

# Critical Assessment of China's Vulnerabilities in Tibet

Mandip Singh



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Vulnerabilities in Tibet**

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**Institute for Defence  
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**Cover:** The cover shows PLA soldiers marching in front of Potala Palace, Lhasa. Courtesy: <http://opencanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/PLA-style.jpg>

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# I - Introduction

It is a familiar routine whenever a demonstration, protest, killing or even a self-immolation occurs in China involving Tibetans: the ‘dirty tricks’ department blames the usual suspects- the Dalai Lama clique and the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGIE), castigating them for instigating the Tibetans to self-immolate for their own narrow political gains. Since March 2011, over 90 Tibetans, mostly monks and nuns, have immolated themselves in various parts of China. Compare this to the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor on 17 December 2010, which ignited the Arab Spring. However, the Chinese have learn’t their lessons from Tiananmen and the Arab Spring- they can ill afford a similar spark to kindle Tibet, for it would come at a huge cost. So China uses a combination of force, coercion, inducement and sops to exercise control over Tibet.

The subjugation of Tibet in 1950, then comprising of large parts of the present day Qinghai, Sichuan and Xizang, has played a significant role in the process of China’s rise. It is a manifestation of its strategic policy of ‘unification’ of its lost territories.<sup>1</sup> China has viewed Tibet as its vassal state that paid tribute to the ‘Son of Heaven’, the Emperor of China. When the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) marched into Tibet in 1950, Mao was only beginning to avenge the ‘Century of Humiliation’ that was heaped on it after the Nanjing massacre of 1849. Later, in 1978, when Deng ‘opened up’ China, he realised that the key to China’s dream of re-establishing the Middle Kingdom lay in becoming powerful. He proposed the famous ‘Four Modernisations’ which became the

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<sup>1</sup> David M Finklestein, ‘China’s National Military Strategy Revisited’ paper presented at Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, 2006, p. 108 . He quotes General Chi Haotian as saying that ‘basic objectives of China’s national defense are to “solidify the defensive capacity, resist foreign invasion, and safeguard the unification and security of the country”?’

mantra and guiding philosophy of the Chinese leadership for successive generations of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Today, the Chinese economy is growing an average 10 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since 2000. In 1978, when China opened to economic reform, the US economy was 31.5 times that of China. By 2001, the gap had closed to 7.5 times and in 2010 its GDP was a staggering 4.5 trillion dollars, just a third of the US and still growing. The foreign exchange reserves have exceeded \$3200 billion and in 2009 it surpassed Japan as the second largest economy in the world. The official defence budget was \$8 billion in 1995, \$30 billion in 2005 and has gone up to over \$106 billion in 2012. Such figures lend credibility to China's growing economic and military power.

As the growth figures began to ring alarm bells in capitals across the world, Chinese spin doctors coined the 'peaceful rise' theory. Zheng Bijian, a former Vice-President of CPC Central Party School and Hu Jintao's diplomatic advisor, was cornered in 2003 to answer Western proponents of the 'China Threat Theory' who believed that China would challenge the international order and rise through territorial expansion and muscle power. Zheng unveiled this theory to assuage the fears of the Western world stating that, 'China would integrate with the world order instead of challenging it' essentially to assuage the fears of the Western world. Zheng assured the world that:

The past 25 years have been quite extraordinary. Our biggest achievement is to have realised that peace and rise, which look quite contradictory, can actually be integrated. In the past, the rise of a big power often involved toppling the international order and a threat to peace. China breaks the rule.<sup>2</sup>

Zheng Bijian, April 2004

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<sup>2</sup> See *'China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997-2004'* compiled by John L. Thornton, Chair of the Board, The Brookings Institution, June 2005 available at <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/events/20050616bijianlunch.pdf>. (Accessed September 26, 2012).

But the ‘peaceful theory’ doesn’t cut ice with China’s post independence strategic culture. In fact, it has been somewhat of an enigma. To avenge its ‘Century of Humiliation’, China has not hesitated to go to war even when internally it has been relatively weak. In 1950, China went to the Korean Peninsula in support of the Communist regime in Korea; barely a year after Mao had overthrown the Nationalists and won the revolution in the country. In fact, the Chinese Army had entered Tibet and Mao was on a campaign to integrate the minorities in Tibet and Mongolia while the war raged in Korea. In 1962, China attacked India immediately after the disastrous ‘Great Leap Forward’ (1958-61), which caused widespread famine and food shortages as Mao attempted to change China from an agrarian based economy to an industrial one with catastrophic consequences. Again in 1969, China confronted the USSR in the Ussuri River crisis, which snowballed into a near nuclear exchange, soon after the tumultuous and despised ‘Cultural Revolution’ (1966-69) in which Chinese society was deeply scarred by religious persecution, forced indoctrination and violence. Even in 1979, China attacked Vietnam and suffered humiliation, despite having embarked on a policy of economic liberalisation and development, just a year earlier, in 1978. Scholars contend that, paradoxically, China seeks peace when it is strong and will go ahead with the ‘reunification of lost territories’.<sup>3</sup> As China developed ‘peacefully’, so did Tibet. But the development has been one sided, benefiting the state and not the Tibetan people. Most of the development has been focussed on creation of infrastructure to exploit Tibet’s vast mineral resources and enable the PLA to use military force whenever China wants to use muscle to resolve the border issue with India.

Tibet has been a major issue in India – China relations. Ever since Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, China has looked at India with suspicion. Over the years, India’s policy on Tibet has been

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Huang Jing, LKY School Of Public Policy, Singapore, in discussion at IDSA, September 19, 2011.



unwavering. India recognises that Tibet is a part of China and that the Dalai Lama is a revered guest in India. India has assured China that it will not permit its land to be used for anti- China activities by the Tibetan people settled in India. Chinese policy on Tibet on the other hand has seen significant changes. It has vacillated from being a geo-political security concern in the early 1950s to becoming an economic security concern post 2000. In the period between the World Wars, Tibet was a ‘buffer’ state separating the Great Powers, a pawn in the Great Game. Mao was convinced that Britain wanted to ultimately use Tibet as the base for conquest of China. Today, Tibet is a source of abound mineral wealth and water for the Chinese industrial complex and the millions of Chinese people that live along the banks of the rivers that flow out of Tibet towards coastal China. China and India have fought a bloody war over the border dispute concerning Tibet. While India and China are talking on a peaceful resolution of the dispute, China has ramped up infrastructure, roads, railways, airports, logistics and communications in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). After 2006, China has raised the ante on Arunachal Pradesh (ALP), calling it “Southern Tibet” and escalated tension by raising pin-pricks on the ALP issue; protesting against the visit of Indian Prime Minister to ALP or even the Dalai Lama to Tawang etc. The fact that China has resolved its land borders with 12 out of 14 neighbours is not lost to the Indian strategists. Presently, China is focussed on ‘unification of territories’ at sea - Taiwan, South China Sea and Japan. The resolution of land borders is a matter of time. The implications on India are clear in the sense that it is prepared to face any eventuality in this region. The ‘two front theory’ is an outcome of the militarisation and internationalisation of the border dispute all along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and in particular, in ALP.

The Sino-Indian discourse in recent years mainly centres on the rise of China and its explosive economic growth, its aggressive foreign policy and massive military modernisation. There is no dearth of research work on China’s strength and power. However, there is little work on China’s vulnerabilities. Tibet and the Tibetan people will play a key role in any Sino-Indian conflict in future.

The aim of this paper is to study and analyse China's vulnerabilities in Tibet from three essential perspectives; firstly, the socio-economic perspective involving the Tibetan people, their livelihood, religion and culture; secondly, the geographical perspective which looks at terrain, lines of communication including roads, railways and air, and thirdly; a geo-political perspective concerning the immediate neighbourhood of Nepal and Bhutan. Such a study will provide essential inputs to policy planners, strategists and thinkers at the strategic level to exploit these vulnerabilities. I must confess that the inputs for my study have been largely from secondary sources and there is a distinct bias of research from Western and Tibetan sources. Very little is forthcoming on Tibet in the open domain from China or Chinese sources. I have also been somewhat handicapped by my lack of knowledge of Mandarin and ground knowledge of Tibet which I have not been able to visit.

The paper has been discussed under the following broad themes:

- I- Tibet: The Historical Background
- II- The 'Trust Deficit' - the Socio-economic Dimension of China's Vulnerability in Tibet.
- III- Latent Tibetan Militancy
- IV- Vulnerability in Lines of Communication
- V- Vulnerability in the Neighbourhood
- VI- Overall Assessment



# I - Tibet: Historical Background

For most part of its history, Tibet remained isolated from the world, literally, being located at the 'roof' of the world. Its relationship with the Chinese Empire was somewhat ambiguous, particularly after the Mongols came to rule China, with the Chinese Emperors preferring to seek tribute from Tibet and leave the rest to their own devices. Buddhism travelled across the Himalayas from India in the seventh century and became deeply rooted in the Tibetan people, transforming Tibet into a Buddhist state. The arrangement of governance was also one of mutual convenience. The Dalai Lama became the spiritual and temporal head of the Tibetan people with military protection from the Manchu Emperor, a kind of Patron-priest relationship<sup>4</sup>. India-Tibet relations go back several centuries and have their roots in an active religious intercourse. While Buddhism took roots in Tibet, the Mansarovar Lake and Mount Kailash, two revered places of Hindu worship remain in Tibet. There was hardly any other linkages save the old Silk route which was an important artery for trade from Central Asia to China. Maharaja Zorawar Singh, the Dogra General of Maharaja Ranjit Singh launched expeditions in the early 19th century to Lhasa which were of little consequence. It was the Younghusband Expedition in 1904-5 that truly opened Tibet to the world. In 1911, the Manchus were overthrown by the revolution spearheaded by Sun-Yat-Sen and within its wake, the Tibetans expelled Chinese Imperial

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<sup>4</sup> Maj Gen Sheru Thapliyal, 'Tibet: The Real Issue' *Indian Defence Review* Issue: 22(4) October-December 2007, November 02, 2007. He says, 'A warrior nation had turned pacifist. Mongols conquered Tibet in thirteenth century and the Tibetan Lamas went into an arrangement with the Mongol rulers known as Cho Yon, meaning Patron-Priest relationship. The Lama became the spiritual and temporal head in Tibet, albeit with foreign support. The concept of the Dalai Lama, which was Mongolian in origin, also came into being during this time. Tibet's troubles seem to have started with the Lama getting used to ruling with foreign support. The concept of national security was totally neglected with far reaching consequences in 1950-51'.

troops stationed in Tibet. Post 1911 and through both the World Wars, Tibet remained a pawn in the Great Game that was played by Western powers with Britain using Tibet as a buffer between Communist USSR and its expansion into British India. Tibet thus remained an independent state from 1911 till Mao sent the PLA into Tibet in 1950. Ironically, Mao justified the capture of Tibet to the historically ambiguous nature of the relationship between Tibet and China.

Nehru had romantic and idealist notions of India and China as two great Asian civilisations that would forge a common destiny and promote world peace in the 20th century.<sup>5</sup> He, therefore did not show concern or protest when Chinese Communists marched into Tibet in 1950, except provide a few outdated small arms and accord permission to the US to carry out aerial missions in Tibet. Once China gained a stranglehold on Tibet, the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 where he was welcomed and settled in Dharamshala. After that, relations with China deteriorated and culminated in the 1962 war.

Tibet has been a very sensitive issue for the Chinese. The presence of the Dalai Lama and his 120,000 followers in India since he fled to India in 1959, is a constant source of friction. Besides, the border dispute of over 38,000 square kilometres (kms) in Aksai Chin in Ladakh, 2000 square kms in Barahoti in the Central sector and 90,000 square kms in Arunachal Pradesh, all along the present day TAR-India border, is a major bone of contention between the two Asian neighbours. Having gone to war in 1962 over the contentious border issue, and experienced face-offs in 1967 in Nathula and 1986 in Somdurong Chu, the centrality of Tibet in the relations between these nuclear powers cannot be overemphasised. More so, recent acts of belligerence by the Chinese and massive development of infrastructure along the Sino-Indian border are a cause of concern for India.

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<sup>5</sup> Rajiv Sikri, 'Tibet Factor in India-China relations', *Journal for International Affairs*, 64(2) 2011, p. 57.

