

**DEMILITARISATION OF THE  
TIBETAN PLATEAU  
AN ENVIRONMENTAL  
NECESSITY**



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INDIA**

**2000**

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## **DEDICATION**

This publication is dedicated to His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama, on the 60th anniversary of his enthronement in Lhasa and the 50th anniversary of his assuming political and religious power of Tibet.

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## **Demilitarisation of the Tibetan Plateau: *An Environmental Necessity***

Historically the vast terrain of over 2.5 million sq. km of Tibet\* provided a perfect buffer between the two great Asian giants — India and China. With a standing army of only 4,000, and 25 percent of the population devoted to monasticism and living by spiritual ethics, Tibet served as a natural zone of peace. This period of peaceful co-existence ended with China's illegal occupation of Tibet. Now nearly half a million heavily armed Chinese soldiers and stockpiles of China's most advanced military and nuclear weapons systems are stationed on the Tibetan Plateau.

The impact of China's policies of exploitation of Tibet's fragile environment and to maintain its military empire is being felt well beyond its political borders. In recent years scientific researches have confirmed that the environmental degradation in Tibet is causing dramatic changes in regional and global climatic patterns. These changes include unexpected flooding, prolonged drought, and changes in the monsoon patterns of the Indian subcontinent and other South and South-east Asian countries.

This information booklet intends to highlight issues concerning the importance of demilitarising the Tibetan Plateau for the benefit of India, China, South Asia in general and the world as a whole.

### **Indo-China Relations**

In May 1998, Atal Behari Vajpayee became the first prime minister in Indian history to identify China as a threat to India's security. As a

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\* Tibet comprises the three provinces of Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang (called *Cholka-sum* by Tibetans), with a total area of 2.5 million sq. km. It includes areas of the present day "Tibet Autonomous Region;" Qinghai and other Amdo areas incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, and Gansu; and major parts of Kham taken by Sichuan and Yunnan. China today acknowledges only the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (1.2 million sq. km) founded in 1965 as "Tibet."

defensive measure against the perceived threat from China, India went nuclear on 11 May 1998. The Prime Minister explicitly mentions in his subsequent letter to the U.S. President Bill Clinton:

We have an overt nuclear weapons state on our borders, a state which committed armed aggression against India in 1962. Although our relations with that country [China] have improved in the last decade or so, an atmosphere of distrust persists mainly due to the unresolved border problem. To add to the distrust that country has materially helped another neighbour of ours [Pakistan] to become a covert nuclear weapons state. At the hands of this bitter neighbour we have suffered three aggressions in the last 50 years.

By 1955, the map of China incorporated Indian territory in disregard to the McMahon Line. In 1962 China declared war on India and annexed Aksai Chin and part of Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, the *Five Principles of Mutual Coexistence* or Panchsheel agreement of 29 April 1954 forged by Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai was violated. As Jawaharlal Nehru stated during a Lok Sabha debate in the Indian Parliament on February 1956: “It is perfectly true that the ideals of Panchsheel have been broken, and are likely to be broken in future, just like every ideal... The man who proclaimed it has broken it or has not acted up to it.” Although the Panchsheel accord erroneously accepted China’s suzerainty over Tibet, it stressed the importance of the Tibetan Plateau being a strategic buffer zone. During the visit of India’s External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, to Beijing in June 1999, China rekindled the moribund Panchsheel.

However, India’s desire to live harmoniously with China to maintain stability in Asia is an ongoing policy. Such a situation will only materialise if the Tibetan Plateau is devoid of military installations and presence and so as to become a genuine Zone of Peace, as the Dalai Lama proposed in the Five-Point Peace Plan for Tibet in 1987.

Demilitarisation of the Tibetan Plateau and therefore the Himalayan borders is the only lasting solution for peaceful Sino-Indian coexistence.

## Militarisation

The relationship between China and India appears to be more positive in recent years. This is a result of talks to reduce border forces, high level political visits, and the signing of major agreements as confidence-building measures. In reality, China's military presence in Tibet has escalated in recent years. There has been an increase in military infrastructure and modernisation of military and para-military facilities. China has developed state-of-the-art laser defence technology and has successfully conducted live tests in intercepting incoming missiles in the Amdo (Ch. Qinghai) region of Tibet (*The Indian Express* 16 November 1999).

China has systematically developed Tibet as a major military base. Tibet's strategic location provides China with an easy means of exerting its power and influence on the Indian subcontinent. It has deployed two types of militia in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR): the Regular Fighting Force (RFF) and the Local Fighting Force (LFF). The Chengdu Military Area directly controls the RFF and presently there are two Mountain Infantry Divisions (MIDs) located in the Kongpo region across the border from Arunachal Pradesh. However, with its rapid deployment systems, Chengdu regularly sends armed forces to 'TAR' when needed. It dispatched forces during the 1987 Lhasa demonstrations against Chinese rule.

In 1994, the Washington-based International Campaign for Tibet reported that the total military personnel in 'TAR' alone including People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Armed Police (PAP) and the Public Security Bureau (PSB) numbered as many as 400,000.

The Tibet Military Division (TMD) in Lhasa regulates the LFF which

is distributed throughout Tibet in seven Military Sub-Districts (MSDs). Among the MSDs the areas of Shigatse, Ngari, Lhoka, and Nyingtri have border links with India, Nepal and Bhutan. Therefore these locations have the greatest concentration of soldiers. Regions in the hinterland such as Nagchu and Chamdo have reduced military strength. Lhasa, being the main headquarters and the location of one of the MSDs, has a large manpower capacity.

