



Brute force won't work

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The Chinese Government and the CPC can try to suppress dissent in Tibet, but they will fail to silence the cry for freedom

Several years ago, I recorded the memoirs of some old Tibetan officials who had witnessed independent Tibet before 1950. Among them was Kundeling, who had dutifully served the Dalai Lama's Government in Tibet and later in exile. After spending several hours remembering a Tibet which no longer exists, the dignified old man told me about his return to Tibet in 1984. He headed the Fourth Fact-finding Delegation sent by the Dalai Lama to investigate the changes wrought on the 'Roof of the World' by what the CPC called the "Liberation of Tibet".

The rapprochement process between Beijing and Dharamsala started in 1979 when Deng Xiaoping, who had come to the helm in Beijing after Mao's death, called Gyalo Dhondup, the Dalai Lama's brother, and told him that he was ready to discuss everything except Tibet's independence. This meeting was followed by the setting up of four fact-finding delegations that visited Lhasa and several remote places in Tibet between 1979 and 1984.

Kundeling recalled the circumstances around his visit to Tibet. Before the First Delegation's arrival in Lhasa, the Chinese authorities were under the impression that they had 'liberated' Tibet or at least 'pacified' it. They truly believed that the people were immensely

grateful to the Communist Party of China for having brought the 'revolution' to the 'Land of Snows'. The local authorities briefed the Tibetan population in Lhasa and everywhere in Tibet that the Dalai Lama's delegates would soon be visiting them. They instructed the people: "You should not resent this visit. You should not insult the delegates. You should not spit on them. Just receive them as your own countrymen."

It did not turn out this way. Kundeling explained, "When the first three delegations went to Tibet (between 1979 and 1982), there were riots (wherever they went); the Tibetans tried even to tear the *chubas* (Tibetan dress) of the delegates to keep them as relics." The entire Lhasa population was in the streets; everybody wanted a *darshan* of the Dalai Lama's envoys. They received a reception worthy of the highest reincarnated *lamas*.

By the time the Kundeling delegation - the fourth one - reached Tibet in 1984, the Communist authorities had learnt their lesson. Spies infiltrated the crowds everywhere. "At first Tibetans came forward to speak to us. But one discovered that some of the Chinese dressed in the Tibetan *chuba*, were spying (on us) with a small walkman in the *chuba* sleeves. People became nervous; they knew they were being taped and would be interrogated later. When the word spread that this was happening, people became more cautious."

The Tibetans, however, found a way to get around the tricky situation: "Because we were sent by His Holiness (the Dalai Lama) to get something touched by us was a blessing... when our cars would leave, the Tibetans would collect the soil out of the prints of the tyres of our cars and keep it as *prasad* to eat or preserve it."

This anecdote shows that the Chinese Communist regime has never been able to understand the aspirations of the Tibetan people and

their deep resentment against Chinese colonial rule. The incident occurred after 30 years of 'liberation'. In a different way, the same thing is happening today in Lhasa and several places of Tibet where the most serious riots since 1989 erupted on March 10.

During the recent 11th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, President Hu Jintao met a few 'Tibetan' delegates and told them: "Tibet's stability has to do with the entire country's stability, Tibet's safety has to do with the entire country's safety."

More worrisome for Tibetans, Mr Hu Jintao told the delegates that the party "fully trusts" the Han Chinese cadre in Tibet. The party will continue to "tremendously support their work and warmly care about their lives". Analysts read in his words of praise for the hard work of the Han cadre in Tibet, a sign that Tibetans will not be given any say in their own affairs. The genuine autonomy demanded by the Dalai Lama is still decades away.

That is precisely the problem: Tibetans do not have a say in their lives, or their future in today's Tibet. With the arrival of the railway line (3.8 million Chinese travelled by train to Lhasa last year) and the influx of new Han settlers, the resentment has increased.

Though the reports of the riots are sketchy, Chinese sources speak of "a tumultuous day (March 14) that saw windows smashed, shops robbed, a mosque burnt down and reportedly many casualties." China's official news agency, *Xinhua*, reported: "Witnesses said the unrest started around 1:10 pm on Friday, several people clashed with and stoned the local police around Ramogia Monastery in downtown Lhasa."

Ramogia Monastery was earlier called Ramoche Monastery. However, the Chinese have used their own phonetic spellings to Sinicise Tibetan

names: 'Ramoche' thus became 'Ramogia'. Each and every old colonial trick is being used in Tibet today; even Lhasa time is Beijing Standard Time. Lord Macaulay would have had to admit that the Chinese are far superior to the British in forcing their 'culture' on indigenous people.

Trouble started on March 10 when 300 monks from Drepung Monastery, near Lhasa started a peaceful protest march towards Barkhor Street in central Lhasa. A few monks were arrested by Public Security Bureau officials and a large deployment of force was immediately seen around Drepung Monastery.

People's Armed Police personnel, including plain-clothed police, were reportedly present around Central Cathedral in Lhasa. The next day, Sera Monastery got involved in peaceful demonstrations. Again, some monks were arrested, and severely beaten and manhandled by PSB officials.

The following day, about 2,000 Chinese troops fired teargas to disperse hundreds of Sera Monastery monks, calling for the release of their fellow monks while shouting pro-Tibet slogans. The situation further deteriorated in the following days with the use of brutal force against the demonstrators.

Beijing immediately put the blame on the Dalai Lama. A Government official in Lhasa told *Xinhua* that there was evidence to prove that the "sabotage" in Lhasa was "organised, premeditated and masterminded" by the Dalai Lama clique. *Xinhua* admitted that the authorities "were forced to use a limited amount of teargas and fired warning shots to disperse the desperate crowds".

The 'limited' use of force mentioned by the Chinese Government nevertheless took the lives of 16 people, according to Chinese sources. The Dalai Lama has spoken of at least 100 dead.

According to the Dalai Lama, "These protests are a manifestation of the deep-rooted resentment of the Tibetan people under the present governance." He said that "unity and stability under brute force is at best a temporary solution. Force is not conducive to finding a peaceful and lasting solution." While urging his fellow Tibetans not to resort to violence, he said that "the protest in Lhasa is borne out of China carrying out a sort of cultural genocide in Tibet, intentionally or unintentionally".

Today, like 24 years ago at the time of Kundeling's visit (or later during the 1987 and 1989 demonstrations), the problem is that China prefers to ignore the aspirations of Tibetans and the need for a larger say in their own affairs.

Unless, Mr Hu Jintao and his colleagues understand this, the Tibet issue will remain alive.