## II - The ‘Trust deficit’- Socio-Economic Dimension of Vulnerability in Tibet

*“There’s something really hollow about the system, and we’re seeing it right now in Tibet... Heavy-handed Leninist policies are evident in many areas in China. They’re just more visible in Tibet.”*

*Chris McNally, ‘Tibet Unrest Signals Deeper problems’*

*Honolulu, March 21, 2007<sup>6</sup>*

In broad terms Chinese strategy in Tibet hinges on the following issues:

- Control of territory – Ensure the territorial boundaries of TAR are secured, inviolable and integrated to the Mainland.
- Economic resources of Tibet – The vast untapped resource potential of Tibet contributes to the growth, economy and progress of China.
- Availability of water – Since TAR is the source of all major rivers that flow into South Asia, South East Asia and the territories to the West, China seeks to control this vital resource to compensate its own critical water shortages in the North and North West of China.

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<sup>6</sup> Chris McNally, an East-West Centre researcher in an article, ‘Tibet Unrest Signals Deeper Problems’, March 21, 2007. at <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/news-center/east-west-wire/tibet-unrest-signals-deeper-problems> (Accessed on September 6 2011).

It is quite evident that any such strategy is unlikely to be people friendly and quite naturally, bound to stir an insider-outsider problem.<sup>7</sup>

## **Tibet Work Forums**

Having consolidated itself in Tibet by 1960, Mao spent the next two decades establishing the hold over the party in China and elsewhere. The disastrous Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, skirmishes with USSR and war with Vietnam diverted Chinese attention from Tibet. Tibet was ruled with an iron hand and the party went about its task of assimilating Tibet with the mainland with missionary zeal. The end of 70s ushered in a period of liberalisation under Deng Xiaoping. The Chinese Government established the Tibet Work Forum, the first forum for policy formulation towards the development in Tibet. The First and Second Forums (1984) were influenced by party moderates such as Hu Yaobang and set out relatively liberal policies for Tibet work. The Third Tibet Work Forum, (1994) post Tiananmen and large-scale demonstrations in the 1980s, made major changes in China's Tibet Policy. The leadership felt the Tibet policy was too liberal and made too many concessions to Tibetan nationalists. It ruled out the possibility of any 'Tibetan-ised' form of development and enforced, instead, a policy of assimilating and integrating Tibet into the wider economic and cultural model of the People's Republic of China (PRC). With China embracing the policy of fast-track economic development and 'opening up', this policy resulted in a massive influx of Chinese Han migrant workers and entrepreneurs into Tibet. The leadership also replaced its moderate policies of encouraging Tibetan culture, religion and participation of Tibetans in government and the economy by enforcing new laws on religion and providing job opportunities to the Tibetans. The consequences were immediate: political repression; tighter internal security, longer

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank Professor Sujit Datta , Gandhi Chair at Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, New Delhi for his comments and views .

sentences for political offences, increased control over monasteries and nunneries, and intensified political education in schools. Officials at the Third Work Forum described the Tibetan independence movement as a snake, and their attempts to 'cut off the serpent's head' led to restrictions on the spread of Buddhism and a political campaign to destroy the religious as well as the political standing of the Dalai Lama. The Fourth Tibet Work Forum provided a central mandate for the policies currently being implemented and endorsed the general policies decided at the Third Forum and carried them forward.<sup>8</sup>

The emphasis of the Fifth Tibet Work Forum, held in January 2010, was on plans for 'leap forward development,' intended to bring levels of income and other economic indicators into line with those in other parts of the PRC. The large-scale extraction of resources and the strengthening of the state's authority and control over Tibetan areas underpin China's ambitious 'Western Development Strategy'(WDS) which has now been in place for a decade. The Fifth Tibet Work Forum emphasised the scientific concept of development, comprehensively building a moderately prosperous society, a need to build a national ecological security barrier and achieve sustainable development, all this while ensuring national unity, social stability, safeguard to national security and creation of a favourable international environment.<sup>9</sup> The issue of Tibet's ecology and waters also took centre stage as it was important to protect China's influence and control over Tibet's water supply, which is of critical importance to the highly water-dependent societies inside Tibet and millions of people in Asia. President Hu Jintao stated: 'It is all the more necessary to pay attention to turning Tibet into an important national security screen, an important

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<sup>8</sup> 'Top-level meeting in Beijing sets strategy on Tibet', January 29, 2010, International Campaign for Tibet, at <http://www.tibetnetwork.org/node/826> (Accessed on September 8, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> *Chinese News*, January 22, 2010 . Also see <http://www.cn-news.info/?p=3> for more details on the Fifth Work Forum.



strategic resources reserve base.’ The sustainable management of Tibet’s water is increasingly becoming a serious security issue in the region and leading to tensions due to China’s economic and environmental policies. However, these Work Forums have not achieved the desired aim of ‘assimilating’ the Tibetan people. According to Professor Dibyesh Anand, ‘The problem with Tibet Work Forums is that they do not address political issues.’<sup>10</sup>

## **Growth Indicators in TAR**

The Central Government has been providing huge amount of aid to Tibet since 2001. During the 10th Five-Year Plan period (2001-05) alone, it allocated 37 billion Yuan (\$5.4 billion ) to Tibet in subsidies and 32.2 billion Yuan (\$4.5 billion ) to 117 projects.<sup>11</sup> In 2011, official figures report that, the Chinese government had earmarked 310 billion Yuan for 188 development projects in Tibet since 2001. Of this, 200 billion Yuan (\$29.3 billion) has been allotted in various kinds of subsidies, with an annual average growth rate of 20 per cent, and 110 billion Yuan (16.1 billion dollars) has gone to fixed assets investment, including construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.<sup>12</sup>

With the assistance of the Central Government, Tibet has been able to maintain a double-digit growth in terms of GDP for 17 straight years, outpacing the national average. Jin Shixun, director of the Tibet Autonomous Regional Development and Reform Commission (TARDRC) said that in the past nine years, Tibet has achieved the fastest social and economic development and the Tibetan people have improved their living standard most

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<sup>10</sup> Dr Dibyesh Anand , Associate Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Westminster University, in a talk delivered at the IDSA, January 13, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Barry Sautman, June Teufel Dreyer, ‘ Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development, and Society in a Disputed Region, *ME Sharpe*, New York, p. 140, 2006

<sup>12</sup> Focus on Tibet, available at [www.chinaview.cn](http://www.chinaview.cn) , January 25, 2010, (Accessed September 10, 2011).

substantially. According to the Fifth Aid-Tibet Work Conference, Development, Literacy, Health and Public utilities have improved manifold since the 1950s. There has been a massive influx of money to build infrastructure – highways, railways and power projects.<sup>13</sup> GDP has increased 30 times since 1950. Life expectancy has increased from 35.5 years in 1950 to 67 years. Literacy rates are up from 2 per cent to 30 per cent and the per capita income has doubled in five years from 2078 Yuan in 2005 to 4138 Yuan in 2010.

Notwithstanding these indicators, there continues to be a ‘trust deficit’ between the Chinese Government and the Tibetan people. Despite huge investments by the Chinese Government in Tibet, the vast majority of Tibetans remain severely disadvantaged both socially and economically by the inadequate provision of education, welfare and healthcare, and marginalised by the influx of Chinese migrants attracted by these strategies. The implementation of policies to settle Tibetan nomads and to resettle Tibetans in towns, is now threatening the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people. The Chinese policies of development, which are based on an urban industrial model in an area that is predominantly rural, are counter-productive; they have increased rather than closed the gap between urban and rural, rich and poor, Chinese and Tibetan, and have degraded Tibet’s fragile ecosystem.<sup>14</sup>

I argue that this ‘trust deficit’ is a collective impact of a number of issues of social and religious significance which have been neglected by the Chinese Government. No amount of money inflow or economic progress will win over the Tibetan people. These key issues are; Demographic aggression or Hanisation; Socio – economic inequalities like wage discrimination, unemployment and denial of equal opportunities and; Religious intolerance.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> ICT report, ‘Tracking the Steel Dragon’ available at [www.savetibet.org/documents/reports/trackingtheesteeldragon](http://www.savetibet.org/documents/reports/trackingtheesteeldragon), (Accessed September 28, 2011).

## Hanisation of Tibet

The invasion of Tibet by the PLA which commenced in 1950, ostensibly to integrate Tibet with the mainland, culminated in violent attacks and rebellion in 1959. While no official Chinese records or documents are available for the loss of life, livestock and property, during this period, there is sufficient proof and evidence cited by emigrants of Tibet of terrible repression and savagery inflicted by the PLA on the Tibetan people. Some term it as 'genocide'. The ingrained prejudice against the minorities is a historical truth and Han always treated the minorities with mistrust and disdain<sup>15</sup>. The major policy that the Chinese pursued once Tibet was subjugated was to change its demography. Mao is quoted as saying, 'Tibet covers a large area but is thinly populated. Its population should be increased from the present two or three million to five or six million and then to over 10 million.' This was done by engineering large scale migration of Han Chinese into Tibet with the ultimate aim of reducing Tibetans to a minority in their own land. Clearly Mao wanted to 'Hanise' Tibet.<sup>16</sup> Conflicting reports of population of TAR are available through a number of sources. Official Chinese Government figures are 2.62 million (2000 census) of Tibetans in

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Parenti, 'Friendly Feudalism; the Tibet Myth' at <http://www.michaelparenti.org/Tibet.html> (Accessed September 03, 2011). Parenti writes, 'Chinese cadres in Tibet too often adopted a supremacist attitude toward the indigenous population. Some viewed their Tibetan neighbours as backward and lazy, in need of economic development and "patriotic education." During the 1990s Tibetan Government employees suspected of harbouring nationalist sympathies were purged from office, and campaigns were launched to discredit the Dalai Lama. Individual Tibetans reportedly were subjected to arrest, imprisonment, and forced labour for attempting to flee the country, and for carrying out separatist activities and engaging in political "subversion." Some arrestees were held in administrative detention without adequate food, water, and blankets, subjected to threats, beatings, and other mistreatment.'

<sup>16</sup> Renmin Ribao, November 22, 1959, at <http://Tibet.net/en/index.php?id=152rmenuid=11>, (Accessed on October 02, 2011).

TAR,<sup>17</sup> but the Dalai Lama's office disputes the official figure and believes that 7.5 million Chinese live alongside six million Tibetans in TAR. The Dalai Lama's office figures seem exaggerated as they include the entire erstwhile state of Tibet. However, in Amdo (Qinghai) and Kham (Sichuan) the Han have already outstripped the locals.<sup>18</sup> Asia Watch in its report in 1990 has disagreed with these figures of 7.5 million given by TGIE but agrees that the migration has been sizeable. Robert McCorquodale and Nicholas Orosz have in a report concluded that, 'a very significant transfer of Chinese to Tibet has taken place since 1949-59.'<sup>19</sup> The report quotes Asia Watch Report 1990 that, 'majority of population in Lhasa is clearly Chinese.' The report adds, 'in essence, the authorities appear to be applying a discriminatory policy barring Tibetans from coming to Lhasa, while placing no restriction whatever on Chinese migration into the city..... a professionally capable and strategically placed Chinese population seems to be the key element in the Chinese Government's plans for the integrated and military development in Tibet.'<sup>20</sup> In June 1987, Deng-Xiaoping admitted that, the Chinese were being encouraged to move to Tibet as the regions two million population is inadequate to develop its resources.<sup>21</sup> Venting his fears at the National People's Congress in 1987, the late Panchen Lama said, 'The expense of keeping one Chinese in Tibet is equal to that of four in China. Why should Tibet spend its money to feed them? ... Tibet has suffered greatly because of the policy of sending a large number of useless people.'

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<sup>17</sup> Tibet Facts and Figures 2002 at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/tibet-english/rkmz.htm>, (Accessed February 10, 2012). Also see UNSCAP Tibet Basic Data at <http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/chinadata/tibet.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> Robert McCorquodale and Nicholas Orosz '*Tibet, the position in International Law: Report of the Conference of International Lawyers on Issues Relating to Self-Determination and Independence for Tibet*', London January 6-10, 1993, p 182. The report cites figures of the Tibetan view of 7.5 million Han and six million Chinese and also cites Asia Watch Report of 1990 which disagrees with the figures of the Tibetans.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 185.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Reuters Report*, Beijing June 30, 1987. Deng Xiaoping during his meeting with ex US President Jimmy Carter, June 29, 1987.