The military sub-districts comprise six border defence regiments, five independent border defence battalions, three artillery regiments and three engineering regiments. Also present are one main signal station, two signal regiments, three transport regiments, three independent transport battalions and four air bases. Two radar regiments, two divisions and a regiment of paramilitary forces are also deployed. There is one independent division and six independent regiments of People's Armed Police and 12 units of artillery divisions (Chutter 1998).

Furthermore, there are 17 secret radar stations, 14 military airfields, eight missile bases in (Nyingtri Kongpo, Lhasa, Drotsang, Siling, Terlingkha, Small Tsaidam, Large Tsaidam, Nagchuka), at least eight ICBMs, 70 medium-range missiles and 20 intermediate range missiles in the whole of Tibet (Dekhang 1998; DIIR 1996).

## **Repercussions on the Indian Subcontinent Geopolitical Implications**

China professes that its military policy is defensive in nature and that it will never seek hegemony nor threaten any country with its nuclear and military power. Its defence expenditure increased by about 20 percent over the last decade. The 1996-1997 defence budget amounted to US\$30.27 billion (Singh et al, 1996-1997). Moreover, China's military establishments in Tibet have increased in recent years.

Claims of sovereignty over neighbouring territories is not new to China's foreign policy. Throughout history China has established su-



zerainty over territories unprotected by natural barriers or at a weak political juncture such as Tibet, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, East Turkestan and North Korea. In 1949 China began the invasion of Tibet when His Holiness the Dalai Lama was in his early teens and the world was recovering from the turmoil of World War II.

In 1974 China captured islands in the Paracel group from South Vietnam just as U.S. military support was phased out and Saigon was collapsing. China also seized islands from the then North Vietnam in 1978 when Hanoi was loosening its ties with Russia. In 1995 China occupied Mischief Reef near the Philippine island of Palawan as soon as U.S. forces withdrew. The justification behind China's claims to those regions is worth further consideration. Communist China, despite having destroyed the legacy of its tangible past during the Cultural Revolution, appears to rely on centuries-old notions of the 'Middle Kingdom' in redrawing its boundaries and justifying its attacks.

In 1962, China betrayed Nehru and India's fraternal vows and captured 12,000 sq. miles of India's territory in the Aksai Chin region bordering Kashmir. China still claims that India holds 90,000 sq. km of Chinese territory in the North-east Frontier Area (NEFA) in Arunachal Pradesh. China also asserts the reunification of Arunachal Pradesh with the 'motherland' as its duty and is yet to recognise Sikkim and Kashmir as parts of India.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, on 24 October 1962, in his last public speech at Gandhi Maidan, Patna said, "when we were raising slogan of "Hindi-Chini, Bhai-Bhai", China was busy nibbling our land and through burte betrayal captured about 12 thousand square miles of our land. When [we] just stepped forward to evict them from those illegally captured posts, the Chinese had the guts to blame offensive on us".

India, the world's largest democratic country, may find itself in the difficult position both geographically and politically of having to deal with China's military expansion and double standards. China's con-

stant assistance to Pakistan in its nuclear and military build-up. It also provides military and economic assistance to Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, in the hope of making these countries dependent on China, thus isolating India and reducing its influence in the region.

Fifty years ago, during the initial stage of China's attack on Tibet, many Indian leaders voiced their concerns. Sardar Vallabhai Patel wrote in his letter to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, dated 7 November 1950: "Throughout history we have seldom been worried about our north-east frontier. The Himalayas have been regarded as an impenetrable barrier against any threat from the north. We had a friendly Tibet which gave us no trouble".

George Fernandes, India's current defence minister, said during the August 1989 *International Convention on Tibet and Peace in South Asia*: "If Tibet becomes a zone of peace, free from Chinese troops and nuclear weapons, there will be no reasons for India to maintain a large army on the Himalayan heights. This would immediately enable both India and China to reduce their military expenditure and use the money thus saved for economic development".

## Environmental Interdependence

Ten major rivers and numerous tributaries arising from the Tibetan Plateau nourish the fertile plains of Asia. These rivers flow into India, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Rivers of Tibet not only provide water, but also bring with them fertile alluvial deposits to sustain the productive agricultural regions in Asia. The region between the Indus Valley in the west and Yellow River Valley in the east sustains approximately 47 percent of the world's population. This creates an obvious interdependence between the environmental health of the Tibetan Plateau and the stability and sustainability of some of the most important and productive croplands in the world.

Tibet, with its wide variety of natural resources and its unique high altitude environment, demands careful location-specific planning to utilise its resources sustainably. Over-exploitation in a fragile mountain ecosystem can lead to long-term ecological consequences. Pollution at the headwaters of rivers in Tibet can affect billions of people downstream in Asia. Our research shows that 85 percent of Asia's population depends on the rivers that flow from the Tibetan Plateau.

Massive deforestation, associated with the development of military and unregulated industries in Tibet, contributes significantly to the pollution and siltation of the downstream rivers and the increasingly destructive flooding that occurs each year. Rivers such as the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra), Driчу (Yangtse), Machu (Yellow), Gyalmo Ngulchu (Salween), Langchen Khabab (Sutlej), Senge Khabab (Indus), Macha Khabab (Karnali), Zachu (Mekong), Bhumchu (Arun), Lhodrak Sharchu (Manas) and others may also carry nuclear waste from uranium mines, nuclear facilities and test sites on the Tibetan Plateau. These rivers finally flow into the Arabian Sea, The Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, Yellow Sea, East China Sea and the South China Sea. At the global scale such an environmental catastrophe is truly frightening.

