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CHINA'S WHITE PAPER ON TIBET: AN OVERVIEW

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On April 15, 2015, the Information Office of China's State Council released a new white paper on Tibet titled, "Tibet's Path of Development is driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide".¹ This white paper was issued after a gap of one year and five months since the last white paper on Tibet on October 22, 2013. The release of a white paper so soon raises a question as to why did Beijing feel the need to issue a new white paper on Tibet and what purpose was the new white paper on Tibet supposed to achieve. The latest paper besides being a lengthy document, constitutes five sections. The first section had labelled Tibet prior to Chinese annexation as a society of theocratic feudal serfdom, backward and isolated from modern civilization. The second section catered to new path of development of Tibet undertaken under the Chinese rule. The new path of development was hailed as a sound path of development; that safeguards unity of the Chinese nation and traditional Tibetan culture; as well as sustainable or eco-friendly. The third section criticized the Middle Way Approach sought by the Dalai Lama and Tibetan government in exile as a pretext to split China and to set up 'a state within a state' by demanding high degree of autonomy by Tibetans. The fourth section claimed that the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile had never abandoned the use of violence to promote their ultimate goal of Tibetan independence. The fifth section dealt entirely with the Dalai Lama and propounded that choices he made were essentially counter to the wishes of the central government and the people of Tibet.²

What could be deduced from the latest white paper is that all the essential sections of the white paper appear to be in reaction or response to various developments



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surrounding Tibet issue. This observation is explained by the following. Firstly, Beijing portrayed increasingly grim picture of Tibet prior to its brutal annexation. It further propounded the inevitable end of the old system. This can be viewed: first, as a feeble attempt on Beijing's part to justify its acts of brutal occupation of Tibet; second, to project Beijing in favourable light and third, an attempt to necessitate its acts of aggression towards Tibet.

Secondly, Beijing shoe-cased economic growth and progress made by Tibet under its rule and subsidies provided by China's central government to Tibet. The economic growth is used by Beijing as evidence to prove that China's rule over Tibet is the only possible path for development. However China's development activities in Tibet were highly criticized for being designed to dilute region's ethnic and cultural identity and its fragile ecosystem. Since Beijing lacks legitimacy to rule Tibet, it attempts to draw the same from economic developments that it has pursued in Tibet. Beijing's emphasis on stability and development remains intact even under the Xi Jinping.

Thirdly, the white paper made vitriolic attacks on the Middle Way Approach advocated by the Dalai Lama and Central Tibetan Administration (Tibetan government in exile). It completely rejected the genuine autonomy sought by Tibetans. Beijing's attacks on Middle Way Approach can be viewed as: first to utterly deprive the Middle Way Approach of any kind of merit, second it could be Beijing's counter measure to balance the resurgent launch of the Middle Way Approach by the Central Tibetan Administration. On June 2014 Central Tibetan Administration launched awareness campaign to create awareness internationally about Tibetans call for peaceful resolution of Tibet issue through genuine autonomy. International support for Middle Way approach has been strong and will potentially grow stronger, should awareness campaign succeed in the coming years.



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Fourthly, Beijing claimed that the Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile have resorted to violent measures throughout under the veil of peace and non-violence. This affirmation is not new, but this time they solely accused the Dalai Lama for inciting Tibetans in Tibet to self-immolate. This kind of affirmation appears as a convenient face saving measure for their policy failures.

Fifthly, Beijing dedicated the last section to the Dalai Lama, where they dealt with negotiations that had taken place between the Dalai Lama's representatives and the Beijing government till 2010. Under this section, Beijing questioned sincerity of the Dalai Lama towards the negotiations and claimed that Dalai Lama had never conducted the negotiation in good faith. These allegations appear as a response to various world leaders voicing support for dialogue process and simultaneously urging Beijing to dialogue with the Dalai Lama. Beijing specified two points: Firstly, they reiterated that negotiations are confined only to discuss the future of the Dalai Lama. Secondly they stressed that Tibet's political status is stipulated in the Chinese constitution; they categorically rejected existence of the 'Tibet issue' per se. Hence they had specifically stated that the 'Tibet issue' and 'a high degree of autonomy' can never be a subject of dialogue process. Such a firm stand by Beijing withers away any optimism over the resumption of dialogue in the coming years.

Central Tibetan Administration based in Dharamsala had called the white paper as "a frenzied attempt to whitewash tragic realities in Tibet" and indicated that it reveals Beijing's nervousness over its grip on occupied Tibet.³ Analysts had perceived that the white paper reflected Beijing view that it was firmly in control and fails to see any ground to compromise. Additionally white paper had indicated that China's position has remained steady and talk of growing moderate faction within leadership has been naive.⁴

Regarding policy implications of the white paper, it essentially indicates that Beijing's hard line approach towards Tibet will continue. Additionally, in previous white



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papers, Beijing insisted the Dalai Lama to acknowledge Tibet as an inalienable part of China, but in recent times, it wants him to admit that Tibet has been part of China “since antiquity”, which is unacceptable for the Dalai Lama.⁵ As of now, resumption of dialogue between the Dalai Lama’s envoy and Beijing that remained stalled since 2010 appears remote.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

End Notes

¹ China Issues White Paper on Tibet, Denouncing the Dalai Lama’s Middle Way, April 15, 2015 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/15/c_134152560.htm, accessed on April 17, 2015.

² For full text of the white paper on Tibet, visit http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-04/15/c_134152612.htm

³ China’s White Paper Whitewashes the Tragic Reality, April 15, 2015, <http://tibet.net/2015/04/15/chinas-white-paper-whitewashes-the-tragic-reality-in-tibet/>, accessed on April 22, 2015.

⁴ Simon Denyer, Rapprochement with the Dalai Lama? No way, says China, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/rapprochement-with-the-dalai-lama-no-way-says->, accessed on April 22, 2015.

⁵ Ibid
