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## **Dalai Lama's Visit to Arunachal Pradesh and China's Shifting Diplomatic Strategies**

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*China's reactions to the visit by Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh in April 2017 symbolises a deeper shift in China's perception of the Tibet issue and India's role in it. The Chinese view the unrest in Tibet as part of the unresolved border issue between India and China. The intensification of the Chinese rhetoric over Tibet is backed by newfound confidence from the Chinese diplomatic victories in recent years over the Dalai Lama issue. With the rising Chinese economic influence, China is increasingly able to isolate Dalai Lama in the international arena and the Tibetan cause he expounds. India's diplomatic signalling of using Dalai Lama may prove to be counterproductive, because China is using it as an anti-India tool, which helps it to mobilize the Chinese nationalists against India's support to the Chinese Tibetan "separatists".*

Since the announcement of Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in April 2017, and throughout the course of the visit which ended on 12 April 2017, China's government and

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media followed it up with criticism, denouncements and warnings to India.<sup>2</sup> Within a few days after the announcement of the visit, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang depicted the proposed visit as an intentional act by the Indian Government to jeopardise the existing peaceful condition in the disputed regions between India and China and the India-China relations at large. Geng Shuang said:

*“The Dalai group has long been engaged in anti-China separatist activities and has put on dishonorable acts in the past on the boundary question. The Indian side knows very well the seriousness of the Dalai issue and the sensitiveness of the boundary question. Under such circumstances, India's invitation to the Dalai Lama to the disputed areas between China and India will bring severe damage to peace and stability of the border areas and China-India relations”.*<sup>3</sup>

The visit of Dalai Lama in April 2017 can be seen as a follow-through of the invitation extended by Arunachal Chief Minister Pema Khandu to Dalai Lama on 9 October 2016 in Delhi to visit Arunachal Pradesh. The visit was earlier slated for the second week of March 2017.<sup>4</sup> Then also China protested in strong terms. Responding to the Indian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's explanation that it is not the first time that Dalai Lama visits the region as an honoured guest, and China-India relationship continued even after his visits to the place earlier, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang said that “...having made one mistake does not give a permit to make another one. It is even more unacceptable to repeat mistakes.”<sup>5</sup>

During the visit, the Chinese Government “has lodged representations with the Indian Ambassador to China in Beijing, and the relevant official of the Indian Foreign Ministry in New Delhi”, and expressed “opposition to India's approval of Dalai Lama's activities in the disputed eastern section of the China-India boundary”.<sup>6</sup> However China's protest against Dalai Lama's meeting with Indian Government leadership, Dalai Lama's visit to disputed territories

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<sup>2</sup> Press Trust of India, “Kiren Rijiju says Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh will take place as scheduled,” *Indian Express*, March 3, 2017, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/kiren-rijiju-says-dalai-lamas-visit-to-arunachal-pradesh-will-take-place-as-scheduled-4553100/>.

<sup>3</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference,” *Foreign Ministry of People's Republic of China*, March 3, 2017, accessed March 7, 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1443063.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1443063.shtml).

<sup>4</sup> Maha Siddiqui, “Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh not a problem: Centre,” *India Today*, October 27, 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/dalai-lama-visit-arunachal-pradesh-centre/1/796710.html>.

<sup>5</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference,” *Foreign Ministry of People's Republic of China*, October 28, 2016, accessed March 7, 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1411259.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1411259.shtml).

<sup>6</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, April 6, 2017, (accessed April 6, 2017), [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1451770.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1451770.shtml).

between India and China or any perceived use of the “Dalai Lama card” by the Indian Government are not new.

In 1977, for instance, India’s the-then Prime Minister Morarji Desai, Acting President Basappa Danappa Jatti and Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram had, on 22 July, received Dalai Lama separately. The reception for Dalai Lama by the-then Indian leadership was highly publicised in both print and visual media of that time.<sup>7</sup> It was symbolic of the Janata party’s intent to take a firm policy towards China. Dalai Lama’s meeting with India’s former leadership was significant in the sense that it happened just over a year after India and China restored ambassadorial relations in August 1976, signalling that India will not distance itself from Dalai Lama for the sake of improving relations with China. China protested and denounced the-then Indian Government’s use of the “Dalai Lama card”. According to China’s official news agency Xinhua, “it should be pointed out that for years, the Indian Government has not reaped any benefit from its anti-China activities through rebel bandit Dalai (sic). Nor will it reap any from them in the future”.<sup>8</sup> Since then, China has routinely denounced the perceived Indian efforts to use the “Dalai Lama card”. The rhetoric only changed in its usage of words in denouncing Dalai Lama. From the harsher Maoist terminology of “bandit” to a more mellowed “political exile engaged in splittist activities”.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the biggest change in the course of years is the emergence of China as a superpower, and China’s capacity to take action to match its rhetoric.

This paper intends to analyse the change in China’s diplomatic strategies in the context of the Dalai Lama’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh in April 2017.

