



# **SACRED AUTHORITY AND STATE POWER: THE FUTURE OF THE DALAI LAMA INSTITUTION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**

**PART THREE:**

**COUNTERING PRC THREATS AND PROTECTING TIBETAN  
INTERESTS**

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This section outlines strategies to counter heightened threats from the People's Republic of China (PRC) on multiple fronts, particularly in regions like India, Mongolia, Nepal, and within the Tibetan diaspora. The recommendations are rooted in the concept of future-proofing, which involves anticipating future challenges and developing methods to minimize the effects of shocks and stresses of future events. The guidelines are based on research and interviews with stakeholders in India, particularly Dharamsala, Ladakh; Mongolia and Nepal, and with Tibetan religious leaders and scholars. They draw upon ongoing advocacy and campaign work by Tibet supporters and Tibetans in the diaspora.

**Greater preparedness is needed from neighbouring countries, Buddhist regions and international governments to counter China's extraterritorial strategies. It is critical for governments to develop positions now that oppose China's interference and affirm the Dalai Lama's authority over his own succession, which is a matter for Tibetan Buddhists to decide.**

The Tibet Policy and Support Act of 2020 makes it official U.S. policy that the Dalai Lama's succession is a strictly religious matter that can only be decided upon by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Buddhist community.<sup>1</sup> Under the Act, if China attempts to identify a future Dalai Lama, they will face sanctions that could include having their assets frozen and their entry to the U.S. denied. The State Department is also tasked with working with like-minded countries worldwide to push back against China's plans to install an imposter Dalai Lama. The legislation strengthens the landmark Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2002.<sup>2</sup>

Two competition bills passed in the U.S. House and Senate in February 2022 and July 2021 respectively reaffirm US policy regarding the Dalai Lama's succession or reincarnation, as well as the religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists, stating that any "interference by the Government of the People's Republic of China or any other government in the process of recognizing a successor or reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama and any future Dalai Lamas would represent a clear abuse of the right to religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists and the Tibetan people" (Sec 3307 of the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act).

While no European member states or the UK have developed similar legislation as yet, the European Union has reaffirmed its position that China should respect the Dalai Lama's succession in accordance with Tibetan Buddhist standards. According to the EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief, adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 24 June 2013 (in particular its paragraph 19), the communities have the right to

perform “acts integral to the conduct by religious groups of their basic affairs. These rights include but are not limited to, legal personality and non-interference in internal affairs, including the right (...) to select and train leaders (...)”.<sup>3</sup>

Countering China’s digital and physical transnational repression is a particularly complex challenge. Its impacts, from anxiety disorders to broken community

ties, are severe, but can be alleviated by the implementation of robust cybersecurity protections, offering psychosocial support, and marshalling international condemnation and action. Policy steps not only aid Tibetan people in reclaiming their agency and security, but can also serve as a blueprint to protect other diaspora communities facing similar digital assaults on their freedom and dignity.<sup>4</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Tibet support groups under the umbrella of the International Tibet Network set out recommendations to governments in their report ‘Tibet, The Dalai Lama and the Geopolitics of Reincarnation’,<sup>5</sup> including the following:

- To the international community: develop a public position or legislation recognising support for the 14th Dalai Lama as the legitimate authority on his succession and affirm that the identification and appointment of Tibetan Buddhist leaders is to be decided solely by Tibetan Buddhist leaders, without any government interference;
- Urgently issue item statements at the UN Human Rights Council expressing serious concern at China’s interference in the Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation process and reiterate that the identification and appointment of Tibetan Buddhist leaders be decided solely by Tibetan Buddhists, and in accordance with international human rights law;
- Refuse to endorse Chinese-government-appointed Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including China’s Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu;
- Establish a Special Coordinator for Tibet (or equivalent) in order to meaningfully respond to the urgent situation in Tibet;

- To the Chinese government: cease any interference in the identification appointment of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including any future reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, which must be determined solely by the Tibetan people, in accordance with international human rights law. Repeal the 'Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism', which requires that the succession of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism is approved by the CCP and invalidates reincarnation lineages outside of China;
- Cease the use of any government databases or registries to monitor, control or legitimise CCP approved Tibetan Buddhist reincarnations;
- Provide proof of the whereabouts and wellbeing of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama of Tibet, and grant an independent monitor immediate access to him and his family;
- Grant immediate, meaningful, and unfettered access to UN mandate holders to assess the situation on the ground, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief;
- Ratify the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Offer bilateral support to the Government of India on the matter of the Dalai Lama's succession and protection of the CTA and Tibetan cultural and religious institutions in India. Consider the security dimension of the issue in anticipation of PLA/PAP mobilization;
- Anticipate economic or other efforts attempting coercion by the PRC to gain recognition of a CCP-installed Dalai Lama. Approach democratic governments to cooperate in a united position, noting that the PRC already uses Tibet as a tool of

economic and political coercion in its bilateral relations and in international organizations that has contributed to the deterioration of democratic norms;

