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JULIA BAIRD: Hello, I'm Julia Baird. Welcome to Sunday Profile.

Surely one of the most curious and fascinating jobs on earth would be that of the Dalai Lama's number one man in Washington.

Lodi Gyari, also known as Gyari Rinpoche, is the special envoy of the revered Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama, in the US.

He's walked the corridors of Capitol Hill for almost two decades pleading the case for the autonomy of Tibet. In that time, China's become a super power but Tibet is still in turmoil.

The Dalai Lama has said he's failed in the mission he's pursued for half a century and he has stepped aside as political leader to allow a new generation to come through, specifically the new Prime Minister Lobsang Sangay, who's 43 and Harvard educated.

So what lies ahead for Tibet? Lodi Gyari would know better than almost anyone. Like the Dalai Lama, Gyari too is recognised by Tibetan Buddhists to be the reincarnation of an important lama or guru and lived in a monastery as a boy.

Today he is the head of the largest Tibet advocacy group in the US. He was formerly foreign minister in the Tibetan government in exile and has led negotiations with China on behalf of his government.

He's been called legendary for his diplomacy. His lobbying work laid the ground work for the US policy shift in Tibet's favour in 2002 when the American government introduced the Tibet Policy Act.

He also played a pivotal part in setting up the first historic meeting between the Dalai Lama and an American president - George H.W. Bush senior in 1991.

Since then the Dalai Lama has met Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama.

So what's it like having one of the most difficult and potentially unrewarding jobs in global politics?

Will Tibetans ever get what they want?

Gyari Rinpoche spoke to me in Sydney soon after attending the new prime minister's inauguration in Dharamsala India and meeting with Australian politicians in Canberra.

I asked him about his first trip to Australia and if he thought our economic dependence on China has made our politicians more timid.

LODI GYARI: Well, first of all, tremendous goodwill. You know, I was really deeply moved because I had opportunity to meet one to one quite a few politicians. And also with a group of them together. And then finally yesterday afternoon I had the opportunity to make a visitation, a briefing to this very important committee which I think deals with foreign defense and trade.

So I was deeply touched by their genuine interest.

And I'm also aware, you know, of the important relations that you have with China. And I respect that. China is a very important country.

And I really very much encourage Australia to even further enhance that relation because for us only those countries that has a relation or only a person who has relation with China can help us, because we are not adversaries in that sense, because we are trying to talk to them.

And we want people to tell the Chinese to talk to us to find a solution. So only a person who has a relation can talk to China.

So therefore... But however I think sometimes yes. I mean, you know, economic relations is very, very important, no doubt, particularly in this day and age. But you must understand China needs you as much as you need. You know, China is going all over the world grabbing resources. And you have tremendous resources.

So I think, sometimes maybe your political leaders or maybe your bureaucrats do not really understand. Because here the Chinese are very, very good at making people believe that, you know, it is from us you need everything, as if there's nothing we need from you. But they need as much from you.

So therefore I think there could be a very complementary, balanced relation where you keep set of your principles, don't compromise on that. At the same time respect China's, because we are not challenging, you know, your policy with regard to China. We're not fighting for independence.

JULIA BAIRD: Have you seen any signs that Australian politicians are more timid than they might otherwise be because of our strong economic dependence on China?

LODI GYARI: I think some of your political leaders have been made to believe that. My point is that I don't think you are really, economically, you're dependent. I think you are an important economic partner with China, which can benefit both sides.

So that I think unfortunately yes, that kind of impression I think has been built to the, you know, some of your leaders.

JULIA BAIRD: But is this something new? Is that impression that you're talking about, is this something that's only really developed over the last five years at a time of such great prosperity for Australia, because of our mining boom and some of our trade with China?

LODI GYARI: Well I, you know, do not want to try to pretend, you know, that I am an expert because this is a... it may surprise you, but my first visit to your country.

JULIA BAIRD: Welcome.

LODI GYARI: But you know I have seen this kind of pattern with other countries you see, also in Europe and sometimes even in America, where I have lived.

So therefore I don't want to single Australia out. But in the recent years, yes, I think because of your rather than dependence I think ever increasing economic relation with PRC, there's definitely been, I think, a move with some of your political leaders of being a little bit too submissive to the Middle Kingdom, which I don't think is good for China in the long run.

Because I think we all have a collective responsibility to help China grow as a responsible nation, a nation that can truly be one of the most important country in the world. Because if you continue to kind of really make China behave like a spoiled person, then you don't allow China to grow.