### **‘Don’t Play the Dalai Lama Card’**

China routinely protested Dalai Lama’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh; however with the economic rise of China, and with its increasing global influence China is currently able to put more pressure on India.

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<sup>7</sup> “Chinese embassy strongly protests against Indian government leader's meetings with Dalai,” Xinhua General News Service, August 6, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> “China urges Germany to avoid official contact with Dalai Lama,” *Xinhua General News Service*, September 18, 2007.

China perceive Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh as a diplomatic signalling and toughening of the India's attitudes towards China. It is viewed in context of the China's opposition to India Joining Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and repeated blocking of India's attempts to get Pakistan-based terrorist organization Jaish-e-Mohammed chief *Masood Azhar* listed on a UN list of designated terrorists.<sup>10</sup> Added to this are the Indian worries about the increasing integration between Chinese and Pakistan military and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which passes through disputed areas of Kashmir, currently controlled by Pakistan and claimed by India.<sup>11</sup>

Chinese media and internet forums extensively copied the official Chinese reaction to the Indian announcement of the Dalai Lama's visit. The media analysis on Dalai Lama's visit followed a pattern of criticising, warning and advising India. The Chinese media analysis presented Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh as a reaction to China's role in blocking India's membership in NSG and preventing the listing of Pakistan-based militant leader Masood Azhar as a terrorist in the United Nations Security Council. It advised India not to be weak-hearted and immature in taking decisions. It also reminded India that NSG and *Masood Azhar* issues are multilateral issues and Dalai Lama issue is an internal issue of China.<sup>12</sup> Chinese analysts believe that Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh is only a part of the larger pattern of the Narendra Modi Government's shifting foreign policy. From a non-aligned foreign policy to an alignment with Japan and US in order to hedge against China's rise. To substantiate the assumption of Modi's shifting foreign policy, Chinese analysts point towards US President Donald Trump's nice words for India such as "true friend" and "partner in addressing challenges around the world", Japan's decision to send *Izumo helicopter carrier* to join the Malabar joint naval exercise with the Indian and US naval vessels in the Indian Ocean scheduled in July 2017.<sup>13</sup> Chinese analysts also list China's grievances of India such as India's obstruction to China's One Belt One Road plan in the South Asian Region, invitation to a

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<sup>10</sup> "India's use of Dalai Lama card tactless" *Global Times*, April 6, 2017, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1041035.shtml>.

<sup>11</sup> Press Trust of India, "India's concerns over CPEC 'unwarranted': Chinese state media," *The Indian Express*, February 24, 2017, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/indias-concerns-over-cpec-unwarranted-chinese-state-media-4541947/>.

<sup>12</sup> "Yindu Shengji da Dalai pai, zhe hen ben zhuo wu li 印度升级打“达赖牌”，这很笨拙无礼” [India's Dalai card play is escalating, and it is stupid and rude], last modified April 6, 2017, *Huan qiu shi bao 环球时报*, April 6, 2017, <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/editorial/2017-04/10430447.html>. (accessed April 7, 2017); Liu Jianxi, "New Delhi using Dalai as diplomatic tool harms Sino-Indian ties," *Global Times*, April 5, 2017, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1040828.shtml>.

<sup>13</sup> Qian Feng 钱峰, "Yindu zi zunxin qiang, xiong huai ye ying kuan xie 印度自尊心强，胸怀也应宽些” [India holds very strong pride, should also have large heart], last modified April 7, 2017, *Huan qiu shi bao 环球时报*, April 7, 2017, <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/1152/2017-04/10436690.html>. (accessed April 7, 2017).

"parliamentary" delegation from Taiwan in February 2017, and think that India is getting aggressive because India is spoiled by the Western media's China bashing on the one hand and the West's wooing of India on the other.<sup>14</sup> China's official media also warns India that China has more diplomatic and military cards than India and because of the overwhelming economic and military superiority that China has over India, it can easily outmanoeuvre India in any geostrategic rivalry situation.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the nationalist military forums also carried the news, India is extensively criticised by the Chinese netizens for facilitating Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh. A large number of Chinese netizens have exhorted the Chinese Government to retaliate by supporting the separatist forces within India, as well by seeking to bring back the "lost territory" of south Tibet. Many of the reactions by the Chinese netizens to the news related to Dalai Lama's visit also reminded India of its inferior position compared to China.<sup>16</sup> The following abridged version of the most recommended comments by the Chinese netizens, when the news of Dalai Lama's proposed visit to Arunachal Pradesh became known, shows the popular Chinese perception on the issue.