The Chinese population in Tibet started with a few thousand and today it has multiplied manifold.<sup>22</sup>

So how has this ‘demographic aggression’ or ‘Han migration’ affected the average Tibetan in Tibet?

To encourage migration from mainland China, the Chinese Government announced a slew of attractive benefits and concessions for its employees and settlers. According to Chinese economists, ‘The personnel brought in from developed regions cannot be expected to live on the local fare of tsampi (roasted barley flour) and raw meat. They need good housing, hospitals, cinemas and schools for their children.’<sup>23</sup> The benefits to migrant were : housing, healthcare, special leave to China, cultural and educational facilities, high altitude allowance; 87 per cent higher wages than in China, special tax exemptions and loans at low interest rates. Above all, the one child policy did not apply to Chinese settled in Tibet.<sup>24</sup>

However, to be fair to China’s Tibet Policy, Tibet was given favourable treatment. Tibetan businesses enjoyed a preferential tax rate of three per cent lower than mainland China, farmers and herdsmen were exempted from taxes and administrative charges. Banks have enjoyed a preferential interest rate of two points lower than the mainland as well as low rate on insurance premiums. All this has ensured a double digit growth for TAR for a decade.<sup>25</sup> Has

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<sup>22</sup> Speech on the situation in Tibet by the Panchen Lama at a meeting of the Sub-Committee of the National People’s Congress in Beijing, March 28, 1987.

<sup>23</sup> Wang and Bai, *The Poverty of Plenty*, Macmillan Publishers, Hampshire and London 1991 p. 148. Also see ‘Briefing Paper for Travellers to Tibet (1999),’ at [http://www.tchrd.org/publications/topical\\_reports/travellers\\_to\\_tibet-1999/](http://www.tchrd.org/publications/topical_reports/travellers_to_tibet-1999/), (Accessed October 03, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Robert McCorquodale and Nicholas Orosz, op cit, p. 185.

<sup>25</sup> Wang Lixiong, ‘A True “Middle Way” Solution to Tibetan Unrest’, *China Security*, 4(2) 2008, p. 28.

this benefited the Tibetans? In one decade (2000-09) in Tibet, the average savings in rural China were pegged at 1160 Yuan . Yet for Tibet this is 1080 Yuan, well below the national average.<sup>26</sup> Even in business, sales in state owned and individual ( largely Han owned in cities) enterprises during the period 2000 to 2009 multiplied five times, but ‘others’- smaller/household businesses owned by the common people just trebled over the same period.<sup>27</sup> Large businesses like wholesale and retail , hotels , restaurants etc. multiplied four times over the last decade (2000-09) but ‘others’-small business, largely household and small shops stagnated<sup>28</sup>. It may be argued that overall Tibet has benefited but the fruits have not trickled down to 76.2 per cent of the population that is largely rural as per 2009 figures.<sup>29</sup> During his visit to Lhasa, Professor Dibyesh Anand observed that there were no Tibetan shop owners in Lhasa, only Han and Hui. The smiling and happy Tibetans holding latest mobile phones were only those seen on large posters in Lhasa. The modern Tibetan village was located behind those posters in Lhasa...and that is where Tibetans lived in extreme poverty.<sup>30</sup> Natural growth rate has dropped by 40 per cent in Tibet over the period 1990-09, with birth rate also dropping by 40 per cent over the same period, indicating economic pressures are forcing people to have smaller families to earn a livelihood.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> ‘People Life by Province, Municipality and Autonomous Region’, *Tibet Statistical Year book 2010*, ch. 18-8, p. 304. National figures in Yuan for rural households are (5153.2 net income- 3993.5 living expenditure = 1159.7 savings) whereas for Tibet it is (3531.7 net income- 2451 living expenditure = 1080.7 savings).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Total Retail sales of Consumer goods by Ownership’, *Tibet Statistical Year book 2010*, ch. 12-2, p. 210.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, ch. 12-3, ‘Total Retail sales of Consumer goods by Sector’, p 211. While ‘whole sale’ figures increased from 319 Million to 1298 Million Yuan, ‘others’ stagnated at 0.3 Million Yuan.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, ch. 3-1, ‘Population and Its Composition’, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Dibyesh Anand, in a talk delivered at the IDSA, January 13, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Birth rate, Death Rate and Growth of Population’, *Tibet Statistical Year book 2010*, ch. 3-2, , p. 29.

There are reports that Tibetans have been relocated to higher reaches in Kham and Amdo areas leaving the fertile valleys for the Han. In 1959 the total area of TAR under farming was 0.2 per cent largely restricted to the river valleys. By 1991 it had increased to 0.3 per cent (almost 50 per cent) largely due to influx of migrants. However, increase in cultivable land was at the cost of pasture land forcing the nomads and the shepherds to look for pastures in higher reaches as also overuse the pastures upsetting the fragile ecology balance. More importantly, this has resulted in a drop in cropland per capita. In Ganze prefecture, for e.g. cropland increased by 4562 hectares while population increased by 255,293 thereby resulting in drop of per capita cropland from 0.17 hectares to 0.11 hectares.<sup>32</sup> In 2006, a relocation project moved 290,000 Tibetans into urban homes - almost 10 per cent of the whole Tibetan population. Critics of the location policy cited that, China had not researched its urbanisation policy and the effects it would have on employment, jobs and Tibetan culture.<sup>33</sup>

## **Socio-Economic Inequalities**

The condition of 2.21 million Tibetans out of 2.90 million, living in rural areas does not seem to have improved much over the last decade. In 2000, the average number of able-bodied and semi-able bodied labourers in a household of 6.78 persons (say 7) was 3.91 (say 4). By 2009, the average household size had marginally reduced to 6.27 but the average number of labourers barely reduced to 3.88. Assuming that, at least two persons in a family are elders and one

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<sup>32</sup> International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet, *The Relationship Between Environmental Management and Human Rights in Tibet*, A report prepared for Mrs. Fatma Zohra Ksentini, Special Rapporteur, for the study of Human Rights and the Environment pursuant to resolutions 1990/7 and 1990/27 of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, July 14, 1992, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Brent Navarro, Tibet: Assessing its Potential for China's Instability, September 15, 2007. Reference cited 'China's relocation of rural Tibetans,' September 05, 2007; from BBC News, August 13, 2007; at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6944342.stm>, (Accessed October 10, 2011).

child, the pressure on the average Tibetan family in rural areas to work seems to remain unchanged.<sup>34</sup> All adults have to work to make a living. In 1999, the average rural household saved 542 Yuan a year. A decade later the figure just doubled to 1137 Yuan.<sup>35</sup> The average urban household, largely migrants, on the other hand had an annual disposable income of 5998 Yuan in 1999 and a decade later, 13,544 Yuan<sup>36</sup> - almost 12 times the rural household, indicating a large inequality in the distribution of wealth. Wages of workers in state owned enterprises, largely held by Han and few Tibetans, remain the highest at 50,272 Yuan per annum with certain departments like Public Management and Social Organisation being the most sought after at 55,215 Yuan. In contrast, low end government jobs in urban collective owned units (cooperatives) which are largely reserved for Tibetans average 12,231 Yuan per annum, less than a quarter of state owned enterprises.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, labour remuneration accounted for two thirds of the GDP in TAR. A closer look at the 'staff and workers' reveals that these group represent upper ranking cadres and workers in public utilities or state owned enterprises. It does not include the migrant or service workers who are from the mainland for a short period of time. Thus, Tibetans have increasingly been marginalised from the areas that generate the GDP in TAR. The benefits of the increase of wages have been disproportionately captured by non-Tibetans over a period of time.<sup>38</sup> The per capita savings in 2009 in Tibet were 6445 Yuan whereas in comparison, similar provinces like Gansu (9364 Yuan) and Yunnan (8327 Yuan) have a much better record of savings, an indication of the inequality in Tibet versus other

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<sup>34</sup> 'Basic condition of Rural households', *Tibet Statistical Year book 2010*, ch. 7-15, p. 114.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, ch. 7-2, p. 94.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, ch. 3-17, pp. 47-49.

<sup>38</sup> *Asian Labour News*, February 21, 2000.



similar regions in the mainland.<sup>39</sup> The comparison with cities on the East coast would be too stark and is best avoided.

The Tibetans have largely been an agrarian society, and agriculture has been the predominant occupation. The changing economy of Tibet and the policies of the government have forced the Tibetans to change their economic model to shift focus to urban livelihood. In 1999, out of a total GDP of 107 million Yuan, the primary industry (agriculture) earned a GDP of 34.2 million Yuan (31 per cent) whereas tertiary industry, still in infancy (services, rent, hotels, etc) earned 47.4 million Yuan (44 per cent). A decade later, primary industry doubled to 63.9 million Yuan (reduced to 14 per cent in real terms) but tertiary industry multiplied six times to 240 million Yuan (increased to 54 per cent, substantiating the argument that Tibetans have been forced to abandon their traditional occupation in recent years and take to other means of livelihood.<sup>40</sup> The annual per capita income of a rural household in 2009 in Lhasa was 4149 Yuan, of which 1095 Yuan (about 26 per cent) only was from wages and salaries and as much as 2232 Yuan (53 per cent) from household business operation- an indication that wages alone are highly inadequate to sustain a rural household. In the interiors of Tibet, like Nagqu and Ngari prefectures, the income is almost entirely dependent on household business with almost no wages or salaries.<sup>41</sup>

Unemployment among the youth is a rising phenomenon. Since Mandarin is the principle medium of teaching, local Tibetans have

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<sup>39</sup> *China Year Book 2009*, ch. 9-4 and 3-4, p 318 and p. 91. The per capita savings were worked out by dividing the total savings by the total population region wise. Hence, for Tibet it was 185 million Yuan by 2.87 million population = 6445, Gansu 2462 million by 26.28 million pop = 9364 Yuan and Yunnan 3784 by 45.43 million pop = 8327 Yuan.

<sup>40</sup> *China Year book 2000*, ch. 19-1, p. 323 and *China Year book 2010*, ch. 18-1, p. 297.

<sup>41</sup> 'Per Capita annual net Income and Consumption expenditure of Rural households by Region (2009)', *Tibet Statistical Year book 2010*, ch. 7-3, p. 95. Figures for Nagqu are 3577 Yuan (per capita income), 2 Yuan (wages) and 3023 Yuan (household business) and for Ngari are 2987 Yuan, 313 Yuan and 2398 Yuan respectively.

lost out on jobs which puts Han settlers at an advantage. Tourism is a booming industry but fluency in Mandarin is a must for people to become local guides. This has effectively placed local Tibetans at a disadvantage. The entire taxi driver community is Han Chinese as taxi drivers are also supposed to be fluent in Mandarin.<sup>42</sup> Chinese migrants are offered tax concessions, leniency on work permits, bonuses and greater market opportunities.<sup>43</sup> During his visit to China in 1996, Shanker Sharan an Indian, observed, 'For strategic reasons as well as for its national resources, Chinese rulers do not soften their own grip over Tibet. Chinese logic continues to assert that even after four decades of their rule, Tibet cannot develop its own ... the situation in Tibet is – Tibetans working, Hans controlling... fear and repression have been internalised among the people.'<sup>44</sup>

The outcome of this has been the marginalisation of Tibetans in their own homeland. When communities are alienated, deprived and denied their rights, they breed dissent. As Barry Sautman says, 'The Chinese government does see economic development as a panacea to cure all problems with ethnic minorities, but economic reforms, with its attendant unemployment, inflation and corruption has set many Tibetans on edge. The potential for inter-ethnic competition that comes with the development is unsettling. Where competition is seen as unfair and occurs in a context of low ethnic interdependence as in Tibet, ethnic conflict and separation are likely to surge'.<sup>45</sup> But as long as Tibetans are without any international support, it does not worry the CPC. Yan Xuetong, a Chinese scholar says, 'If separatists abroad get no support from China's neighbours, they will become frustrated and fail. And China based separatists

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<sup>42</sup> Dibyesh Anand, op cit. Others who have visited Lhasa as tourists also concur.

