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[Home](#) > China: Tibet Work Forum Held on August 26, 2015, Prior to the Founding Anniversary- Important Policy Guidelines Given by Xi Jinping

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Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, during the National People's Congress Session (Beijing, March 5, 2015), called for holding a celebration to mark the 50th founding anniversary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) which falls on September 1, 2015.

Accordingly, hectic preparations are afoot in Lhasa to observe the event some time in that month. In the run up to the event, steps are being taken to ensure high level security in the TAR including troop movements. The Chinese state media announced holding of a joint military drill with live firing and participation of units belonging to army, air force, artillery, armed police, intelligence, reconnaissance and electronic warfare, on August 10 on the Tibetan plateau in Sichuan by Chengdu Military region which oversees Tibetan areas including the sensitive border with India. Code-named 'Joint Action-2015D', it is being officially described as the "first of five similar drills that will involve a total of more than 140,000 soldiers from over 140 PLA regiments of various types." Under the drill, tanks or heavy artillery in convoys of more than 200 vehicles, have been observed in different parts of Tibet. It requires to be noted that internal security is not the only purpose of the drill; as part of about 100 planned Chinese military exercises being planned, it looks meant for testing the military capability to fight and win battles around China's periphery, if necessary. These exercises will integrate different branches of the Chinese military, for which a Special Command on joint exercises was set up in 2014.

According to sources in media of exiled Tibetans, the date of the celebration is yet to be fixed, but it can be held sometime in coming September, for which an organizing committee under the chairmanship of Li Baorong, a senior official of the People's Republic of China (PRC) State Council, has been formed. Restrictions are being imposed on the movement and activities of Tibetans, the issue of travel

permits to the region has been stopped, entry into the TAR of arms and ammunitions, knives, explosives including dangerous chemicals, leaflets and other political publications, and remote-controlled toy planes, has been banned and surveillance of Internet activities has been ordered. Also, a 'Clean Sweep and Strike' campaign aimed at providing postal security is in progress; being closely monitored under it are postal exchanges between Beijing and the TAR. The organizing committee in its meeting on August 1, 2015, has said that an "image of a harmonious and stable Tibet within the country and abroad" will be projected during the celebration.

The ongoing efforts to ensure tight security in the TAR have given rise to speculations that a high level central team is to visit Lhasa to attend the anniversary and that may include the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Xi Jinping himself. The theme for this year's anniversary, according to official media, will be "countering separatism and encouraging the people in the TAR to closely unite around the CCP Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as General Secretary."

The pre- TAR anniversary scenario in China is marked by sure signs of fresh initiatives with regard to Centre's Tibet policy. Primarily, the need for such initiatives seems to have arisen from a change in Beijing's perceptions with regard to challenges for China's sovereignty over Tibet. Beijing has come to view the Dalai Lama's comments on his reincarnation of late as "an important issue concerning sovereignty and national security" (Xinhua, July 19, 2015).

The first sign was the issuing of a White Paper on Tibet (April 2015) which contained a harder line on the Dalai Lama than before. The paper in particular rejected the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach, which advocates a genuine autonomy for Tibet without challenging sovereignty of the PRC.

As next step, a conference of the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee was convened (May 20, 2015); Xi Jinping stressed on the occasion that "Now, our Party is facing significant changes in the internal and external situation and in missions and tasks. The more we change and the more the United Front develops, the more the United Front work will do well". This makes clear that Xi wants a change in the present United Front work which deals with Tibet.

The third sign was the visit (July 9-12, 2015) of the present Director of the CCP Central Committee's United Front Work Department, Ms Sun Chunlan to Tibetan areas in Gansu, Sichuan and Qinghai. The leader demanded Tibetan Buddhists should 'promote patriotism', and Buddhist teachings should be "adaptable to core values of socialism in order to become an important force for national unification, ethnic unity and social stability." This means the stand of Beijing that Tibetan Buddhism should serve the CCP's interests.

Fourth comes the holding of a top level 'Strategy Forum' in Lhasa on July 10, 2015, which took important decisions on coordinating activities to ensure 'political stability' in the TAR as well the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures incorporated into Yunnan, Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu provinces. Such a cross-regional approach is notable.

Most significant is the deliberation at the subsequent CCP Politburo meeting on July 30, 2015. In a statement issued after the meeting, the party "vowed to safeguard national unity, strengthen ethnic unity, unswervingly carry out the anti-separatism battle, and promote patriotism in the region, in order to achieve long term stability". The repetition of emphasis on 'stability' is notable. The statement said that "*the authority of the central government has always been important in the reincarnation process. Historical precedents have clearly shown the central government's vital role in the process. Since then, all confirmations of the Dalai Lama have required approval by the central Chinese government, which has deemed the process an important issue concerning sovereignty and national security.*" *The State media did not report this.* A particular report (Italian language Christian News service-Asia News) quoted an anonymous source as telling at the end of the meeting that **Xi Jinping said as follows on the occasion- "the CCP would pick the next Dalai Lama period; if things do not go well, we are ready to take corrective action."**

An initiative which is going to define the future directions of Xi Jinping administration towards the exiled spiritual leader is the post-Politburo meeting decision to form a "Leading Group" for United Front Work. This group will especially decide on resumption of talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives; the talks remain stalled since January 2010. It is being seen as indicating an up gradation of the United Front Work Department of the CCP Central Committee so far looked after by Yu Zhengsheng, a politburo standing committee member.

