CHAPTER-3

PUBLIC SUPPORT TO TIBET ISSUE

There are two different directions to influence decision-makers. One is to try and reach them personally and the other is to influence the public and then wait and let public concern do its own work. And influencing the public here is a vital key to unlocking Tibet from Chinese rule. There are two important reasons why one should rely on public opinion rather than politicians. First, "politicians don't last" and second, "public opinion will necessarily change politician's thinking whereas politicians will not necessarily change public thinking".¹

Disregarded by the power that be, Tibetans concentrated on interested individuals. Years of this kind of work have paid off. A combination of American fascination with the religion and culture of Tibet, the considerable international prestige of the Dalai Lama, issues like nonviolence, human rights, democracy, freedom, and the environment, all seem to make Tibet exert an increasingly powerful impact on American individuals and organizations.

Over the years Tibet support groups, media, Dharma Centers, movie stars and artistes and certain individuals have been playing an important role to generate public opinion in favor of the Tibetan cause. Besides this indirect long-term approach they have also been involved in more direct activity of lobbying in US Congress and


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Department of State. In this Chapter we shall examine the nature, intensity, agents and impact of the American public support to the Tibet issue.

1. TIBET SUPPORT GROUPS

There are hundreds of Tibet support Groups (TSGs) in the United States of America. Membership of these support groups is open to all. These groups are involved in diverse activities related with the welfare of Tibetan refugees, generating public awareness of the Tibet issue, lobbying in the US Congress and the Department of State. Most of these support groups publish their journal to be circulated among their members and general public.

Few important TSGs are International campaign for Tibet, International committee of Lawyers for Tibet, the Tibet Fund, Students for a Free Tibet, Tibetan Women Association, US Tibet Committee etc. We will discuss about objectives and activities of few selected Tibet Support Groups.

(a) International Campaign for Tibet

The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) is a non-profit, non-partisan, public interest group. Founded in 1988, it is based in Washington, DC. ICT works to promote human rights and self-determination for Tibetans and to protect their culture and environment. Among other works International Campaign for Tibet conduct fact-finding missions to Tibet, India and Nepal, testify before the US Congress, the United Nations and other international bodies, network with exiled Chinese democracy and overseas Chinese organizations; work with Chinese language media and conduct research on
Chinese rule of Tibet, promote news coverage of issues in Tibet, send out ‘Action Alerts’, publish two newsletters, the Tibet Press Watch and Tibetan Environment & Development News, speak to academic, civic and community groups.

As mentioned in its website following is the mission of the International Campaign for Tibet. ICT believes that governments and people around the world need accurate information on current conditions in Tibet; that Tibetans are a "people" under international law and have the right to self-determination; that Tibet is an occupied country which has a distinct language, culture and religion; and, that dialogue between Tibetans and Chinese is integral towards finding a solution to the situation in Tibet.

International Campaign for Tibet has taken following projects so far:

**Human Rights Project** - ICT monitors and investigates human rights conditions and works with appropriate organizations and government officials to publicize abuses and bring pressure to bear on the PRC government.

**Legislative Activities** - ICT seeks support for Tibet in the form of letters from members of Congress to the PRC leadership, floor speeches, testimony, resolutions and legislation. ICT also responds to many requests from members of Congress and their staff for information and assistance.

**Fact-Finding Missions** - ICT conducts on-site fact-finding missions to Tibet, China, India and Nepal. ICT has investigated the Chinese population transfer, prisons, education, deforestation and China's nuclear activities on the Tibetan plateau.
**Environment and Development Initiative** - ICT monitors cultural and environmental implications of foreign and Chinese economic development projects in Tibet and publishes the bi-monthly Tibet Environment and Development News.

**Tibetan Refugees in Exile** - ICT works to protect the right of Tibetan refugees to pass safely through Nepal and monitors conditions for Tibetan refugees around the world.

**The China Project** - ICT networks with exiled Chinese democracy and overseas Chinese organizations, works with Chinese language media, edits and translates books and materials and conducts research on Chinese rule of Tibet. The project also develops Chinese language material on Tibet and sends it to China.

**Education & Publications** - ICT's bi-monthly Tibet Press Watch is distributed to all prominent organizations and individuals who are engaged in work on Tibet. ICT has published the leading report on religious persecution in Tibet, a report on Chinese settlers and population transfer in eastern Tibet, a survey of international development projects in Tibet, and a report on nuclear activities in Tibet. ICT staffs regularly give lectures and provide news and background to the media.