I think I do know a little bit of China because the last 26 years in fact my main kind of job is dealing with China. There are, I think, many leaders in China would themselves want to make a change.

So every time I think countries such as yours takes a firm stand on issues such as Tibet or human rights, I think you're contributing in helping those moderate forces within China.

Every time you submit to the whims of the hardliners I really think you are doing huge disservice even to those leaders, those forces in China who themselves are trying to bring that great nation as responsible stakeholder.

JULIA BAIRD: Now it's a very critical time in Tibet at the moment. We were just talking about hardliners in China. Now there is an increasing number of young people who are frustrated, who are fed, up, who think that the years of trying to get autonomy and not independence have not worked and it's time to consider another solution.

I'm very interested in your attitude to this because in 2008 the Dalai Lama said he was ready to accept the fact that he had failed to win true autonomy for his people and he was looking to other Tibetans to advise the way forward.

Is this true? Has the Dalai Lama, after half a century of fighting for his people's autonomy, fundamentally failed?

LODI GYARI: Absolutely not. I think it is through his influence, you know, through his, the path that he has already charted for us, there will be success.

But yes, I am aware of the remark. In fact you know I was present when he made that remark. And he had not only said it once but he said it several times during that period.

But that was after these country-wide demonstrations inside Tibet.

JULIA BAIRD: In 2008.

LODI GYARI: That's right, yes. For the first time, because earlier Tibetan people have been deeply resentful of China's policies. But the only reports that you got were from out of Lhasa mostly and out of some of the monasteries, some of the monks and nuns. But 2008, it was nationwide. So once it became evident this deep resentment is felt by every Tibetan, not just by some monks and nuns... Because China has always tried to, you know, tell the Westerners: look, [they're] just a handful of reactionaries who want to restore the old Tibet. And in 2008 you saw

young people, most of them products of their education system. And many of them sons and daughters of party functionaries.

But at the same time, you know, His Holiness... yes, really also felt at that time, for the first time, a sense of being - not hopeless, but helpless.

Because you know, he really didn't know what he can do because he is, every day he's getting news about this outpour of strong sentiments, the demonstrations, the Chinese cracking down on them.

And there he was in Dharamsala, deeply pained by what's happening and almost unable physically to do anything about it. It was a difficult year for His Holiness. I myself saw that he was in deep, deep pain.

And so sometimes I think he really felt that "have I failed?", you know?

JULIA BAIRD: Do you think he was depressed by what had happened?

LODI GYARI: I think he was deeply saddened. And he felt handicapped of not being able to do something that will have immediate impact. So that was I think purely a reaction to that widespread situation.

But now he's absolutely convinced. You know he now forcefully still encourages people to follow his middle way approach, the non-violent approach.

And I have no doubt that for us Tibetans, you know, the best way to pursue this is through non-violence. Best way to pursue this is reaching out to the Chinese government, even though it has been difficult, almost, unfortunately, 'til today, without any tangible result.

But even as the person who has been going there all the time and most of the time coming back empty handed, even I don't feel anything rather than a sense of optimism.

Because first of all the most important is the Tibetan people themselves. You know this two-thousand - and for me was really very moving because I then realised that the Tibetan movement is very much alive within Tibet.

JULIA BAIRD: Do you think there's anything that could be done differently, given that we have had two decades where you still have not achieved the goals that you wished for in China?

I mean the Dalai Lama has global renown and affection. He's feted by Hollywood. His books have sold millions.

But what he hasn't done is actually captured the hearts of the Chinese. And by that I mean the man and woman on the street.

Do you think there's anything that he could have done differently strategically?

LODI GYARI: No. I think we need to do more of what he has been doing. And I think he has captured, or is beginning to capture, the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. Not the politburo, unfortunately, and it may take time. Even there, you know, I'm not that hopeless.

Unfortunately there is a huge, huge number of Chinese who are indoctrinated by the Chinese Communist Party who think of Tibet in a very distorted way. And not only about the political stand

of His Holiness but even as a people, I think, maybe backward. Unfortunately, therefore, many Chinese don't know, think that Tibetans have no culture... We've been so kind, liberated them... These are a kind of people who live on the mountains, you know, kind of illiterate.

They don't know that this is a great civilisation, a civilisation that has so much to offer to China.

So I think, you know, His Holiness is definitely now reaching out to the hearts and minds. And that, I think, is what frightens the leaders in Beijing.

