



## The Way Forward in Tibet

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Op-Ed

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When I meet with the Dalai Lama today, I fully expect him to reaffirm his strong commitment to engaging Chinese officials in dialogue. President Bush has repeatedly expressed his own steadfast support for dialogue between the Dalai Lama and China's leadership. Meaningful dialogue presents the only viable way forward.

In March, demonstrations in Lhasa that began peacefully escalated into violence and quickly spread to other Tibetan areas of China. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has expressed deep concern regarding these events, has called on all sides to refrain from violence, and has strongly urged China to exercise restraint in dealing with the protesters and to respect the fundamental right of all people to peacefully express their religious and political views.

Underlying these tragic events is China's long-standing repression of religious, cultural and other freedoms for the Tibetan people, repression that has been extensively documented in State Department human rights reports and elsewhere. Since 1949, the cycle of protests followed by crackdowns has repeated itself several times, but the end result has always been the same: Control is restored but only temporarily, while the underlying causes of Tibetan grievances remain unaddressed.

The recent protests are a manifestation of lingering frustration at a lack of progress in addressing Tibetans' concerns. These ethnic clashes have resulted in fatalities of Tibetans and Han Chinese and in widespread arrests. The best way for China's leaders to address Tibetan concerns is to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama, who has advocated a "middle way" that embraces autonomy for Tibet within China and rejects seeking independence. The Dalai Lama is the only person with the influence and credibility to persuade Tibetans to eschew violence and accept a genuine autonomy within China that would also preserve Tibetan culture and identity.

The U.S. government believes there is a basis for dialogue between the Dalai Lama and China's leadership. The Dalai Lama has met the preconditions for dialogue called for by China: He does not advocate independence for Tibet; he does not engage in or advocate separatist activities; and he recognizes that Tibet is part of China. The Dalai Lama has publicly come out strongly against the violence that erupted recently in Lhasa and other areas. He even took the extraordinary step of offering his resignation if necessary to convince all parties of his nonviolent approach to reaching resolution. And he has indicated his support for holding the Olympic Games in Beijing. The United States has honored the Dalai Lama as a man of peace and a lifelong advocate of nonviolence by awarding him the Congressional Gold Medal last October.

When the Chinese government uses harsh rhetoric against the Dalai Lama, or steps up "patriotic education campaigns" that include forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama, it serves only to further enflame tensions. Some in China, however, have taken a stand against such tactics. In an unprecedented move, prominent Chinese intellectuals are circulating a petition that calls on the Chinese government to end its "one-sided" propaganda campaign and initiate direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

Since 2002, the Dalai Lama's representatives have conducted six rounds of talks with Chinese officials, in a major departure from the previous 20 years of nonengagement. These discussions, while substantive, have not yet produced concrete results. If continued in good faith, this dialogue could build trust and provide the long-term basis for political and economic stability in Tibet. As Secretary Rice has noted, while Beijing has missed opportunities to engage the Dalai Lama directly, there is still hope, and it is not too late to do so.

In addition to engaging in meaningful dialogue, China should immediately cease the repressive measures directed at Tibetans seeking to practice their religion and preserve their cultural identity, and should release those detained for peacefully protesting or expressing their views. Although the Chinese government recently arranged official trips to Lhasa for journalists and diplomats, we continue to call for unfettered access for all media and foreign diplomats into Tibetan areas.

We hope that the current generation of Chinese leaders -- who have shown that they can pursue enlightened economic policies and who aspire to make China a respected global and regional stakeholder -- recognize that the resumption of a serious and direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama offers the best hope for resolving long-standing problems and achieving worthy goals in Tibet.

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