

Question and Answer session

with

LODI GYALTSEN GYARI  
Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

on

THE CURRENT STATE OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE  
DALAI LAMA  
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF  
CHINA

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QUESTIONER: I feel very sympathetic to the cause of the Tibetans. Having said that, I have one comment and one question.

You mentioned that the China negotiator will be bound somehow with the established law and the policy and the White Papers, but I simply don't see the rationale behind that because China is known as a country ruled by law, not by the rule of law. Why do you feel so optimistic, at least in the overall framework? That is my first comment and question.

The second one is you elaborate about what kind of autonomy Tibetans want to have, that Tibetans are not very satisfied with marginal improvement of the current existing autonomous region nor are they are very happy with Hong Kong's status which has actually an independent legislature and executives and police. Beijing has proposed to Taiwan, as package of unification, independent government and independent armed forces. In a nutshell, except the sovereignty and armed forces, Tibetans want to have everything in the package that Beijing has proposed to Taiwan for the possible avenue for unification. Thank you.

MR. GYARI: I think we Tibetans and politically maybe I am too much of an optimist. In fact, sometimes some of my friends, either as a compliment or maybe even a little criticism, call me the optimal optimist. While I certainly admire your kind of rational perspective, I think we will stay the course the way that we want to see things. Maybe it is an illusion, but I think that we want to pursue that.

Now, having said that, I want to be today very candid, share with you everything. Still, this is a delicate process of dialogue, and my purpose here is to clearly share with you what has so far happened, what has been so far put on the table, and therefore, I do not want to go into any of the specifics of what we may discuss tomorrow because your question does lead me to that.

But let me just say this, just as I said in my remarks. Each of these areas, be it Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Tibet, has a very unique characteristic, very different needs. So, therefore, you cannot find identical solutions to every one. Do we want everything that Hong Kong has? No, because it is not relevant to us. There may be some areas that because of Tibet's uniqueness, we might need certain areas that even Hong Kong doesn't have right now. These are things that are still delicate. Therefore, if I start sharing it before even I share it with my counterparts in Beijing, I don't think I will be doing my job properly.

QUESTIONER: First, a correction of the comment made by the gentleman from Japan, when he mentioned the Chinese offer to Taiwan, whether this is exactly what the Tibetans want. Actually, in Beijing's offer, their invitation, Taiwan will be able to retain its own military. So it will have its own troops. Do the Tibetans also want to retain its military as part of the negotiating package?

My real question is, given the fact that the current Chinese leader, Hu Jintao, used to work in Tibet, so he should have knowledge about this particular case. What would be your judgment of his policy as well as your expectation from him? Thank

you.

MR. GYARI: Thank you very much. Yes, first of all, we feel quite optimistic because the most important leader in China today is a person who has personal experience in handling the Tibet issue, having even been in Tibet for a very long period of time. Of course, there are others who have a different view, including even among the Tibetans, not only outside but inside, they feel the opposite. But I believe and the belief of His Holiness -- which I think he has, in fact, stated it once or twice -- is that we believe that it is far better to be dealing with a person who has a personal firsthand knowledge of the situation rather than dealing with the leaders who depend on the information being fed to them by others. So in that, we are very optimistic, and I think as China consolidates, it is my hope that President Hu Jintao will, in fact, take this issue on through which he will really make a great contribution to China as a nation.

Again, on your first question, I had begun reacting to the latter part. It is very similar to what your colleague just asked. Of course, if you want to suggest that we go back and see if we can reimplement the 17-Point Agreement, then of course, the 17-Point Agreement did talk about permitting the maintenance of the Tibetan Army, but we are not going back to the 17-Point Agreement.

But, again, I don't want to be pulled into this kind of specific discussion. Just as I said, there are different needs. Ours is one of the preservation of the distinctive culture and identity of the Tibetan people which we believe is not only important to us; it is important to China; it is important to the rest of the world. So, again, I think my reaction is very similar to the one I gave earlier.

QUESTIONER: I share your enthusiasm and hopes for the continuing dialogue, and I hope that it produces results that will be very useful to Tibet. It seems to me, though, it is clear that the question of a unification of all ethnic Tibetans would be a major stumbling block, a major problem for successful resolution and for the movement of dialogue to negotiation. I wonder if the position of the Dalai Lama is essentially that an administrative transformation is necessary or if there is any possibility that a policy transformation for an ethnic group, for ethnic autonomous regions at any level, could be sufficient to address the problem of the Dalai Lama representing ethnic Tibetans as well as the Tibetan Autonomous Region being reconstituted.

MR. GYARI: Thank you, my friend. Thank you for your words of both optimism and hope. As you have clearly seen, I also have a great deal of fear in my heart because I certainly fear if the Chinese leaders fail to seize the opportunity of the presence of His Holiness. I also have a deep fear and sense of great concern.