<sup>43</sup> Tibet Support Group UK at [www.tibet.org/Activism/Rights/poptransfer.html](http://www.tibet.org/Activism/Rights/poptransfer.html), (Accessed September 26, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Shanker Sharan, *PTI* feature, May 25, 1996.

<sup>45</sup> Barry Sautman: 'Resolving The Tibet Question: Problems and Prospects', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 30, p. 88-111.

without international endorsement are not worth worrying about.<sup>46</sup> This emboldens the PLA and the CPC to unleash its policy on hapless Tibetans without fear of external intervention or interference. According to Barry Sautman, ‘PRC leaders are sure that troops in Tibet will contain any violence initiated by emigrant Tibetans and can accept that as long as China is not fractured, India will not abet Tibetan militancy, since it fears a two front war.’<sup>47</sup>

## Religious Intolerance

The average Tibetan is a deeply religious person. Religion has been ingrained in Tibetan society and Tibetan life, culture, festivals and beliefs centre on religion. When China annexed Tibet, 90 per cent of the Tibetans lived in the countryside, and there were only two major professions- farming and religious pursuit- tend to the land and cattle or become a monk. The Chinese policy of religious persecution and religious intolerance has left indelible scars in this deeply religious society. Samdhong Rinpoche, the Tibetan PM in exile, while speaking on the occasion of the 50 years of Tibetan occupation, summed it up, ‘Since the invasion, the Chinese have done everything possible to wipe out the Tibetan identity, culture and religious heritage. But they have not achieved anything; on the contrary, in the last 50 years, we have emerged even stronger and united in our struggle and determination to preserve our Tibetan identity, culture and religious heritage—both inside and outside Tibet’.

Kerry Dumbagh, in a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report for the US Congress notes that, while the physical infrastructure of religious institutions in Tibet appears better maintained than five years ago, there are fewer signs of religious devotion at Lhasa’s holiest sites than in the past.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Yan Xuetong, ‘Best Friends Next Door’, CD, March 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Barry Sautman, op cit. p. 91.

<sup>48</sup> Kerry Dumbagh, ‘Tibet: Problems, Prospects, and U.S. Policy’, *CRS Report for Congress*, April 10, 2008.

Controversial issues that have hurt Tibetan religious sentiments are:-

- Demonisation of the Dalai Lama : The Dalai Lama has been both the spiritual and temporal head of the Tibetans for centuries. He is at the heart of the Buddhist culture of Tibet. The Chinese Government has made all attempts to demonise and discredit the Dalai Lama as a ‘traitor’ and a ‘wolf in a sheep skin’. This has been a source of deep resentment amongst the Tibetan people.<sup>49</sup> According to Wang Lixiong, ‘To Tibetans, the Dalai Lama is not just an individual; he represents the Dalai genealogy and the system has sustained Tibet for more than five centuries.....hostility to the Dalai Lama is not simply seen as hostility to him, but is tantamount to hostility towards the entire Dalai genealogy, the entire Tibetan religious system and the whole Tibetan nation.’<sup>50</sup>
- Selection of the 11th Panchen Lama: The Chinese Government has selected their own Panchen Lama - five-year-old Gyaltzen Norbu, son of a yak herder, officially enthroned as the 11th Panchen Lama in a ceremony attended by some Tibetan monks and senior Chinese communist leaders rejecting centuries old tradition of the Dalai Lama’s choice. The Chinese have also put the ‘real’ Panchen Lama, Gedhun Cheokyi Nyima, and his family under arrest and he has never been seen since 1995.
- On August 3, 2007, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) issued a set of regulations that require all Tibetan lamas wishing to reincarnate to obtain prior government approval through the submission of a ‘reincarnation application.’ The ‘reincarnation applications’ require coming from ‘legally registered venues’ for Tibetan

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<sup>49</sup> Congressional Executive Commission on China: *Annual Report 2007*, p. 192.

<sup>50</sup> Wang Lixiong, op cit, p. 29.

Buddhism. Management Measures for the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism, proclaimed that, ‘the reincarnation of Living Buddha’s shall not be interfered or dominated by any organisation or individual abroad (read the Dalai Lama) ... the reincarnation of living Buddha’s should fulfil the application and approval procedures.’<sup>51</sup> This law attempts to ensure control over the succession of the Dalai Lama by ensuring his successor will be born in China.

- Freedom of movement of monks and nuns has been severely restricted in TAR for purposes of teaching studying or practising religion. All such moves require a lengthy process of permission, reports and approvals from the local government and prefectures.<sup>52</sup>
- Forcible patriotic education of monks and nuns in monasteries:<sup>53</sup> During the ‘monastery rectification’, many monks chose to be forced out of monasteries rather than obey

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<sup>51</sup> Claude Arpi, ‘Beijing’s unopened secret gift package to Nepal’ *DNA*, August 29, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Congressional Executive Commission on China: *Annual Report 2007*, p. 194 ‘The TAR 2006 Measures impose new requirements that eliminate freedom of movement for monks and nuns in the TAR if they travel for the purpose of teaching, studying, or practicing religion. Monks and nuns living in TAR monasteries and nunneries may not travel anywhere in the TAR for the purpose of practicing religion without carrying with them their “religious personnel identification [card]” and an unspecified form of “proof” provided by the county-level government where they live, and reporting “for the record” to the county-level government where they wish to practice religion. Monks and nuns in the TAR may not travel to another TAR prefecture to study religion without first obtaining approval from the local government in the destination prefecture, and reporting the approval to the local government in the prefecture of origin.’

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192. ‘Patriotic education (“love the country, love religion”) is an open-ended campaign to bring to an end the Dalai Lama’s religious authority among Tibetans, and that requires Tibetan Buddhists to accept patriotism toward China as a part of Tibetan Buddhism. Patriotic education sessions require monks and nuns to pass examinations on political texts, agree that Tibet is historically a part of China, accept the legitimacy of the Panchen Lama installed by the Chinese government, and denounce the Dalai Lama.’

an order to slander the Dalai Lama in public. According to Tibetan belief, cursing their teacher would take them to hell. China failed to recognise the huge influence that monks and priests have on ordinary Tibetans.<sup>54</sup>

China continues to hold a rigid stance on the issue of religion and the Dalai Lama. Chinese arguments on Tibet are underlined by intention of separatism and threat to national unity, thereby blocking all avenues of rapprochement.<sup>55</sup> Since February 2009, 21 Tibetans- 19 men and two women- set themselves ablaze protesting against China's religious repression in Sichuan and TAR. 14 out of them were clergy or former clergy persons.<sup>56</sup> Self immolation is increasingly being seen as an accepted expression of religious oppression and the harsh response by the government against such acts has only given this more popularity and publicity. Nicholas Bequelin, a senior researcher in Hong Kong for Human Rights Watch is quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that, the Chinese Government is trying to prevent incidents by strengthening controls, but too much repression and control provokes these acts suggesting a vicious circle.<sup>57</sup> According to Dibyesh Anand, the immolations

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<sup>54</sup> Wang Lixiong, op cit, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> George Fitzherbert, 'Land of Clouds', *Times Literary Supplement*, June 30, 2008, p.7. He writes, 'To engage with China's arguments concerning Tibet is to be subjected to the kind of intellectual entrapment, familiar in the Palestinian conflict, whereby the dispute is corralled into questions which the plaintiff had never sought to dispute. Tibetans complain of being robbed of their dignity in their homeland by having their genuinely loved leader incessantly denounced, and of being swamped by Chinese immigration to the point of becoming a minority in their own country. But China insistently condemns such complaints as separatism, an offence in China under the crime of 'undermining national unity', and pulls the debate back to one about Tibet's historical status. Foreigners raise questions about human rights and the environment, but China again denounces this as a foreign intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation, and pulls the debate back to Tibet's historical status.'

<sup>56</sup> ICT, Self Immolation Fact Sheet, at <http://www.savetibet.org/resource-center/maps-data-fact-sheets/self-immolation-fact-sheet> (Accessed November 20, 2011). By December 2012 the figure of self-immolations had risen to 96.

<sup>57</sup> Sharon Lafraniere, 'More Monks Die by Fire in Protest of Beijing', *New York Times*, January 9, 2012.

are by those monks and nuns who protested and were thrown out of monasteries post 2008. As per the new rules and regulations, no person with criminal record can join monasteries. Since cases were registered against these monks and they had no other place to go, they were left with little option but to immolate themselves.<sup>58</sup> The Human Rights Watch was also scathing in its report on Chinese intolerance<sup>59</sup>, ‘The Chinese authorities have not heeded the demands of Tibetans, but have instead resorted to heavy-handed tactics that can only deepen and further fuel resentment. They must respect the right of Tibetans to practice their religion and to enjoy their culture.’ Unable to find a solution to the ‘immolation problem’, Zhu Weiqun, the Head of United Front Work Department (UFD), Tibet Section and the official spokesman for Tibet wrote in the *The Study Times* (Xuexi Shibao) that, ‘Some of our current educational and administrative policies have unintentionally weakened (the minority people’s) sense of nationhood and Chinese nationalism..... The best way to achieve ‘national cohesion’ is by stopping to give them separate status as an ethnic minority on identity cards, using ethnic labels in the titles of schools and autonomous regions, and giving them privileges reserved for minorities’.<sup>60</sup> Clearly, China intends to abolish special privileges and preferential policies to its minorities, a radical policy recommendation in China’s ‘minorities policy’. This is also in violation of the ‘17-Article Agreement’ signed by the Tibetan local Government, often cited as the basis of China’s march into Tibet. It stipulates: ‘the Central Government will not change the existing political system of Tibet, nor will it change the Dalai Lama’s

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<sup>58</sup> Dibyesh Anand, Associate Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Westminster University in a talk delivered at the JNU, January 13, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘China: Address Causes of Tibet Self Immolations’, November 7, 2011, at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/07/china-address-causes-tibet-self-immolations> (Accessed November 22, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> See news video n at [www.voanews.com](http://www.voanews.com), March 02, 2012. Also see Saibal Dasgupta, *TOI*, February 24, 2012 at [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-02-24/china/31094674\\_1\\_minority-status-dalai-lama-zhu-weiqun](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-02-24/china/31094674_1_minority-status-dalai-lama-zhu-weiqun) (Accessed April 03, 2012).

inherent status and position', 'In matters relating to reforms in Tibet, there would be no coercion on the part of the central authorities, and the reform would be carried out by the Tibetan local Government of its own accord. Consultations with local Tibet leaders shall be made when the people show desire for the reform.'<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Exclusive interview with Zhu Weiqun, May 7, 2011, carried by *China's Tibet* magazine available at <http://in.china-embassy.org/eng/xzjx/t820877.htm> (Accessed April 03, 2012).



### III - Latent Tibetan Militancy

Mao's army marched into Tibet in 1950 and commenced the 'reformation' of Tibetans aimed at assimilating them into the socialist pattern of the Chinese model. The reformation process started a cycle of change which was alien to the Tibetan way of life. Land was taken away, religion was shunned, basic rights were denied to people, communes were created and atrocities were heaped on common folk to 'educate' the masses. Historically, the Tibetan elite, who exercised political control from Lhasa, had little to do with the eastern territories of Kham and Amdo. When the Chinese attacked Tibet, they first entered eastern Tibet, unleashing their policy of assimilation on Amdo and Kham. Tibetan elite, fearing loss of their status, stability and established socio-economic power advised the Dalai Lama to cooperate with the Chinese.<sup>62</sup> The Khampas and Amdowas, however took to arms. Ordinary farmers, nomads, traders and even monks joined in the struggle. In 1954, the first large scale uprising in Kham called the Kanting rebellion involved 40,000 Khampas<sup>63</sup>, who formed guerrilla bands and attacked the PLA. Severely hampered by food shortages and sickness due to high altitudes, the PLA suffered heavy casualties. In February-March 1956, 8,000 monks were besieged in Lithang monastery. The guerrillas attacked and lay to waste the Chinese garrisons of Chamdo and Lithang. According to reports, between 1954-58, 40,000 PLA soldiers were killed in eastern Tibet alone while the Khampa movement swelled in ranks to 80,000.<sup>64</sup> But till then the resistance lacked a coherent leadership.

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<sup>62</sup> See Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *CLA's Secret War In Tibet*, University Press of Kansas, Kansas 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Dawa Norbu, *'China's Tibet Policy'*, Routledge, London, p. 218.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony James Joe, *'Resisting Rebellion: the History and Politics of Counter insurgency'*, University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky ,2004, p. 85.

