



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetans ordered to prostrate to pictures of Chinese President as Tibet leaders prioritize anti-Dalai Lama stance

<http://www.savetibet.org/tibetans-ordered-to-prostrate-to-xi-jinping>

January 15, 2019

Inside Tibet report

- As the authorities in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) emphasized their “clear-cut” stance against the Dalai Lama at meetings of the Region’s Party Congress last week, news emerged from eastern Tibet that Tibetans are being told to prostrate and make offerings to pictures not of Buddhist icons, but of Xi Jinping.
- Also at the TAR Party Congress, new measures to enforce border security were announced consistent with a current emphasis in state media on militarization in Tibet, stepped up in 2018 in the buildup to a series of significant political dates this year, notably the 60th anniversary of the March 1959 Uprising, and the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The nationalist Chinese Global Times reported the launch of a new ‘howitzer’ cannon that shoots laser-guided and satellite-guided projectiles linked to China’s political rhetoric on so-called “Tibetan independence” forces, and Xi Jinping’s statements earlier this month on “combat readiness.”
- The Party’s priority of infrastructure construction as part of a strategic rail network, connected to military preparedness, was also emphasized at the TAR Party Congress, with updates on the accelerated construction of the high speed rail line from Chengdu to Lhasa (following the single line from Golmud to Lhasa in 2006), which will traverse the most densely settled and forested parts of the plateau.

Tibetans required to make offerings to pictures of Xi Jinping

As authorities in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) emphasized their “clear-cut” stance against the Dalai Lama at meetings of the Region’s Party Congress last week, news emerged from eastern Tibet that Tibetans are being told to prostrate and make offerings to pictures of Xi Jinping.

TAR Chairman Che Dalha (Chinese: Qi Zhala) announced in his work report to the regional Party Congress that oppressive measures had been heightened, saying: “Tibet has firmly curbed and cracked down on secession, infiltration and sabotage activities by hostile forces [a political term encompassing the Dalai Lama and Tibet supporters] at home and abroad” (Xinhua, January 11, 2019).

Amid other signs of an intensified campaign against the Dalai Lama, in the eastern Tibetan area of Serthar (Chinese: Seda) county in Sichuan, Tibetans who receive official “poverty alleviation” subsidies from the government have been ordered to remove images of the Dalai Lama from their homes and to destroy their altars, according to information from former political prisoner Golok Jigme. Some families are even being compelled to display images of China’s leader Xi Jinping in their homes, and to prostrate and make offerings.

Another source told the International Campaign for Tibet that new housing provided for Tibetans relocated in settlements in Kham were already equipped with small altars – not with Buddhist icons, but with images of Chinese Party leaders.¹

According to a Global Times report, Tibetans are not only required to pay obeisance to current leaders, but also to Chinese officials stationed in Tibet centuries ago. Proposals were submitted this week by members of the consultative body of the TAR to build “statues of officials deployed to be stationed in Tibet throughout history,” including a possible “relief sculpture of them in Lhasa.” Although the Global Times states that this is one of a number of “proposals to protect the region's traditional culture” the purpose is political, to underline China’s false claim of unbroken historic sovereignty over Tibet for centuries. The Global Times indicated that among the officials who may be immortalized in the artworks were officials sent to Tibet in 1727 during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) to administer the region, known as Ambans.²

Although the Manchu Qing (as also the Mongol Yuan) period rulers³ had influence over Tibet, neither attached Tibet to China as the PRC leadership claims today.

In another development, a massive image of Mao Zedong has been created in a Tibetan area in the form of a thangka (a Tibetan Buddhist religious painting), involving 12,000 people in its production and costing more than 4 million yuan (\$580,000) in a move apparently designed to assert Tibetan subjugation to the image of Mao.⁴

Yet another Tibetan source told the International Campaign for Tibet that some poor families display images of Chinese Party leaders in their homes for fear of having their subsidies cut if they do not. The same source, who has travelled widely in eastern Tibet, said that monasteries and households do still display images of the Dalai Lama, despite the dangers.

