72).
6. For an account of the meeting's proceedings, see Report of the National United Front Work Conference, January 23, 1982, *Minzu zhengce wenxuan* [Selected Documents of Nationality Policy], cited in Sharlho (1992: 38n9).
7. In comments to the Panchen Lama, who resided in China, Deng stated, "You and the Dalai are different. You are patriotic and support the unity of the country, while the Dalai is someone who engages in separatism." TAR Communist Party History Chronology, October 26, 1980.

8. Both the second and third missions arrived in May 1980. The second fact-finding mission, led by Tenzin N. Tethong, was expelled from Tibet on a charge of inciting political disorder among the masses. A fourth scheduled delegation was cancelled altogether. In 1985, a delegation led by W.G. Kundeling was finally permitted to travel to Tibetan areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). For detailed accounts of these missions, see Shakya (1999: 378) and Smith (1996: 571).
9. The letter criticized the conditions in Tibet, but applauded Hu Yaobang's efforts to remedy the situation by acknowledging past errors. See Dalai Lama (1981: 8–9).
10. For an account of the differences in their positions on Tibet's historical political status, see Sperling (2004).
11. *Xizang Qingkuang Jianjie* [Summary of Conditions in Tibet], Zhonggong Xizang Zizhiqu Dangwei Xuanchuanbu Bian [TAR CCP Propaganda Department] (July 1985) p.32. Translation by the authors.
12. The Tibetan delegation consisted of the same three representatives who traveled in April 1982 and October 1984: Juchen Thubten Namgyal, a senior cabinet minister; Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari, then chair of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile; and Phuntsog Tashi Takla, a former *Kuson Depon* and interpreter for the Tibetan Government at the 1951 signing of the 17 Point Agreement.
13. D. Norbu (2001: 320–21). There is disagreement about the content of these discussions. Goldstein takes issue with Norbu's account of the Tibetan position at the 1982 meeting; see Goldstein (1997: 138n12).
14. Shakya (1999: 398).
15. D. Norbu (2001: 321).
16. The first student demonstration in Tiananmen Square erupted in 1985. These were followed by larger student demonstrations in late 1986. The latter were influenced by calls for political reform by prominent figures such as Fang Lizhi.
17. This response was issued by the State Nationality Affairs Commission on 28 September 1987 (Shakya 1999: 523n61).
18. *News From China*, No. 40 (New Delhi: Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 28 September 1988), as quoted in Norbu (2001: 323).
19. The Kashag is the cabinet of the Tibetan government-in-exile. As the highest executive body of the exiled Tibetan administration, it exercises power subordinate only to the Dalai Lama.
20. Background paper, "The Tibetan government's position on negotiations with China" (Dharamsala: Department of Information and International Affairs, 1995).
21. For a longer account of this development, see Shakya (1999: 430).
22. Lodi Gyari, closing remarks, "Inside Tibet Conference," Georgetown University, September 2003.
23. The Dalai Lama's decision not to accept this invitation has been characterized as one of the most important missed opportunities of the post-1978 era; see for example, Goldstein (1997: 90). Considered in light of the circumstances of the day, however, this seems doubtful since, by the end of 1989, those who had engineered the invitation were themselves purged from their positions of power.