## The Indian Monsoon

The Tibetan Plateau is a critical player in the stability of the global climate and has an especially important influence on the Indian monsoon. In the summer the air above the Plateau becomes hotter than the air above India. This enables the Plateau to act as a heating mechanism. Thus, an anticyclone is formed over the Southern Himalayas drawing in the Indian monsoon until the Plateau cools in the winter when the winds are reversed (Reiter, 1993).

Through the help of computer modelling it has been estimated that there are approximately 15-29 major indicators which help predict the formation of monsoons. The pattern of *jet streams* (high altitude winds) in the upper atmosphere and the snow cover on the high Tibetan Plateau are among the major indicators. The amount of snow cover on the Plateau is partially determined by the amount of vegetation, forest and grass cover. More specifically, the amount and type of vegetation influences the rate at which the snow cover recedes during the Spring. Green forest cover absorbs 95 percent of solar radiation; clear-cut areas and grasslands absorb only 80 percent while barren land and bare rock absorb even less. Forested areas also break up snow cover and consequently help retain an even greater amount of heat. Hence, as the Tibetan Plateau's ability to absorb solar radiation is crippled by incessant deforestation and grassland degradation, the snow cover retreats at a decelerating pace.

As the forest cover decreases the heating mechanism of the Plateau diminishes and through a series of interconnections, the pressure systems are altered, which either delays or reduces the Indian monsoon. This lingering snow cover disrupting the Indian monsoon has the potential to foster disasters for Indian agriculture (Reiter, 1993).

The monsoon rains contribute 70 percent of India's annual rainfall. Referred to as the lifeblood of Indian farmers, its stability determines whether millions of farmers live or die. In 1998, the destabilised mon-

soon caused droughts and heavy rainfall in several regions in India causing extensive damage to many crops such as onions, potato, peas, cauliflower and cabbage. The price of onions, which was between Rs. 8-10 per kg., rocketed to Rs. 50-55 in November 1998 (Anandan, et al., 1998).

## Global Climate

The Tibetan Plateau plays a significant role in global weather patterns, deflecting and compressing wind currents over thousands of kilometres (Reiter, 1981). A correlation has been established between high, extended snow cover on the Tibetan Plateau and high winter sea temperatures over the North Atlantic, bringing sunny summer weather in Europe as well as typhoons in the Pacific. This relationship is partly explained by abnormal fluctuations in *jet stream* patterns above the Tibetan Plateau which affect Pacific typhoons (Reiter, 1993). These Pacific typhoons further result in the interruption of trade winds off the west coast of North and South America, which is responsible for *El Nino* (warm ocean current). The *El Nino* is the leading factor in disturbing patterns which stir up ocean water causing disruptions of the marine food chain, affecting the entire economy of Peru and Ecuador. Storms causing damage to North America, especially the Californian coastline and bringing droughts in New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, India, and unexpected rains and droughts in Southern Africa are also part of this phenomenon. Recent studies have indicated that changes to the Tibetan Plateau's vegetation cover plays a significant role in generating regional climatic disruptions which have the potential to hasten global climatic effects (Reiter, 1993).

## Nuclear Weapons and Waste Historical Development

The first known nuclear weapon was brought onto the Tibetan Plateau in 1971 and installed in the Tsaidam Basin (Ch. Qaidam) in northern Amdo (Ch. Qinghai). His Holiness the Dalai Lama, while participating

in a meet-the-press programme, organised by the Karnataka Union of Working Journalists in Bangalore in India, said he had authentic information that China had set up a nuclear weapons factory in Tibet. He said that China had stationed a half-a-million-strong military force in Tibet, which indicated that the situation in the occupied territory was potentially explosive (*The Statesman* 21 January 1992).

China's Nationalities Affairs Commission issued a document through *Xinhua* on 18 April 1991 the official news agency stating that allegations of nuclear pollution from the deployment of nuclear weapons and nuclear waste in Tibet were "totally groundless". However, the same news agency later admitted that nuclear wastes were dumped in Tibet. On 19 July 1995 it reported that there was a "20 square metre dump for radioactive pollutants" in Tsojang (Ch. Haibei), Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture near the shores of Lake Kokonor. The report claimed that the military nuclear weapons facility (Ninth Academy) that produced the waste had maintained an "excellent" safety record during its 30 years of operation and that there had not been "any harm to the environment" and "no one at the base ever died of radiation" .

The report did not give details as to how the nuclear waste was initially contained or how it is being managed. It did however quote You Deliang, spokesman for the China National Nuclear Corporation, as saying that China spent a large amount of money from 1989 to 1993 to "strictly supervise the environmental conditions of the retired nuclear weapons base".

Chinese government propaganda even went to the extent of saying "Haibei Prefecture moved its capital from Menyuan county to the site of the retired nuclear plant, only one month after the area passed a state examination in June, 1993. Atom Bomb City (Ninth Academy) has since been serving the economic prosperity of the people" (*Xinhua* 19 July 1995).

A 1993 report *Nuclear Tibet*, published by the International Campaign for Tibet, documented reports by a Tibetan doctor, Tashi Dolma, of abnormally high rates of diseases in towns nearby the nuclear facility. She also treated children of nomads who grazed their animals adjacent to the “Ninth Academy” or “Factory 211” nuclear base, seven of whom died of cancer within five years.

## The Ninth Academy

The Northwest Nuclear Weapons Research and Design Academy, known as the “Ninth Academy” or “Factory 211”, was built by the Ninth Bureau of the Chinese Nuclear Production Establishment in the early 1960s to produce China’s early nuclear bomb designs. It is China’s top secret nuclear city located in Tsojang, 100 km west of Amdo’s capital Siling (Ch. Xining).