On June 16, 1958, the Khampas in eastern Tibet joined hands with Tibetans in central Tibet to form the Chushi Gangdrug under the charismatic Khampa trader Andrug Tashi Gompo, also called Andrugstang. The Chushi Gangdrug was a loose confederacy of guerrilla groups which were brought under a common flag and fought against the Chinese in Tibet from 1958-60. Large number of the Chushi Gangdrug were secretly trained in the US and returned to Tibet to lead guerrilla groups. The crowning achievement of the Chushi Gangdrug was when they facilitated the escape of the Dalai Lama to India in March 1959, once it became obvious that the Chinese were likely to arrest the Dalai Lama from the Potala Palace. In the ensuing rebellion post the escape of the Dalai Lama, almost 30,000 resistance members were killed in what is now called the 'Lhasa Uprising'. Ultimately, China managed to politically and militarily conquer Tibet; but to this day resistance remains within Tibet, and the Tibetan diaspora throughout the world, due to the legacy of the brave struggle of the Tibetan freedom fighters five decades ago.<sup>65</sup>

In 1960, after the death of their leader Andrugstang, the Chushi Gangdrug moved to Mustang, a semi-independent state in Nepal on the Tibet-Nepal border and set up base under a new leader General Baba Yeshe. The Chushi Gangdrug resistance army fought the Chinese till 1974.<sup>66</sup> During the period 1960-74, Nepal, India and the US provided support in training, equipment and logistics but soon these countries lost interest due to changing political environment in the region. Internal power struggle within the resistance and lack of external support brought it to an end in 1974, in the last battle with Chinese troops in Mustang. Since then it has become a political and social welfare organisation in the exiled Tibetan community.

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<sup>65</sup> Babayeva, Yuliya, *The Khampa Uprising: Tibetan Resistance against the Chinese Invasion* Honours College Theses, Paper 31. at [http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege\\_theses/31](http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/honorscollege_theses/31) (Accessed October 22, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> See Carole McGrahanan, 'Truth, Fear and Lies: Exile Politics and Arrested Histories of the Tibetan Resistance', *Cultural Anthropology*, 20(4), p. 570-600, p. 2005.

In 1987, Lhasa was rocked by pro-independence demonstrations which brought 2000 Tibetans on the streets. The Chinese used overwhelming force to quell the demonstrations and prevented it from spreading to other parts of Tibet. In 1994, a group of resistance leaders led by Lithang Athar, an old resistance leader, signed a political agreement with the Tibetan and Mongolian Affairs Office of the Taiwanese Government. The agreement stated that Tibet would be independent on Taiwan's reclamation of mainland China, and the Dalai Lama would be recognised as the sole legitimate head of Tibet.<sup>67</sup> It was a bold move to revive the resistance but the Dalai Lama and the TGIE refused to recognise this agreement. In fact, this renegade group was excommunicated and only pardoned in 2000 by the Dalai Lama. In 1996, a series of bomb explosions rocked Lhasa, which was blamed on the Chinese attempting to discredit the Tibetan people, but there was no evidence to support this theory.<sup>68</sup>

In 1998, the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), a radical youth organisation was established in India. On March 10, 1998 it gained worldwide attention when six members of the TYC embarked upon a fast unto death in New Delhi. Their aim was to draw the attention of the UN General Assembly to the Tibetan problem and demand for a rapporteur to investigate allegations of human rights abuses

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 584.

<sup>68</sup> *Tibet News Network*, March 22, 1996 reports 'The Party Headquarters is the first clearly political target in the current series of bombs in Tibet. The choice suggests that the bombers have progressed from attacking symbolic targets to hitting key centres of the Chinese administration in Tibet. The first two bombs of the current series were aimed at a little known Chinese monument dedicated to road constructors, on the western edge of the city last July. In August or early September, around the time of celebrations to mark the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region, two more bombs were reportedly placed at a fuel depot and at an electricity supply station in western Lhasa, and in January this year a device was detonated in front of the house of the Tibetan lama who led the pro-Chinese faction in the dispute over the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. So far no-one has claimed responsibility for any of the explosions, and there is no evidence to show that all the bombings were carried out by the same group.'

in Tibet; the appointment of a special envoy on Tibet; and a request that the UN should initiate a supervised plebiscite on the future of Tibet.<sup>69</sup> While the fast ended abruptly on April 26-27, 1998, by forcible eviction and forced feeding of the fasting members by the police in Delhi, Thupten Ngodup, an ex-monk and an ex-soldier, set himself alight in protest at the enforced removal of the hunger strikers and died from almost one hundred per cent burns on April 29, 1998. The death of Ngodup elicited a damning statement from the TYC, ‘The Tibetan people have sent a clear message to the world that they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of a free and independent Tibet. If the attitude and indifference and lack of support to the issue of Tibet continue, more blood will be shed in the coming days.’<sup>70</sup> It went ahead to say that ‘The Middle Path is the strategy of His Holiness and the militant struggle is ours... Maybe one day both the angles will meet.’<sup>71</sup>

### March 2008 Uprising

The March 2008 uprising brought to fore the insecurities and vulnerabilities in the Chinese policies against the Tibetans provoked by Chinese migration assimilations policies and cultural imperialism. Tsering Topgyal writes that the 2008 uprising was the most recent cycle in the long running saga of Sino-Tibetan insecurity dilemma and that unless a way is found to break out of this dilemma; Tibet could explode into another frenzy of violence and counter violence in the near future.<sup>72</sup> While the official figures of Chinese

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<sup>69</sup> Jane Ardley, *Violent Compassion: Buddhism And Resistance In Tibet Department Of Politics*, University Of Keele, Paper For The Political Studies Association-UK 50th Annual Conference, April 10-13, 2000, London.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 21, quote from the official website of the Tibetan government-in-exile – at <http://www.tibet.com> (Accessed on December 01, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid p. 22, quoted from an article ‘Tibetan self-immolation questions Dalai Lama’s middle-path’, WTNN April 30, 1998 (part 1).

<sup>72</sup> Tsering Topgyal, ‘The Insecurity Dilemma and Tibetan Uprising 2008’, *Journal Of Contemporary China*, 20(69) March, 2011, p. 183-203.

Government claimed that 18 civilians died and 382 were injured on 14 March 2008, TGIE in its fact sheet claimed that 220 Tibetans were killed, 5600 were arrested or detained, 1,294 injured, 290 sentenced and over a 1000 disappeared in the crackdown. The uprising was put down by troops of 149 Mechanised Division of Chengdu Military Region (approximately 12,000-15000 troops), Tibetan Military District which has about 60,000 troops stationed permanently in Tibet<sup>73</sup> and a large number of troops from the People Armed Police (PAP). The disproportionate use of force to quell the uprising is apparent.

Tsering argues that, 'insecure state, not exclusively weak states, embarks on state building to mitigate their insecurities. State building provokes identity insecurity in groups that do not share the identity and interests of the state, ....adversial groups resist state building to address their insecurities through ...peaceful and violent measures. This action-reaction cycle ...ends in more insecurity for both parties.'<sup>74</sup> The Tibetan dissatisfaction and anger in March 2008 was best summed up by the letter of an educated Tibetan from Lhasa who identified 'Han immigration', 'lack of religious freedom', 'dilution of Tibetan culture and identity', 'provocative propaganda in the media' and 'unrestricted exploitation of the natural resources of Tibet', as the main cause of the March uprising.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Virendra Sahai Verma, '*Infrastructure in Tibet*', April 24, 2011 at <http://tibetstudygroup.com/article.php> (Accessed on February 10, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Tsering Topgyal, *op cit*, p. 184.

<sup>75</sup> ICT, 'Letter from Tibet', March 25, 1998.

## IV - Vulnerability in Lines of Communication

### Roads

Geographically, the Tibetan plateau is bound by the Kun Lun mountains in the north and the Himalayas in the south. Prior to the annexation of Tibet, access to Tibet from the Chinese side was much more difficult and restricted to just two routes; the South-Western through Sichuan and the North-Western through Xinjiang. By comparison, routes through Chumbi valley, (present day Sikkim) and Tawang through India were easier. In fact, even Chinese had accessed Lhasa from these Indian routes in the earlier years<sup>76</sup>. After 1950, China realised that, that access through India would become a major vulnerability as there was a growing belief in the Chinese polity, especially with Mao, that India was leaning to the West. The possibility of having a capitalist US ally on its southern borders forced China to embark on major road construction projects to access Tibet and reinforce its full control over the Tibetan plateau. In 1950, China commenced on the construction of four major strategic highways which linked Tibet to the main land. The northern and western highways, in particular, run just 35 kms parallel to the Himalayan borders are critical to more deployment and sustenance of troops in the forward areas.<sup>77</sup>

### Sichuan Tibet Highway

The Sichuan-Tibet Highway is a marvel of road construction. The Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT) votes this highway on the list of 'World's 23 deadly roads'. The Chengdu-

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<sup>76</sup> Swaran Singh, 'Tibet Factor in evolution of Sino-Indian Strategic Ties', *Journal of Peace Studies*, 8(1), January-February, 2001, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Swaran Singh, *ibid*, p. 11.

Lhasa route is divided into two: The northern route which is 2415 km long including 1304 km in Tibet, which was opened on December 25, 1954. Subsequently, the Dongerluo-Zhubalong-Bamda south section was commissioned in 1969 with 1285 kms length in Tibet. The southern route came up as an alternate route to the northern road which is vulnerable to vagaries of weather and geography. The routes are treacherous and pass through 14 mountain ranges and 10 rivers including Mekong and Salween and are known to be susceptible to frequent closure due to land slides and rock falls. The road is a vital link for all formations and units of Chengdu Military Region which mobilise to Tibet, essentially the 13 Group Army's 37 Division, located at Chongqing, 300 km south east of Chengdu and 149 Mechanised Infantry Division located at Leshan, 120 kms south of Chengdu.<sup>78</sup> With numerous bridges and long stretches of glaciated terrain, the highway is susceptible to attack by the Indian Air force (IAF) and assault by organised rioters.<sup>79</sup> This highway passes through Sichuan province which has a very large population of Tibetans living outside present day TAR lending credibility to Chinese fears of being disrupted during critical periods. Realising this, perhaps redundancy was created by constructing the south section.

## **Qinghai - Tibet Highway**

The Qinghai-Tibet Highway is one of the highest in the world starting from Xining in Qinghai Province to the city of Lhasa, a total of 1937 kms. It crosses four major mountain ranges, the highest point being Tangula (5150m), and three major rivers. First built in 1950, it was commissioned on December 25, 1954 to support the PLA march into Tibet. It is the main state secondary road, 10 metres wide, and has a speed limit of 60 km/hr and by far the shortest and

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<sup>78</sup> *Janes : China World Armies*, (28), 2010, p. 148.

<sup>79</sup> Andrei Chang, 'PLA's Rapid Reaction Capability in Tibet', *Bharat Rakshak*, June 27, 2008.

the safest highway with best road conditions into Tibet. Short of Lhasa, it branches off due west towards Ngari through Nagqu-Nyime-Gerze and is the alternate route to the Xinjiang Highway. This highway is called 'Hei-A' Highway.<sup>80</sup> In the event of sabotage of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, as was done by Khampa rebels in the 1950s, this highway is the alternate route to Tibet from the mainland. However, this highway too is unreliable especially in winter when snowfall makes it impassable.<sup>81</sup> The other issue is the need for acclimatisation. In a high altitude area troops moving from the plains need to get used to the rarefied oxygen in the atmosphere as they climb to higher altitudes. There is a need for transit camps and medical facilities at regular intervals of distance to ensure acclimatisation process is facilitated. This has a bearing on the need for logistics all along the routes of induction of the troops. The road is vital for use of units of Lanzhou MR, essentially 61 Infantry Division from Tianshui and 12 Armoured Division from Zhangye both in Gansu Province.