24. Yan Minfu was unusually open to engagement with the Dalai Lama. During a private gathering at the Panchen Lama's residence in Beijing in the late 1980s, Yan even proposed that the United Front's name be changed to reflect the changing times. Arjia Rinpoche, personal interview, San Francisco, August 18, 2003.
25. "Zhongyang zhengzhiju changwei taolun Xizang gongzuohui jiyao" (Minutes of Central Politburo Standing Committee Discussion of Tibet Work). This document is commonly referred to as "the turning point document" (*zhuanzhexing wenjian*).
26. In Chinese, *shouhaizhe xintai*.
27. These included, for example, offering to meet Li Peng during his December 1991 visit in New Delhi. In a speech at Yale, the Dalai Lama also proposed to visit Tibet himself.
28. Gyalo Dondup undertook numerous trips to China throughout this period. His June 1992 was described as 'semi-private', while his mission to deliver a memorandum a year later was regarded by Tibetans as 'official', in recognition of his status as a Cabinet minister at the time.
29. For an account of these developments, see Tibet Information Network (1996).
30. Dalai Lama (1991).
31. For a detailed account of the search for the new Panchen Lama, see Hilton (1999).
32. "Outline of Dalai Lama bid revealed," *South China Morning Post*, November 3, 1998.
33. "Jiang urges US to be far-sighted on Tibet issue," *Xinhua*, November 16, 1998.
34. "Dalai Lama says informal China talks broken down," *Reuters*, December 9, 1998.
35. Officials in the United Front were leading a campaign against contacts with the Dalai Lama during this period. The two volume set *Toushi Dalai* [Seeing Through the Dalai] (Shen and Dama 1997) was published as a part of this campaign. These volumes haphazardly compile unsubstantiated and largely incoherent accusations against the Dalai Lama.
36. Arjia Rinpoche was a standing committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and deputy chairman of the state-controlled Chinese Buddhist Association. He publicly stated in March 2000 that he had left China because he could no longer uphold his responsibilities in the repressive conditions prevailing in Tibet.
37. "Fresh comments on negotiations between 14th Dalai Lama and the central government," *China's Tibet*, as cited in "Inside story of negotiations," *Xinhua*, February 2, 2002.
38. *New York Times*, September 10, 2002. This was the reason given for the visit in the Chinese media. *China Daily*, March 2003.
39. *Reuters*, September 17, 2002.
40. "A crowning sheen to China's 50-year rule?" *Tibetan Review*, 37 (October 2002): 1.
41. Tsering Shakya, RFA interview, mid-September 2002; also J. Norbu (2002).
42. The Tibetan delegation has been composed of the same four members: Lodi Gyari,...

43. See *Ming Pao*, January 28, 2003. Jiang had established this precondition during a joint Clinton-Jiang press conference in June 1998. Also, during his November 2003 visit to the US, Premier Wen Jiabao seemed to strike a conciliatory tone when he commented, "We have taken note of the recent remarks by the Dalai Lama but we still need to watch carefully what he really does;" *Washington Post*, November 23, 2003.
44. For example, the Chinese government prevailed upon the Nepalese authorities to deport 18 Tibetan refugees.
45. The Tibetan Policy Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush on September 30, 2002, as part of Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003 (H.R. 1646). The Act represents a milestone in the institutionalization of US political support for Sino-Tibetan dialogue. Under the heading "Tibet Negotiations," section 613 of the Act requires the president to encourage the Chinese government to enter into a dialogue with the Dalai Lama. The Act also provides for a presidential reporting mechanism on the specific steps taken toward "a negotiated agreement on Tibet" and the status of any discussions between Beijing and the Dalai Lama. It is noteworthy that in his formal statement on the Foreign Relations Authorization Act as a whole, President Bush expressed concern that a number of the Act's provisions "impermissibly interfere with the constitutional functions of the presidency in foreign affairs." But his statement of intention "to construe as advisory" those provisions that "direct or burden the conduct of negotiations by the executive branch" appears not to have been directed at the provisions concerning Sino-Tibetan dialogue. See statement by the President, Office of the Press Secretary, September 30, 2002.
46. In 2001 the average household income per person among the TAR's rural population (which is predominantly ethnic Tibetan) was the lowest of the entire PRC, being estimated at 1,404 yuan (US\$170); see National Bureau of Statistics (2002: 331,345). For an analysis of the rural/urban divide as shown in the 2000 census, see Fischer (2004a).
47. According to the 2000 census, most of the rapid urbanization in the Tibetan region has been due to Chinese and Chinese Muslim migration; see Fischer (2004a).
48. "China and the Dalai Lama must negotiate," *Taipei Times*, November 6, 2000. This was a development and expansion of Wang's ideas from his earlier writing; see for example, Wang Lixiong (1998).
49. Personal interview, anonymous official source, Washington, D.C., June 12, 2003.
50. There are indications that this view has begun to win supporters among the centrist reformers within the Party. The receptiveness of the Party's centrists to the possibility of renewed engagement has been suggested by Pan Yue's reported public espousal of talks with the Dalai Lama. See Chinaaffairs.org, August 9, 2002. For a discussion of centrist reformers, see Zhong (2004).
51. In Chinese, *daguo xintai*. Medeiros and Fravel (2003).
52. After the strategic alignments of the Cold War came apart, the first tentative steps toward Sino-Indian rapprochement were taken, leading to the diplomatic breakthroughs of the 1990s.