The construction of the Ninth Academy was approved by the late Chinese premier Deng Xiaoping, then the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The Ninth Academy is situated at 36.57 N, 101.55 E, with an elevation of 10,000 ft (3,033 m) above sea level, 10 miles (16.1 km) east of Lake Kokonor and lies in a watershed which drains into the Tsang Chu River (Ch. Xichuan-he). This becomes the Machu (Yellow River). In the late 1970s the Ninth Academy further established a chemical industry institute to conduct experiments on reprocessing highly enriched uranium fuels.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Ninth Academy operated under emergency conditions to build China’s nuclear weapons capability. An unknown quantity of radioactive waste in the form of liquid slurry as well as solid and gaseous waste was dumped by the Academy. The disposal of the waste was haphazard and their record-keeping dismal. Initially radioactive waste was dumped in shallow and unlined landfills (Ackerly 1993; ICT 1993).

According to a report by the official China news agency *Xinhua* (20 July 1995), the Ninth Academy was decommissioned in 1987 and the base was moved to in Eastern Tibet sites falling within Sichuan Province. However, in 1996 tibetans living near the Ninth Academy informed the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, that Chinese security personnel still secretly guard the Ninth Academy around the clock.

A direct railway line connects the Academy with Lake Kokonor, the largest lake on the Tibetan Plateau. Nuclear waste experts believe that radioactive waste was also dumped into the lake. A reliable report from a Chinese man whose father was a nuclear scientist in Lanzhou, Gansu, states that in 1974 there was an accident leading to nuclear pollution of the lake (ICT 1993). The Ninth Academy is located on marshy land allowing polluted water and radioactive particles to easily seep into the groundwater which flows into Lake Kokonor.

Lake Kokonor is sacred to Tibetans. Throughout history they have protected the natural beauty and sanctity of this lake through sustained spiritual practices and ecological respect. As the principle lama of Rebgong Monastery in Amdo, Je Kalden Gyatso, explains: “Today the island at the centre of Lake Kokonor is called the abode of *Maha Deva* (Lord Shiva). It has historical connections with Tibet’s great king Songtsen Gampo and also Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava). It is the abode of *klu* (beings who inhabit water) and *Jangchub Sempa* (*bodhisattvas*). It was a pilgrimage site for many kings and saints” (Palbar 1994).

## Nuclear Weapon Production and Uranium Mining

Gonpo Thondup, who escaped from Tibet to Dharamsala in India in March 1987, visited two nuclear weapons production departments code numbered 405 in Kyangtsa and 792 in Thewo, Amdo region. His statement was presented by Tsewang Norbu at the World Uranium Hearing in Salzburg, Germany, on 14 September 1992. It reads:



“The effects of experiments and waste from 792 and 405 have been devastating. Before 1960, in this region of Amdo harvests were plentiful and domestic animals healthy. Now the crop yield has shrunk and people and animals are dying mysteriously, and in increasing numbers. Since 1987 there has been a sharp rise in the number of deaths of domestic animals and fish have all but vanished. In the years of 1989 and 1990, 50 people died in the region, all from mysterious causes. Twelve women gave birth in the summer of 1990, and every child was dead before or died during birth. One Tibetan woman, Tsering Dolma (aged 30), has given birth seven times and not a single child has survived.”

Gonpo Thondup added that, “The people living near departments 405 and 792 have experienced strange diseases they have never seen before. Many local people’s skin turned yellowish and their eyesight has been affected seriously. The local populace reported strange memory losses and many babies are born deformed. The people of the area are desperated and can only turn to religion and local doctors who have no knowledge of the uranium mines or of the nuclear plants nearby” (Dekhang 1998).

There is consistent evidence that China’s nefarious nuclear programme has caused the regular loss of human lives. According to Tibet Information Network (TIN) in a News Update of 11 September 1992, at least 35 Tibetans living near uranium mines died within a few hours after developing a high fever and distinctive diarrhoea in Ngaba Prefecture in Sichuan Province.

The nuclear waste pollution of the Tibetan Plateau, besides having local effects, also has trans national implications. The high altitude winds that blow over the Tibetan Plateau may carry nuclear pollutants from Tibet across the globe to affect downstream countries. No boundary can be built to control air pollution. Consequently, serious accidents at nuclear power and weapons production plants can endanger the lives of people and the health of the environment over a

massive radins. When the major disaster occurred at Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the then Soviet Union in 1986, radioactive dust from the faulty plant travelled 950 miles (1,529 km) west-northwest resulting in extensive damage to people, property and the environment (Chitkara 1996).

## **Zone of Peace on the Roof of the World**

Under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Government-In-Exile (TGIE) has proposed negotiations to solve the problem of Tibet and transform the plateau into a Zone of Peace by withdrawing all Chinese troops from the region.

China has vowed time and time again that they are a no-first-use nation and that they are on record as being strongly in favour of nuclear abolition (Butler 1998). In Geneva on 27 April 1998, the head of the Chinese delegation at the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation on Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Sha Zukang, called for a convention on a total ban of nuclear weapons to be convened at an early date like the conventions banning chemical and biological weapons (*Xinhua* 27 April 1998). China on 23 July 1999 declared publicly its endorsement of a treaty to maintain South-east Asia as a nuclear-weapons-free zone, making it the first major military power to do so (*Inside China Today* 1999). These are positive signs.

