

Background Guide Topic Three:**The situation in Tibet***Introduction*^{1,2,3}Finding a Middle Ground Between China and Tibet

The large, diverse region of Asia and the Pacific presents the UNDP with a dynamic challenge in finding ways to achieve its broad goals of promoting democratic governance and reducing poverty. Because the needs of particular parts of the region are often divergent, it is sometimes difficult to determine a solution to an issue facing the whole continent. When attempting to promote effective democratic governance, it is essential that the varying economies and social structures of each country be taken into account when developing and implementing a strategy. Asia and the Pacific are home to some of the most prosperous nations in the world, but it also accounts for over half the world's poor, and the relative inexperience of young democracies in the region must be addressed in order to foster the growth and spread of these nations.

One of the most volatile regions in all of Asia, Tibet, provides the UNDP and its regional office with a unique challenge in serving as almost a liaison between the region and its occupying country, China. Because there have been numerous human rights violations on behalf of China in the region of TAR (Tibetan Autonomous Region), the UNDP and the UN in general has a vested interest in developing a compromise between the warring sides on debate over Tibetan sovereignty. Until then, the UNDP must work toward eradicating the disparity in poverty levels between TAR and other regions of China and help the Tibetan people foster development in their region. The literacy rate in Tibet remains at a mere 25% which also must be addressed if any substantial development is to take place in the region.

In 2006, the UNDP instituted the Tibet Development and Poverty Alleviation Programme with an ending date of June 2010. The programme recognizes the rich cultural history of the region as well as a steady rise in the economy, but it also identifies the lack of infrastructure and spread of the population to unreachable, rural areas as major challenges that must be overcome in order to promote development.

If implemented successfully, this programme could make long strides in helping Tibet overcome

1 "About UNDP in Asia Pacific." *United Nations Development Programme: Asia and the Pacific*. UNDP, 2009. Web. 4 Sep 2010. <http://www.undp.org/asia/about.html#about_undp>.

2 "Tibet at a Glance." *The Official Website of the Central Tibetan Administration*. CTA, 2009. Web. 4 Sep 2010. <<http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=8&rmenuid=8>>.

3 "Tibet Development and Poverty Alleviation Programme." *Project Summary: UNDP*. UNDP, Jun 2010. Web. 4 Sep 2010. <<http://www.undp.org.cn/map.php?province=Tibet>>.

development disparities as well as move the UN closer to reaching a compromise with China and TAR.

History^{4,5,6,7,8}

When two conflicting nations cannot come to a consensus on the mere facts of history between the two nations, it often creates a volatile relationship that rarely fosters compromise. The PRC (People's Republic of China) and TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) face this exact scenario, as the divergent viewpoints of history have been the leading cause of the current debate surrounding China and the Tibetan region. Historical perspectives from both sides dealing with Tibetan sovereignty in particular must be examined in order to come up with a comprehensive strategy that creates a win-win situation for both parties.

The conflict in Tibet is rooted in the historical interpretations of numerous entities in the region focused on the issue of Tibetan independence. While the main focus of the UN should be on the Chinese and Tibetan perspectives, it is important to note the role other nations have played in the framing of this debate. Situated in the Himalayan Mountains directly between India and China, the Tibetan Plateau has encountered massive territorial disputes since the beginning of written history. Beginning in the early 20th century, powerful forces in the region became acutely interested in obtaining the territory after the decline of the Qing dynasty. The British forces occupying India saw the end of a three-hundred year old dynasty as the perfect opportunity for invasion, and they did so in 1903, killing 4000 Tibetans in the process. Because China was entangled in its own civil war at the time, it did not begin concerning itself with the apparent border invasion by the British until years later. In 1910, the Manchu dynasty of China invaded Tibet and named it a Chinese province.

Prior to the invasion by the British in 1903, some say that Tibet had been considered a protectorate with a Chinese governor, which would signal China's key assertion in the whole debate, that the Tibetan

4 Jian, Chen. "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union." *Journal of Cold War Studies*. 8.3 (2006): 54-101. Print.

5 "Report on Tibet Negotiations." *US STATE DEPARTMENT'S ANNUAL REPORT ON TIBET NEGOTIATION*. US State Department, Feb 2010. Web. 4 Sep 2010.

6 Sperling, Elliot. "The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics." East-West Center Washington, 2004. Print. "Tibet at a Glance." *The Official Website of the Central Tibetan Administration*. CTA, 2009. Web. 4 Sep 2010. <<http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=8&rmenuid=8>>.

7 "Tibetan Sovereignty Has a Long, Disputed History ." *NPR: National Public Radio*. NPR, 11 Apr 2008. Web. 4 Sep 2010. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89552004>>.

8 Tsering, Bhuchung. "A Look at Quality of Life in Tibet." *Tibetan Review*. (2006): Print.

region has been an integral part of China since the 13th century. Tibetan historical records, however, haven been interpreted as signaling a historically independent country that has maintained its sovereignty up to more recent times. While no major country has recognized Tibet as a sovereign nation, the thirteenth Dalai Lama declared independence for the region in 1912. This declaration was never formally recognized, however, and negotiations took place in Simla, India in 1913 to try and alleviate the discord. At this conference, the Chinese delegation reiterated their position on the status of Tibet: that the region had been a part of the Mongol Empire in 1206 and continued to be subordinate to Chinese imperial control since that time.