53. The outlining of a strategic partnership initiative in January 2004 signaled India's emergence as a strategic ally of the US. "US boosts ties with India, pushes defense and trade initiatives," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 January 2004.
54. US Council on Foreign Relations Task Force Report, as cited in "China, India competing for influence: US Council," *The Times of India*, May 23, 2003.
55. Van Praagh (2003).
56. US National Intelligence Council projection, as cited in "India to be a major power by 2015," *The Times of India*, December 6, 2003.
57. The best known example is the 2001 crackdown on the Serthar Buddhist Institute, a Tibetan Buddhist colony in eastern Tibet. An estimated eight thousand devotees were forcibly evicted and two thousand retreat huts were demolished, while the abbot Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was held incommunicado.
58. Personal interview, Washington D.C., May 7, 1999.
59. Pan Yue's recent article on the need to transform the CCP's attitude toward religion (Pan Yue 2001) sparked energetic discussions both in the Party and in the wider public.
60. This fifth department is commonly referred to as the "combined department," or *zonghe chu*. The sixth department within the Second Bureau manages religious affairs (*zongjiao chu*). Of the four departments assigned to Tibetan affairs, two handle foreign-related issues while the other two handle domestic ones.
61. "Leading small groups" have also been established for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao, as well as for national security. See Medeiros and Fravel (2003).
62. Zhu Xiaoming argued that the Middle Way doctrine was a three-step plan toward independence; first, to unify the entire Tibetan region; second, to achieve autonomy for the region; and third, to separate from China.
63. The Dalai Lama formally made this authorization in May 1998.
64. A recent elaboration of this point was made in an article in *China's Tibet*: "Strictly speaking there would have no 'Tibet issue' in the world, just as there have been no 'Washington issue' or 'New York issue.'" This statement appeared in Hua Zi, "What is the real intention of the United States," as quoted in "Bylined article refuting US report on Tibet," *Xinhuanet*, June 9, 2003.
65. Some Tibetan areas were controlled by Chinese warlords, while many others were governed by independent tribal chieftains and local rulers. However, even at that time all of these areas maintained uninterrupted relations with Lhasa through religious and cultural ties.
66. This was also the Chinese reply to the Tibetan delegates in the early 1980s; see D. Norbu (2001: 322).
67. The issue of socio-economic differences was already being raised prior to the signing of the 17 Point Agreement in 1951; Phuntsok Takla, personal interview, Dharamsala, February 3, 1993. The point was repeated during the talks of the early 1980s; see D. Norbu (2001: 322).
68. See, for example, "Dalai tuixing 'Da Zangqu' qitu weibei Xizang renmin yiyuan," *Tibet Daily*, August 21, 2002.
69. Li (2003b).

70. For example, in a joint petition to the Central Party Committee, a group of Tibetan cadres from Qinghai and Gansu exhaustively argued the benefits of consolidating the existing autonomous areas into a single administrative entity. Petition on file with the authors.
71. Derong Tsering Dondup (1995: 222).
72. The equivalent Tibetan term is *zhing-chen dang rang-skyong-ljongs lnga*.
73. Song (1998:67). This point has also been made by Chinese analysts based inside China, including former political strategist Wu Jiaxiang.
74. In fact, there are indications that the centralization of power is increasing. For example, Jiang Zemin's order to amend the 1984 Regional National Autonomy Law focused on strengthening the central state's ability to implement its ongoing Western Development strategy. See Saunders (2001).
75. "White Paper on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet," *Xinhua*, May 23, 2004.
76. According to Bo Guili, deputy chair of the National County Level Administrative Management Research Association, the "structural reforms" of the past twenty years have been, in essence, an attempt to reform the high concentration of power in the structure of management and to establish a reasonable system for power-sharing. Also see Wang Yi (2003).
77. "Zhongguo sheng ji jianzhi keyi she wushi – liushi ge," *Zhongguo Zhanlue*, January 30, 2004, vol.1.
78. There are indications that the new central leadership is reviewing proposals to overhaul the regional administrative system; see Li (2003a).
79. For example, Liu (2002). Also see Wu Jiaxiang (2001). Formerly a prominent advocate of renewed authoritarianism, Wu now argues that, in order to democratize, China's political structure must first be transformed into a federal system.
80. Sperling (2002).
81. Hill and Gaddy (2003).
82. On the impact of the Chinese migration patterns, see Fischer (2004a).

