

Chinese Expansionism and the Future of Tibet

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At the Hearing of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

On "U.S. Policy Towards Tibet: Access, Religious Freedom, and Human Rights"

December 6, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Yoho and Ranking Member Sherman, for the invitation to testify before the Subcommittee on this important matter. I want to begin by noting an article that appeared last week in *The Washington Post* by David Ignatius that was provocatively entitled "China's Plan to Rule the World." The article referenced several reports commissioned by the Pentagon and the Air Force, one of which describes China's economic and military buildup as "perhaps the most ambitious grand strategy undertaken by a single nation-state in modern times." The article described several dimensions of the strategy, in particular the \$1 trillion "One Belt, One Road" trade and infrastructure plan that dwarfs by some seven times the Marshall Plan in postwar Europe, and that has "the strategic intent of constructing a Chinese-led regional order in Eurasia."

While the article alluded to China's military buildup in Asia, which has alarmed Japan, India, and other countries in the region, it actually understated the scope of China's growing power projection by overlooking its far-reaching efforts in the fields media, education, and political values and ideas. This is sometimes called soft-power, but a study of rising authoritarian influence, that was released just hours ago by the National Endowment for Democracy, says that it is more properly called "sharp power" since its goal is to pierce and penetrate targeted populations by manipulating and distorting the information that reaches them. China spends an estimated \$10-15 billion on such sharp-power efforts.

The United States and many other countries have tended to take a benign view of China's policies because Xi Jinping tries to present himself to the world as a global citizen, and he does not indulge in the brazen behavior of Russia's Vladimir Putin. In addition, the illusion still persists that the integration of China into the global economy and political order will moderate its behavior and encourage its internal liberalization. In fact, the threat posed by China to the world order has increased with its growing economic power, and repression is worse today than at any time since the death of Mao Zedong four decades ago.

Nowhere is this repression more cruel than in Tibet, where the Chinese government is pursuing a policy that the Dalai Lama has called "cultural genocide." In addition to the systematic effort to destroy the Tibetan religion, language, culture, and distinct national identity, China has flooded Tibet with Han Chinese settlers, placed monasteries under direct government control, arrested and tortured writers, and forcibly resettled more than two million nomads in urban areas, destroying their traditional way of life and disrupting the fragile ecosystem of the Tibet Plateau. The death and likely murder in prison in July 2015 of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, the beloved community leader and spiritual teacher, is emblematic of this oppression, which has led to the self-immolation - in desperate protest - of more than 150 Tibetans.

The continued Tibetan resistance to Chinese oppression exposes the falseness of China's claim to the legitimacy of its rule in Tibet, which rests on the assertion, stated in a White Paper issued by the

Chinese government in 2015, that “Tibet has been an integral part of China since antiquity.” China insists that it won’t resume the negotiations over Tibet’s status that it broke off in 2010 until the Dalai Lama agrees to this assertion, something he cannot do since it is contradicted by the historical literature and overlooks the fact that Communist China invaded Tibet and illegally annexed it in 1959.

I believe that it is not sufficient just to protest against the massive violations of human rights that are taking place in Tibet. It is also necessary to state clearly that Tibet was not a part of China before the invasion occurred, that China violated international law by invading Tibet, and that it continues to violate international law by denying the Tibetan people their right to self-determination.

Most of all, I think we need to take a realistic look at China’s global strategy. In doing so, we should heed the words of Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese dissident who was not allowed to attend the ceremony in Oslo when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, and who died in prison last July. More than a decade ago, Liu warned that if China continued to rise as a dictatorship, “the results will not only be another catastrophe for the Chinese people but likely also a disaster for the spread of liberal democracy in the world.”

We need to remember Liu Xiaobo, study his writings about the relationship between international security and political freedom, and shape a policy toward China that recognizes the dangers we face and is consistent with the values we cherish.

We also need to remember that the struggle for Tibetan rights cannot be separated from the fight for human rights and freedom in China. In 2008, following the outbreak of violence in Lhasa, Liu and 28 other Chinese dissidents appealed to China’s leaders to engage in direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama, and expressed their “hope that the Chinese and Tibetan people will do away with the misunderstandings between them, develop their interactions with each other, and achieve unity.” That is the path to a more democratic China and a more peaceful world.