*"Currently, some people without a sense of propriety in India believe that American military is shifting its focus to the east, colluding with Japanese 'pirates', and giving pressure to China in East China Sea and South China Sea; seeing this opportunity, India again wants to provoke China. These people misjudged the situation, China is no longer the China of previous days. The condition in Tibet is also not the same, the power of China is currently incomparable, not only does China have a powerful army, but also powerful missile forces and air force, Tibet already is linked with railways and has military-capable highways running up to the boundary region. The international situation also changed greatly, currently Russia will not support*

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "India's use of Dalai Lama card tactless" Global Times, April 6, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Selected news and forums see "wai jiao bu: dun cu Yin fang ke shou she Zang wen ti cheng nuo bu gei Dalai ji tuan ti gong wu tai外交部:敦促印方恪守涉藏问题承诺 不给达赖集团提供舞台" [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Urge India to adhere to its commitments on Tibet-related issues and not to provide a stage for the Dalai clique], last modified March 3, 2017, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0303/c1002-29122318.html>. (accessed March 8, 2017); "Yindu yao qing Dalai cuan fang "abang" Zhong fang dui ci biao shi yan zhong guan qie印度邀请达赖窜访“阿邦”中方对此表示严重关切" [China express serious concern over India's Invitation to Dalai Lama to visit "Arunachal Pradesh"], last modified March 4, 2017, <http://world.huanqiu.com/exclusive/2017-03/10248788.html>. (accessed March 8, 2017) ;"Yindu yao qing Dalai fang wen Zhong Yin zheng yi di qu wai jiao bu hui ying印度邀请达赖访问中印争议地区 外交部回应" [India invites Dalai Lama to visit disputed areas between India and China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs respond], last modified March 3, 2017, <http://lt.cjdbj.net/thread-2367401-1-1.html>. (accessed March 8, 2017).

*India in its fight against China. Americans are unreliable, will not risk a war with China for the sake of India. Pakistan will not look on with folded hands given the opportunity they will bayonet India. The old imperialist powers like England and France even if they want to support India, currently don't have the power to do so, the support will be only rhetorical. If India dares to provoke a fight this time, not only will China have to teach India a lesson again, but this time the lesson will be very different from 1962, all of Indian military which enters the boundary areas will be annihilated, all the Chinese territory encroached by India will be taken back, Sikkim which is annexed by India will be joined to China's Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal all will be brought into China's sphere of influence, Chinese military will not retreat again. Like before (1962) whether people in New Delhi will escape in frenzy, only god knows.*"<sup>17</sup>

Since the announcement of the visit by Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh Chinese media reminded India that Dalai Lama as a diplomatic tool was becoming increasingly ineffective, and China successfully applied diplomatic and economic pressure on many countries not to host Dalai Lama.<sup>18</sup>

## **Lessons from China's Diplomatic Strategy over Dalai Lama**

According to Chinese official media "Any meeting, private or official, is interpreted by Beijing as a kind of endorsement for the anti-China secessionist and a blatant interference in China's domestic affairs, which will inevitably lead to strained bilateral relations".<sup>19</sup> The warning about strained bilateral relations have been followed up earnestly by China in two instances of Dalai Lama visiting a foreign country and meeting foreign leaders in recent years. One example is Mongolia, which is a small country, and arguably most attached to Dalai Lama in its religious beliefs, history and culture, however also dependent on China for its economic survival. And

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<sup>17</sup> This comment is written by a Netizen with name "XI45816" from Xian City (Shaanxi province); as of 27 March 2017, this comment is recommended by 1823 readers. For the news item on which this comment is written see Yindu bugu zhong guojing gao zhiyi yaoqing Dalai cuan fang zang nandi qu 印度不顾中国警告执意邀请达赖窜访藏南地区 [Regardless of China's Warnings India Invites Dalai Lama to visit South Tibet], last modified March 5, 2017, [http://news.ifeng.com/a/20170305/50754129\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/a/20170305/50754129_0.shtml). (accessed 8 March 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Yu Ning, "India using Dalai Lama card risks worsening bilateral ties," *Global Times*, March 6, 2017, accessed 8 March 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1036203.shtml>; Mo Jingxi, "Beijing concerned over Dalai Lama border visit," *China Daily*, March 4, 2017, accessed 8 March 2017, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2017-03/04/content\\_28430751.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2017-03/04/content_28430751.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Liu Chang, "Why Western leaders should refrain from meeting with Dalai Lama," *Beijing Review*, May 16, 2012, accessed 8 March 2017, [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/headline/txt/2012-05/16/content\\_453286.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/headline/txt/2012-05/16/content_453286.htm).

another country is Britain, which is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and a strong advocate of human rights in international relations.