### **Xinjiang - Tibet Highway**

The Xinjiang -Tibet Highway starts from Yecheng county of Xinjiang and ends at Lhaze county of Shigatse Prefecture in Tibet, a distance of 1455 kms. Its construction commenced in 1951 and the road was commissioned in 1957. Crossing 10 mountain ranges, its average height is 4000-5000 metres reaching the highest elevation of 5433 metres. From Yecheng it goes on to Kargilik, an additional distance of 1288 km near the Tajikistan border, passing through the disputed territory of Akshai Chin, connecting Ngari to Kashgar. Near Shigatse the road branches into three; one continuing toward Xinjiang the second leads to the Nathula border with India, leading on to the trade route through the Chumbi valley: and the third to Kathmandu, also called the Sino-Friendship Highway. The road is

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<sup>80</sup> See [www.tibetravelplanner.com/reg-Ngari.htm](http://www.tibetravelplanner.com/reg-Ngari.htm). (Accessed on December 13, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> Dawa Norbu, 'China's Tibet Policy' , *Strategic Development*, 1951-1998, p. 232.



likely to be used for units of Lanzhou Military Region inducting into TAR from 'Hei-A' Highway and Qinghai-Tibet Highway opposite the Ladakh and Central Sector of India.

### **The Yunan-Tibet Highway**

The Yunnan-Tibet Highway is 800 km long starting from Dali (Yunan) to Markham (Tibet). It was constructed as an alternate route to Tibet from Yunnan due to unreliability of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway in 1974. Crossing peaks of 4300 metres height and the Jinsha and Lancang rivers, its importance lies in the fact that it skirts the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh and North Myanmar, enabling mobilisation of troops from Kunming to the India-Tibet border. Units of 14 Group Army, essentially 40 Motorised Infantry Division at Dali and 49 Motorised Infantry Division at Kaiyuan can quickly mobilise on this route.

### **Railways-QTR (Qinghai - Tibet Railway)**

The inauguration of the Qinghai - Tibet Railway on 01 July 2006, was a major achievement in China's Great Western Development Policy which aims at economic development of West China and minorities in an attempt to reduce the East- West divide. Besides being an engineering feat, the QTR is also a symbol of China's power status and promotes the policy of 'Hanisation' of the West. It is 1956 km long, traversing over 550 km of permafrost and crosses heights of 5072 metres (Tangula pass). It also boasts of 675 bridges totalling 160 kms of length and the world's longest tunnel, Fenghuashan Tunnel, which is 4905 metres long. The QTR is proposed to be extended to Nepal by 2013 as also to Nyingchi in East, Shigatse in the West and Yadong in the Chumbi valley by 2020 AD. The QTR is the core of Deng's minority policy which hinged on economic development of minorities as the best way to 'assimilate' them with the mainstream.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Abanti Bhattacharya, *IDS Comment*, 'Strategic Implication of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway', July 7, 2006.

The larger importance of the QTR is 'strategic'. The Qinghai Tibet plateau accounts for 10 per cent, 12 per cent and 26.7 per cent of the world's boron, lithium and caesium reserves respectively. This resource corridor has a potential value of \$ 750 billion.<sup>83</sup> Tibetans believe the QTR has been made to facilitate exploitation of Tibet's vast resources generating resentment – large contracts will only benefit the Han and the mainland. The QTR has the capacity to transport an average of almost 70,000 passengers a month, thereby opening the TAR to Han migration, a policy long enunciated by the CPC. One of the key vehicles that have facilitated the migration process has been the QTR. Not only has it provided jobs, it has also opened Tibet to tourism, transportation and mining. The QTR facilitates movement of heavy equipment and stores in the event of mobilisation of the PLA. A total of 361 high altitude passenger carriages were provided by Bombardier transportation, 53 of which are luxury sleeper carriages for tourist service.<sup>84</sup> Thus, QTR will have 300 plus carriages for mobilisation of the military in the event of internal unrest or external aggression. Each carriage has a seating capacity of 98 and assuming one rake comprises of 20 carriages, QTR can transport approximately 2000 troops in one rake in one trip. The QTR line has a capacity of eight pairs of passenger trains.<sup>85</sup> Thus, 16,000 troops can be moved every 48 hours along the QTR or one Division every two days.

## **The Yarlung Tsang Po or the Brahmaputra**

Originating from the Tamlung Tso lake, south east of Mount Kailash, the Yarlung Tsang Po is the largest and the longest river in Tibet. Its general flow is from west to east dropping from 4500 metres in the west to 3000 metres in the east across 2900 kms of

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<sup>83</sup> Embassy of PRC in Bulgaria, 'Qinghai-Tibet Railway to Boost Economic growth on Plateau', August 11, 2006.

<sup>84</sup> Wikipedia, Qinghai-Tibet Railway at [http:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Qinghai\\_Tibet\\_Railway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qinghai_Tibet_Railway) (Accessed on July 6, 2011).

<sup>85</sup> Wikipedia, op cit.

South Tibet. Its alignment flow meanders along the line Ngari-Shigatse-Lhasa-Nyingchi. The river is a major obstacle to all movement south of this line and can only be crossed at key bridges all along till it enters into India from the Great Bend near Namcha Barwa peak in East Tibet. There are a number of bridges of importance, viz, Paizhen Bridge on the Lhasa-Nyingchi road, Qushui Bridge on the Lhasa- Gonggar airport road- the lifeline to Lhasa- almost 300 metres long and 10 metres wide, Tsetang Bridge near Tsatang, Saga bridge to the west of Shigatse and Nyago Bridge. These bridges are vulnerable to interdiction by air and long range weapons. They affect movement of the PLA from their bases in the depth to the forward areas and forward positions on the Plateau. It would be reasonable to assume that all major depots and logistics nodes would also be north of the Tsang Po due to proximity to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and would depend on the safety of these bridges for secure lines of communication.

## **Airlift**

In terms of sheer numbers, the PLAAF is the third largest air force in the world after the US and Russia. The PLAAF's early years were under the shadows of the PLA Army and therefore was a lesser known service. In fact, it went unrepresented at the CMC till as recent as 2004. PLAAF's chain of command is organised into four levels with Headquarters Air Force (HQAF) with a Commander Air force at the apex level directly under the CMC and now a member of the CMC; 7 Military Region Air Force (MRAF) Headquarters at the MR level; Air Divisions with the Group Armies; and Air Regiments and operational units which function under the Air Divisions. While the overall responsibility of operations in a MR remains that of the PLA Military Region Commander, the Air Force commander is the Deputy Commander of the MR, subordinated to the PLA commander. In the Indian context, only two of the seven MRs are opposite India - Lanzhou, opposite the Ladakh region and Chengdu, facing the Central and North Eastern India.

Very few active units of the PLA of Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs are permanently based in Tibet. The borders are normally looked

after by the Region Military District (Tibet and Xinjiang) and troops of the PAP. In the event of hostilities, the active units are required to be mobilised into Tibet by road and by air. The Chengdu MR maintains 149 Mechanised Infantry Division as the Military Region Rapid Reaction Unit, which is expected to be the first to be mobilised for operations in Tibet. During the March 2008 Tibetan uprising, 149 Mechanised Infantry Division was identified as the formation which mobilised and was responsible to quell the riots that broke out in and around Lhasa.<sup>86</sup>

There are 14 airbases<sup>87</sup> from where PLAAF can launch operations. Of these, five are on the plateau and the rest at comparatively lower altitudes and plains. The five on the plateau are at 4500 metres height and have a runway length of 4000 metres, which can take most wide bodied aircrafts. Due to altitude, capability of the aircraft is reduced, requiring additional runway length and restricting its capability to carry cargo and passengers.<sup>88</sup> The capability is severely degraded when taking off from these airfields due to altitude and climatic conditions. Fighter aircraft taking off from these high altitude airfields can barely operate with full operational loads and depend entirely on air-to-air refuelling to execute missions deep

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<sup>86</sup> Andrei Chang, 'PLA's Rapid Reaction capability in Tibet', *Bharat Rakshak*, June 27, 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Manish G, 'PLAAF Deployments in Tibet', *CLAWS Article 1537*, April 9, 2010. He says 'There are 14 airbases in these two regions from where PLAAF can launch air operations. The established bases are Hoping, Bangda, Shiquanhe, Bayixincun (in central Tibet opposite AP) and Kongka. There are two airfields in Lhasa Prefecture, airfields at Shannan, Xigaze and additional four that can be made operational quickly. Many have runways of 4000 metres length and their average altitude is 4000 metres.'

<sup>88</sup> See [www.mountainflying.com/pages/articles/indian-summer.html/](http://www.mountainflying.com/pages/articles/indian-summer.html/) (Accessed October 04 2011 ). For example, a small aircraft like a Cessna 172, requires an additional take off distance of 12 per cent for each 1000 feet of altitude up to 8000 feet and 20 per cent additional take off distance for every 1000 feet above 8000 feet. In high altitudes, as much as 70 per cent of the speed is required to be obtained at half way point of the runway, necessitating need for take off at cooler temperatures, head wind and reduced all up weight.

into enemy territory which in any case is a serious limitation on its inventory. This raises the vulnerability of fuel tankers in proximity of the borders<sup>89</sup>. Alternatively, the PLAAF will have to use airfields in the plains which have the inherent limitation of reduced radius of action and operational depth into Indian Territory. In the case of a civilian aircraft like the Airbus 319, for e.g., its load carrying capacity is reduced by 20-25 per cent when it takes off from the plains and lands at an airfield at 11,500 feet.<sup>90</sup> On its return, depending on time of the day, weather and conditions it may take off with almost negligible load. Therefore, the capability to airlift troops, their subsequent sustenance, and replenishment of supplies, fuel and war like material is degraded. China possesses just 14 per cent and 6 per cent of the heavy strategic lift capability that Russia and the US possess respectively. This is a critical vulnerability of conducting operations in Tibet. China's National Defence White Paper 2008 has included one additional mission to the PLAAF; 'Strategic projection'. While China aspires to achieve such a capability and recent acquisitions indicate a number of indigenous and import projects to procure heavy lift aircraft are in the pipeline, yet, the PLAAF's progress in this area over the past decade has

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<sup>89</sup> Richard Fisher, Jr, '*China's Maturing Fighter Force*', International Assessment and Strategy Centre October 15, 2011, p. 12, at [http://www.strategycenter.net/research/pubID.265/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.strategycenter.net/research/pubID.265/pub_detail.asp). He writes 'So thus far, the PLAAF and PLANAF have about 15 tanker aircraft based on the X'ian H-6 bomber, using a hose/drogue refuelling system based on a British design. Early on these were paired with small numbers of J-8 fighters equipped with refuelling probes, and now J-10 fighters exercise increasingly with H-6 tanker aircraft. In the future it is likely that a military version of the COMAC C-919 regional airliner could be outfitted as a refueller, and a possible larger four-engine passenger transport being developed by X'ian, could see early service as a tanker.'

<sup>90</sup> I am thankful to Capt Gopal Bhalla and Mr Brahm Majithia for providing me inputs on civil aircraft. At an average, the reduction in carrying capacity of an Airbus 319, from Delhi to Thoise (altitude 11,500 feet) is by 4275 kgs against 12,000 kgs in the plains.. This is a ball park figure as carrying capacity is affected by a number of factors that could affect the calculations. Thus, an Airbus 319 would normally carry about 80 passengers against a full capacity of 122 on its flight to Thoise from Delhi. This figure could be extrapolated for Lhasa which is about the same height as Thoise for aircraft flying from Chengdu or Lanzhou.

been modest.<sup>91</sup> The transport fleet of the PLAAF in TAR is based on the following units:

- 4 Transport Division (Chengdu MR) based at Kionglai with one Regiment of Y7 Transport aircraft and one Regiment of MI-17V Helicopters.
- Two Transport Regiments of Y5/Y7 Aircraft at Lanzhou. While there are reports of ongoing modernisation of the PLAAF's Transport Fleet, it is noteworthy that none of these are based in TAR. Out of the total Transport Fleet of 600 Aircraft on their inventory, the only modern Aircraft are approximately 50 IL76 and 48 AN12 (Y8) Aircraft.<sup>92</sup> Of these, the contract of 50 IL 76 is unlikely to have materialised<sup>93</sup>. Instead, the AVIC project, an indigenous transport aircraft, is still a few years from fructification.<sup>94</sup>

The carriage capacity of the Y8 is at best 20 tons or one main battle tank or 96 soldiers.<sup>95</sup> One Chinese Brigade comprising of 3000-4000 troops can be airlifted in 60-80 Y8 aircraft or 13-17 IL76 aircraft. According to Fravel, China has a fraction of the strategic airlift capabilities limited to just one fully equipped Light Mechanised Infantry Brigade.<sup>96</sup> Thus, a Rapid Reaction Division

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<sup>91</sup> Roger Cliff, *The Development of China's Air Force Capabilities* - Testimony presented before US-China Economic and Security Review Commission on May 20, 2010.