- Upgrade and expand relations with the Central Tibet Administration and convey support to Tibetans. With the loss of the preeminent and central figure of Tibetan Buddhist civilisation, the nature of the Tibetan leadership will change;
- Vigorous and timely monitoring of China's extraterritorial influence efforts over Buddhism and Tibet and robust responses to same on a case by case basis;
- Engage with Tibetan community representatives and Central Tibetan Administration wherever possible with regard to countering China's transnational repression;
- Desist from stating that Tibet is part of China or the PRC. At no point did the PRC inherit or acquire sovereignty over Tibet and Tibet is not legally a part of the PRC today;
- Develop a position supporting Mongolia, its democracy and its Buddhist institutions, from outside interference, paying particular attention to the welfare and well-being of the spiritual leader Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutuktu and his family and the monastic establishment in Mongolia

## INDIA

A detailed set of recommendations to the Indian government developed by the Foundation for Non-Violent Alternatives in Delhi<sup>6</sup> is used as a basis for the following guidelines:

- Develop and promote as a core position of the government of India specific language on the Dalai Lama's succession - that it is a strictly religious matter that can only be decided upon by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Buddhist community. Support the Dalai Lama's wishes on his reincarnation and ensure there is high-level engagement with ensuring they are fulfilled, and any attempts at interference rejected. India should be seen as the centripetal force in safeguarding the sanctity of the process and firmly oppose outside interference and influence.
- The increasing trend of Tibetans opting for Indian citizenship within the Tibetan diaspora holds nuanced implications for Indian political parties. This demographic shift can influence the political dynamics in regions with significant Tibetan populations, potentially altering the electoral landscape and the calculus of political representation. Indian political parties may need to adapt their strategies to address the concerns and aspirations of the growing Tibetan-Indian citizenry. The programme could include CTA



sponsored visits to Tibetan settlements, institutions of cultural heritage, Tibetan Parliament in Exile and civil society organisations to inculcate a comprehensive experience and understanding of one's identity. Tibetans who were eligible for Indian citizenship and have taken foreign nationality having settled abroad could be considered for grant of Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI). Urgent steps should be taken to give better documents to enable international travel and procedures to obtain identity papers should be simplified, Tibetans taking enormous risks to illegally visit India to see high-ranking lamas must not be repatriated thereby dealing a blow to the conception of India being a safe haven. Rules forbidding visiting Tibetans, if holding foreign passports, from staying overnight in the Settlements unless permitted by the Foreigners' Registration Office (FRO) must be reexamined.

- Revive the post of Adviser on Tibetan Affairs as a single point contact for Tibetan diaspora related matters.
- Official statements should stop describing the Dalai Lama as merely an 'honoured guest' or 'revered religious leader' but start referring to him as the 'leader of the Tibetan people'. He should be met publicly at the highest levels and his functions should be attended by political leaders as well as top civil servants.
- Uniform implementation of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy 2014 should be ensured. Problems of the Tibetan settlements pertaining to terms of land lease need to be resolved by granting a long lease.
- Substantive steps need to be taken to promote Tibetan studies in Indian universities, and to ensure Tibetan students have full support in their studies (for instance via a scholarship programme). In a welcome development recently, Jawaharlal Nehru University announced the exemption of Tibetan students from the large fee charged to international students in 2019, which had been met by dismay as it limited third and fourth-generation Tibetan students in India from seeking admission. Facilitate admission of foreign students in Tibetan monasteries in India who are otherwise going to China and encourage Tibetan monks to travel freely for their teachings. Support Mongolian Buddhist monks in Southern India religious institutes. India can also encourage visits by Chinese Buddhist pilgrims to India especially during the time of Tibetan Monlam prayers in Bodh Gaya. Contact between Chinese devotees and Tibetan monks is not necessarily something to be viewed with undue suspicion.
- Establish a department or a ministry of Himalayan and Tibetan affairs or the creation of an office of Northern Himalayan Frontiers and Tibetan Affairs, under the Prime Minister's office. Establish hill universities to focus on local, regional and strategic studies, history and culture of the region; such universities must become repositories of knowledge of their respective regions.

- Involve the Dalai Lama, his office and legitimate Tibetan authorities in the re-establishment of the Nalanda Buddhist University.
- Desist from stating that Tibet is part of China or the PRC. At no point did the PRC inherit or acquire sovereignty over Tibet and Tibet is not legally a part of the PRC today. India should stop saying it does not support Tibetan independence and refer to the Indo Tibet border and not the Sino Indian border. Regardless of subsequent Agreements following the 1954 Trade Agreement and an acknowledgement of One China Policy, it is China that has questioned India's territorial integrity by not accepting Arunachal Pradesh as an inalienable part of India and is now rejecting Ladakh's status as a Union Territory.