You know I think one of the biggest problems right now is the fear because they know that if the Dalai Lama has unrestricted access to the Chinese people, you know, that His Holiness may not only become something to inspire the Tibetans and other minorities, but even the Chinese themselves.

But my job is to try to always tell them - don't fear him. He has no ulterior motive. He even loves people in the politburo, you know. Reach out to him. He is not something that you need to fear.

But you know I don't blame them, of course. They don't take my word seriously because I'm his envoy. But I do hope that, this is a way I think people can help, this is the way I think many US presidents like President Bush, President Clinton and even President Obama, and I think this is important - every time they meet Chinese leaders that they keep on telling them don't fear him, reach out. You haven't met him for the last many decades. We meet him all the time and we know that he is someone who can really help China rather than, harm China.

JULIA BAIRD: Do you think a part of this fear comes from the fact that the Chinese government has called him a separatist, a traitor, a monk in wolf's clothing, a monster with a human face and an animal's heart and one of the most critical obstacles to resolving the dispute? I mean they're harsh words. Do you think that they've trickled down to the Chinese people generally?

LODI GYARI: Unfortunately yes. It does to a great segment who have no other access other than the party propaganda.

But I think, again, no matter, whatever effort they may make, Chinese people are beginning to have more access to, you know, international situation.

But yes, this is the biggest problem. In fact during my last round I clearly told my Chinese counterparts, I said you are doing something unforgivable. You are doing something that for the Chinese and Tibetan people will take long time to reconcile. You are feeding wrong information and making the Chinese and Tibetans have animosity for the first time.

Because, you know, the Tibetans always deeply resented the Chinese government policy. But the Tibetan people, you know, I think this is something we should be very proud, had no bitterness against Chinese as people.

But in the last few years, because of what the Chinese government has been doing, instigating, Tibetans are beginning to have some kind of resentment against the Chinese as people because they see, you know, that they have no rights, their resources are being taken away.

And similarly, the Chinese people are also beginning to have resentment against Tibetans as a people because Chinese propaganda has been telling them that these people are ungrateful people. These people are collaborating with international forces to destabilise China, [that] if the Dalai Lama had the right he would most probably want to divide China into so many pieces.

So this kind of thing of course is causing, you know, deep resentment which I think is really irresponsible, and if I can use a Chinese term, unpatriotic.

JULIA BAIRD: You're on Sunday Profile. I'm Julia Baird and I'm talking to Mr Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's envoy in the United States.

Now in 2008, the year in which you said the Dalai Lama was very saddened by the turmoil and the violence in Tibet, he said: "My trust in the Chinese government has become thinner, thinner, thinner. Suppression is increasing and I cannot pretend that everything is okay."

You yourself, that year there were talks which China rejected your request or demand for autonomy once again and you said: "We have now reached the crossroads. There's a total lack of willingness to seriously reciprocate our sincere and serious efforts."

Now you're still at an impasse. You say that you're optimistic. So how can you reconcile that? What's the way forward?

LODI GYARI: Well the forward is I think continued, I think we are on the right path. The important thing is to make the Chinese leaders make a little move, you know, so that they can also come to the right path.

And I think, you see this is where I think countries such as Australia can help.

You know, I was telling some of your experts in Canberra and also some of your lawmakers that besides discussing about human rights abuses which is gross, which must be raised... Stability. China is obsessed with stability. And of course it should be, because I think her stability is, you know, being undermined by her policies.

Look what's happening in East Turkestan, what the Chinese call Xinjiang, inner Mongolia. You see, not just Tibet now. And unless they really try to resolve that there's going to be huge instability in China.

And I don't think anyone, particularly let's say that even some of your leaders and people who want to have this great economic relation with China, I'm sure even they want, maybe not for Tibet but for their own interest, a stable China.

JULIA BAIRD: So if they don't recognise the rights or the autonomy of some of these kind of growing nation states it'll threaten the economic stability of the entire region?

LODI GYARI: Yes absolutely, yes, I think it is a fact. China's current leaders talk about harmony. But where's the harmony in Tibet? Where's the harmony in East Turkestan, Xinjiang? Where's the harmony in inner Mongolia? Where's also the harmony, you know, among ordinary Chinese?

So today I think, unfortunately the leaders of Beijing live in fear, fear of their people, fear of people like the Dalai Lama. They don't have to have that fear.