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Background of the Tibet Conflict

Tibet has been a focus of international concerns for close to a century. Tibet's contested status as an independent state or autonomous region, the conditions prevailing within its territory—indeed, even its very borders—have all been the subject of controversy and sometimes violent struggle.

In 1911, when the Qing, China's last imperial dynasty collapsed, Tibet emerged as a *de facto* independent state. That independence was not recognized by China, nor was it formally and unambiguously acknowledged by Britain, India or any other state. Nevertheless, under the government of the Dalai Lamas, Tibet did effectively function independently of China, with the requisites generally expected of states. However, with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tibet's *de facto* independence came to an end. In October of 1950, the People's Liberation Army, already in control of Tibetan-inhabited territory outside the jurisdiction of the Dalai Lama's government, crossed the line into territory controlled by the Tibetan government; and Tibet was formally incorporated into the People's Republic of China by means of an agreement signed in May 1951. Friction, ambiguous expectations and interpretations of Tibet's status under that agreement, and the harsh and often brutal implementation of Chinese socialism in Tibetan-inhabited areas in the eastern portions of the Tibetan Plateau, all worked to spark a revolt in the 1950s that led ultimately to fighting in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, and the flight of the Dalai Lama and well over 100,000 Tibetans into exile, mostly in India and Nepal. Subsequent decades witnessed the implementation of Chinese policies on the Tibetan Plateau that followed what often seemed like radically different directions: the establishment of a Tibet Autonomous Region in 1965, the attempt to suppress a separate Tibetan identity in the 1960s and 1970s, economic liberalization and a relative loosening of cultural and religious restrictions in the 1980s, repression of any signs of separatist tendencies and allegiance to the Dalai Lama in the 1990s, etc. Such ambiguities and apparent contradictions have served to exacerbate the Sino-Tibetan relationship.