As next initiative, officers with Tibet experience have been promoted to the rank of full general on the occasion of the 88th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army on August 1, 2015. The promotions may mean increased level of attention on the part of Xi Jinping regime to the need to protect internal security in Tibet as well as the sensitive border with India.

Next important PRC's move on Tibet issue was holding of the Sixth Forum on Work of Tibet in Beijing by the CCP Central Committee at Beijing on August 24-25, 2015 which focused on "the research and deployment of the work for the economic and social development and long-term stability of Tibet" ("Why the Sixth Forum on Tibet is held now?", China Tibet Online, http://eng.tibet.cn/2012sy/xw/201508/t20150826_3928217.html [1] China, August 26, 2015).

Xi Jinping said at the Forum, "The work of Tibet concerns the overall work of the Party and the state, and the CCP Central Committee has always attached great importance to it. More efforts are needed to promote economic growth and all-round social progress in Tibet and Tibetan-inhabited areas in four other provinces, for which sustainable measures and continued preferential policies will be adopted. Tibet and Tibetan-inhabited areas in four other provinces have entered a critical stage toward fulfilling the country's goal of building a moderately prosperous society in a comprehensive way. Special financial, tax and investment policies should continue to be in place in the future in the

TAR and Tibetan-inhabited areas in Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai provinces. Development, which aims to improve living conditions for various ethnic groups and beef up social cohesion, should be advanced in a prudent and steady manner, and all measures taken should be sustainable. Bettering basic public service and adopting targeted measures to alleviate poverty and solving key problems which lead to poverty and improve living conditions for the impoverished as soon as possible, are a must. More active employment policies should be carried out to help residents of all ethnic groups to walk out of their farms and pastors to work in towns and companies and start businesses. Efforts should also be made to incorporate education on socialist core values into courses in schools at various levels, popularize the national commonly-used language and script, and strive to foster Party-loving and patriotic builders and successors of the socialist cause."

Addressing the same meeting, Premier Li Keqiang said among others that building of local infrastructure in the TAR should be sped up, including transportation networks, water conservation projects, power grids. He added that Tibet should be made an important tourism destination in the world, and that commerce and trade with South Asia should be promoted to boost the Tibetan economy. All other five politburo standing committee members attended the meeting.

The party and state media in China did not say anything about the Dalai Lama issue coming under discussion in the Forum. They however gave publicity to a signed Commentary published at the end of the Forum in the official website of the Department of United Front Work ("China Will never go the Dalai Lama's Middle Way", Kelsang, China Tibet online, August 26,2015 http://eng.tibet.cn/2012sy/xw/201508/t20150826_3928554.html [2]). The Commentary, apparently reflecting the party's policies, asserted that "the Central Government did not in the past, nor is now and will not in the future accept the Middle Way solution to the Tibet issue. The essential intent of the 'Middle Way' is to split China. The Dalai group refuses to accept China's sovereignty in Tibet and wants to seize the reins of power and set up a semi-independent political regime. In particular, China is against the Dalai Lama's proposal for a high degree of autonomy in Tibet; the essence of a high degree of autonomy is to set up a state within a state, free of any control from the central government". On Tibetan Buddhism, the commentary asked for promotion of "political unity and respecting religious belief", saying the government is against intervening and limiting Tibetan's religious freedom.

What do the new initiatives mean? They, in particular Xi's observations made at Tibet Work Forum, certainly look indicators to the leader's Tibet policy which now stands finalized. Its key elements are – ensuring development, opposing 'separatism' and in this way establishing stability in the TAR and other Tibetan-inhabited areas. The clubbing of TAR with other Tibetan areas by Xi in his speech at the Forum seems to be interesting suggesting that the Government itself has come to favor a cross-regional approach on development of all Tibetan areas including the TAR. In political sense however, this may not mean that on "Greater Tibet" demand, the government is bridging the gap with the Dalai Lama side. Their differences still persist. As another point, the published material on the Tibet Work Forum have so far not said anything on resumption of talks between the Centre and the Dalai Lama side. This may still happen; much would depend on the assessment of the situation in the TAR by the newly constituted Leading Group.

For known reasons, India has a stake in the Tibet situation; New Delhi should therefore carefully watch the emerging scenario with regard to

Tibet issue.

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Tags:

[China's Policy in Tibet](#) [4]

[Dalai Lama](#) [5]

[Greater Tibet](#) [6]

[Dalai Lama's Middle Way](#) [7]

Category:

[Papers](#) [8]

Countries:

[China](#) [9]

Topics:

[Political](#) [10]

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Links

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- [2] http://eng.tibet.cn/2012sy/xw/201508/t20150826_3928554.html
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- [9] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/china>
- [10] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>