**(b) Students for a Free Tibet:**

Students for a Free Tibet began in 1994 as the brainchild of Heidi Melz. Officially launched in August of that year as a joint project of the US Tibet Committee and the International Campaign for Tibet, SFT began humbly but
had big plans. By April 1996 SFT has developed into the fastest growing segment of the Tibet movement in North America, with chapters at 75 Universities and several high schools.

Many students have become aware of the Tibet situation. Formation of SFT provided a channel providing assistance in setting up chapters, distributing resources and offering guidance as to how to focus efforts to help Tibet.

SFT was able to bring students together; no longer a few isolated individuals spread across the continent, they were now part of a powerful, coordinated network.

The majority of SFT’s work is done by the Chapters themselves. Many groups have been extremely productive, with some organizing a full week of events. At Harvard University the Dalai Lama spoke to students leaders from all across the continent. Two months later the Oberlin College chapter hosted the first national conference of Students for a Free Tibet.

In 1996 SFT launched a divestment campaign targeting the member corporations of the US- China Business Council. The Council lobbies for on behalf of nearly all the major corporations invested in China. It was instrumental in ensuring the unconditional continuation of China’s Most Favored Nation trading status. SFT has also been active advocate of the boycott of Chinese goods. Working closely with the US Tibet Committee, the Milarepa Fund and other TSGs to develop a coordinated boycott campaign.
SFT uses a wide range of methods to raise awareness of the Tibetan situation and further the struggle for freedom. Civil disobedience is definitely an important tool, both for its ability to galvanize support as well as to get media attention. In March 1996 five students were arrested for blocking the entrance to Splendid China, a PRC owned theme park in Florida.

(c) US Tibet Committee:

In 1977 the US Tibet Committee was founded by Tibetans and Americans who wanted to work together to help further the national cause of Tibet. A small group of volunteers, dedicated to the simple principle that the people and government of the United States could do more to help save Tibet, stimulated the American public awareness of the history, culture and current oppression of the Tibetan people. The USTC is a nonprofit, tax exempt corporation, which has grown from a small number of activists headquartered in New York City, to a nationwide human rights organization. The USTC has, over the past 20 years, organized numerous demonstrations and conferences, sponsored lectures, film and video presentations, and other educational events including the annual commemoration of Tibetan national day, a march of protestors from the United Nations to the Chinese consulate on March 10th.

USTC advocates a complete and total boycott of all goods made in China until Tibet is free, as well as possible economic, political and diplomatic sanctions be imposed upon China until Tibet is free. The volunteers of the USTC are activists and educators; conducting mail and leaflet campaign to the general public, working for a common purpose with other domestic and
international Tibet supporters. The USTC works to keep Tibet in the media and maintains contact with elected representatives to keep Tibet on the public legislative agenda.

Most importantly, since 1994, the USTC has encouraged the growth of the vibrant Students for a Free Tibet.

(d) International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet:

International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet (ICLT) is a group of lawyers (and non-lawyers) dedicated to using the skills of legal profession to promote respect for the human rights of Tibetans, both in Tibet and in exile. While the ICLT works to improve those human rights which pertain to Tibetan's basic living condition, it is especially concerned with ensuring Tibetan's right of self-determination. The Committee's work falls chiefly into following three areas:

1. Legal research and drafting: Projects include writing an article on self-determination for law review publication; producing "how to" guide to presenting claims before the various organs of the United Nations; drafting position papers for use by representatives of the Dalai Lama's Government in Exile; litigation on behalf of Tibetan plaintiffs under the Alien Tort Statute.

2. Assisting Tibetans to pursue their claims in appropriate national and international forums:

The Committee has already represented Tibetan interests at the August 1989 session of the U N Sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination
and Protection of Minorities. Additionally the Committee is working to enable Tibetans to present claims on their own behalf before the various organs of the UN, and is preparing litigation resources for Tibetans to bring suite in federal court.

3. Serving as an educational resource to the community at large:

The Committee is compiling a resource library of articles, speeches, legal materials and videotapes. Additionally, the committee will provide speakers for interested groups and cooperate with other Tibetan support groups to sponsor Tibetan speakers and performers.

Activities of Tibet Support Groups:

US-Tibet Committee and Southern Asian Institute of Columbia University cosponsored a conference entitled “Tibet and China: Is there a solution” on March 6, 1989. The conference focused on the Chinese government’s current abuses in Tibet, and what action the United States government and American citizen can take to improve this extremely serious situation.2

A press release titled “Merciless Repression Underway in Tibet” was issued on March 6, 1989 by International Campaign for Tibet. The release informs “Yesterday in a demonstration coinciding with the one year anniversary of the March 5th demonstrations, Tibetans were fired upon by police...President Bush may now

2 Document No. 17, Department of Information and International Relations, Documentation Center, Central Tibetan Administration, Tibetan government in exile, Dharmsala, India.
better understand why congressional leaders place so much importance and urgency in imploring him to raise the issue of human rights in China, and especially in Tibet.  