### **The Case of Mongolia**

Even though Dalai Lama's visit to Mongolia in November 2016 was religious in nature, and no Mongolian government authorities were involved in the organization or planning of his visit, the Chinese reaction was punishing in nature. The Chinese government reacted by postponing all governmental meetings and hiking up fees for the Mongolian exports at a vital border crossing, and increased tax on goods crossing the Chinese border bound for Mongolia.<sup>20</sup> Mongolia also at the same time was facing a tough financial situation, Moody's substantially downgraded Mongolia's credit rating from B3 (highly speculative) to Caa1 (substantial risk). Mongolia was finding it difficult to fulfil its international debt obligations, and was negotiating with China to receive a soft loan of 4 billion USD, the Chinese government postponed all meetings and negotiations following the Dalai Lama's visit.<sup>21</sup> China's economic pressure worsened Mongolia's economic situation, which forced it to seek help from other countries. The country which it turned to for help was India, Mongolian Ambassador to India G Ganbold sought clear support from India against China's punitive economic measures. According to him "It's important that India raises its voice against the unilateral measures China is taking against us which is hurting our people especially when severe winter is upon us." In response India reiterated its friendly relations with Mongolia, and the pledge to implement 1 billion USD credit line offered to Mongolia during India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to that country in 2015.<sup>22</sup> However India steered clear of taking a clear position in responding to Mongolian Ambassador's request. This did not stop the Chinese media from ridiculing the Indian attempts to help Mongolia against China.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "The controversy surrounding the Dalai Lama's visit," *The UB Post*, December 18, 2016, accessed 8 March 2017, <http://theubpost.mn/2016/12/18/the-controversy-surrounding-the-dalai-lamas-visit/>.

<sup>21</sup> Jargalsaikhan Defacto, "Power or economy?," *The UB Post*, December 11, 2016, accessed 8 March 2017, <http://theubpost.mn/2016/12/11/power-or-economy/>.

<sup>22</sup> Indrani Bagchi, "India to help Mongolia, staying away from its spat with China," *Times of India*, December 8, 2016, accessed 8 March 2017, [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-to-help-Mongolia-staying-away-from-its-spat-with-China/articleshow/55879044.cms?utm\\_source=toimobile&utm\\_medium=Facebook&utm\\_campaign=referral](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-to-help-Mongolia-staying-away-from-its-spat-with-China/articleshow/55879044.cms?utm_source=toimobile&utm_medium=Facebook&utm_campaign=referral)

<sup>23</sup> Wen Dao, "New Delhi overreaches to meddle in China's core interests," *Global Times*, December 21, 2016, accessed 8 March 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1025055.shtml>.

The economic realities forced Mongolia to bow to Chinese demands. Mongolia is dependent on China for its economic survival, for according to Mongolian Foreign Ministry “China has been Mongolia’s largest trading partner and foreign investor over the last 15 years. In 2014, Mongolia’s trade with China accounted for 61.7% of Mongolia’s total foreign trade with total trade turnover of around 6.8 billion USD. Mongolia’s export to China accounted for almost 80% of the country’s total export and its import from China accounted for 30% of Mongolia’s total import”.<sup>24</sup>

The issue was resolved when Tsend Munkh-Orgil, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, made a telephonic conversation with Wang Yi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China on 24 January 2017 and expressed his government’s regrets that the Dalai Lama’s visit to Mongolia at the invitation of the Gandantegchenlin monastery had adversely impacted friendly relations between Mongolia and the People’s Republic of China.<sup>25</sup> The Mongolian Government also publicly stated that “the Dalai Lama would not be allowed to visit Mongolia during its term in office”.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Case of Britain**

In May 2012, China warned the then British Prime Minister Cameron and Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, of "serious consequences" for Britain after the private meeting with the Dalai Lama. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's meeting with Dalai Lama in 2008 was also followed by China’s usual warnings and threats, however without much consequences, for China was still an emerging trading nation and not so much a source of investment. Cameron’s meeting with Dalai Lama in contrast resulted in almost one and half year of stagnation in political relations between the two countries, bilateral visits by the top leadership were called off or postponed, the immediate aftermath of Cameron’s meeting was also noteworthy for the strong verbal rebukes by Chinese officials as well as Chinese media.<sup>27</sup> Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei termed Cameron’s meeting with Dalai Lama, as “supporting separatist activities against China”, which became a Chinese standard response to foreign

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<sup>24</sup> “Mongolia-China Relations,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia*, accessed 10 March 2017, <http://www.mfa.gov.mn/?p=29545>.

<sup>25</sup> “Foreign Ministers of Mongolia and the People’s Republic of China Talked on the Phone,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China*, January 4, 2017, accessed 4 March 2017, <http://www.mfa.gov.mn/?p=38461&lang=en>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm Moore and James Quinn, “China freezes out Cameron for meeting Dalai Lama,” *The Daily Telegraph*, May 7, 2013.



leaders' meetings with Dalai Lama. According to Hong, Britain should "stop conniving at and supporting separatist attempts to achieve Tibetan independence, take practical measures to eliminate the terrible impact and take actions to preserve Chinese-British relations".<sup>28</sup>

The change in Chinese position in relations with Europe is explained by the Chinese nationalist media by pointing out that "although China had struggled with Germany and France over the same problem (*Dalai Lama's visit*) in 2007 and 2008, by 2012, China was much stronger and was deemed more influential".<sup>29</sup> From 2009 to 2012, Sino-British trade increased from US\$ 39.2 billion to US\$ 63.1 billion. Around the period of political freezing from May 2012 to the end of 2013, Chinese investment in the UK surpassed that of the previous 30 years, with the investment for mergers and acquisitions alone exceeding US\$ 8 billion.<sup>30</sup> Chinese official statements indicating that strong political relations were a prerequisite for an increase in the Chinese investments in the UK was considered by the British media as a veiled threat. The political issues may ultimately affect Chinese decisions to invest in England, as well as it may negatively affect other sources of income like Chinese tourists and students. This became a major concern for the British Government.<sup>31</sup>