In his New Millennium Message, the Dalai Lama stressed the importance of non-violence, demilitarisation, and environmental protection for a better millennium:

This past century in some ways has been a century of war and bloodshed. It has seen a year by year increase in defence spending by most countries in the world. If we are to change this trend we must seriously consider the concept of non-violence, which is a physical ex-

pression of compassion. ... We must first work on the total abolishment of nuclear weapons and gradually work up to total demilitarisation throughout the world. In the process of doing this we also need to work towards stopping the arms trade, which is still very widely practised because it is so lucrative. When we do all these things, we can then hope to see in the next millennium a year by year decrease in the military expenditure of the various nations and a gradual working towards demilitarisation. Human problems will, of course, always remain, but the way to resolve them should be through dialogue and discussion. The next century should be a century of dialogue and discussion rather than one of war and bloodshed.

Tibet's future role as a peace zone was first outlined by His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he addressed the United States Congress Human Rights Caucus on 21 September 1987, and initiated the Five-Point Peace Plan for Tibet. The first point in this plan states that the whole of Tibet shall be transformed into a Zone of Peace. This is in-keeping with China's open support for the kingdom of Nepal's planned transformation into a peace zone. If Tibet were to be included in this plan, then the proposed peace zone in Central Asia would be much bigger and more meaningful. The Dalai Lama's 1988 address to the European Parliament echoed the same plea for the "conversion of Tibet into a zone of peace, a sanctuary in which humanity and nature can live together in harmony". But Beijing's response, received via the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi on 17 May 1989, said, "the Dalai Lama's proposal for turning the whole of Tibet into a Zone of Peace will never be accepted by the Chinese Government".

Environmental protection is one of the most important items on the agenda of the Dalai Lama's vision for a future free Tibet. The fourth point in his peace plan talks about ecological restoration and protection of Tibet and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet as a nuclear

factory and a nuclear waste dump-site. In his new millennium message says:

For the sake of our future generations, we need to take care of our earth and of our environment. Environmental damage is often gradual and not easily apparent and by the time we become aware of it, it is generally too late. Since most of the major rivers flowing into many parts of South-east Asia originate from the Tibetan Plateau, it will not be out of place to mention here the crucial importance of taking care of the environment in that area.

Moreover in the *Guidelines for Future Tibet's Polity and the Basic Features of its Constitution*, His Holiness mentioned that "free Tibet's government shall be committed to preserving a clean, healthy and beautiful environment". This vision is conceived not only for the benefit of Tibet but for the whole world, because the environmental degradation on the Tibetan Plateau will not only have local effects but most certainly global consequences as well.

## **Indian Leaders on Tibet**

The future of Tibet is closely linked with the security of India and other surrounding countries. Of special concern is the conversion of Tibet into one of China's primary strategic military zone and the consequent threat it poses to the Indian subcontinent. Many Indian experts are keenly interested in the Tibetan issue and closely watch the developments in Tibet. The *All India Convention on Tibet* was held in Calcutta on 30 and 31 May 1959. In 1960, Jayaprakash Narayan organised the *Afro-Asian Convention on Tibet and Against Colonialism in Asia and Africa*. At that meeting he urged the government of India to make a fresh appraisal of its policy towards Tibet. In February 1989, the *Himalayan Bachao Sammelan* organised a conference on India, China and Tibet in Delhi. Atal Behari Vajpayee, the current Prime Minister of India, inaugurated the conference.

In August 1989 the National Committee for Tibet and Peace in South Asia, headed by George Fernandes currently India's Defence Minister, organised an *International Convention on Tibet and Peace in South Asia*. The convention was attended by delegates from 11 countries with more than 80 prominent participants, including the former President of India Giani Zail Singh. Such important conferences and seminars led to the formation of the All-Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet, which in 1994 organised the inaugural World Parliamentarians Convention on Tibet in New Delhi.

On 17 March 1960, Atal Behari Vajpayee, then a member of Parliament and leader of the Bharatiya Janta Party, mentioned in an address to the Lok Sabha: "I believe that the security of India is linked with the autonomy of Tibet...from the point of view of national interests, the fact that Tibet is being annihilated cannot be for the good of India in the long run".

Jaya Prakash Narayan on 30 May 1959, in his presidential address at The All India Convention on Tibet held in Calcutta said, "India, as an immediate neighbour of Tibet, and as a country regarded for its moral position, its detachment and freedom from power politics, has a great responsibility in this matter. The world looks to India for a lead and India must not fail". A peaceful and ecologically stable Tibet will undoubtedly help both India and China in their socio-economic development. Such an achievement would be a model for other countries to follow.

With the new phase of friendlier Indo-China relations, future Tibet can potentially link the two Asian giants in a relationship of peaceable coexistence. Such a situation can only happen if the Tibetan Plateau is demilitarised and transformed into a peace zone. It is time for the government and the citizens concerned to seriously discuss the issues outlined here and take concrete steps to make the Roof of the World into a zone of peace and tranquillity for the benefit of the Indian subcontinent and the world at large. ■

## **A Message From The Dalai Lama For The New Millenium**

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The Dalai Lama 1 January 2000

Many people seem to be excited about the new millennium, but the new millennium in itself will be nothing special. As we enter into the new millennium things will be the same; there will be nothing unusual. However, if we really want the next millennium to be happier, more peaceful and more harmonious for humankind we will have to make the effort to make it so. This is in our hands, but especially in the hands of the younger generation.

We have had many experiences during this century — constructive as well as extremely destructive ones. We must learn from these experiences. We need to approach the next millennium more holistically, with more openness and farsightedness. If we are going to make the right kind of efforts to make the future of the world better, I believe the following matters are of great importance.

