

Tibet-China Negotiations: Background

A brief outline of efforts made by the Tibetan Government-in-exile towards the commencement of negotiations with the Government of China.

In 1951, one year after Chinese troops first entered eastern Tibet, a delegation of Tibetan officials was sent to Beijing in an effort to negotiate a solution to the conflict. There, they were forced, under threat of full-scale invasion, to sign the "Seventeen-Point Agreement". The agreement outlined the terms through which Tibet was to cede control over its external affairs to China. Under international law, agreements between states are considered to be null and void if they are the result of coercion or threat. Within days, the Tibetan government in Lhasa withdrew from the terms and conditions of the Seventeen-Point Agreement.

Although Beijing authorities have never recognized the Tibetan government's withdrawal from the Agreement and continue to insist that it remains in effect, they have at the same time systematically violated all its provisions. Between 1951 and 1959, the number of Chinese troops in Tibet increased steadily and Chinese officials took over control by force. In March 1959, the situation erupted into full-scale revolt. In Lhasa, Tibet's capital city, the revolt was suppressed by a bloody and violent assault by Chinese troops, resulting in the deaths of more than 10,000 Tibetans. The Dalai Lama escaped the city and travelled over the Himalayas into exile in India. After establishing his Government-in-exile, he began a long and tireless effort to initiate dialogue with Beijing in order to end the conflict and suffering in his homeland.

- The United Nations passed three resolutions on Tibet in 1959, 1961 and 1965, in which it called for the cessation of practices which deprive the Tibetan people of their fundamental human rights and freedoms, including their right to self-determination.
- In 1979, Deng Xiaoping invited Gyalo Thondup (the Dalai Lama's eldest brother and his then Envoy to China) to Beijing and told him that except for the issue of total independence, all other issues related to the situation in Tibet could be discussed and all problems could be resolved.
- In 1980, the Dalai Lama offered to meet with General Secretary Hu Yaobang through communications with the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. There was no response to the offer.
- On March 13, 1981, the Dalai Lama sent a letter to Mr. Deng Xiaoping describing the results of three fact-finding delegations to Tibet and suggesting ways to improve the relationship between China and Tibet.
- On July 28, 1981, General Secretary Hu Yaobang gave Gyalo Thondup a document entitled, "Five Point Policy towards the Dalai Lama", a document criticizing the Dalai Lama and dictating the conditions for his return to Tibet.



- On September 21, 1987, the Dalai Lama announced his Five Point Peace Plan for Tibet. The basic elements of the Plan were:
 - Transformation of the of Tibet into a zone of *ahimsa* (peace and non-violence);
 - Abandonment of China's population transfer policy;
 - Respect for the fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms of the Tibetan people;
 - Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste;
 - Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet.
- On October 17, 1987, the Chinese authorities delivered a message to the Dalai Lama criticizing him for the Five Point Peace Plan and accusing him of having instigated the Lhasa riots on September 27, 1987.
- On June 15, 1988, at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the Dalai Lama elaborated on the Five-point Peace Plan and presented the Strasbourg Proposal in which he suggested that China could maintain responsibility for Tibet's foreign policy and a restricted number of military installations in Tibet for defence purposes.
- On September 23, 1988, the Chinese government stated that it was willing to begin negotiations and that the date and venue would be left to the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan Government in exile proposed January 1989 in Geneva as their choice and named the members of their negotiating team.
- The Chinese government responded on November 18, 1988, rejecting Geneva and expressing preference for Beijing or Hong Kong, as the venue. The Dalai Lama agreed on Hong Kong but then the Chinese government refused to communicate any further.
- On September 2, 1991, following almost 3 years of silence from the Chinese government, Gyalo Thondup, then Cabinet Minister of the Tibetan Government in exile, declared that the Strasbourg Proposal was no longer considered to be an appropriate basis for negotiation.
- In December 1991, when Premier Li Peng visited New Delhi, the Dalai Lama proposed to meet him there. There was no response from Chinese authorities.
- Formal contact between the Dalai Lama and Beijing through the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi was cut in 1993. Informal links were maintained, but severed completely by Beijing in November 1998.
- In October 2000, Gyalo Thondup, traveled to Beijing at the invitation of the Chinese authorities. He returned with a message from the Chinese authorities (of which the details are not known) and the Dalai Lama replied with a request to send a delegation to meet with representatives of the Government of China.
- On January 30, 2001, 87 members of the Canadian Parliament wrote to Prime Minister Chrétien asking that he play an active role in bringing representatives of the Government of China to the negotiation table with representatives of the Dalai

- Lama. The Prime Minister was not requested to adopt a policy position regarding Tibet's status, but rather to broker the commencement of dialogue.
- On September 9 2002, special envoys appointed by the Dalai Lama, arrived in Beijing, for the first direct and formalized contact with Chinese officials since 1993. The envoys also traveled to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) where they held talks with Tibetan officials including Mr. Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, Vice Chair of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and Mr. Ragdi, Chairman of the TAR People's Congress.
 - On May 8, 2003, President Bush submitted the "Tibet Negotiations" report to the US Congress. The report describes repeated calls by the US administration for a Sino-Tibet dialogue.
 - On May 25, 2003, the Dalai Lama's Special Envoys returned to Beijing for follow-up meetings with Chinese officials and a visit to the eastern Tibetan province of Kham. Permission to travel to a Tibetan area outside the TAR is considered significant because it implies that all of historical Tibet, not just the TAR, could potentially be under discussion in a negotiation process. Tibet's eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo, are now incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan and Sichuan.
 - On the heels of the second Special Envoy delegation, the Xinhua News Agency published a strongly worded article reaffirming the legitimacy of the Beijing's control over Tibet, denouncing US interference and re-asserting preconditions for any negotiations - that the Dalai Lama renounce Tibetan independence and recognize Tibet as an inalienable part of China; that he recognize Taiwan as a province of China; and that he cease all "separatist activities".

For **additional information**, please see www.tibet.ca for:

The Seventeen Point Agreement (publications)

Backgrounder on the Lhasa Uprising (publications)

Members of Parliament Urge the Prime Minister to Convene Negotiations between China and Tibet. (press releases, January 30, 2001)