The bilateral relationship only began to normalise when Cameron visited China in late-2013 and distanced himself from Dalai Lama. Since 2013 Cameron avoided meeting Dalai Lama, and even Dalai Lama criticised Cameron for bowing to the Chinese pressure and putting commercial benefits above human rights.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from Mongolia and Britain, China also successfully used diplomatic pressure on many other countries. For instance, the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize award to the Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, by the Norwegian Nobel Committee resulted in China-Norway ties being frozen for six years, which was only restored in 2016, after China obtaining from Norway its commitment to the one-China principle and respect for China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> "China unhappy at Cameron's meeting with Dalai Lama," *The Guardian*, May 15, 2012, accessed 5 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/15/china-unhappy-cameron-dalai-lama>.

<sup>29</sup> "Sino-UK ties herald golden time with West," *Global Times*, October 16, 2015, accessed 5 March 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/947442.shtml>.

<sup>30</sup> "Cui Hongjian, "UK breaks away from dated China mindset," *Global Times*, December 13, 2013, accessed 5 March 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/831787.shtml#.Uq5oJtJPS6h>.

<sup>31</sup> Malcolm Moore and James Quinn, "China freezes out Cameron for meeting Dalai Lama."

<sup>32</sup> Tom Mctague, "Money, money, money. That's what it is': Dalai Lama slams Cameron for kowtowing to China and refusing to meet him," *Daily Mail*, September 23, 2015, accessed 5 March 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3246512/Money-money-money-s-Dalai-Lama-slams-Cameron-kowtowing-China-refusing-meet-him.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Wang Zhuolun and Wang Huihui, "China Voice: Diplomatic hat-trick no accident," *Xinhuanet*, December 29, 2016, accessed 5 March 2017, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-12/29/c\\_135942509.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-12/29/c_135942509.htm).

diplomatic victory over Mongolia is considered as a warning to other countries. According to China's official news agency *Xinhua*, China's diplomatic victory over Mongolia "rings alarm bells for any countries that have contact with this political exile (*Dalai Lama*) who attempts to split Tibet from China under the cloak religion – such a move will severely jeopardize ties with China". It also warns that "anyone who dares challenge China's red lines, especially the one-China principle, will pay the price. Countries with an ambiguous position are better off adopting a sober attitude rather than making a rod for their own backs".<sup>34</sup> China is emboldened by these diplomatic victories and managed to isolate Dalai Lama and Tibet issue to a large extent in the international forums.

### **Is India Vulnerable?**

Though China is the largest trading partner of India, China has minimal economic leverage with India. India is one of the largest export markets for Chinese companies. However China is only the third largest export market for India. In the year 2015-2016 India's export to China was only worth US\$ 9 billion, compared to US\$ 40 billion to the US and US\$ 30 billion to the UAE. India imports more than US\$ 61 billion worth of Chinese goods, resulting in a US\$ 52 billion trade deficit.<sup>35</sup> In the scenario of trade halt between the two countries Chinese will face more negative effects in the form of losing the market and resulting unemployment. India's worries will be short-term, because India's largest export to China is raw materials, which can be in the long-term absorbed by India's own internal market. Chinese investment in India is also minuscule. According to Indian Government statistics, between April 2000 and December 2016, China was the 17th largest investor in India. The amount of total Chinese investment is little more than US\$ 1.6 billion, accounting for 0.50% of total investment India received in last sixteen years.<sup>36</sup> The Chinese media tend to exaggerate the Chinese investments to India, for instance Chinese newspapers point out that in recent years several Chinese smartphone manufacturers have established or plan to establish factories in India. However, the Chinese investment is coming to India because of the natural market forces. For instance, as the Chinese smartphone market nears saturation, India has proved to be an attractive market for Chinese

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *Government of India, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Department of Commerce*, accessed on 6 March 2017, <http://commerce.gov.in/eidb/default.asp>.

<sup>36</sup> *Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India*, accessed 6 March 2017, [http://dipp.nic.in/English/Publications/FDI\\_Statistics/FDI\\_Statistics.aspx](http://dipp.nic.in/English/Publications/FDI_Statistics/FDI_Statistics.aspx).

smartphone manufacturers. India currently has more than one billion mobile phones in use, while only 250 million people are smartphone users, demonstrating a huge market potential for the years to come. This is also true about many other industries.<sup>37</sup>

In the current economic scenario China does not have much economic tools to pressure India on the Dalai Lama issue. Nevertheless, increasing Chinese investment in the Indian companies and the encouragement of this investment by Indian Government will create potential security vulnerabilities and can be used as tools to pressure India.

