

## The Tibet Factor in Indo-China Relations

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**Abstract:** *The fact is that India & China have a long history of bitter rivalry and some unsolved border disputes in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Regarding the strategic and security issues, both the countries are always guided by mistrust and competition. The origin of the Tibet Problem can be viewed in the perspective of the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1951 which eliminated a buffer between the two Asian giants and transformed the border dispute in to a rivalry. However, the entry of Chinese troops in Tibet in the wake of 1956 made the problem more critical and the grant of asylum by India to Dalai Lama, China charged India as an expansionist country. Consequently India and China felt an urgent need to reach on a solution of their border disputes and both of them tried to solve the matter. The present research paper highlights the Tibet Factor in Indo-China Relation in its historical perspective since its origin.*

**Keywords:** TAR, China Factor, Contention, Dalai Lama, Chinese Occupation.

**Introduction:** The Tibet factor has always been a bone of contention between India and China since 1951. Most of the scholars argue that Tibet factor is a central point of discussion for foreign policy analysts. Moreover, India's disputed border with China and Tibet as an autonomous region of China can be viewed as a tension in bilateral relations. From the late fifties, thousands of Tibetans led by Dalai Lama came over to India and granted refugee status but China opposed and again recognized as an autonomous region. However, China has always been suspicious about India's intention; while India assures China on the status of Tibet nevertheless we can't ignore the fact that China should understand India's stand on Tibet Issue.

**The origin of the Tibet Problem:**

The British in order to open Tibet for trade invaded Tibet in 1904 and forced Lhasa convention on Tibet. Tibet fought its own wars with the invading British forces but was no match to the super power of the time. In between the Chinese intention was not of supporting Tibet militarily; rather than China simply accepted Tibet as its dependency that formed an important other fence in strategic terms for China. However, there was no standing Chinese Army in Tibet and further more China attempted to incorporate Tibet into its empire. Thus a few years later the nationalist leaders of China tried to restore the imperial autonomy of Tibet but they failed. Further during the Shimla Conference in 1914, China disagreed to boundary alignment between Inner Tibet and outer Tibet. In the subsequent years, the China Govt. refused to recognize the MacMohan Line as a valid border line between India and China. In 1949 the People Liberation Army (PLA) trounced the nationalist govt. from China and entered Tibet in 1950. Consequently in

1951 China forced Tibet to sign a 17 points agreement that would offer autonomy to Tibet in lieu of Tibet accepting Chinese sovereignty. Furthermore, these developments created Indo-China dispute in 1962.

**The Chinese Claim on Tibet:**

Chinese claim on Tibet goes to its historical background during the regime of Manchu Dynasty that a defensive policy of having regarding the Great Wall as a Maginot line not deterring aggression. Therefore, an aggressive policy and China's security concern became interlinked. Moreover, the China's growing population has brought about a need for '*LEBENSRAUM*' so urgent that occupation of a defenceless Tibet became an urgent need for China. In this perspective Tibet was annexed by China in 1951 and this region was called '*Tibet Autonomous Region*' (TAR) in 1965 having an area of 1.23 million sq. miles as against 2.5 million sq. miles of greater Tibet. However, India have not intended to make India a bone of contention between the two and India has always recognized Tibet as a part of China. Nevertheless, India

has always been in favour of a peaceful solution of this complicated issue. That is why; India's first Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru opposed the military occupation of Tibet by China in 1951. However, India and China signed '*Panchsheel Agreement*' in 1954 to maintain peaceful environment between the two countries.