Now, first of all, the Tibetan people are one people, which the Chinese have accepted. They don't say that there are many Tibetan peoples or many Tibetan nationalities within the PRC. There is just one single Tibetan people or single

Tibetan nationality, and they are unified in every regard, same people, same culture. What we are asking is that they be able to live within one single administration.

So I think sometimes the way it is mentioned in America, it looks like something awesome, something difficult. But I think if they really carefully analyze, and I hope their concern is not about Tibetan people being one people because we are already one people. No matter whether we are separate by provincial boundaries or whatever, we are one single people, recognized as one single people.

The only thing we are saying is, just as I said, the issue of different areas within China having different qualities that need to be protected. For us, it is our distinctive cultural and religious identity. In order to preserve that, we strongly believe and we think our request is legitimate. We are utterly convinced. Even though I am not an expert on the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, my present task has made it necessary for me to study a bit of that. I don't consider myself to be a legal expert, but my present task has prompted me to study a little bit of that. I am utterly convinced from every point of view, what we ask is legitimate, what we ask is according to the Chinese Constitution, Chinese laws. So on this issue, we firmly believe and we must firmly persist in our effort to convince the leaders in Beijing of the importance of the Tibetans being under a single administration for the purposes that I mentioned earlier.

QUESTIONER: Hu Jintao is going to meet with leaders of the U.S. and India and other countries, and the White House already said that President Bush would raise the Tibet issue with Hu Jintao. So how exactly would you like countries like the U.S. and India to help or how would you like the international community to help you?

MR. GYARI: Well, first of all, we are committed. We realize that the problem that we have will ultimately be resolved by us and the Chinese. On this, we have been very clear because we know that this is not the only way but ultimately the best way because again, in my lifetime, I have seen many agreements broken by third parties or others. Sometimes it does help, but I have also seen them fall apart the very next day. Ultimately, we are committed to that.

At the same time, we very much appreciate and we are grateful for the concern of the international community. You specifically mentioned the President. I have also seen the remark by the senior spokesperson just yesterday, saying that indeed President Bush will raise the issue of Tibet and will raise the issue about the dialogue when he meets with the Chinese President. We very much appreciate it, and we hope that this will be seen not as a hostile act of the Chinese Government but as a sincere effort by people who really care about world stability and understand how important for China, for China's image, for China's stability it is that the Tibet issue be resolved.

It is important. It is, I think, the sensible and the moral thing for the world leaders also to continue to think that.

QUESTIONER: You spoke a little bit about China's long history with Tibet, Tibet's long history with China, and about the issue of identity. It seems to me one of the issues that the Chinese leaders lack trust about is whether or not there is any way that Tibetans as one of the 56 nationalities that you mentioned in a multinational Chinese State can conceive of themselves as being Tibetan citizens of China. Is there, in your view, a history there that is workable, and if so, what are some of the aspects that Tibetans can build on to say if you are in Beijing, don't worry, we can be citizens of China but also preserve our distinctive culture?

MR. GYARI: I think your question is important. Looking back through the history if I be very candid with you, even in the recent history, not going back hundreds or thousands of years where we have totally different interpretations but even in, let us say, the past half-century, there are problems there. In fact, I don't think, to be very candid, a solution could be found even in the recent past. In fact, by going back to the past, a lot of negative emotions are aroused. But the Chinese leaders should have the wisdom to allow the Tibetans with dignity, by free will, and with nudging from our leader, His Holiness, which he is doing consistently day and night, to become part of this multiethnic nation.

I cannot entirely explain that to some of the Tibetans because I certainly don't have a very popular job. I think I end up being very unpopular in many segments of society. But I try to tell my Tibetan friends that we are not talking about the Tibetans accepting in this day and age sovereignty of another nationality. We are not talking about dominating all or occupying Tibet. We are talking about the opportunity where, as one of the 56 nationalities, we become part of the sovereign. This is what I think the Chinese Constitution is trying to tell us. Of course, unfortunately, many of my Chinese friends and Tibetans still have problems. But I really feel that the time can come where Tibetans will want the Tibetan part of their own identity and heritage, of being able to wear his or her hat, and at the same time, without any conflict, be able to think of being a citizen of the People's Republic of China. The only person who can really help achieve that is the Dalai Lama.

QUESTIONER: On your comment of the Tibetan administration's commitment to stay the course, if I can use the famous jargon these days in this town, did you have a timeframe?