## **Tibet and the Border Issue**

China believes that India is using Dalai Lama to reinforce its claim on the disputed territories. China's official reaction to Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh in April 2017 is very clear about the visit's impact on the boundary issue. Reacting to the news of Dalai Lama's visit Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying said "the Chinese side holds a consistent and clear position on the eastern section of the China-India boundary. The Indian side knows well the role of the 14th Dalai Lama. Arranging his activities in this sensitive area where China and India have territorial disputes not only violates India's commitment on Tibet-related issues, but also fuels the border dispute". She also said that the visit will undercut "the foundation for boundary negotiation and bilateral relations" and escalated the boundary dispute.<sup>38</sup> The Chinese government furthermore considered that the Indian action of allowing Dalai Lama to visit the disputed territories between India and China was "against the solemn commitment that the Indian government has made on Tibet-related issues and will have negative impact on the proper settlement of the territorial dispute between China and India through negotiations".<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Li Qian, "Rise and coexist," *Global Times*, February 22, 2017, accessed 8 March 2017, <http://epaper.globaltimes.cn/2017-02-22/P12-13.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, April 5, 2017, accessed April 5, 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1451507.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1451507.shtml); "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, April 6, 2017, accessed April 6, 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1451770.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1451770.shtml).

<sup>39</sup> "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, April 12, 2017, accessed April 12, 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/t1453181.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1453181.shtml).

Chinese media and experts pointed out that since 1959, for a half a century in India, Dalai Lama many times referred to himself as the “son of India”, and also referred to his ancestral place of Southern Tibet as “State of Arunachal Pradesh”. In January 2007, in an interview to the Indian media, he said “in 1914 government of Tibet and British Indian government both accepted McMahon line, according to the agreement at that time, Arunachal Pradesh is a part of India’s”.<sup>40</sup> In 2014, the head of the “Tibetan Government-in-Exile”, which is supervised by Dalai Lama, during a meeting attended by Dalai Lama, openly said that “Simla agreement demarcated the boundary line between India and Tibet, McMahon line became the boundary line between India and Tibet”. In recent years regarding India-China boundary issue Dalai Lama several times reiterated Indian sovereignty over “southern Tibet”.<sup>41</sup>

The Chinese response about the latest announcement of Dalai Lama’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh also refers to the visit’s likely impact on the border dispute. According to Fu Xiaoqiang, an expert on South Asian studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, “India is trying to reinforce its actual control over the disputed area by inviting the Dalai Lama to visit there. But this will not help solve the problem, or change the fact that it is a disputed territory”. He also said that “since China and India have agreed to solve the border issue through negotiations, India should stop what he described as petty moves and respect the consensus the two countries have reached”.<sup>42</sup> China is concerned about the potential unrest in Tibet, and believes that Tibetan groups in foreign countries are actively involved in instigating unrest in Tibet against the Chinese control there. The increasing Chinese worry about the Tibetans in India acting as catalysts destabilizing Tibet is reflected in Chinese hacking attempts that target Tibetan organizations in India. Though denied officially by the Chinese Government, major cyber security firms monitoring activities of Peoples Liberation Army-affiliated Chinese hackers suggest that the border issue-related information and information about Tibetan organizations in India is a major target of Chinese hackers. According to cyber security firm *FireEye* Chinese hackers are targeting organisations in India to steal information related to border disputes and Tibetan exile groups, In April 2015, *FireEye* reported that a separate Chinese hacking team, APT30, had been spying on governments and

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<sup>40</sup> “Wai mei: Yindu ying yu zhong guo he ping xiang chu, rang Dalai hao zi wei zhi 外媒：印度应与中国和平相处，让达赖好自为之” [foreign Media: India Should peacefully Coexist with China, and Let Dalai Conduct Himself well], last modified November 7, 2016, <http://world.huanqiu.com/article/2016-11/9644139.html>. (accessed 4 March 2017)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Mo Jingxi, “Beijing concerned over Dalai Lama border visit,” *China Daily*, March 4, 2017, accessed 5 March 2017, [http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-03/04/content\\_28431000.htm](http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-03/04/content_28431000.htm).

businesses in Southeast Asia and India uninterrupted for a decade, echoing claims made by US firm *McAfee* in 2011. According to Bryce Boland, *FireEye* chief technology officer for Asia-Pacific, "Collecting intelligence on India remains a key strategic goal for China-based APT groups". "These attacks on India and its neighbouring countries reflect growing interest in India's foreign affairs".<sup>43</sup> It is not a new story that India is targeted by Chinese hackers, it was affirmed in the year 2010 by none other than the then National Security Adviser M K Narayanan, when his office was hacked by suspected Chinese hackers.<sup>44</sup>

### **China's Hedge against Dalai Lama: the Northeast Card?**

Indian security agencies for long believed that China is using Northeast Indian rebels to keep pressure on India about Tibet-related issues.