New measures for ‘border security’ in Tibet underlines intensified focus on militarization and Xi Jinping emphasis on ‘combat readiness’

At the TAR People’s Congress last week, Qi Zhala also announced that new measures have been taken to enforce border security, including new vehicle-mounted howitzers “to improve combat capability at high altitudes”, according to the People’s Liberation Army, reported by the Global Times on January 7 (2019).⁵ Signaling the political agenda of the move, the state media report stated that the new weapons demonstrated that: “China's border issue has not been completely resolved, and was challenged by pro-Tibet independence forces and terrorists”. In a clear warning to India, the newspaper also stated that the equipment had already been deployed by an artillery brigade during a 73-day-long stand-off in 2017 between the PLA and the Indian Army at the Doklam tri-junction between Sikkim in India, Tibet, and Bhutan.

On January 4 (2019), during a meeting of the Central Military Commission, President Xi Jinping ordered the Chinese armed forces to enhance their combat readiness “from a new starting point and

¹ The same source, who had visited a number of settlements where Tibetans were housed after being displaced from their land, a major Chinese policy, observed that: “The houses built by the government look clean and ordered, but they are made with cheap materials and I imagine are going to last about five years in the harsh weather conditions of Tibet.” The source was interviewed by ICT in December 2018.

² Global Times, ‘Tibetans propose erecting statues to central government liaison officials’, January 14, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1135697.shtml>

³ The Yuan Dynasty was led by the Mongols in the 13th and 14th centuries, and the Manchu Qing Dynasty ruled China from the 18th century until the 20th century.

⁴ International Campaign for Tibet report, January 7, 2019, <https://www.savetibet.org/chinese-response-to-tibet-reciprocity-bill-signals-its-fear-of-us-support-for-tibet/>

⁵ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1134945.shtml>

open new ground for developing a strong military.” The Party is preparing for a series of landmark anniversaries in 2019, notably the 60th anniversary of Tibet’s Uprising in March 1959, and the 70th of the founding of the PRC in 1949. The number of military training exercises as well as weaponry used has been stepped up.

Song Zhongping, a military expert, told the Global Times in the same report that the new howitzer has 52-caliber cannon with a range of over 50 kilometers and shoots laser-guided and satellite-guided projectiles. The report also referred to a training exercise by an artillery brigade in the Tibet Military Command; the frequency of these was increased significantly in 2018.⁶

Claude Arpi, who tracks military and strategic developments on the plateau, noted that according to Xinhua, some 2 million personnel had been involved in more than 18,000, mostly small-scale exercises in 2018. The report did not offer a comparison for 2017, but state media reported earlier that the PLA conducted roughly 100 larger-scale exercises in 2016.⁷

Last November (2018), the Chinese state media reported on the unveiling of a new light tank, the Type 15, specifically stating that it “can outperform other Chinese tanks in combat operations in plateau areas like Tibet while also holding advantages in island landing missions.” (Global Times, November 25, 2018).⁸ This followed major military drills on the plateau in 2017, coinciding with the China-India standoff at the border, by the PLA Western Theater Command. Details of the trial flight of new armed reconnaissance drones have also been revealed in the state media this month, with images of a drone flying in an undisclosed location, which looks like a mountainous Tibetan landscape.⁹

An integral element of the current emphasis on “combat readiness” is the strategic rail network across Tibet. The TAR Party Congress heard that the Sichuan-TAR railway is expected to begin construction this year. The state-owned China Railway Corp has stated that it aims to complete a feasibility study of the railway by the end of the second quarter of 2019 and seek approval from the central government in the third quarter.¹⁰

Dramatic acceleration in development announced at Party Congress

The high-speed rail line from Chengdu to Lhasa (following the single line from Golmud to Lhasa in 2006) will traverse the most densely settled and forested parts of the plateau, travelling through Kham to enter the TAR and Nyingtri (Chinese: Linzhi) via Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu). Costing 250 billion yuan (\$36.88 billion), the railway will shorten the journey from Chengdu to Lhasa from 48 hours to 13 hours. According to the same state media report, the 140-kilometer Chengdu-Ya'an section of the Sichuan-Tibet Railway officially started operations to 11 stations on December 28, 2018.