1. While engaging in material progress and taking care of physical well-being we need to pay equal attention to developing peace of mind and thus taking care of the internal aspect of our being.
2. Along with education, which generally deals only with academic accomplishments, we need to develop more altruism and a sense of caring and responsibility for others in the minds of the younger generation studying in various educational institutions. This can be done without necessarily involving religion. One could therefore call this 'secular ethics', as it in fact consists of basic human qualities such as kindness, compassion, sincerity and honesty.

3. This past century in some ways has been a century of war and bloodshed. It has seen a year by year increase in defense spending by most countries in the world. If we are to change this trend we must seriously consider the concept of non-violence, which is a physical expression of compassion. In order to make non-violence a reality we must first work on internal disarmament and then proceed to work on external disarmament. By internal disarmament I mean ridding ourselves of all the negative emotions that result in violence. External disarmament will also have to be done gradually, step by step. We must first work on the total abolishment of nuclear weapons and gradually work up to total demilitarisation throughout the world. In the process of doing this we also need to work towards stopping the arms trade, which is still very widely practiced because it is so lucrative. When we do all these things, we can then hope to see in the next millennium a year by year decrease in the military expenditure of the various nations and a gradual working towards demilitarisation.

Human problems will, of course, always remain, but the way to resolve them should be through dialogue and discussion. The next century should be a century of dialogue and discussion rather than one of war and bloodshed.

4. We need to address the issue of the gap between the rich and the poor, both globally and nationally. This inequality, with some sections of the human community having abundance and others on the same planet going hungry or even dying of starvation, is not only morally wrong, but practically also a source of problems. Equally important is the issue of freedom. As long as there is no freedom in many parts of the world there can be no real peace and in a sense no real freedom for the rest of the world.

5. For the sake of our future generations, we need to take care of our earth and of our environment. Environmental damage is often gradual and not easily apparent and by the time we become aware of it, it is generally too late. Since most of the major rivers flowing into many

parts of South-east Asia originate from the Tibetan Plateau, it will not be out of place to mention here the crucial importance of taking care of the environment in that area.

6. Lastly, one of the greatest challenges today is the population explosion. Unless we are able to tackle this issue effectively we will be confronted with the problem of the natural resources being inadequate for all the human beings on this earth.

We need to seriously look into these matters that concern us all if we are to look forward to the future with some hope. ■



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## **Tibetan Buffer Good for Both India and China**

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**Dawa Norbu\***

Tibet looms large in Sino-Indian relations and politics, even after 45 years of Chinese occupation, because of its intimate connection with the strategic interests of both parties. It is a manifestation of continuing Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in inner Asia and the Himalayas. The crux of the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry is this: if the Chinese power elite considers Tibet to be strategically important to China, its Indian counterpart thinks it is equally vital to Indian national security.

Tibet thus presents itself even today as a strategic dilemma for both parties. If India dominates Tibet (as the British raj had done until 1947), the Chinese feel insecure and threatened. Conversely, if China occupies Tibet (as it has since 1950), India feels that its whole northern security system, stretching over 2,000 miles, is open to external danger. Such a strategic zero-sum game over Tibet may be resolved through neutralisation of the contested territory, as Britain and Russia did in their treaty of 1907 which ensured peace for 43 years. What makes this historical lesson to neutralise Tibet (or more specifically Outer Tibet) pertinent is the nuclearisation of India.

### **Median space**

Since most of China's nuclear facilities are located in Inner Tibet (Amdo and Kham), well within the reach of India's nuclear facilities, the need to transform Outer Tibet into a nuclear-free and buffer zone in order to increase the peace-friendly strategic space for both is more urgent than before. This will enlarge Nepal's nuclear-free zone proposal which China used to support. The neutralisation of Outer Tibet will have a peace-inducing effect on Sino-Indian relations in particular. It might

also have its demonstration effect on other contested territories and conflict zones in Asia.

As we have observed, India has conceded to the Chinese creation of buffer states along the cis-Himalayas which during the British raj constituted the inner rampart of India's defense system. Now it is time (and the nuclearisation of the South Asia makes it more urgent) for the Chinese to create a buffer zone out of their territory which had historically functioned as an autonomous buffer state. These two buffer lines from the Chinese and Indian sides will increase the overall strategic peace-friendly space that might minimise the chances of a nuclear arms race or even conflict between China and India.

Fortunately, I see some favourable global tendencies which might encourage the neutralisation of Tibet. Firstly the end of the Cold War has meant a considerable reduction of international tension, which might in turn lead to the reduction of mutual suspicion and tension between India and China in the long run. Secondly, the current globalisation tends to lay more stress on economic gains and less on national glory. Both of these factors make sense when we remember that Tibet's modern fate has been a victim of Sino-Indian strategic rivalry whose uncompromising logic has reduced the Tibet issue to a zero-sum game. This has been a costly game for both China and India. For example, up to 1947, 75 Indian policemen were enough to guard the Indo-Tibetan border; now India has to deploy seven to eight divisions in the Himalayas. Up to 1911 the Chinese military presence in Lhasa was limited to 250-300 soldiers; now China has to deploy 150,000 soldiers in Tibet. If, therefore, Dalai Lama's middle way conflict resolution is accepted, followed or preceded by the neutralisation of Tibet, then both the Chinese and Indian defence budgets will be drastically reduced.