<sup>92</sup> *Janes : China : World Air Forces, China-Air Force* (32), 2010, p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> Globalsecurity.org, at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/plaaf-equip.htm>. The report says 'Ulyanovsk plant did not deliver any IL76/78 throughout 2009/10. In 2011, they delivered 2 numbers IL76s. One to Jordan and the other to a Russian carrier. The Ulyanovsk plant has not reached its planned production capacity of 10 airframes a year which it hopes to in 2012. Further, the negotiation between Rosoboronexport and the Chinese remain suspended and the 2005 contract is in abeyance.'

<sup>94</sup> Janes, op cit p. 130.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

<sup>96</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, 'China's search for Military Power', *The Washington Quarterly*, 2008, p. 134.

like the 149 Mechanised Infantry Divisions or the 15th Airborne Corps, the strategic reserve of the PLAAF with three Airborne Divisions (43rd, 44th, 45th), each with 10,000 troops is restricted in its timely deployment due to limitation of strategic mobility and restrictions imposed by high altitude airfields. Heavy vehicles and heavy equipment of these formations will have to be moved by road or prepositioned.

It has been assessed that the overall capability of the PLA is to air transport about a Division plus (13,000 troops) in a single evolution or airdrop a regiment worth 3000 troops in a single airlift. This capability was on display during 'Stride 2009' (Kuayue 2009) and Exercise 'Airborne Movement 2009' (Kongjiang Jidong) in which 15 Airborne Corps inducted a 20 day large scale, multi modal transportation, trans-regional exercise with 13,000 troops and heavy equipment.<sup>97</sup>

The other major limitation is the heavy lift helicopter capability. Once men, material stores and equipment are landed at airfields, they need to be transported to far-flung posts at extreme high altitudes. Helicopters are the mainstay of maintenance and replenishment operations at those altitudes. A Mi-17, which can lift 3000 kgs at sea level, would lift a mere few hundred kgs at altitudes in excess of three kms. Contingency of an heli-borne assault in this region has a remote chance of success.<sup>98</sup> The PLAAF has just 20 Mi-17V heavy lift helicopters and a few variants of the Z9 with limited cargo carrying capacity on its inventory. These were found to be grossly inadequate during the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, when in the absence of heavy-lift helicopters the PLA was unable to ferry relief supplies and heavy equipment to the interior areas which were affected by the earthquake.<sup>99</sup> Even in

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<sup>97</sup> Details available at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/aircraft-transport.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/aircraft-transport.htm) (Accessed on October 03, 2011).

<sup>98</sup> Manish G, op cit.

<sup>99</sup> *Janes China : World Air Force* (32), 2010, p. 11.

winter months and during inclement weather, when the roads are cut off, the helicopter supply chain remains the only reliable means of relief and communication.



# V - Vulnerability in the Neighbourhood

## Nepal

China's engagement with Tibet's neighbourhood to the South, essentially Nepal and Bhutan, has seen major policy changes since the Tibetan uprising of 2008. Hitherto fore, China's interest south of the Himalayas was, at best, perfunctory. In the run up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the events of 2008, China's sensitivity towards these two countries increased dramatically. These sensitivities flow from two major concerns; use of these countries as a base for support to the Tibetan cause, and use of these territories by India to capture real estate in Tibet.

Nepal, a Hindu kingdom, till the ushering of democracy in 2006, has undergone major political upheaval. Traditionally, a pro-India state, Nepal was also accommodative to Tibetans and the Tibetan cause. A home to 20,000 Tibetan refugees, Nepal had a 'Gentleman's Agreement' of liberally permitting movement of Tibetans across the borders. It was also a major link between Tibet and the TGIE in Dharamshala, India. China always viewed Nepal as part of 'India's sphere of influence' and the Nepali Congress a stooge of India. Once King Birendra opted for democracy, and Maoists began a violent agitation to grab power, China sensed opportunity. The Maoists had an anti India agenda and sought to break away from the dependence on India. China mounted a 'charm offensive' to woo Nepal. In 2008, Nepal responded positively by preventing Tibetans from protesting against the Beijing Olympics. Realising the strategic importance of Nepal, China's policy hinged on three major issues; proximity to Tibet, India's leverages in Nepal and the development of economic influence in South Asia.

China began to constructively engage Nepal by sending a large number of delegations – media, business, military and political –

from 2008 onwards. The Chinese White Paper on Defence in 2008 clearly indicates a shift in focus in areas of concern from Taiwan to TAR and Xinjiang. The shift occurred after improvement of relations with Taiwan once the Kuomintang party came to power and began engaging the mainland. This bonhomie shifted the gaze to Tibet and Xinjiang. Resultantly, internal security became the new challenge for the Chinese Government due to growing dissent and ethnic violence in the minority regions.

Worried that Nepal may ultimately become a rallying point for anti-Tibetan activities from the South, its soft underbelly, China sensed its vulnerability with the emergence of Nepal as a possible frontline state in the furtherance of a US-Europe-India led agenda into Tibet. Some Chinese scholars view it as a part of 'strategic encirclement' of China. China sought sealing of its borders and restriction of movement of Tibetans from Nepal in an attempt to close the tap on Tibetan migration. China is apprehensive that the Tibetan refugees may take advantage of Nepal's instability and strengthen their position within the country. Moreover, the Chinese are not comfortable with the multiparty system of Nepal, with the parties numbering around 32, and would like to have an abiding relationship with any force eager to work with them. India's successful engagement with the latest Maoist-led government has added to Chinese concerns leading it to cultivate Nepal even more proactively.<sup>100</sup> On a parallel track, China opened whole new vistas for trade and commerce with Nepal. The Lhasa-Kathmandu Friendship Highway linking Nepal to China and the proposed extension of the QTR railway to Nepal opened huge opportunities for trade and movement of Chinese goods to South-Asia. China is involved in several other projects in Nepal like the Melamchi water project, hydel and telecommunication and infrastructure projects including the development of Lumbini and Pokhara as well as the

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<sup>100</sup> Nihar Nayak, 'Chinese PM in Nepal: A short visit but a long trail?' *IDSIA Comment*, January 18, 2012

Tato Pani and Kathmandu Ring Road.<sup>101</sup> China has also engaged Nepal militarily by providing assistance in terms of weapons and in construction of a military hospital. China's interest in Nepal has been welcomed by the Nepalese people who are concerned about India's arrogance and interference in Nepal's internal affairs. The statements by the new Chinese envoy, Yang Houlan to Chairman Dahal have reassured Nepal that 'China will never deviate from its policy of non-interference in the internal matters of Nepal.'<sup>102</sup> China is thus viewed as a positive balance to India. The proposal to open another strategic road from Nepal to Tibet will enable transportation of oil tankers and heavy trucks which will provide a fillip to the volume of trade between China and Nepal. Nepal sees this as an alternate supply route for essential commodities and a means of ensuring energy security by decreasing dependence on the land routes through India. This highway also has military significance- it will assist movement and forward deployment of its military and logistics closer to the heartland of India – UP and Bihar.<sup>103</sup>

The seriousness with which China is courting Nepal is evident from a flying five hour visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to Nepal on January 14, 2012. The visit was cloaked in absolute secrecy and even postponed earlier indefinitely owing to a possible threat of disturbance by the strong Tibetan community in Nepal.<sup>104</sup> Wen distributed a largesse of \$140 million in aid in return for Nepal's assurance that they would tighten border controls and access to Tibetans as also recognise and support 'One China' policy. Amongst other aid projects, China promised a \$117 million three year grant, \$20 million to assist the peace process, \$2 million to modernise the Nepal Police and \$5 million for construction of the Pokhara

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<sup>101</sup> Bhavna Singh, 'China's Nepal Focus', Nepal – Articles #3431, IPCS, July 14, 2011.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> I am grateful to my colleague, Mr Nihar Nayak, a scholar of eminence on Nepal at the IDSA for providing me important inputs on Nepal-China relations.

airport. China also promised assistance for three large hydropower stations in the west and improvements to its outdated rail network. The vulnerability of China in Nepal is best understood by a quote by Hu Shiseng, a leading South Asia scholar at the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), 'The unstable situation in Nepal provides golden opportunities for those who want to play the Tibet Card to create problems for China in Tibetan regions'.<sup>105</sup>

## **Bhutan**

China's sensitivity to Bhutan has become evident in recent years. Historically, China had no ties or relations with Bhutan except for a very brief period in 1911 when China had suzerainty over all the five hill states, which could not be consolidated. The Tibetan and Bhutanese people had historical ties as they came from the same Mongoloid stock, had many cultural affinities besides being linked together by Buddhism. There were minor issues of disagreement between Bhutan and Tibet on Bhutanese enclaves in Tibet. However, soon after China occupied Tibet in 1951, China claimed large tracts of land in Bhutan totalling 764 square kms in two distinct areas of Bhutan, supporting them with historical reasons.

Till 1984, Bhutan's border dispute was clubbed together with India and no direct talks were held with China. In 1984, China insisted on bilateral talks and ever since, China has had 19 rounds of bilateral talks with Bhutan over the boundary dispute. It is interesting to understand why Bhutanese territory so important to China. China has settled its land frontiers with 12 out of 14 countries with which it had border disputes, very amicably, mostly accepting loss of

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<sup>104</sup> Nihar Nayak, op cit. He says 'An earlier scheduled visit, which was to take place on December 20, 2011, was reportedly cancelled because China was not impressed with the security arrangements in Nepal. Chinese intelligence reportedly came up with information that there could be some demonstrations with black flags and attempts at self-immolation by some Tibetan refugees.'

<sup>105</sup> Ananth Krishnan, *The Hindu* January 14, 2012.

territory, to achieve a favourable permanent settlement. But not with Bhutan. The answer to its vulnerability in Bhutan lies in the strategic importance of the Chumbi valley.

The narrow Chumbi valley is in the shape of a dagger pointing at India. The Valley is nestled between the two shoulders of the Paunhuri and Chomulhari peaks which comes together as an inverted triangle at Sinchu La, the trijunction of India, China and Bhutan border. This was the ancient Gateway to Tibet. Sandwiched between Bhutan on the East and India (Sikkim) on the West, its strategic location exacerbates China's fears the valley may be cut-off by a pincer move by both countries. But Chumbi Valley also provides strategic advantages to China. Located just 50 kms from India's vital Siliguri Corridor that connects the North Eastern States to the rest of the country, the valley affords China an opportunity to sever this critical link. It is also the shortest route to Bangladesh and has the potential to provide China access to the Bay of Bengal. Some scholars believe improving connectivity between Tibet and India, by extending the QTR railway to Yatung in the Chumbi valley and onwards to Siliguri can be the beginning of a third strategic North-south corridor. The other two are the Irrawady corridor connecting Myanmar to Yunnan and the Karakoram Corridor which connects Gwadar to Xinjiang, both of which are on either side of India.<sup>106</sup>

In 2006, China offered to exchange the disputed territory of 495 square kms in the Central sector with 269 square kms in the North West, a notional of loss of 224 square kms of its original claim of 764 square kms. The rationale was simple- the 269 square kms borders the Chumbi Valley and this strategic piece of land offers depth to the Chinese defences, besides affording them access to

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<sup>106</sup> Medha Bist, 'Chumbi Valley-Economic Rationale but Strategic Resonance', *IDSIA Comment*, September 23, 2010. I am also grateful to Medha Bist, a scholar of eminence on Bhutan affairs at the IDSIA for providing me inputs on China-Bhutan relations.

the Siliguri plains from the heights in Bhutan.<sup>107</sup> In November 2007, the PLA reportedly demolished several unmanned bunkers in forward posts in the Doklam area near the Bhutan-India-China trijunction, as a manifestation of its belligerent and aggressive stance on the claims in this sector.<sup>108</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> round of talks between China and Bhutan held in Thimpu from January 11-13, 2010 it was decided to direct the Expert Group of the two Governments to meet and discuss the modalities for a Joint Field Survey with a view to harmonise reference points and names of places in areas in the Western Sector which are now the focus of the Boundary Talks. These areas comprise the four pastures of Doklam, Charithang, Sinchulumpa and Dramana. Professor Srikanth Kondapalli, says, 'The Chinese want the Bhutanese to compromise on the Chumbi valley sector so they can move in'.<sup>109</sup> Some experts view these aggressive moves as a deliberate strategy to put pressure on India and strengthen China's claims on disputed areas along the LAC.

