

Dalai Lama visits San Diego: US pivot to Asia cloaked in spirituality

Norisa Diaz**29 June 2017**

On Friday the Dalai Lama—Tenzin Gyatso—addressed a crowd of 25,000 at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), his first visit to the US since meeting President Barack Obama in 2014. The following day he spoke before similar numbers at the university's graduation ceremony, with San Diego being the first stop on his US tour.

While in town he also addressed a crowd of 200 Indian community members at a private meeting organized by the Friends of the Dalai Lama, which has close connections to the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) government of Narendra Modi. At the meeting he urged the “preservation of Tibetan religion and culture,” and referred to himself as a “Son of India.”

Gyatso’s remarks came in the context of the closer relationship between the US and India, which offered its air bases and ports to the US Air force and Navy in 2016 in the buildup against China. Last month New Delhi boycotted the One Belt One Road (OBOR) forum in Beijing to further signal its loyalty to Washington.

Gyatso was born in 1935 and chosen at the age of two as the reincarnation of the deceased 13th Dalai Lama. Following a mass uprising in 1959 suppressed by Chinese troops, the then 24-year-old fled Tibet and has been living in exile in India ever since.

Although portrayed by the political establishment and media as a simple Buddhist monk, the Dalai Lama speaks for a social layer within the Tibetan ruling elite that has lent itself to foreign intrigues against China over the course of more than half a century.

Following Indian independence in 1947, the Tibetan cabinet sought assistance from New Delhi and London to prevent “communist” influence from Beijing. In 1950, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) invaded Tibet in an effort to prevent the region from being

turned into a hostile puppet of foreign powers, as was the case with Taiwan. Initially indifferent towards the invasion, the US would soon exploit the “plight of the Tibetan people” following the outbreak of the Korean War, and its renewed interest in the region. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) eventually recruited almost the entirety of the Tibetan regime, beginning with two of the Dalai Lama’s brothers.

The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sought support within the region by guaranteeing the privileges of the Buddhist hierarchy and nobility and offered no land reform or abolition of serfdom in Tibet as it had done in other parts of China. The majority of Tibetans were serfs exploited by landlords or monasteries. Buddhism provided the religious ideology to pacify the masses, whose subjugation was cast as the punishment for sins of a past life.

Later in 1956, Mao’s land reforms and drastic collectivization devastated semi-subsistence farmers and nomads. Anti-Chinese sentiment, which had grown since the invasion, sparked a wave of revolts in 1956 and later led to a much larger rebellion in 1959. While some rebel groups were funded and trained by the CIA, the masses were overwhelmingly responding to their economic devastation.

The rebellion also brought to the fore divisions within the Tibetan ruling elite with regards to its relationship towards Beijing and independence.

During this time, Gyatso spoke for a social layer which sought to appease both the masses and Beijing, known as the “middle way,” while another layer sought to manipulate public anger towards support of US-backed “independence.” Both divisions contained within it an anti-communist Cold War agenda along with the self-interest of the privileged elite.

Gyatso and his entourage have resided in India since

the 1959 rebellion. From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the government-in-exile received generous US support, with the CIA paying the Dalai Lama \$180,000 annually and spending millions to arm and train anti-Chinese guerrillas. This policy ended following President Richard Nixon's rapprochement with the Chinese regime in 1972. The Reagan administration would later fund Tibetan separatist movements through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), set up in 1983 to undertake operations previously assigned to the CIA.

Now at 81, the Dalai Lama travels the world stoking anti-Chinese and anti-communist sentiment under the banner of "peace and compassion."

The Dalai Lama's speech before the San Diego public on Friday, "Embracing the Beauty of Diversity in Our World," could not have been more deliberately obscure and misleading.

He insisted in his talk that the problems of humanity lie in the lack of "oneness" between the people of the world. Using empty slogans of "working together" and "sharing each other's problems," he called for love and kindness as the antidote to hostility.

He described the 20th century as a "violent century," lumping together the first and seconds world wars with the Russian and Chinese revolutions, which he referred to as "civil wars."

The cause of this "violence" was the 20th century's mistaken preference to "solve problems by force." He continually insisted that people were not using their "intelligence."

He made a quick mention of global warming and paid lip service to "the gap between rich and poor." The layers within the Tibetan elite whom he serves, however, seek only to better exploit the Tibetan people and have no interest in sharing the spoils to raise the living standards of China's poorest region.

UCSD Chancellor Pradeep Khosla and San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer introduced the Dalai Lama, with the latter offering him a key to the city. The identity of his hosts pointed to the material interests underlying the welcome for the celebrity Tibetan monk.

San Diego sits on the US-Mexican border and is home to some of the largest military bases in the country. UC San Diego is the region's largest employer with close ties to its second largest—the defense industry, funneling many of the best and brightest to

BAE Systems, General Atomics, National Steel & Ship Building (NASSCO), Boeing, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon. It is also the North American hub of drone manufacturing and engineering.

"Here in San Diego, it doesn't matter where you're from, people from all over the world are welcome to call our city home, and each person brings their unique culture, tradition, and history with them," said Faulconer. Just weeks earlier, undocumented parents, Francisco Duarte and Rosenda Pérez, were abducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in front of their home leaving their four children to fend for themselves. Elementary school teachers in the region also report seeing ICE vans and officers waiting and patrolling outside schools.

Chancellor Khosla, who hailed the Dalai Lama as a "man of peace," is part of a well-heeled academic administration. Like all top UC officials, he has close ties with big business, the political establishment and the Democratic Party. Khosla also has close connections to the intelligence and spyware community as a member of the board of Avigilon Corporation of Vancouver which is a leading company using facial recognition and body movement technology to help police identify suspects. He also holds a seat on the board of "HCL Insys Pvt. Ltd," one of India's largest high-tech companies.

The 25,000 tickets to see the Dalai Lama at UC San Diego were sold out within a few hours, reflecting in part the carefully cultivated promotion of his image as a supposed champion of peace and universal values. Behind the mystical hype, however, the purpose of his tour was bound up with the definite class interests of a privileged religious hierarchy and the pursuit of great power politics, embodied in US imperialism's military "pivot to Asia."



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