The nuclearisation of the Tibetan Plateau and of India will have a profound effect on the Tibet issue. Tibet is theoretically transformed into a nuclear launching pad, and there is therefore an urgent need to

make Outer Tibet, at least, a nuclear-free zone so as to enlarge Nepal's idea of also becoming nuclear free, a concept which China supports. Otherwise the danger of a nuclear strike, targeted or accidental, is not remote. Beijing's main concern is whether or not India decides to increase the number of its weapons and deploy along the Sino-Indian border, which seems likely, given the present government's perception of threat. If they do, then China might decide to do so more openly and actively. As John Ackerly has documented, China's "Los Alamos" is Inner Tibet and India is well within its nuclear reach.

Seen from such a perspective a nuclear arms race is likely to be more between India and China and less between India and Pakistan, because Pakistan, due to its limited resources, cannot keep up the nuclear race. Its informal allies such as China might find it too costly to continue to aid Pakistan in a nuclear arms race with India. China might as well confront and concentrate on India directly rather than through an expensive proxy nuclear race.

## **Nuclear Danger**

If such a reading is correct, then nuclear dangers involving the Tibetan Plateau, the Himalayan region and South Asia are real. The nuclearisation of the Tibetan Plateau and South Asia is sure to increase tension along the Sino-Indian borders. It might trigger a nuclear arms race and the possibilities of a nuclear conflict cannot be ruled out, given the pending, emotive, contentious issues between the two sides.

Faced with such grave dangers to regional peace, the responsible task of an area specialist with an interest in strategic studies is not to instigate war. Rather, it is to research and present relatively objective or realistic structures of peace that minimise the chances of regional conflict. Nuclear China is a well recognised fact now, and that is why Beijing perceives India's nuclear test as a challenge to its nuclear monopoly in Asia. But India's recent nuclear explosion is a new reality

which, though not on the same scale as China's capability at present, has to be recognised and taken into account when we propose any enduring peace plan for Tibet.

What, unfortunately, makes our projection of nuclear arms races and nuclear dangers such a serious issue is the sheer proximity of Chinese and Indian nuclear sites. Such proximities have inherent nuclear dangers. When nuclear weapons were placed in the former Soviet Union and the USA, long distances away from each other, nuclear crises could be managed. But when Russian nuclear missiles were moved to Cuba, at once a serious nuclear crisis was triggered. At present Chinese nuclear sites in Inner Tibet are roughly 2,000 km from New Delhi. And if India decides to deploy its nuclear weapons along the Himalayan border, we face a dangerous eyeball-to-eyeball situation. This will give no peace of mind either to the Chinese or the Indians, and much less to the Tibetans who inhabit the plateau. Therefore, there is an urgent need to increase the buffer or strategic space between the two nuclear states.

## **Peace Dividend**

I would not suggest, even though it would be ideal, making the entire Tibetan Plateau and the cis-Himalayas a nuclear-free zone because almost all the Chinese nuclear facilities are located in Inner Tibet close to the traditional Sino-Tibetan border. Therefore Beijing is unlikely to entertain such sweeping proposals. However, it is realistic that Outer Tibet should be transformed into a nuclear-free zone to enlarge Nepal's concept of it. Another reason why I suggest Outer Tibet is that the resumed Sino-Tibetan dialogue is increasingly narrowing down to Outer Tibet as a realistic subject of negotiation rather than the entire Tibetan Plateau.

Finally, the neutralisation and denuclearisation of Outer Tibet that immediately borders India would have an overall peace-producing effect on both sides of the Himalayas because it removes, almost auto-

matically, one major cause of Sino-Indian strategic rivalry in Inner Asia and the cis-Himalayas.

It will also bring peace dividends to both the parties — a reduction in defence expenditure. India's defence expenditure on the Himalayas is 50 to 60 million rupees per day. China's defence expenditure may be even more. The Chinese have to burn three to four litres of petrol in order to bring one litre of oil to Outer Tibet. It costs China four times more to feed and clothe a soldier in Tibet than in China proper. And the cost of the nuclear arms race between China and India is beyond our simple calculation. It benefits neither Chinese nor Indian peasants who constitute over 80 percent of their respective populations. Nor does it benefit the average Tibetan nomad or peasant.

In short, neutralisation, and transformation of the TAR into an autonomous, nuclear-free zone would increase the chances of peace and stability in Asia, and also cut down Chinese and Indian defence budgets, which could be rightly directed towards economic development. I believe this is in the interest of all the parties involved — Chinese, Indians, and Tibetans — and is a small concession that a great power like China can well afford to make for the Tibetan people, whose struggle has enjoyed worldwide support. ■

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Reprinted from the Statesman of 18 September, 1999

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## **Blueprint For The Demilitarisation Of The Himalayas As An Ineluctable Environmental Necessity**

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Major General (Rtd) Vinod Saighal\*

The military dimension has generally prevailed over most other dimensions of human existence since the dawn of history; but never to the extent that it has in our century. Coming closer to our day and age it now tends to preponderate over the dimensions to the detriment of the planet as a whole. As a landmass the Himalayas, and the regions adjacent to the great mountain chain, have the dubious distinction of playing host to perhaps the largest concentration of military forces and destructive weapons systems anywhere in the world. The collective concentration of the forces of China, India, Pakistan and a few other states could soon destroy one of the most magnificent natural habitats of the world.

Individually, countries like India, Nepal, Bhutan, and China “have” started perceiving at the periphery of their military vision that all is not well with the ecology of the region. In non-military segments there is a greater awareness that an irreversible decline may already have set in. All countries that derive sustenance from the mighty Himalayan sources have subconsciously realised that the day of reckoning is not far off. The audience present here does not have to be reminded of the suffering caused to hundreds of millions of people by unprecedented floods.