Former Foreign Minister Vijay Gokhale recommends that India develops policy positions now to anticipate and counter PRC positions and demands.<sup>7</sup> He raises the following questions for which appropriate policy would need to be identified, including the following: If the 15th Dalai Lama candidate is discovered in Indian territory, will India publicly acknowledge this fact? If not, what will be the status of the Living Buddha candidate? Since a number of the exile community holds Indian citizenship, how would the country deal with the situation if the selected Dalai Lama candidate were an Indian national? In the aforementioned scenario, would India permit the 15th Dalai Lama unfettered access to the 14th Dalai Lama's residence and possession of the ritual objects and symbols of the Dalai Lama, along with the enthronement ceremony?

## NEPAL

The following suggestions for steps that could be taken by the Nepalese government, international NGOs and foreign missions in Nepal and civil society are based on interviews with stakeholders in Nepal and draw from research by Jamyang Dorjee in his paper, 'State of Buddhism under Hindu kingdom and the emerging democratic secular government of Nepal'.<sup>8</sup>

- Assist and strengthen the movement of original Buddhists like Tamangs, Magars, Rais and other Himalayan peoples returning to their Buddhist roots;
- Build and strengthen resilience of Buddhist communities and practitioners in remote areas of Nepal, including renovation of monasteries and teaching programmes;



- Establish a centre for Buddhist and/or Himalayan studies in the Kathmandu valley;
- Buddhist organisations and monasteries to work together to produce more Buddhist teachers who can work in the Nepalese language;
- Programmes to translate Buddhist teachings by the Dalai Lama into Nepali and distribution;
- Efforts to help revive the rich tradition of Newari Buddhists;
- The Nepali Buddhist Federation deserves more support from international and local NGOs in order to help create a political lobby for proper representation;
- Revision of school curricula that formerly stressed Hindu norms to include Buddhism;
- INGOs and embassies based in Nepal to provide support in developing a communications strategy around Tibet and its historic, political and cultural ties with Nepal to ensure issue is not neglected or misrepresented;
- Strengthen communications frameworks and networking within the Buddhist world in Nepal, across schools, traditions, community groups. Project Buddhist soft power through considering initiatives such as monasteries opening clinics, a Buddhist university in the capital (during the COVID pandemic, monasteries in Kathmandu provided free catering for the local population). Another Nepalese stakeholder suggest that efforts could be made by all the Himalayan peoples/groups to provide teachers who can teach Buddhism as well as Tibetan script (an experiment on these lines in Mustang proved successful.) He also said: "While we explore means to develop ancient monasteries in the remote hill areas eg Dolpa, Manang, Solukhumbu, we need to remember that people leave for economic reasons, so it is important to think about accompanying this initiative with generating sustainable income to villagers."
- Support for training programmes and scholarships of Nepalese journalists to encourage more balanced coverage, and counter China's efforts to spread propaganda and bias (which includes offering scholarships in China);
- Support for Nepalese thinktanks to deepen scholarship on Tibet, China, the Himalayan region;
- Contribute to the revival of Lumbini in accordance with its Buddhist heritage, for instance restoration of statues, convening events and dialogues with Buddhists from all schools.

## MONGOLIA

- Develop knowledge in the international diplomatic community about the significance of the Bogd Jebtsundampa and Mongolian Buddhist culture; the support of the international community is essential in helping to protect and strengthen Buddhist institutions and counter PRC influence efforts;
- Funding of Buddhist projects. “Going to monasteries and asking for blessings no longer appeals to younger people,” a Mongolian scholar observed. “They want to know how to be involved in other substantive ways too.”
- Encourage and support the programme of Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning (SEEL) which has been introduced to the Mongolian education system by social entrepreneurs and Tibetan Buddhist leaders.<sup>9</sup> SEE Learning is the culmination of an academic collaboration that began in 1998 between Emory University and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Guided by a shared vision for an education of heart and mind, the program conveys a universal, non-sectarian, and science-based approach to bringing the ethical development of the whole child into education—an approach long advocated by the Dalai Lama.
- Engagement of Buddhist institutions and practitioners in education, such as help with teaching English to Mongolian students, and secondary school projects such as meditation retreats. Provide support to translate books by the Dalai Lama and on Buddhism into Mongolian, a project initiated with positive results by Telo Tulku Rinpoche and his foundation. “After Bhutan, Mongolia is the only free country holding the Tibetan Buddhist tradition so we have a strong responsibility,” a Mongolian academic said. “And through doing so in Mongolia, we can also influence other places in Central Asia.” The translation of key texts from Mongolian would also support Mongolian authors.
- Provision of secular educational tools, such as children’s books to encourage holistic learning and critical thinking.
- Promoting democracy – discussions/education/civil society events on how to solve problems without violence. A Mongolian scholar said that these initiatives in civil society are essential: “Mongolia was a Communist country, so people don’t know how to argue, there were two sides, there was no inbetween.”
- Combined with this, the development of religious literacy is often overlooked. “We need to develop a harmonious society, to help people explore what Christianity is, what is Islam, what is Buddhism - to give kids the freedom and knowledge to choose, if we want to build Mongolia into a healthy democracy.”