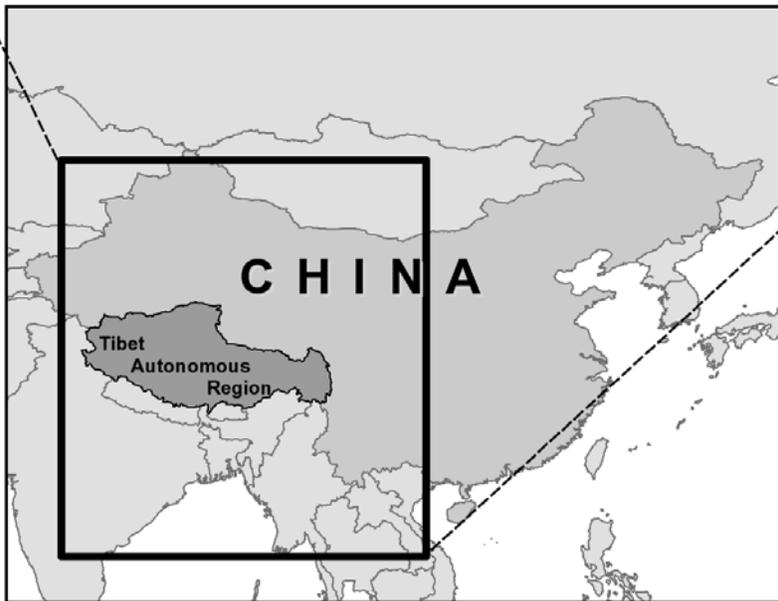
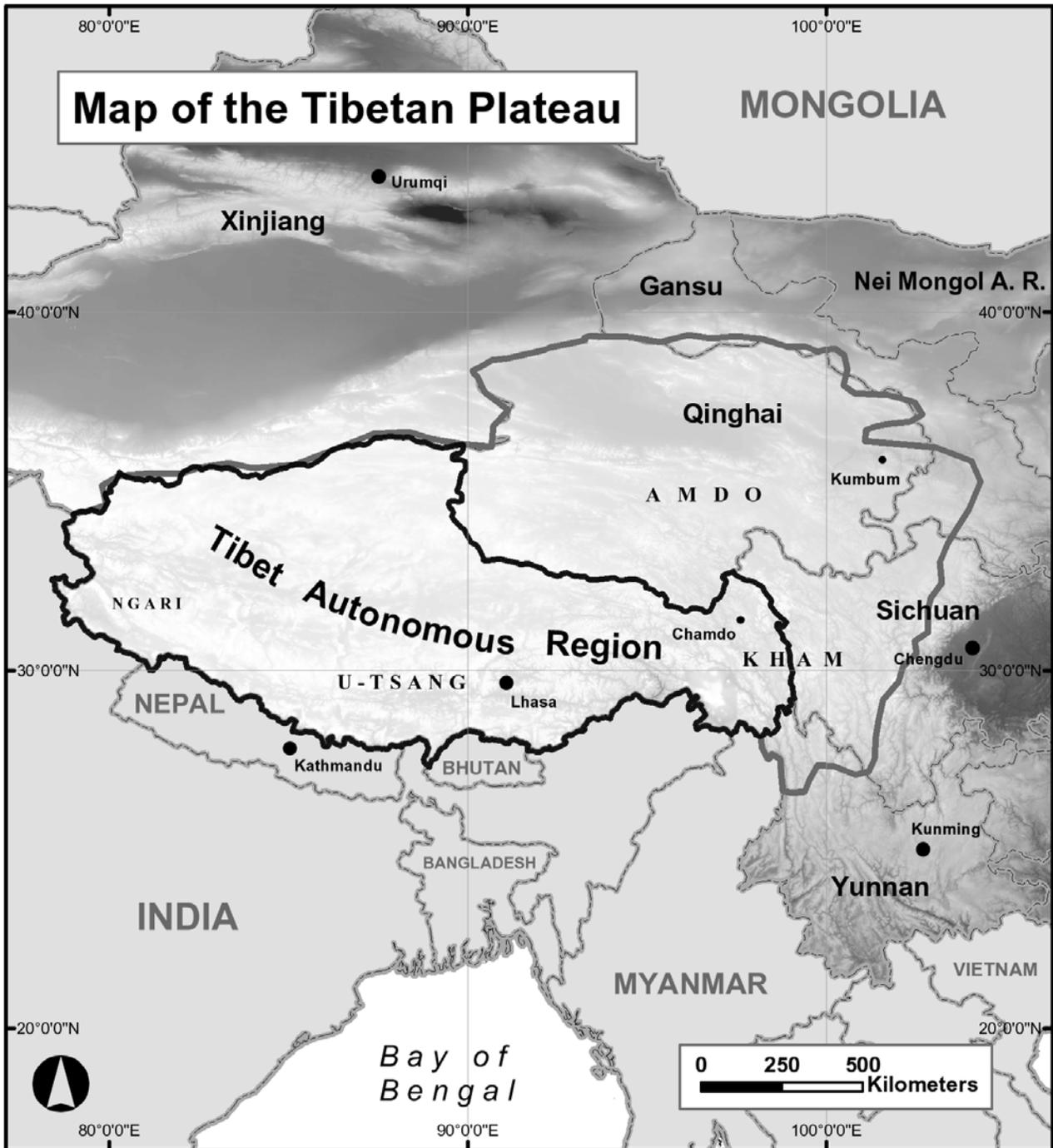
Internationalization of the Tibet issue followed upon resolutions passed by the U.N. General Assembly in 1959, 1960 and 1961, one of which explicitly supported the right of the Tibetan people to "self-determination." The result of this history has been to place legitimacy at the foundation of many of the other aspects of the Tibetan issue. Thus, more than half a cen-

ture after the incorporation of Tibet into the PRC, questions of economic development, cultural freedom, human rights, and demographics in Tibet all stand against the background of questions about the legitimacy of Chinese rule in the region. This sense of contested authority is further supported as much by China's protestations that there is no issue of Tibet (while at the same time insisting that the Dalai Lama must acknowledge that Tibet has historically been a part of China) as it is by the activities and pronouncements of Tibetan exiles relating to Tibet's right to independence or—on the part of the Dalai Lama—"real autonomy."

Attempts to resolve the Tibetan issue since the late 1970s have focused on formal and informal contacts and discussions between representatives of the Dalai Lama and his government-in-exile on the one hand, and the Chinese government on the other. These have taken place periodically over the last twenty-five years, with no real resolution. Over the last two years such contacts have revived again, but even the nature of those contacts is disputed by both parties. For more than a decade the Dalai Lama has been able to meet with several world leaders who, at his urging, have periodically called on the Chinese government to approach or respond to him in an attempt to resolve the Tibetan issue.