Beginning from 2010 various reports in the Indian media suggest that China wanted all Northeast Indian rebel factions to make a joint front to fight against the Indian Government.<sup>45</sup> The Indian suspicion of China helping Northeast rebels to form a unified front is substantiated by the formation of United Liberation Front of Western Southeast Asia (UNLFW) in 2015.<sup>46</sup> The new militant outfit carried out its first major attack in June 2015, killing 20 Indian soldiers in an ambush in the state of Manipur, showing the revival of militancy in the region.<sup>47</sup> Later Indian intelligence officials discovered that the leader of the militant outfit who conducted the ambush had contacts with the Chinese People's Liberation Army officers.<sup>48</sup> Though Indian officials could not trace the arms procurement by the Northeast militant organizations to any official sources in China, they were convinced that Northeast rebels are getting arms from China.<sup>49</sup> In 2004 a large amount of illegal arms and ammunitions shipments was captured in

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<sup>43</sup> James Griffiths, "China blamed for hacking in India," *South China Morning Post*, August 22, 2015, p.8.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Beeston and Jeremy Page, "Chinese hackers are blamed for 'Trojan' cyber spy attack; India," *The Times*, January 18, 2010, p.32.

<sup>45</sup> Manoj Anand, "China assures help to rebels for fight against India," *Asian Age*, February 24, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Rezaul H Laskar, "Nine militant groups of NE form united front with Chinese blessings," *Hindustan Times*, April 24, 2015, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/nine-militant-groups-of-ne-form-united-front-with-chinese-blessings/story-6SuTFuFRymf27fSueYyoaP.html>.

<sup>47</sup> "20 soldiers killed in Manipur ambush in deadliest attack on Army in 33 yrs," *Times of India*, June 5, 2015, accessed March 9, 2017, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/20-soldiers-killed-in-Manipur-ambush-in-deadliest-attack-on-Army-in-33-yrs/articleshow/47547738.cms>.

<sup>48</sup> Vijaita Singh, "Manipur Ambush: 'Chinese army officials in touch with NSCN(K) leaders'," *Indian Express*, June 9, 2015, accessed March 9, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/manipur-ambush-chinese-army-officials-in-touch-with-nscnk-leaders/>.

<sup>49</sup> "Ulfa-I may be a spent force but not Paresh," *The Times of India*, May 18, 2015, accessed March 11, 2017, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Ulfa-I-may-be-a-spent-force-but-not-Paresh/articleshow/47312156.cms>.

Bangladesh, those weapons were manufactured in China and destined for the terrorist organization United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which advocates the secession of the Indian State of Assam. In relation to this illegal arms smuggling, a special court in Bangladesh awarded death penalty to the ULFA leader Paresh Baruah in absentia in 2014.<sup>50</sup> Since 2008 itself ULFA leaders, fearful of the growing pressure by India on Bangladesh to crackdown on them, tried to explore the Chinese province of Yunnan as a new base for their Indian operations. In 2008 ULFA Chief Paresh Baruah was believed to have visited Yunnan province to examine the possibility of setting up bases.<sup>51</sup> By 2014 the ULFA was depleted of its cadres and leaders because of the arrests, crackdown in Bangladesh, as well as the large-scale surrenders to the Indian authorities.<sup>52</sup> While the leader of the faction which advocates the independence of Assam, Paresh Baruah, is reported to have established his base in the Chinese province of Yunnan, this is denied by the Chinese Government.<sup>53</sup> The belief that the faction which still advocates Assam's independence ULFA(I)<sup>54</sup> is supported by China seems to be corroborated by the ULFA (I) leaders' open appeal to China to help them in their struggle against India. ULFA (I) also adopted China's position on Tibet, as well as started to put pressure on Tibetans' political activities in the Northeast region. On November 2015, chairman of the ULFA(I), Dr Abhizeet Asom, supporting China's view, criticised India's 'interference' in China's internal affairs through support for Tibetan independence struggle. Dr Abhizeet Asom also criticised Dalai Lama for not raising his voice against India's "human right violations" in Assam.<sup>55</sup>

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the Indian spiritual guru who tried to persuade Paresh Baruah to talk to the Indian Government, believes that Paresh Baruah is under pressure from the Chinese authorities to not give in on the issue of negotiations with India.<sup>56</sup> The Chinese control on ULFA(I) is apparent in Dr Abhizeet Asom's open letter to Dalai Lama on the occasion of his visit to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in April 2017. In his open letter to Dalai Lama he used

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<sup>50</sup> Haroon Habib and Sushanta Talukdar, "ULFA's Paresh Baruah sentenced to death in Bangladesh," *The Hindu*, January 30, 2014, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/ulfas-paresh-barua-sentenced-to-death-in-bangladesh/article5634460.ece>.

<sup>51</sup> "ULFA Trying To Build Base In China: DGP," *Hindustan Times*, December 6, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> "ULFA C-in-C flees Bangla after crackdown," *Hindustan Times*, June 1, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> "China, new hideout of top ULFA commander Paresh Baruah," *Hindustan Times*, June 1, 2009.