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<sup>107</sup> The 269 square kms comprise of Dramana, Shakhateo, Giu of 138 square kms and Sinchulumpa 42 square kms. The most contentious seems to be the 89 square kms. Doklam claim of Bhutan that China rejected outright from the onset. Details accessed from at <http://www.bhutantimes.bt/index.php?option=comcontent&task=view&id=1777&Itemid=1> (Accessed on February 15, 2012).

<sup>108</sup> Mohan Balaji, 'In Bhutan, China and India collide', *Asia Times Online*, January 12, 2008.

<sup>109</sup> Percy Fernandez, 'China inching closer to India through Bhutan', *India Times News Network*, August 01, 2005.

## VI - Overall Assessment

China's policy to Tibet can be generalised as a 'carrot plus a big stick' policy according to Wang Lixiong.<sup>110</sup> The carrot has been the large monies poured into development of the economy, infrastructure and livelihood of Tibet, whereas the big stick has been the use of force, denial of equal opportunities and religious oppression against the Tibetan people – none of which has done much good to the process of assimilation of the Tibetans into the Chinese model. The famous Chinese dissident Wei Jinsheng<sup>111</sup> who understood the sentiments of the Tibetan people, urged the Chinese Government to take three actions to resolve the Tibetan issue<sup>112</sup>- firstly, the need to root out hatred and discrimination between the Han and the Tibetan people; secondly, the government should speed up the development of market economy in Tibet and establish close economic relations between the heartland and Tibet- suggesting that the 'Go West' campaign has not benefited the Tibetans, and thirdly; abolish the detention of Tibetan religious leaders, alluding to the issue of the succession of the Karmapa and the Dalai Lama. Coming from an ethnic Han of this stature lends credibility to the argument that resentment among the Tibetan people against the Chinese policies run deep and is a potential source of instability which can be exploited.

Despite improving the overall economy of the region, creation of world class infrastructure and development of the region, there is

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<sup>110</sup> Wang Lixiong, op cit, p. 28.

<sup>111</sup> Wei Jinsheng, a Chinese dissident rose to fame when he called Deng Xiaoping a 'dictator' and was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1979 for writing that 'democracy' be included as the 'fifth modernisation'. He gained international fame and was released from prison in 1993, a week prior to the vote on the Olympics venue in which Beijing was a contender. He was re-arrested in 1994, sentenced to 14 years in prison but in 1997, exiled to the US on the personal request of President Clinton.

<sup>112</sup> Claude Arpi, 'China's Weakness: The Tibetan and Uighur Nationalities Areas', *South Asia Defence and Strategic Year book, 2010*, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, p.101.

still a long way to achieving the goal of complete assimilation. A large number of Tibetans are discriminated, denied and deprived of the fruits of the 'Great Western Development Strategy' launched by the party in 2000 and they continue to feel a sense of alienation in their own land. The Tibetans are unable to come to terms with their loss of cultural and religious identity and no amount of economic wealth can win over the Tibetan's deep rooted faith in their religion and culture. Such a large population can be a breeding ground for dissent. Unless China is more accommodative to the Dalai Lama and addresses the inequalities that are heaped on the Tibetan people and gives more freedom to Tibetans to profess and practice their religion, China may find it difficult to integrate and absorb Tibet into the mainland.

The latent militancy in Tibet is a reality that has been a cause of great concern to the Chinese Government. Their reaction to any demonstration, uprising or even self immolations has been one of brutality, excessive use of force and denial. The party is extremely sensitive to the reoccurrence of any violent or militant acts by Tibetans. In a sense, the Chinese Government is vulnerable to rise of a Tibetan resistance movement that can have international support and jeopardise China's plans for Tibet. Zhang Qingli, The party secretary of the CCP for TAR had drawn considerable international ire for his scornful remarks against the Dalai-lama, calling him 'a wolf in monk's clothes, a devil with a human face'. Zhang went about his hard-line policies of eroding Tibet's religious, cultural and national identity. None of these actions helped in winning over the Tibetans – no wonder the trust deficit only widened. The announcement of a change in the party secretary and the nomination of Chen Quanguo, an economist, can be interpreted as a softening of Beijing's stand. Professor Huang Jing from the Lee Kuan Yew (LKY) School of Public Policy stated that, 'China may rule Tibet, but they have never been able to rule Tibetans'.<sup>113</sup> This underlines the deep rooted feelings of the national

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<sup>113</sup> Professor Huang Jing, LKY School of Public Policy, in discussion at IDSA, September 19, 2011.



and cultural identity of Tibetans. Way back in 1997, Mervyn Goldstein, argued that terrorism from outside would destabilise Tibet, particularly during the transitional period. He believed that Tibetans are unlikely to watch the transformation of their homeland helplessly and may embark on a ‘war of conscience’, a Tibetan style *intifada*.<sup>114</sup> It is no secret that China spends more on its internal security budget than its defence budget, indicating that China is deeply conscious of any form of dissent in its minorities, particularly the TAR. Historically, Tibetans have been a proud militant race and the rise of latent Tibetan militancy would be China’s worst nightmare. It would be important for India’s China watchers to see whether this movement will come to the fore, especially in the post Dalai Lama phase and whether such a movement will be a natural successor to the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), given its wide international acceptance and influence, especially in the West. What it evidently lacks is coherent leadership.

The PLA has extended lines of communication in Tibet. This has forced them to preposition a large number of borders guarding forces ab-initio in Tibet. Men and material, permanently stationed on the Tibetan plateau at high altitudes require special clothing, living infrastructure, equipment maintenance and protection to fight

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<sup>114</sup> Jane Ardley, *op cit*, p. 22 It reads ‘Goldstein (1997) advances the proposition that organised violent opposition in Tibet is a viable strategic option for the future of the Tibetan struggle. He argues that a campaign of terrorism organised from outside Tibet would destabilise the region, particularly during periods of transition in mainland China. If he is referring to the transition after the death of Deng Xiaoping to the leadership of Jiang, then it appears that perhaps the Tibetans have lost an opportunity. However, the change of leadership passed off without disruption, and so the opportunity was never really there. A major obstacle for such a campaign would, according to Goldstein, be the Dalai Lama and his commitment to non violence. He maintains, however, that a campaign of violence would ultimately be difficult for the Dalai Lama to prevent: The crux of the matter is that Tibetans are unlikely to stand indefinitely on the sidelines watching Beijing transform their homeland with impunity. Nationalistic emotions coupled with desperation and anger make a powerful brew, and there are Tibetans inside and outside of Tibet who are intoxicated with the idea of beginning such a campaign of focused violence - in their view a “war of conscience”, a Tibetan-style *intifada*.’

effectively at these altitudes. All these add to the cost of maintaining a large military presence in Tibet. Rapid Reaction Forces (RRF) and most offensive formations are located in the Chengdu and Lanzhou MRs at distances of over 2000 kms. In the event of hostilities, these formations have to cross large distances over four-five days, traversing high mountain passes at 5000 metres (16,000 feet) which are perennially under snow, and cross large rivers, valleys and ranges. The defiles along these routes can be easily identified by air and satellites. Further, these troops need large transit camps enroute where they can be sheltered, refuelled and carry out repair and refit. Transit camps leave large signatures as they have fuel dumps, rations stores, vehicle repair facilities and medical units. All these are highly vulnerable to interdiction by air, engagement by missiles, sabotage and subterfuge. The QTR alone has 675 bridges which are extremely vulnerable to interdiction.

All roads lead to Lhasa. Lhasa emerges as the hub of all activity during mobilisation or deployment of troops throughout Tibet. With key logistics depots, rail head and airport in proximity, Lhasa would be the nerve centre or the centre of gravity in Tibet. Acclimatisation of troops as they move from low altitudes and plains to high altitudes beyond 9000 feet is an important facet of induction on the Tibetan Plateau. This process incurs a huge time penalty on induction timings of forces from the plains.

To ensure the safety of the QTR, the PLA has deployed a large contingent of troops at regular intervals to patrol the railway even in peace time. Only recently, the foot patrols have been assisted by armed vehicle based patrols- all adding up to the cost of security of these vital lines of communication. Well coordinated Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) using a mix of human intelligence, air and space based platforms can provide adequate notice in time and space impose delay and cause attrition on the PLA during induction by road and rail.

Any movement to forward areas including logistics and supplies are susceptible to disruption of bridges on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) river.

In so far as airlift is concerned, the carriage capacities are restricted due to high altitudes. This would require a far greater air craft to be deployed for mobilisation. Since loads are reduced, RRFs, which almost entirely move by air from the plains, are likely to consume far greater resources at these altitudes. The other severely restricting factor in the PLAAF is the shortage of heavy lift helicopters. These are essential to lift loads and maintain posts at extremely high altitudes of 18-22,000 feet, which are isolated and not accessible by road.

China's sensitivity to the hill states stems from history when Nepal gave refuge and space in Mustang to the Chushi Gangdrug to launch its guerrilla warfare on the Chinese state till 1974. China would not like its soft underbelly to be exposed again- hence the strategic move to win over the Himalayan states in return for guarantees against use of their territories against Chinese interests in the TAR. The engagement of Bhutan and Nepal, two states that are closely associated with India's circle of influence in South Asia, also indicates Chinese attempts to contain and confine India. While Nepal is keen to shed its dependence on India and Maoist influence would show a natural affinity for China, it is unlikely to have a major impact in the long term. Nepal is engulfed from three sides by India and the Himalayas do not afford an all weather and economically viable alternative to Nepal. While Nepal has strangled Tibetan resistance as a quid pro quo with China, it can at best be a buffer between the two Asian giants and certainly not inimical to India.

Bhutan too is keen to seek a solution to its border problem but will be more circumspect to India's sensitivities in the Chumbi Valley before taking a final call. While China attempts to win over Bhutan by settling the border dispute in favour of Bhutan, the strategic implications of loss of Doklam and areas in the North West are not lost to the Bhutanese, who are equally threatened should China use Bhutan for furtherance of its military aims across the Himalayas.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, it is abundantly clear that Tibet as it is today, has not been an equal recipient of the fruits of China's progress and success story. China has been unable to assimilate and integrate the Tibetans into the mainstream of Chinese life. In fact, the divide has only aggravated with unprecedented numbers of monks and nuns self immolating themselves in TAR and other Tibetan occupied areas outside TAR. China continues to use force and coercion to subdue and subjugate the Tibetan people even as China rejects Dalai Lama's peaceful 'middle path' solution. Communist China views Tibet as an economic issue not a socio-religious issue. It continues to flog the misbelief that economic prosperity will assimilate the Tibetan people.

China has highly vulnerable Lines of Communication and strategic limitations in executing military operations in Tibet. Raising the cost of undertaking operations would serve as an effective deterrent.

The isolation of Tibet from the mainland and its policy of appeasing Nepal and Bhutan would require deft and adroit diplomacy by India to ensure Indian influence in these states is not lost to the 'lure of the lucre' that China uses in abundance in its diplomatic engagement. China's deliberate procrastination on any settlement or concessions to Tibetans is premised on the belief that the demise of the Dalai Lama will finally settle the Tibetan issue. India needs to factor all possible outcomes of such a scenario and harness its huge soft power capability to support the genuine aspirations of the Tibetan people.

**T**he paper looks at the critical vulnerabilities of China in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Ever since China captured and annexed Tibet in 1950, it has been unable to integrate the Tibetan people with the mainland. There is a 'trust deficit', essentially socio-economic factors and religious persecution that continues to fuel dissent between the Tibetan people and the Chinese government. Besides, Tibetans have a proud legacy of taking to arms to fight for their rights, which is presently latent. Militarily, the high altitude and inhospitable terrain render communications vulnerable and impose severe limitations to conduct of operations in TAR. The author looks at these criticalities from an Indian viewpoint and draws some key assessments for China watchers in India with regard to policy on Tibet.



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