In this presentation we will dwell upon the intra-regional dimension of the problem in order to highlight the fact that unless the countries of the region come to their senses and join hands to reverse the eco-destruction of the Himalayas the future generations of Chinese, Indians, Tibetans, Nepalese and Pakistanis will not have much left to

fight over. The eco-restoration of the Himalayas is now an ineluctable “survival imperative” for over a billion people living in and around the Himalayan region.

The eco-revival plan being put forward for consideration divides the portion of the Himalayan region under consideration into four segments: i.e. areas west of the 75<sup>0</sup> meridian, that is the Pakistan-Afghanistan sector; the Indian sector; the India-China sector; and other relatively dormant sectors. The first sector, the Pak-Afghan Sector, west of the 75<sup>0</sup> meridian is outside the purview of today’s presentation, being the battleground for the power play of very many outside powers. We will take the remaining sectors turn by turn.

### **Indo-Pakistan Sector (Jammu and Kashmir Sector)**

The J and K sector can again be divided into two sub-sectors i.e. Ladakh Sector and areas to its north; and remainder of J and K.

In the Ladakh Sector the major dispute centres around Siachen. The highest battleground in the world has created, in addition to the human suffering undergone by troops of both sides, environmental devastation whose effects will only be known once the troops pull out. Tens of thousands of tons of human waste, oil and lubricants and other contaminants have penetrated the snowy vastness, not to mention the millions of rounds of small arms ammunition and mortar and artillery shells. We grew up with the phrase “pure as the driven snow”. It has acquired a different meaning in much of the Himalayan landscape. We recommend an immediate demilitarisation of the Siachen region along the following line:

**ā** Non-military joint commissions to verify the exact position of the belligerents on the ground. After verification the documents to be deposited by the respective governments at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague. Both countries would give written undertakings not to re-militarise or change the status quo in Siachen after

troop pull back, for a minimum period of 25 years. In case of infringements, the ICJ to be empowered to impose heavy fines on the defaulting party.

Concomitantly, China would give a written guarantee not to, in any way, take advantage of the demilitarisation to the detriment of the countries pulling back their troops. Other nations are not required to get into the act.

ã After submission of the documents to the ICJ complete demilitarisation up to designated lines would be effected within 180 days.

ã The Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan to jointly dedicate a memorial to the fighting spirit of some of the best soldiers in the world. They have been fighting under conditions which test the limits of human endurance.

Thereafter, joint Indo-Pak scientific teams to study the environmental impact of militarisation of the Siachen region and the remedial measures that are required to be undertaken for limiting damage to future generations.

## **India-China Sectors**

The India-China Sectors can again be further subdivided into three zones from the point of view of past hostility as follows:

ã *Zones of Absolute Tranquillity.* These are the areas where no skirmishing or fighting has taken place since after the occupation of Tibet by Chinese troops i.e. continued tranquillity for nearly 50 years.

ã *Zones of Continuous Tranquillity* represent those areas where for over 35 years there has been no fighting or skirmishing i.e. since the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962.



ã *Zones of Hostility* or skirmish zones.

Having delineated the sub sectors we recommend the following pattern for gradual demilitarisation of the Sino-Indian border as well as the ecologically fragile zones of Tibet..

ã In the first instance, the Siachen demilitarisation model to be applied to the first two zones of the Sino-Indian border i.e. the absolute tranquillity zones and the continuously tranquil zones. Similar deposition of documents before the ICJ along with identical pledges and penalties for infringement. China being a permanent member of the UN Security Council with veto powers, that body has been given a wide berth and the ICJ route taken instead.

ã Establishment of joint eco-restoration commissions to undertake joint eco-restoration work without prejudice to either country's stand on the boundary dispute.

ã Pledge before the ICJ that neither country would ever use eco-restoration zones for military activities in the future or to launch any military operations through those areas.

ã The Chinese government to set up an independent commission for the phased denuclearisation and demilitarisation of Tibet in anticipation of international movement in that direction. Regardless of the rate of international progress the Chinese government to unilaterally chalk out a massive 25 year programme for the eco-restoration of Tibet. The World Bank and the Tibetan the Tibetan issues.

ã The Government of India, in concert with the Government of Nepal, to chalk out a (similar) 25 year scheme for the full-scale eco-restoration of the Himalayas in the entire sub-Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions. Gorkha pensioners in Nepal and Indian ex-servicemen, hailing from the region, to be incorporated in this

mammoth task.

At this juncture we have sketched out a bare-bones scheme for the eco-restoration of the Himalayas. The Eco-Monitors Society has already done considerable work to flesh out the scheme. ■

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This speech was delivered at *the Eco Revival Summit 98* on 9 November 1998, India International Centre, New Delhi.

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*This past century in some ways has been a century of war and bloodshed. It has seen a year by year increase in defence spending by most countries in the world. If we are to change this trend we must seriously consider the concept of non-violence, which is a physical expression of compassion. In order to make non-violence a reality we must first work on internal disarmament and then proceed to work on external disarmament. By internal disarmament I mean ridding ourselves of all the negative emotions that result in violence. External disarmament will also have to be done gradually, step by step. We must first work on the total abolishment of nuclear weapons and gradually work up to total demilitarisation throughout the world. In the process of doing this we also need to work towards stopping the arms trade, which is still very widely practised because it is so lucrative. When we do all these things, we can then hope to see in the next millennium a year by year decrease in the military expenditure of the various nations and a gradual working towards demilitarisation.*

— H.H. The XIV Dalai Lama's New Millennium Message, 1 January 2000.

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