

The Tibet factor in US–China relations

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Tibet had been used as pawn in the Great Powers game in the Central Asia. Even in the modern period, it appears to be used for the same purpose in a different context. As one of the main objectives of the American foreign policy was containment of communism, Tibet assumed both ideological and strategic importance to the US after the communist party came to power in China. The paper attempts to trace why and how India and British reluctance to take strong stand on Tibet issue influenced American Tibet policy both before and after 1959 revolt. The US refused to accept China's occupation of Tibet until 1972. However, with the warming of Sino-American relations, Washington relegated Tibet question aside. The paper attempts to focus on why even the Carter administration did not take China to task for its dismal human rights record; what compelled it to shift the US Tibet policy by recognising for the first time that Tibet was a part of China. The paper examines what was the US position on the delegation diplomacy engaged in by the new leadership in China and the Tibetan leadership since 1979. It highlights how Tibet became an item of concern in the US China policy after 1987. It particularly deals with differences in opinions between the US Congress and the White House on the Tibet issue. The paper also examines why the second term of the Clinton administration emphasised on the quiet diplomacy in connection with human rights situation in Tibet. The paper examines whether it is right to regard as sign of the success of the US quiet diplomacy when the Chinese leadership showed its desire to build some kind of a low level bridge with the exile Tibetans in 2002. The paper concludes with attempts to focus whether other countries, including the US, were involved in encouraging Tibetan leaders give up Tibet's historical claim of being independent country before serious negotiation started; whether it is more appropriate for the US to stick to its initial policy of championing the cause of self-determination in Tibet rather than shifting its Tibet policy according to the demand of its narrow national interests. These and related questions are the subject of this paper.