

US-backed Chinese separatists, dissidents meet in Dharamsala, India

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As Washington presses forward with its anti-China “pivot to Asia,” US-sponsored Chinese exile and dissident groups held an Inter-ethnic/Interfaith Leadership Conference from April 28 to May 1 in McLeod Ganj, a suburb of Dharamsala, India. The stated purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to bring about a transition to “democracy” in China.

The conference was orchestrated by US imperialism along with its regional ally, India, as part of Washington’s growing diplomatic and military-strategic offensive against Beijing. While intensifying preparations for war against China, the US is encouraging explosive ethnic and regional divisions within China, a country with 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities. The goal is to divide China along ethnic lines and ultimately reduce it to semi-colonial status.

The conference, “Strengthening Our Alliance to Advance the Peoples’ Dream: Freedom, Justice, Equality and Peace,” was jointly hosted by a leading Indian-based NGO, the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), and the US-based Initiatives For China (IFC), led by Tiananmen Square activist and exiled Chinese dissident Yang Jianli.

It brought together representatives of various separatist groups from Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, “pro-democracy ” Chinese dissidents, and leaders of China’s religious minorities, including Christians, Muslims and Falun Gong.

US government representatives attended the conference, including representatives of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Foreign delegates met the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist leader, whose exile government is in Dharamsala, on April 28.

The only media permitted at the conference was Radio Free Asia, which is funded by a US federal agency, the Broadcasting Board of Governors. According to India’s

the *Wire*, “reports, videos and articles emanating from event were only broadcast on its Cantonese service, with the station’s English web site not making any reference to the conference or the visa controversy” (that had preceded it.) *The Wire* cited the president of the US-based Uyghur American Association, Ilshat Hassan, who attended the conference. He made clear that a major topic of the conference was the division of China along ethnic lines.

Hassan said, “The youth from China were arguing that big China should be kept intact, stating that democracy will be coming soon. We didn’t say that we want to be independent, but that we must have self-determination. It will be decided by the people of East Turkestan and the people of Tibet on what they want after they are allowed to decide themselves. I guess they are still young.”

As they seek to foment ethnic nationalism and separatism in China, US imperialism and its allies are seeking to exploit real bitter social conflicts and national divisions that emerge from the reactionary policies of the Chinese regime. It has relied ever more on fomenting Han Chinese nationalism since restoring capitalism in China over the course of the 1980s. It has also resorted to discrimination and outright repression of ethnic minorities like the Uighurs in Xinjiang, which like other inland regions of China faces high unemployment and low wages.

There have been escalating ethnic riots in Xinjiang between Han and Uighur people, and Beijing has begun banning beards and Muslim veils, provoking discontent among Uighurs and particularly among the large number of unemployed university graduates. Numerous reports indicate that thousands of Uighurs have travelled to the Middle East to join Islamist militias fighting as NATO proxies in the war for regime change in Syria.

The response of Washington and its allies to this state of affairs is utterly reactionary. They are seeking to exploit the discrimination and oppression faced by the Uighurs to

stimulate ethnic-nationalism and divide the working class along ethnic lines, promoting various right-wing bourgeois nationalist groups that they directly control. After orchestrating wars for regime change in Libya and Syria relying on Islamists as proxies, US imperialism and its allies are debating whether to employ similar methods against China.

Many of the organisations at the conference, such as the TCHRD, IFC, and the Uyghur American Association, are assets of US imperialism, directly funded by the US-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The NED finances as many as 22 organisations in Tibet, including the TCHRD, which receives some \$60,000 per year from Washington. Its stated mission is to monitor, document and highlight political repression and human rights violations in Tibet.

The NED is also involved in funding groups that claim to represent the mainly Muslim Uyghur ethnic minority to the north-western Chinese region of Xinjiang. The US-based Uyghur American Association and the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC) groups are funded by the NED to the tune of \$295,000 and \$260,000, respectively. The WUC is headed by US-based multimillionaire businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer.

Initiatives for China (IFC) receives as much as \$86,500 per year from the NED. It was founded by Tiananmen Square activist and exiled Chinese dissident Yang Jianli, who completed his Doctorate in Political Economy at Harvard University.

Jianli was arrested by the Beijing regime and sentenced to five years imprisonment on espionage charges. With the support of a UN Resolution and a unanimous vote of both houses of the US Congress, Jianli was released in 2007. He advocates a transition to “democracy” in China and US leadership of the struggle for “peaceful democratic reform.”

Under the guise of defending the universal right to freedom of religion, the United States Commission of International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) coordinates closely with Chinese dissidents groups. USCIRF is a bipartisan commission of the US federal government, tasked with making policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF senior representative Katrina Lantos Swett, who founded the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice in 2008, attended the Dharamsala conference.

Direct US financing and supporting of Chinese dissidents against Beijing is a reckless strategy that is escalating diplomatic tensions and threatens to provoke a

war between nuclear-armed powers.

Beijing has made clear that it could react violently to overt encouragement by the major powers of separatism in China. At the 2005 National People’s Congress (NPC), the regime passed an “anti-secession law” pledging to go to war in response to a Taiwanese declaration of independence, which it fears could be the signal for the broader promotion of separatism in China.

Before the conference took place, a diplomatic row erupted between China and India over New Delhi’s decision to grant a visa to exiled Uyghur leader Dolkun Isa of the WUC. Although Indian authorities canceled the visa it had granted to Isa after protests from Beijing, provoking harsh criticisms in the Indian media, India offered tourist visas to other Chinese dissidents, including Ilshat Hassan, to attend the conference in Dharamsala.

As the US “pivot to Asia” inflames tensions between the major Asian powers, the attitude of the Indian bourgeoisie towards China is increasingly hostile, as well.

On May 1, the *Times of India* wrote, “One only need to observe the carefully calibrated yet unmistakably hostile Chinese strategic pursuits vis-a-vis India—be it the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passing through territories historically claimed by India), the OBOR (One Belt One Road Initiative), or the String of Pearls in the Indian Ocean—to understand that if India fails to stand up to the Chinese now, while it still can, it may forever surrender the possibility of resisting Chinese arm-twisting in the future.”



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