The Chengdu-Lhasa railway represents a dramatic acceleration of development in line with China’s strategic and economic objectives in the region. The fully electrified high speed rail line is connected to the recent completion of the world’s highest altitude high-voltage power grid, further indicating the

⁶ “The recent [military drills] have become more intensive and India-focused. In December 2018, the armed police conducted a counter-terrorism campaign in Tibet in “intensive warlike confrontations”. Srikanth Kondapalli, a professor in Chinese Studies at JNU University in Delhi, India, wrote in the Indian newspaper Financial Express. ‘Is India ready? China steps up military build-up in Tibet as America passes law of Reciprocal Access’, January 14, 2019, <https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/is-india-ready-china-steps-up-military-build-up-in-tibet-as-america-passes-law-of-reciprocal-access/1443394/>

⁷ ‘China Prepares for War’, January 11, 2019, <http://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2019/01/china-prepares-for-war.html>

⁸ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1128943.shtml>

⁹ Global Times, January 6, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1134747.shtml> In November, 2018, The Global Times quoted a professor at the National Defense University who revealed details of China’s new armed reconnaissance drone, which had been seen at the Airshow China 2018 in Zhuhai.

¹⁰ Global Times, January 3, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1134526.shtml>

accelerated demand for hydropower resources and pressure on Tibetan areas with damming. The announcement in November (2018) of the operationalisation of the Tibet-China Power Network Project, an ultra-high voltage power grid project with “the largest altitude span in the world” according to the state media,¹¹ means that the plateau is now interlinked with the rest of China in an electricity grid.

Generating the energy needed for the railway and other developments will require multiple dam building on the upper reaches of Tibet’s major rivers, including those in an area under the protection of UNESCO World Heritage, the Three Parallel Rivers area of Yunnan. Central planning documents monitored by the International Campaign for Tibet demonstrate that the many dams planned for Three Parallel Rivers are to go ahead, among many dams whose financing is progressively announced by Beijing. The short-term plan focuses on dam and grid construction on the Yangtze (Jinsha in Chinese, also its Tibetan tributaries Dadu and Yalong) upriver from Three Parallel Rivers.¹²

These projects are of high political importance to the Party state, meaning that matters of protection of the environment come a poor second. Massive investment in infrastructure in the region by the Chinese government – railways, airfields and roads – has facilitated an unprecedented tourism boom, expansion of mining Tibet’s resources and enhanced capacity of military deployment.¹³

¹¹ According to Xinhua, the Tibet-China Power Network Project consists of the Tibet-Zhongzhong and Changdu Power Grid Networking Project and the Sichuan-Tibet Railway Lhasa-Linzhi Section Power Supply Project. The total investment is about 16.2 billion yuan. It is by far the most complex and challenging construction plateau in the world. Xinhua, ‘The world’s highest altitude ultra-high voltage power grid project completed and put into operation’, November 26, 2018, http://www.cnepaper.com/qhkjb/html/2018-11/28/content_4_11.htm

¹² The National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration, together with the relevant provincial government departments and power generation group companies, accelerated the construction of the Sanjiangkou and Daduhe Shuangjiangkou hydropower stations in the Yalong River, and promoted the construction of the Longpan Hydropower Station in the middle reaches of the Jinsha River as soon as possible, striving to complete as soon as possible and increase the number of Ya long Hydropower regulation capacity in the middle reaches of the Jiang, Dadu River and Jinsha River.” (Chinese official circular on promoting hydropower consumption in Southwest China’, October 19, 2017, <https://chinaenergyportal.org/en/circular-promoting-hydropower-consumption-southwest-china/>) The same document stated that the State Grid had been instructed to better coordinate hydropower operation: “promote the establishment of a unified and coordinated dispatching management mechanism for the Yangtze river basin, study the cascade joint dispatching system of the river basin, give full play to the overall benefits of the cascade hydropower development in the river basin, and improve the market competitiveness.” Also note instructions issued by the National Energy Administration in February 2018 to accelerate the construction of leading reservoirs and to focus on Yunnan, Sichuan and surrounding areas in order to “effectively alleviate the problem of water abandonment”. The latter effectively means environmental flow, meaning the natural flow of a river that has not been impounded and interrupted by cascades of dams. (<https://chinaenergyportal.org/en/guiding-opinions-2018-energy-tasks/>). Five major infrastructure and grid construction projects are outlined on an official website detailing investment in Yunnan in the period 2016-20 at: <http://www.yn-invest.gov.cn/XMArticleInfo.aspx?id=12034> . At least 14 of the projects listed are within the scope of the UNESCO World Heritage property.

¹³ International Campaign for Tibet report, March 14, 2016, ‘Plans for second railway across Tibet confirmed: likely to have even greater impact,’ <https://www.savetibet.org/plans-for-second-railway-across-tibet-confirmed-likely-to-have-even-greater-impact/>