At this same conference, Tibetan delegates presented information they had gathered about the specific extent of Tibet's territories and asserted "Tibet and China have never been under each other and will never associate with each other in the future". Tibetan history has emphasized a priest-patron relationship with the Republic of China, which recognizes the secular protection of the current Chinese dynasty while respecting the jurisdiction of Tibetan religious leaders, namely the Dalai Lama. This priest-patron relationship has dominated Tibetan historical records without much focus on the literal historical details. Because the Republic of China was embroiled in internal as well as external conflicts at the present time, it was unable to effectively challenge Tibet's de facto status as essentially independent.

This soon changed however as soon as the People's Republic of China was formed and the Chinese Communist Party along with their People's Liberation Army invaded the Tibetan plateau in 1950 and effectively took control of the region. While the Republic was less firm about enforcing Tibetan cooperation with sovereignty rules, the PRC ensured they would establish formal control over the region and fully incorporate Tibet into the People's Republic of China. The Tibetan government sent an urgent plea to the UN for help retaining their sovereignty, but it was to no avail. When Tibet was convinced to sign the Seventeen-Point Agreement of 1951, China established complete sovereignty over the region and debate was cut off about the historical status of Tibet's independence.

The debate remained dormant until the Tibetan uprising in 1959. On March 10th of that year, the Tibetan population led a massive revolt in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa to protest the encroachment on their basic human and cultural rights by the Chinese Communist Party. The Dalai Lama immediately

evacuated the region and took exile with other Tibetan leaders in India, where they continue to operate an unofficial Tibetan government in Dharamshala. Communication between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government has been nearly nonexistent since that time until only recently, where talks have begun once again but are hardly substantive.

Since the crushing of the Tibetan uprising in 1959, where thousands were killed by the PLA, the PRC's grip on Tibet has only grown tighter and rigid. Beginning with Mao and continuing with the current Party leaders, it has been a central focus of the CCP to convert the "backward" political and cultural infrastructure that had been in place in the region for centuries. The pressure China has placed upon Tibetans has caused many to seek refuge in nearby India and has also led to often-questionable human rights actions.

The Dalai Lama has sent the UN numerous statements in regard to Tibetan sovereignty and has denounced the position of wanting independence from China, but rather a relationship that allows Tibetan culture and religion to flourish under some Chinese rule. Tibet as a region, otherwise known as TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) is on the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder in China and lags substantially behind other regions of China. According to the China Human Development Report of 2005 and analysts at the UNDP, the quality of life of Tibetans, those residing in rural areas in particular, is significantly lower than almost any other region in the continent. It is essential that these disparities be alleviated, and as talks between the two entities began again in 2002, there has been hope in the international community that a compromise can be reached to both preserve Tibetan way of life while satisfying the PRC's sovereignty.

In order to eradicate the mistakes and violations in the past, it is necessary for China to foster a more hospitable relationship with Tibet and the Dalai Lama that respects the region's unique differences while incorporating it within the framework of Chinese government. Tibetans also must realize they cannot act as a completely sovereign state and respect the boundaries the Chinese put in place if they are a reasonable means to a mutually beneficial end. It is up to the UN and UNDP in particular to continue to foster these relations along with coming up with strategies to aid the development of the Tibetan region in a way that will allow more of its citizens to prosper. Differing historical perspectives as well as vast differences in culture must be taken into account in order to come up with an effective,

comprehensive plan.

Current Situation

Tibetan Economy

Since the 1950s Tibet has been an integral part of modern day China. In recent years China's economy has exploded globally; however, the same cannot be said for the Tibet region. Tibet has the lowest economic output of all the regions of China and roughly one million of Tibet's 2.7 million inhabitants live below the poverty line of USD \$105 dollars a year. Nonetheless, China continues to pump billions of dollars towards developing Tibet, nearly USD \$45 billion dollars since 2001. A large majority of the region's citizens still make a living as subsistence farmers, which comprise nearly 80% of the population. Accordingly, the economic output from all this farming only amounts to about 1/5 of the total output of all the regions of China. Many observers of China's economic policy in Tibet note that a large portion of development money is used mainly to stabilize the region from an ever growing income disparity between the border regions of the West and the wealthy coastal areas of the East. In terms of support from Beijing, Tibet receives around 90% of its budget expenditures from the government and is exempt from all taxes.⁹ Chinese President Hu Jintao remains optimistic on Tibet's economic performance saying, "by 2020 the per capita net income of farmers and herds people in Tibet should be close to the national level".¹⁰ All economic indicators point to massive growth in Tibet in coming years if China's current development strategies pay off. Tibet has experienced double-digit GDP growth the past several years and has seen marked reductions in poverty as well. The challenge for the UNDP will be holding China accountable for this region's development while providing support and resources to ensure its implementation.