JULIA BAIRD: You spoke before about how there might be some kind of fear or timidity amongst Australia's politicians that to speak out boldly on Tibet might jeopardise economic relations with China. Do you believe the same is true in the US, given the large amount of debt America has to China right now?

LODI GYARI: I saw a similar situation in America also in the beginning, absolutely, you know. But I think, somehow, at least a fairly large number of them, I think have overcome that through, I think, experience.

And we know several American business people, very important business people, who really took the bold step of publicly inviting the Dalai Lama, honouring him. And they've realised that, you see, if you do that, you know, the Chinese tolerate it. At the end of the day Chinese are very rational people.

JULIA BAIRD: We're coming up to a time when I understand the Dalai Lama is going to be meeting or his senior lamas are meeting to discuss who his spiritual successor will be in Dharamsala in September, next month. Have you been included in these considerations about who his spiritual successor might be?

LODI GYARI: Even though I grew up as a monk and people still call me Rinpoche, I'm not in that hierarchy.

I did urge His Holiness that it's important that he make a clear pronouncement because, you know, Chinese have this kind of false hope that maybe, you see, if we can't somehow make this Dalai Lama do what we want, maybe we will have a hand in the selection of the next dalai lama and then make that dalai lama do what we want.

But the sooner the Chinese, you know, get the clear message that is nothing but an illusion, I think it'll make them even more kind of sensible in their negotiations.

At the end of the day, you see, no-one, no-one else but the Dalai Lama himself should be able to decide in what manner his reincarnation should be selected.

JULIA BAIRD: Are you worried about what would happen if the Dalai Lama dies suddenly, or unexpectedly?

LODI GYARI: Well I'm certainly worried because even though he has been wise to set in motion a system, I think it will be devastating for the Tibetan movement, you know, when he's not there.

But similarly for the Chinese, this is something that we discuss all the time because Chinese always kind of threaten us that well anyway, we know that your whole movement is around one person and when he's not there... And I tell them, true. I said I'm one person who will agree with you, I don't disagree, but it will also be devastating for the Chinese. So I said that the clock is ticking for both of us. When he's not there the Chinese don't have a counterpart that has the historical moral authority and also courage to make difficult decisions.

I mean look at the Dalai Lama's decision not to seek independence. No-one would have dared to do that. You have to be the Dalai Lama.

JULIA BAIRD: What is it exactly that you would be afraid of should the Dalai Lama pass away?

LODI GYARI: The unity and the cohesiveness of the Tibetan people. And if you're familiar with our recent history, like all other I think different nations, peoples, we were not all the time unified. And you know, we had our own problems, differences, regional differences. Even sometimes, you know, sectarian differences.

And it was the leadership of this Dalai Lama in a very kind of ironic way actually, you know, in a way it was a most tragic time for us... In a way, you know, this was time that Tibet actually resurrected again as a people, as a nation, as a unified.

And so one of my concerns as a Tibetan is that if he's not there whether we will be able to continue to move on the path that he has chosen, with this great unity amongst ourselves to pursue a common goal, or we ourselves again kind of become as we were last few hundred years. I mean that to me is a really huge concern.

The other is yes, also to resolve the issue with China. Because at the end of the day we'll have to find a solution with China. And if there are serious negotiations then I think there's going to be very tough proposals that will be confronted by the Tibetan leadership.

And at that time, again, I really don't think just the elected institutions will have the historical and moral capability to take those... You know, they may be bold to make decisions. But being bold to take a decision and being able to sell that idea to the Tibetans, especially inside, is not going to be easy.

I personally feel that these negotiations cannot really succeed, you know. I have deep worries, you know. But sometimes I say jokingly maybe I'm too timid, you know, because during our elections to the office of the Kalon Tripa, some people also kind of suggested why don't you run?

I said, I'm too timid. I really don't want to run for office, knowing very well that the Dalai Lama will not be there as the head of that institution.

I feel that a person like myself has some capability to serve if there is a strong leader like him. And I said that, therefore, I said that I'm not as courageous as some of my friends who were running for this very important office because I'm kind of terrified, you know, to be there and, you know, not have him as the head of the system.

JULIA BAIRD: Mr Gyari, thank you so much for joining us on Sunday Profile.

LODI GYARI: Thank you, thank you very much.

JULIA BAIRD: That was Lodi Gyari, the special envoy of the Dalai Lama in Washington talking to me, Julia Baird, on Sunday Profile.

Thanks for listening and thanks to my producer, Irene Ulman

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