

Endorsing China's lies cannot change the fact that Tibet is not part of China

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Tibetan Hopes

During his maiden visit to China, President Barack Obama became the first American President in history to publicly make an acknowledgement that *“we recognize that Tibet is part of the People’s Republic of China”*. This recognition of Communist China’s spurious claims of sovereignty over occupied Tibet, drawn from a cynical cauldron of economic interest and geo-political considerations, has generated a sense of profound disappointment across the broader Tibetan community and also among those who cherish values of justice and democracy.

There was a genuine sense of belief that the President would transfer his message of change, hope and integrity to America’s somewhat tainted foreign policy. In the weeks prior to President Obama’s trip to China, Tibetans dared to hope that at last their struggle for freedom and human rights was strengthened by a statesman whose commitment to democratic principles and justice would mean that the rights of the Tibetan people are not ignored or marginalized. Hand-written letters and artwork from Tibetan children, poured into the White House imploring Obama to speak-out against the oppression and injustice inside Tibet. As Air-Force-One departed optimism prevailed that on this occasion China’s global economic influence would not censor any criticism of its illegal occupation and violent repression of Tibet.

Such expectancy proved to be cruelly misplaced, as evidenced from the moment the President addressed Chinese students at a carefully staged event in Shanghai, in which he significantly avoided any reference to Tibet. The portents were ominous and given Beijing’s previous public demands, that Obama issue an acknowledgement that Tibet was part of China, it was clear that such an arrangement had already been agreed between the two sides. Such knowledge did not however lessen the distasteful impact and disillusionment at seeing the President next to Hu Jintao, a man whose hands are stained with the blood of countless Tibetans and Uyghurs upon his hands, as he delivered the carefully scripted recognition that China had demanded, an acknowledgement that the United States considers Tibet part of China. Although President Obama was simply re-stating what has been a longstanding official US policy towards Tibet, his words trampled over the hopeful expectations of Tibetans across the United States and the rest of the world.

Missed Opportunities

An opportunity to advocate the Tibetan people’s rights, as contained in three United Nations Resolutions, (No’s 1353, 1723 and 2079) was cold-heartedly spurned. Within a building, under the shadow of which the massacre of Tiananmen Square was conducted, there was no room for the political and legal rights of people to determine their own future Nor could that atmosphere sustain any spoken reference to the destruction of Tibetan culture or support for Tibet’s freedom. Such ideals were abandoned in exchange for appeasing Chinese sensitivities on Tibet. President Obama and his colleagues at the State Department dismissed the 1991 determination of the US Congress, which asserted that *“Whereas the United States should not condone aggression by accepting China’s claim to sovereignty over Tibet; Now, therefore, be it: Resolved.....that Tibet, including those areas incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Quinghai, is an occupied country under the established principles of international law....”*

Historical Outline

An ancient country with a rich cultural tradition, Tibet enjoyed the rights and privileges of a political and territorial sovereign state until its invasion in 1949 by China. Religion was a unifying force among Tibetans; as was their language, music, literature, and art. For centuries Tibet displayed all the characteristics of a fully operating independent nation, minimal Chinese influence came only at times when China itself was under foreign occupation during the 14th and 18th centuries (Mongolian and Manchu Dynasties). Following the expulsion of Chinese forces, from Tibetan territory in 1911, the 13th Dalai Lama reasserted Tibet’s full independence by using a binding declaration and engaged in international diplomatic relations by signing independent treaties with Mongolia, Nepal and the then British India.

Betraying Tibetan Aspirations

Such facts and China’s illegal occupation of Tibet has been cast aside and replaced by the convincing realities of trade with China and its growing influence upon the world stage. Which have bewitched successive Presidential administrations, that have largely remained silent, as Tibetans inside Tibet faced machine guns and tanks to demand their independence. Barack Obama’s is no different.

The ultimate aspiration of the Tibetan people for complete independence has been expressed by Tibetans inside and outside Tibet. The recent historic and peaceful protests of 2008 in Tibet which resulted in the murder, imprisonment and disappearance of thousands of innocent Tibetans is a vivid reminder of the genuine aspiration of the Tibetans inside Tibet.

The participation of Tibetans in determining the future status of their country was formerly recognized as vital by His Holiness: *“I have always stated that the central issue is that the Tibetan people must ultimately choose their own destiny. It is not for the Dalai Lama, and certainly not for the Chinese to make that decision. It should ultimately be the wishes of the Tibetan people that should prevail”*.

In legitimizing Chinese rule over Tibet, the Obama Administration is denying Tibetans of their birth-right of self-determination and their inherent freedom of deciding their own future. Moreover by acknowledging Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, President Obama has abandoned the ‘Tibetan dream’ of a free nation, a goal which the Dalai Lama recognized, is shared by a vast majority of his people, *“I also know that every Tibetan hopes and prays for the full restoration of our nation’s independence” (HH The Dalai Lama March 10-1994)*.