

Chinese soldiers lose sanity controlling peaceful Tibetan protesters¹

Last week, during their annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue, Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi and Deputy Secretary of State William Burns had some wide-ranging discussions. During the two-day talks, Burns asked his Chinese counterpart about the fate of the Tibetans and Uighurs in the People's Republic. On the last day, when the two leaders held a joint press Conference, Yan Jiechi reiterated that all was well in the Land of Snows: "China has made important progress on human rights. People in various regions in China including Xinjiang and Tibet are enjoying happier lives and they are enjoying unprecedented freedoms."

Yang was deeply unhappy with the annual human rights report of the US State Department which spoke of deteriorating conditions in Tibetan areas and Xinjiang. He hit back at US, urging Washington to look into its own courtyard: "We hope the United States will improve its own human rights situation."

Mr. Yang may believe that the Tibetan enjoy 'unprecedented freedoms', but his own People's Armed Police (PAP) suffers in an unprecedented manner on the Roof of the World.

This emerges from a secret Chinese document which has recently been smuggled out of Tibet and later translated by the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), a human right agency based in Dharamsala.

The document, dated October 2008 is called "A Handbook on Psychological Counseling and Protection During Stability Maintenance Work in Tibetan Areas". It was drafted by the medical staff department of the Sichuan's PAP

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Corps. Its objective is to counsel the paramilitary forces doing 'maintenance stability work in Tibetan areas', an euphemism for repression of peaceful gatherings on the Tibetan plateau. The 'handbook' was prepared to take care of the psychological health of the armed police. Various hospitals and health institutes participated in drafting the document which explained: "The purpose of this handbook is to create awareness on common psychological problems faced by PAP soldiers in stability maintenance in Tibetan areas and to identify common psychological problems to strengthen the ways and means to handle such problems while carrying out stability maintenance tasks" Because the PAP's 'psychiatric wellbeing is needed to maintain stability'.

Well Mr. Yang, even if the Tibetan masses are unprecedentedly happy, your Police forces seem to have a serious problem.

The handbook answers the questions of the stressed jawans in a question and answer format.

First question: How to ease mental stress faced by stability maintenance troops in Tibetan areas?

The answer gives the background of 'the work': "Ever since the soldiers began their responsibility of maintaining stability in Tibetan areas, despite all the risks and dangers, on the whole they have kept a determined mind, without succumbing to fear, and made lots of efforts bearing all hardships."

But it is not so easy to control unarmed non-violent Tibetan crowds. The handbook says: "However, the environment of Tibetan areas is very unique and special, and carrying out activities there entails lots of complexities."

Indeed, 60 years after the so-called Liberation of Tibet, the Chinese stress out as soon they reach the plateau.

The handbook goes into detail into different cases of severe headaches, nightmares, flashbacks of brutal episodes such as beating (self-immolations had not begun when the manual was written): "if you face unbearable experiences such as insomnia, it would have an extremely negative impact on your responsibility to carry out work successfully." The unnecessary psychological traumas should be resolved in an appropriate time, says the manual. It explains further: "If you are suffering flashbacks, you should close your eyes and imagine that you are zooming in on the scene like a camera. It may feel uncomfortable. Then zoom all the way out until you cannot see anything. Then tell yourself the flashback has gone."

Perhaps, perhaps not!

It appears now that special teams have been visiting the region, spending months at a time counseling Chinese troops.

The handbook even says that the lack of oxygen at high altitude can worsen the syndrome by "decreasing rational thinking and leading to short temper or depression".

There is a consolation, you will have the support of the masses and praise from the Party, if you "resolutely implement the directives of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission and Chairman Hu Jintao" and fight the 'separatists'. Does this really help?

The handbook even provides a phone number (0833-2452776) to call in case of emergency.

The main issue seems to be that the PAP works in a completely foreign environment, with no understanding of the country, the language, the culture or the mindset of the Tibetans. Many of the soldiers live (and sleep)

in fear of being attacked; some even see maroon frocks of monks in their nightmares.

Matthew Akester, a Tibetan speaking scholar who has studied the handbook, explains: "This document provides rarely seen low-level testimony that China's security forces see themselves as engaged in a taxing counter-insurgency in Tibet, despite the absence of armed opposition, or indeed any substantial threat to their personnel."

The latest example of unreasoned and needless shooting by the PAP occurred on the occasion of the 78th birthday of the Dalai Lama on 6 July in Tawu County in Kardze Prefecture of Sichuan.

It was reported that at least 9 Tibetans sustained serious gunshot wounds; some of them are believed to be in a critical condition. Horrific pictures of a monk, Tashi Sonam, who was shot in his head circulated on the Net. Apparently, the PAP troops lobbed teargas shells on a religious gathering, and later beat monks and lay people.

The manual clearly explains the symptoms of constant fear of the soldiers who often panic in front of the 'peaceful' sight of a crowd burning incense and chanting mantras.

By the way, last week the Commander of the People's Armed Police in Tibet, Major General Guo Yili, died suddenly of heart attack. He was just 56 years old and had served his entire career in Tibet.

Still not acclimatized? Too much stress? Who knows?