The second part is there are those who believe that a certain group of Chinese leaders are all ears to the Tibetan proposal whereas the other side is totally deaf. Although the existing government has ruled out any third party participants and left everything to the taskforce headed by you, the person best known for international relations from day one still happens to be the Dalai Lama's elder brother, Gyalo Thondup. A couple of days ago, unofficially, he stated to Radio Free Asia that there are a lot of Tibetans who feel that there are two kinds of leaders in China today -- one, willing to listen; the other, not at all. But he says no, they are the same, and he thinks we are making a mistake if we think there are two kinds of leaders in China.

Your comments, thank you.

MR. GYARI: It may be new jargon, but His Holiness will stay the course and we will stay the course because it is in our interest. I always tell my Tibetan friends when His Holiness the Dalai Lama or the leadership urge us to do certain steps of reconciliation, some people think we do it to please the Chinese. It is a pro-China gesture. I say, no. We do it because it is a pro-Tibetan gesture. We do it because it is in our own interest.

Timeframe, time ticks. Since we have been here, we have lost or we haven't gained. Obviously, it is natural for everything politically, for such a sensitive issue as Tibet. There is a natural timeframe. There is a natural timeframe which the Chinese Government must be aware of. For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is very hearty, but he is 71 years old. These are the facts that both we as Tibetans and the Chinese must take into account. So we don't talk about whether some people sit in a room and create a timetable. As rational, sensible, responsible people, both the Chinese and us Tibetans must accept that there is a timeframe, far more important than something we create.

There are not many people who can really truly analyze China, but I think it is a fact that you don't have a crystal ball or be such a brilliant person to know that there are conflicting views in China today on a number of issues. In fact, I see this as something important because maybe 20, 30 years ahead, people will know, but today, yes, it is a reality that China is changing. There are different rules. On Tibet, definitely there is unfortunately still a group who believes that they need to just wait for His Holiness the Dalai Lama to not be and the result will be in their favor.

But there are also others whom I know and I have encouraged who see it in China's interest. This is important. If someone takes a position in Beijing because of their sympathy for Tibet, maybe that sympathy can be overcome by rationality, but there are people in my view who rationally think for the interest of China, for China to become a responsible great nation that this issue should be resolved. So we ourselves must also help contribute to the latter school of thought.

This is what I mean when I said that in gathering here, maybe one section of Chinese will unite within Brookings and maybe even unite with some of our good friends. But I know; I know very well from my past experience, there will be some there who very much appreciate. You don't have to be that wise to see that there are these conflicting views today in China.

QUESTIONER: You mentioned your personal fear and greatest concern, in terms of the Chinese Government and you just mentioned the problem of various sides of opinion, but the mainstream of the Chinese, the Beijing Government, what do you think their concern and greatest fear is in terms of fulfilling the Tibetan, as you said, legitimate request?

Another question; do you have any schedule in mind about the sixth round of conversations or dialogue with the Beijing Government?

MR. GYARI: As I said, I don't read a crystal ball. So I certainly cannot share with you how the Chinese leaders think. I do believe and it is my hope that there are today leaders and important leaders in Beijing and various parts of China who have the same kind of concerns and fears that I have, rational fears, rational concerns. It is these, ultimately, and my belief again that will help us come to a conclusion that will be of great help to all of us.

As far as the sixth round is concerned, what I can tell you is that I am ready. We have just recently come back from Dharamsala where we conducted discussions, where we have -- again I can share with you -- thoroughly examined everything that we discussed this past February, concerns that our Chinese counterparts have raised. Some of it, we dealt, in my view, with very much clarity. If those concerns are raised, generally, if those concerns are raised simply for the sake of raising them, that is a different matter.

As to when it will happen, unfortunately, unlike other negotiations where the two parties mutually talk about when we shall meet, where we shall meet, it has always been the Chinese Government who decides these matters, and we have seen the reality. We deal with it, but it is my hope that we will have the next round without too much of a delay.

QUESTIONER: Lodi, the question I have for you is you talked a bit about the resolution of the Tibet issue being in the interest of China, particularly the question of stability. I was just curious if you could talk a little bit more about why you think the Tibet issue is so important from a domestic point of view and the future of Chinese stability in China.

MR. GYARI: Well, I think is very obvious. First of all it is a reality that China is a nation composed of many different nationalities. It is also a fact that in the present moment, because of the suppressive policies, there may be signs of stability, but those of us who study that region really do know that there is lots of resentment, not only in Tibet but in many other areas, even among the Chinese themselves. I don't want to simply say that the resentment or dissatisfaction is limited only to one Chinese area. So, therefore, I think, to go back to the very encouraging philosophy of peaceful rise and harmonious society, if they are serious about it, which I think they are because out of compassion, I study it very carefully as much as I can, as much as I can understand, and they seem to be seriously looking at some of the problems that they have in order to overcome them. From that alone, I think there is a clear acceptance of the need and also the danger of instability.