# POLICY STEPS TO COUNTER DIGITAL TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Confronting the psychological and societal damage of digital transnational repression against Tibetans and other PRC diasporas requires coordinated action in multiple domains. Policy steps to strengthen cybersecurity, provide mental health support, enhance international responses, and build community resilience are outlined by Turquoise Roof in its report, 'A Long Shadow: The Expansion and Export of China's Digital Repression Model in Tibet'. Turquoise Roof recommends the cooperation of policymakers, tech companies, and civil society to implement these measures and uphold the rights of Tibetans to live free from digital tyranny.<sup>10</sup>

Those steps include the following:

1. **Strengthen cyber security measures for Tibetan activists and organisations.** Importantly, host states should treat intrusions into Tibetan activists' devices or online accounts as serious offences, investigating and aggressively prosecuting such cyber incidents where possible, to show that there are consequences for China's digital transnational repression operations. By hardening digital defences and improving response and resilience capabilities, Tibetans cybersecurity experts can be empowered to mitigate the risk of persistent digital intrusions.
2. **Increase mental health and trauma support services.** The psychological scars of digital repression must be addressed through accessible support. Host governments, in partnership with Tibetan community organizations, could fund counseling and mental health services geared towards diaspora members who have experienced surveillance-related trauma.
3. **Enhance global diplomatic and legal responses.** Democracies should continue to coordinate multilaterally to impose costs on states that practice digital transnational repression. First, countries should update their laws where necessary to explicitly criminalise and punish harassment or stalking of diaspora activists on their soil, even when perpetrated by agents or proxies of a foreign power. Dedicated transnational law enforcement networks should continue to be trained to recognise patterns of digital

repression (such as coordinated phishing campaigns against an exile group) and work across borders to investigate them. On the diplomatic front, governments need to be unambiguous that surveilling or coercing exiled Tibetans violates international norms.

4. **Provide access to digital solidarity networks.** For instance, telecommunication companies in France in partnership with grassroots charities like Emmaus Connexion Solidaire provide computers, second-hand phones, and SIM cards with different internet packages at reduced price for poorer and more precarious groups without access to digital WiFi enabled devices.
5. **Expand capacity-building and resilience networks.** Empowering the Tibetan community itself to counteract the chilling effects is crucial. One recommendation is to continue to foster peer-to-peer support and knowledge-sharing networks.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Text of the Act: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4331/text?format=txt&r=3&s=1>

<sup>2</sup> “Tibetan Policy Act Talking Points.” International Campaign for Tibet, <https://savetibet.org/advocacy/tibetan-policy-act/tibetan-policy-act-talking-points/>.

<sup>3</sup> EU Foreign Affairs Council. EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief. 24 June 2013, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis and recommendations outlined in full, see Walton, Greg. ‘A Long Shadow: The Expansion and Export of China’s Digital Repression Model in Tibet, Impacts and Recommendations’, April 2025, <https://turquoiseroof.org/a-long-shadow-the-expansion-and-export-of-chinas-digital-repression-model-in-tibet/>

<sup>5</sup> International Tibet Network. Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and the Geopolitics of Reincarnation, <https://tibetnetwork.org/geopoliticsoftibetsreincarnation/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Resetting India’s Tibet Policy: Repositioning the Future.” FNVA World, 2022, <https://fnvaworld.org/resetting-indias-tibet-policy-2022-2/>.

<sup>7</sup> Gokhale, Vijay. The Next Dalai Lama: Preparing for Reincarnation and Why It Matters to India. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 November 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/11/the-next-dalai-lama-preparing-for-reincarnation-and-why-it-matters-to-india?lang=en&center=india>.

<sup>8</sup> Unpublished paper, shared with the kind permission of the author. The research was initiated at the request of the Dalai Lama’s late Special Envoy Lodi Gyari.

<sup>9</sup> Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning Learning Mongolia and its introduction to the curriculum: <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/compassionlab/mongolia/> Overview of SEEL programmes: <https://compassion.emory.edu/see-learning/>

<sup>10</sup> Walton, Greg. ‘A Long Shadow: The Expansion and Export of China’s Digital Repression Model in Tibet, Impacts and Recommendations’, April 2025, <https://turquoiseroof.org/a-long-shadow-the-expansion-and-export-of-chinas-digital-repression-model-in-tibet/>