Thus, India opted for cooperative relationship with China because of an emerging power in South Asia and tried its best for mutual and beneficial bilateral relations. But in 1959 the emerging friendship between India and China was deteriorated due to the differences over the Tibet which led to the war between both the countries in 1962. China attacked India in 1962 over the issue of Tibet because China regarded India as a country that had potential to interfere on the issue of Tibet and after that China has always considered India as a nation with hegemonic intention in South Asia. Meanwhile, China has implemented many large scale development techniques in Tibet and its allied areas which may be recognized as large scale

investment, subsidies, development of industries, agriculture, education and training. The education policy since 1980 has hastened Tibetan integration into Chinese main stream and to mollify world opinion on the Tibet issue. In 1987, China recognized Tibetan as the official language in Universities and Technical Institutions in Tibet. Likewise, China's '*West Development Campaign*' is a part of Chinese policy in Tibet. However, India's Prime Minister, Sh. Rajiv Gandhi visited China in 1988 and he assured China that Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory. Nevertheless, China has always been disagreed with India on the issue of Tibet and it claims that India is allowing anti-Chinese political activities through Dalai Lama.

In the wake of 21<sup>st</sup> century, India's Prime Minister Sh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited China and signed a declaration of peace and cooperation. India assured China that she does not want to threat China's territorial integrity. India recognized Tibet again as an autonomous region of China. Further it recognized TAR as a part of

territory of the People's Republic of China and India declared that it would not permit its land for Anti-Chinese activities. Nevertheless, the protests of Tibetans against Chinese rule are continuing. The first protest was begun in 1959 at Lhasa and 2<sup>nd</sup> from 1987 to 1989. In this sequence the 3<sup>rd</sup> protest began in 2008 and China blamed Indian – Tibetan community and Dalai Lama's for these Anti-Chinese activities. However, India advised Dalai Lama to keep himself away from these political activities as they influenced the bilateral relations between India and China; nevertheless, China intended on India's positive efforts, however, India assured China to stop any protest against Chinese policy on the soul of India by Tibetans during the period of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, both the countries signed a shared vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century and gave a new direction to build a sense of confidence on the Tibet issue including the other border disputes. Meanwhile, in 2010 Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited India and stated that China would do the best to settle all the

border disputes with India including the Tibet problem.

Here it is noteworthy that the US and some other western countries seem more receptive to Tibet issue and they seem to be worrying about the violation of human rights in the Tibet territory. Most of the scholars argue that Tibet needs Indian help to legitimize their human rights in the perspective of changing global environment. However, India understands Chinese anxieties about the roof of the world and accepts Tibet as an autonomous region of China but it is very unfortunate that Dalai Lama including two lakhs Tibetan is living a life of exile in India. In keeping with ancient traditions of India, Dalai Lama is treated with respect and courtesy befitting with his position as a holy man and India does not allow any political activity by the Tibetans on Indian soil. Nevertheless India hopes that Dalai Lama and Tibetans living in India will soon return to their native land.

However, China over the last decade has established highly

sophisticated military infrastructure in TAR adjoining India; five fully operational air bases, several helipads, an extensive rail networks and 30,000 mile of roads – giving them the ability to rapidly deploy its 30 divisions along the border. China has not only increased its military presence in Tibet; but also its nuclear arsenal in TAR. In addition the PLA's strategic options against India are set to multiply as Chinese land and rail links with Pakistan, Nepal, Burma and Bangladesh. Moreover the spurt in violent incidents and unrest and growing incidents of self-immolations by Buddhist monks in Tibet keep India engaged both in terms of keeping close watch over the Tibetans in the country ensuring that they did not indulge in any Anti-Chinese activity as well as providing shelter and basic amenities to the Tibetan refugee. The Chinese president XI Jinping has planned a five point proposal for guiding India-China relations. China also accepts that boundary disputes between India and China are very complex issues and both the countries need to solve them in a

peaceful environment. That is why; confidence building measures should be initiated between the two countries.

**Conclusion:** Now we can say that the Tibet issue has always been a bone of contention between India and China & this process between the two has been constrained due to the presence of Dalai Lama and Tibetans in India. Although the Dalai Lama has relinquished his demand for total independence; nevertheless, China does not believe on India's statement on the Tibet Issue. It is said that recent development in Indo-China relations and in TAR may create the mysterious between the two nations in future. Therefore both the countries should keep continuous confidence building measures program for the betterment of bilateral relations.

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