Tibet is very important because we have here the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a person who really can bring about reconciliation. If it happens, I think it will definitely be of tremendous influence in other regions.

For example, the Chinese sometimes scold me because they feel that we are in connivance also with our brothers and sisters from Xinjiang. On the opposite, I tell

them they should be happy that we have some relation with some segment, not with everyone, with the very pragmatic and peaceful elements of the people from Eastern Turkestan. I tell my counterparts when they raise this issue, you should be very happy because we have a relation and our influence has been one of positive influence. You don't want them to be left to other kinds of influence which can definitely happen because of the culture and the religious background of the region.

I think there are a lot of people watching. If His Holiness is involved both to reach out to an agreement and then enforce that, I can tell you that is going to make a tremendous difference in many parts of Tibet and China.

QUESTIONER: I think you are right about Tibet, the single nationality in China. I really agree with you, but I think my question is: From that, why can we draw the conclusion from that all the Tibetan people in China should live in a single administration?

Correct me if I am wrong; just before the 1950s, I think there were already Tibetans who lived in Henan and Jiangxi under a different administration. Why don't you try to achieve economic, cultural, and religious autonomy in the different provinces simultaneously? I think that is a worthy goal to achieve. Thank you.

MR. GYARI: Yes, you are right. You mentioned about the fact that the present administrative division of Tibet happened before the coming of the People's Republic of China. But if you go back and study and analyze how the division happen, then I think for a socialist progressive government founded precisely in response to the decadent and reactionary system that existed before, you cannot actually help but agree to say that this new China undid a lot of wrong things and it is the most sensible thing. In fact, I sometimes believe that they should have done it a long time before the Tibetans were compelled to plead for it.

It is not as easy as saying that let us reshift the administrative units. It has become complicated. But we do believe we are not seeking it just for the sake of a single administration. We truly believe that for us to be able to not only preserve but to be able to advance and grow as a single people with a single common culture, it is important for us to have that opportunity. We believe what we ask is legitimate. We believe that, in fact, it is exactly in keeping with the philosophy of the new nation of China that came into being.

QUESTIONER: I wonder if you would say a few words on the succession issue. We know that is a difficult problem, but it seems to be one that Chinese officials are very right about. If, for example, they were to say that they wanted you to make concessions from your side to allow them to choose the next Dalai Lama or to require you to accept the Panchen Lama that they chose, would those kinds of demands be possible for your side?

MR. GYARI: I think that Columbia University, just as Brookings did, should



invite me, so that I can come and give a presentation exclusively on this issue of succession because it is much more complex than I think the issues we have discussed today here.

Let me just speak because I happen to be also brought up in the Buddhism tradition, and my close friends also know that I have this title of Rinpoche, which many Tibetans have, a few thousand, I think. So that means I am also incarnate. So I think I know a little bit of that tradition.

First of all, the time has come, as His Holiness very courageously did, for a complete separation of Church and State. It shouldn't be the business of the State. The State is guided by the Communist Party which doesn't believe in religion or deal with the issue of religion. That should exclusively be left to religion. Similarly, in the past, I know that the Tibetans and also the Christians have, in certain periods in history, tried very hard, to allow the Church to have a say in the State, to have influence on the State, to have a say in that, even for the Church. Now, it is much better for the Church to remain true to its own and have nothing to do with the State. So that is first of all.

My hope is whatever arrangement that we work out will be one where there is a very, very clear and separate distinction. Of course, there are certain areas where even the Church must be governed by certain rules of the land just as it applies to any individual anywhere. So that is one thing.

On the other hand I don't want to give too long an answer because, as I said, this needs a separate discussion. But there are some people in China today who have the illusion that not only is the Dalai Lama getting old but he will be gone and they will be able to manipulate and choose somehow either through the Panchen Lama that they have nominated, to have a say in that. I think that is, again to be very frank, an illusion.

Here, I think the Dalai Lama has definitely the upper hand, the upper hand in the sense that you are talking about his reincarnation. So this Dalai Lama has been very, very farsighted and very liberal in his thinking. He is going to make it very clear. He already has. First off, there is a very clear charter that we have for what happens when the Dalai Lama is no longer there. Immediately the Council of Regents kicks in which takes over the responsibilities of looking for the reincarnation, et cetera. But he has also made it very clear about talking his reincarnation because we believe that everyone is reborn. So everyone of you is a reincarnate, but there are some of those who are very special because they are supposed to be able to decide where and when to be reborn.

It is illogical for a person who for reasons left Tibet, to die in exile, and then to choose to be reborn from where he had spent so much of an effort to get out. That alone is very illogical, I think. Some people in Beijing should not have the illusion that this is something they can manipulate.

My hope is by the time there is some understanding, the Church and the State should be totally separate, and I think it will happen. It should happen.