Since 1988, the Dalai Lama has conceded the point of Chinese sovereignty and pressed Western governments to work for the preservation of Tibetan culture; and in 1989 the Dalai Lama was accorded the Nobel Peace Prize for his activities in support of Tibet. Nevertheless, the process dialogue and confidence building remains at an impasse, and there is a lingering pessimism about any resolution of the Tibetan issue during the Dalai Lama's lifetime.

Map of the Tibetan Plateau



- Cities and Towns
- ▬ TAR Boundary
- ▬ Historical Tibet (est.)

Note: Kham region is largely divided between the TAR and Sichuan Province with smaller portions in Qinghai and Yunnan; Amdo region includes most of Qinghai with small portions also in Sichuan and Gansu.

Note: Map boundaries and locations are approximate. Geographic features and their names do not imply official endorsement or recognition by the UN.

Project Information

The Dynamics and Management of Internal Conflicts in Asia

Project Rationale, Purpose and Outline

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 Principal Researchers: Edward Aspinall (Aceh)
 Danilyn Rutherford (Papua)
 Christopher Collier (southern Philippines)
 Gardner Bovington (Xinjiang)
 Elliot Sperling (Tibet)

Rationale

Internal conflicts have been a prominent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945. Asia has witnessed numerous civil wars, armed insurgencies, coups d'état, regional rebellions, and revolutions. Many have been protracted; several have far reaching domestic and international consequences. The civil war in Pakistan led to the break up of that country in 1971; separatist struggles challenge the political and territorial integrity of China, India, Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka; political uprisings in Thailand (1973 and 1991), the Philippines (1986), South Korea (1986), Taiwan, Bangladesh (1991), and Indonesia (1998) resulted in dramatic political change in those countries; although the political uprisings in Burma (1988) and China (1989) were suppressed, the political systems in these countries as well as in Vietnam continue to confront problems of political legitimacy that could become acute; and radical Islam poses serious challenges to stability in Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India. In all, millions of people have been killed in the internal conflicts, and tens of millions have been displaced. And the involvement of external powers in a competitive manner (especially during the Cold War) in several of these conflicts had negative consequences for domestic and regional security.

Internal conflicts in Asia (as elsewhere) can be traced to three issues—national identity, political legitimacy (the title to rule), and distributive justice—that are often interconnected. With the bankruptcy of the socialist model and the transitions to democracy in several countries, the number of internal conflicts over the legitimacy of political system has declined in Asia. However, political legitimacy of certain governments continues to be contested from time to time and the legitimacy of the remaining communist and authoritarian systems is likely to confront challenges in due

course. The project deals with internal conflicts arising from the process of constructing national identity with specific focus on conflicts rooted in the relationship of minority communities to the nation-state. Here too many Asian states have made considerable progress in constructing national communities but several states including some major ones still confront serious problems that have degenerated into violent conflict. By affecting the political and territorial integrity of the state as well as the physical, cultural, economic, and political security of individuals and groups, these conflicts have great potential to affect domestic and international stability.

Purpose

The project investigates the dynamics and management of five key internal conflicts in Asia—Aceh and Papua in Indonesia, the Moro conflict in the southern Philippines, and the conflicts pertaining to Tibet and Xinjiang in China. Specifically it investigates the following:

1. Why (on what basis), how (in what form), and when does group differentiation and political consciousness emerge?
2. What are the specific issues of contention in such conflicts? Are these of the instrumental or cognitive type? If both, what is the relationship between them? Have the issues of contention altered over time? Are the conflicts likely to undergo further redefinition?
3. When, why, and under what circumstances can such contentions lead to violent conflict? Under what circumstances have they not led to violent conflict?
4. How can the conflicts be managed, settled, and eventually resolved? What are policy choices? Do options such as national self-determination, autonomy, federalism, electoral design, and consociationalism exhaust the list of choices available to meet the aspirations of minority communities? Are there innovative ways of thinking about identity and sovereignty that can meet the aspirations of the minority communities without creating new sovereign nation-states?
5. What is the role of the regional and international communities in the protection of minority communities?
6. How and when does a policy choice become relevant?

Design

A study group has been organized for each of the five conflicts investigated in the study. With a principal researcher each, the study groups com-

prise practitioners and scholars from the respective Asian countries including the region or province that is the focus of the conflict, the United States, and Australia. For composition of study groups please see the participants list.

