

Major policy meeting on Tibet in buildup to sensitive anniversary

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A major policy meeting on Tibet presided over by China's top leader Xi Jinping concluded this week in Beijing, as security is tightened in Lhasa in advance of a political anniversary on September 1.

The Tibet Work Forum on August 24-25, setting out Tibet policy for the coming years, is the sixth such strategy meeting on Tibet to be held since the Chinese took over Tibet in 1949-50.

Attended by the entire Politburo, the Party leadership, the emphasis of the Work Forum was on 'stability', a political term associated with a dramatic expansion of military and police powers. According to the Chinese state media, the meeting also emphasized the struggle against 'separatism', above economic development, in contrast to the last Tibet Work Forum in January, 2010. The official Global Times reported: "Stressing that national unity, consolidating ethnic unity, and realizing long-term and comprehensive social stability should be regarded as the primary task for the region, Xi said that the country should "firmly take the initiative" in the fight against separatism, and adhere to the principle of governing Tibet under the rule of law." (August 27, 2015, Global Times). The Chinese authorities state that the Dalai Lama is a prime cause of Tibetan 'separatism'.

There has been an intensification of security in the Tibet Autonomous Region, including an increased number of checkpoints, stepping up of surveillance and controls, and large-scale movement of troops in July.^[1] This is likely to be a part not only of the renewed emphasis on political 'stability' but also in the buildup to the 50th anniversary of the establishment by the Chinese authorities of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet said: "The sight of armed troops in trucks displaying political slogans moving through Tibet serves only to underline the failed policies of the Chinese Party state after more than half a century. These hardline measures, and the insistence of the Chinese authorities to ensure Tibetans 'celebrate' this upcoming anniversary, reveal the CCP's uncertainties over lack of its authority in Tibet. This is a leadership that needs to assert itself over a people who emphasise peace and non-violence, through tanks, 'counter-terrorist' measures and rhetoric resonant of the Cultural Revolution. The anniversary on September 1 is an empty celebration, as there is no genuine autonomy in the 'Tibet Autonomous Region', as promised by Beijing in the 1950s. There is a need for a fundamentally new approach on Tibet. International governments must signal its alarm over the priorities revealed by the Sixth Work Forum, which undermine chances of achieving a genuine stability."

Footnotes

[1] ICT report and footage, August 12, 2015, <http://www.savetibet.org/major-troop-movements-in-tibet-hardline-approach-to-dalai-lama-in-key-policy-talks/>