<sup>54</sup> The ULFA-ATF renamed itself as ULFA-Independent (ULFA-I), following its 'central executive committee' meeting between April 2 and 5, 2013. See South Asia Terrorism Portal, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist\\_outfits/ulfa.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/ulfa.htm).

<sup>55</sup> "ULFA(I) supports China over Tibet," *Assam Tribune*, November 7, 2015, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=nov0815/at054>.

<sup>56</sup> Kalyan Barooah, "Paresh Baruah under Chinese pressure to shun talks: Ravi Shankar," *The Assam Tribune*, January 24, 2017, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=jan2417/at054>.

the Chinese name “Nan Zang (Southern Tibet)” for the Chinese claimed Indian Territory of Arunachal Pradesh. He mentioned “Nan Zang” along with other Northeast territories of India as places illegally occupied by the Indian Government. The letter also follows the Chinese viewpoint about the India-China border issue by stating that the boundary line (McMahon line) is drawn without the consent of the then Chinese authorities after the Simla Accord of 1914. He also criticised Dalai Lama for accepting and reiterating that the Tawang town in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh is Indian territory. Further Paresh Baruah also warned Dalai Lama not to engage in anti-China activities in Assam and Northeast region.<sup>57</sup>

If we analyse from the Chinese point of view there are obvious similarities between Paresh Baruah and Dalai Lama. Both are “rebels” who advocate “separation” from their respective “motherlands” .While India is sheltering Dalai Lama, a Chinese “rebel”; though unacknowledged, China is also sheltering Paresh Baruah, an Indian rebel. Dalai Lama is supporting India’s perception on the India-China boundary dispute and making pro-India statements. Paresh Baruah is also supporting the Chinese point of view on the boundary dispute, and calls for the support of China to liberate Northeast regions of India from Indian “hegemony”. However the similarities end there, Paresh Baruah is the head of the faction of a banned terrorist organization in India without much support in Assam itself. He is a lesser known person in the world. Dalai Lama is a world renowned spiritual leader, who won the Nobel Peace Prize and has huge support among Tibetans in Tibet as well as Tibetans world over. He attracts sympathy and affection from all over the world, including from world leaders and celebrities.

The Chinese courting of Northeast Indian rebels and using them as one of the tools to delegitimize Dalai Lama’s support to the Indian position on the boundary issue will put pressure on India. It has the *potential* to disrupt the peace and stability of India’s North-eastern region. Because of the Indian Government’s neglect of the region for a long period of time, and due to the slow pace of economic development in the Northeast region, rebels with the backing of China’s resources will find Northeast an easy recruiting ground.

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<sup>57</sup> “Full text of ULFA[I] Chairman’s Open Letter to Dalai Lama,” *Times of Assam*, March 29, 2017, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://www.timesofassam.com/headlines/full-text-ulfai-chairmans-open-letter-dalai-lama/>.

## Conclusion

The recent successes in pressuring foreign governments on the issue of the visit of Dalai Lama give China new confidence that sooner or later pressure will mount on India and India may find Dalai Lama and the 'exile government' more a burden than an asset.

Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh is used by China as a mobilizing and propaganda tool. The Chinese narrative depicts Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh and the town of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh as India's aggressive act in the border areas. This narrative goes with the Chinese narrative of India harbouring colonial British geostrategic thinking, in other words viewing Tibet as a neutral buffer zone. It can be argued that this makes all the so-called improvements and "progress" in last decades, as well as numerous agreements signed between India and China on the border issue, of questionable value. Because it is clear that China don't believe in peaceful intentions of India. China perceives Dalai Lama's activities in India as well as other parts of the world as part of his plan to separate Tibet from China.

The narrative of trade bringing peace between India and China is already open to doubt because of China using economic and trade tools to pressurize Britain, Mongolia and several other countries to desist from inviting Dalai Lama. Trade and investment give leverage to the biggest and powerful countries engaged in it, which is very much visible in China's interaction with Mongolia and Britain in the case of coercing them on the basis of potential and real economic costs.

China views the Tibet issue as not being separate from the border issue with India; the Indian view is that Tibet is not an issue between India and China, because Indian *Government has recognised the Tibet Autonomous Region as part of the territory of the People's Republic of China*. The Chinese accusation of India using Dalai Lama to legitimate its "occupation" of territories claimed by China shows that China will not compromise on what it sees as the Tibetan territories controlled by India, such as Tawang. With the increase in the comprehensive power of China, India will find it hard to resist the pressure.

Other countries will be less inclined to support India, because India is less economically attractive and strategically not articulate in the region, India may eventually get isolated on the issue of Tibet. China may also counter India's support to Dalai Lama by supporting rebels in India's North Eastern region.



The pattern of the Chinese diplomatic pressure and of rhetoric on the Dalai Lama issue shows that China may take advantage of any favourable economic position it enjoys with India. India has to factor in this aspect when it comes to its trade and investment relations with China.

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