All five study-groups met jointly for the first time in Washington, D.C. from September 29 through October 3, 2002. Over a period of four days, participants engaged in intensive discussion of a wide range of issues pertaining to the five conflicts investigated in the project. In addition to identifying key issues for research and publication, the meeting facilitated the development of cross country perspectives and interaction among scholars who had not previously worked together. Based on discussion at the meeting five research monograph length studies (one per conflict) and twenty policy papers (four per conflict) were commissioned.

Study groups met separately for the second meeting. The Aceh and Papua study group meetings were held in Bali on June 16–17, the southern Philippines study group met in Manila on June 23, and the Tibet and Xinjiang study groups were held in Honolulu on August 20–22, 2003. The third meeting of all study groups was held in Washington, D.C. from February 28 to March 2, 2004. These meetings reviewed recent developments relating to the conflicts, critically reviewed the first drafts of the policy papers prepared for the project, reviewed the book proposals by the principal researchers, and identified new topics for research.

Publications

The project will result in five research monographs (book length studies) and about twenty policy papers.

Research Monographs. To be authored by the principal researchers, these monographs present a book-length study of the key issues pertaining to each of the five conflicts. Subject to satisfactory peer review, the monographs will appear in the East-West Center Washington series *Asian Security*, and the East-West Center series *Contemporary Issues in the Asia Pacific*, both published by the Stanford University Press.

Policy Papers. The policy papers provide a detailed study of particular aspects of each conflict. Subject to satisfactory peer review, these 15,000- to 25,000-word essays will be published in the East-West Center Washington *Policy Studies* series, and be circulated widely to key personnel and institu-

tions in the policy and intellectual communities and the media in the respective Asian countries, United States, and other relevant countries.

Public Forums

To engage the informed public and to disseminate the findings of the project to a wide audience, public forums have been organized in conjunction with study group meetings.

Two public forums were organized in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with the first study group meeting. The first forum, cosponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society, discussed the Aceh and Papua conflicts. The second forum, cosponsored by the United States Institute of Peace, the Asia Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center, and the Sigur Center of The George Washington University, discussed the Tibet and Xinjiang conflicts.

Public forums were also organized in Jakarta and Manila in conjunction with the second study group meetings. The Jakarta public forum on Aceh and Papua, cosponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta, and the southern Philippines public forum cosponsored by the Policy Center of the Asian Institute of Management attracted key persons from government, media, think tanks, activist groups, diplomatic community, and the public.

In conjunction with the third study group meetings, also held in Washington, D.C., three public forums were offered. The first forum, cosponsored by the United States-Indonesia Society, addressed the conflicts in Aceh and Papua. The second forum, cosponsored by the Sigur Center of The George Washington University, discussed the conflicts in Tibet and Xinjiang. A third forum was held to discuss the conflict in the southern Philippines. This forum was cosponsored by the United States Institute of Peace.

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Policy Studies 2

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Anatomy of a Separatist Organization

Dr. Kirsten E. Schulze, London School
of Economics

Policy Studies 3

Security Operations in Aceh:
Goals, Consequences, and Lessons

Dr. Rizal Sukma, Centre for Strategic
and International Studies, Jakarta

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Beijing's Tibet Policy:
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About this Issue

This study examines the dialogue process in the Sino-Tibetan dispute from the early years of the post-Mao era to the present. It considers the latest round of discussions between Beijing and the Dalai Lama in light of the failures of the early initiatives as well as the current conditions for dialogue. In its reappraisal of the early failures, the study contends that even when Beijing appeared most inclined to enter into talks, the gap between the two sides was too wide for meaningful engagement. The study then traces the relationship between the PRC and the exiled Tibetan leadership from the early engagement of the 1980s through the protracted stalemate of the 1990s, Jiang Zemin's abortive exploratory talks of 1997–98, and on to the breakthrough of 2001, when direct contacts between Beijing and Dharamsala were re-established. The study contends that conditions for Sino-Tibetan talks have improved over time. But while factors such as the emergence of domestic critics of China's Tibet policy suggest a momentum toward engagement, developments such as the institutional restructuring of Beijing's management of Tibetan affairs signal potential obstacles to serious dialogue. The authors argue that while both sides can benefit from the current process of talking about talks, they will nonetheless find it difficult to overcome their differences on the substantive issues of autonomy and unification.

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