Tibet – China Relations

Aside from the economic impact of Beijing, the cultural challenges and differences between the Tibet region and the rest of China are quite distinct and an important point of consideration to keep in mind while forming policy. Many in Tibet regard themselves first and foremost Tibetan rather than Chinese, harkening back to less than amicable relations with imperial China. Even though many strides have been made in regards to increasing the standard of living and socioeconomic status in the TAR, this cultural clash has prevented a greater thawing of tensions between Tibet and Beijing. Amid all this

⁹ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6083766>

¹⁰ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-03/05/content_9546247.htm

apparent economic success and progress remains the political and cultural unrest of the Tibetan people, who quite notoriously rioted in mid-2008 during the Beijing Olympics. These riots, resulting in the deaths of 18 civilians and one policeman, placed the issue of Tibetan independence quite extravagantly on the international stage. Many NGOs and non-profits have emerged since the Chinese take-over of Tibet; although, the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, 14th Dalai Lama, has switched his political goals from achieving full independence for Tibet to seeking greater autonomy within the Chinese system. The actualization of Tibetan independence is quite farfetched given the current state of international politics.¹¹ The primary goal of any IGO, such as the UNDP, should be focused on reconciling Chinese and Tibetan cultural differences by ensuring the preservation of the unique Tibetan identity, striving to uphold the UN Declaration of Human Rights within the TAR, and helping to integrate Tibet into the Chinese economy as a whole. While it may certainly be within a UNDP member state's interest to advocate for Tibetan independence, this goal is not a priority on the foreign policy agenda's of most states, especially those in positions to carry out the sort of political maneuvering to bring about such a change.

The UNDP in Tibet

The UNDP established the Tibet Development and Poverty Alleviation Programme as a way of demonstrating a “strong link of economic development with cultural and environmental protection in the fields of handicrafts, sustainable tourism, trade and protection of the old city core [Lhasa].”¹² This program ran from July 2006 through June 2010 and coincided with China's completion of the first MDG, halving poverty, which was a principle goal of the initiative. Though relatively small in terms of budget at USD \$6 million dollars, it has helped push the development agenda of Tibet towards fostering a greater tourism industry, maintaining the distinct culture of the region, and helping to protect the local environment. The culture and ancient heritage of Tibet is probably one of the most valuable economic assets it possesses. If this valuable resource can be effectively harnessed it will certainly help to bolster the TAR's rapidly growing economy and build future wealth for the region. Also, protecting the unique Tibetan culture will help smooth over relations with China, as many Tibetans fear so-called “cultural genocide” at the hands of migrant workers and ethnic Han Chinese emigrants.¹³

11 http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event_summary&event_id=3775

12 <http://www.undp.org.cn/modules.php?>

[op=modload&name=News&file=article&catid=8&topic=31&sid=429&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0](http://www.undp.org.cn/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&catid=8&topic=31&sid=429&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0)

13 <http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/08/06/travel/06transtibet.html>

Conclusion

The Tibetan economy is projected to grow by an astonishing 12% in coming years. This is due mainly to heavy investment by Beijing in the form of infrastructure, notably with the construction of rail to the Tibetan capital Lhasa, and industrial ventures, such as revamped mining projects extracting vital minerals and providing ample jobs for the Western regions. However, many in Tibet feel all this development, though beneficial to the impoverished region, is largely marginalizing their unique and ancient culture. The UNDP must strive to find development solutions that uphold both aspects of this puzzle – bringing Tibet into the developed world and keeping pace with China’s exploding economy – while maintaining a careful eye on an irreplaceable civilization with distinct religious and cultural relevance far beyond the reaches of the Himalayas.

Directive

Points to Consider

The situation in Tibet has many complexities with multiple points of consideration for both the Chinese and Tibetan sides. It is essential to keep an open mind when discussing policies concerning culturally sensitive topics and human rights violations while always upholding the policies and ideologies of your respective states. A fundamental understanding of the historical relationships between China and Tibet, especially during the past century, will definitely benefit delegates and allow for much richer debate with a greater understanding of the multifaceted issues these two groups are facing. Also, please strive to keep the positions and interests of your respective state at the forefront of your agenda in committee. The vast majority of states would most likely not confront an increasingly powerful China with a non-binding resolution asking for the immediate accession of Tibet as a sovereign entity. However, if that is within your government’s national interest than by all means please exercise your rights as a committee member to push that policy.

UNDP Operating in Tibet

The UNDP must work closely with China since it is China with the greatest interest and available resources to put towards Tibetan development. Also, the UNDP has a fairly broad mandate in terms of what it can accomplish in the TAR (Tibetan Autonomous Region). To narrow the scope somewhat, environmental protection and promotion of Tibetan culture seem to be main areas of concern for most

Tibetans. As far as economic empowerment goes, China has given Tibet billions of dollars for development and governance, a figure much larger than anything the UNDP could assemble into a development fund. Therefore, perhaps it would be a more efficient use of committee time to focus on the more human aspects of development rather than solely on aggregate economic outputs or industrialization, as Beijing seems to have a fairly solid plan for lifting Tibet out of poverty within the next decade. Also, keep in mind the territorial sovereignty of PRC with respect to debating Tibet by forming resolutions that would help actualize development in a constructive and positive manner rather than inflaming present tensions.