US Tibet Committee wrote a letter to the President Bush urging him to raise the issue of democracy in China and Tibet during the visit of Chinese President Wan Li. It further suggested that Wan Li should be urged to use his influence to immediately lift martial law in Tibet and to allow credible international organizations access to Tibet to monitor the situation and finally to urge the Chinese government to start substantive negotiations with representatives of the Dalai Lama without further delay.

In 1991 International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) selected 10 Tibetan prisoners of conscience who are representative of the many different types of Tibetans who remain in prison because of their political, religious and cultural views. ICT staff would be monitoring their cases and providing information to human rights groups, members of the Congress, organizations with consultative status at the UN through which effective appeals could be made on their behalf.

A rally was organized by ICT and USTC in front of the White House on February 29, 1992 to appeal for President Bush's support to Tibetan human rights at the United Nations.

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4 Tibet Press Watch, May 1989, p.8
5 Tibet Press Watch, April 1992, p.3
International Campaign for Tibet launched a petition campaign around the country calling on the International Olympic Committee to reject Beijing as a host city because of China’s egregious human rights record. Furthermore, the Tibetan Youth Congress and Tibet Support Groups declared September 19, 1993 as “No Olympic for China Day”. This campaign achieved its goal on September 23, 1993 when IOC voted to hold the Year 2000 Olympic games in Sydney, Australia.

International Campaign for Tibet, Tibetan Rights campaign, Friends of Tibet, US Tibet Committee and many other groups launched an intensive campaign in the United States to get President Clinton to stand by his promise to revoke MFN status to China if his conditions are not met.

Even though Clinton caved in to pressure from the Chinese and business community on all the fronts – tariffs and the linkage – the programs he announced could bring some positive results if the Administration actively pursued them.

Three day meet of Tibet movement activists was organized in Washington on the second weekend of March, 1996 to push forward Tibet’s quest for freedom from oppressive Chinese rule. Program included a conference, rally in front of Chinese Embassy and a session on lobbying.

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6 Tibet Press Watch, July 1993, p. 4
7 Tibet Press Watch, May 1994, p.3
8 Tibet Press Watch, February 1996, p. 3
In early December students at the University of Wisconsin petitioned their Boards of Regents to divest university holding from corporations who are members of the US China Business Council because it advocates against human right concerns in China and Tibet. 9

Toronto-New York Tibetan Independence march was organized by International Tibet Independence movement. The March concluded in New York City on June 14, 1997 with a rally at the United Nations. 10

Several hundred Tibetans and Tibet supporters from Canada and the United States gathered in Vancouver on November 23, 1997, for a massive rally to coincide with the visit there of Chinese President Jiang Zemin to participate in the APEC summit. 11

US Tibet Committee’s “action alert” dated December 3, 1990 requests Tibet supporters to write a letter requesting the Department of State to issue a public apology and retraction of Lilly’s remarks and urge to forcefully raise the issue of Tibetan human rights and self-determination with the Chinese leadership. On December 1, 1990 James Lilly, US Ambassador to China, had called a group of Tibetan demonstrators “cowards” and suggested that they should “go back to and serve China.”

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9 Tibet Press Watch, February 1996, p. 4
10 Tibet Press Watch, July 1997, p. 9
11 Tibet Press Watch, December 1997, p. 7
TSGs brought together many men and women of talent and skill to the Tibet movement. Their lobbying skills, media expertise, their knowledge of the inner workings of the various bureaucracies and parliamentary procedures, their easy access to the various NGOs and the UN have empowered the movement and made it more vibrant and dynamic.

Networks of TSGs working for the cause of Tibet have given the movement greater effectiveness, influence and reach. The Tibetan voice is now heard loud and clear in the various international forums. More and more NGOs are making statements on behalf of Tibet at the UN. There are increasing number of official statements from the US Government and resolutions by the Congress on issues relating to Tibet.

The combined efforts of the TSG movement have posed a direct challenge to the credibility and Chinese monopoly of news about Tibet. The World Tibet News (WTN) has brought about an efficient sharing of news and views on Tibet.

Independent reports and reviews by various TSGs on human rights, environment, nuclear missiles and waste dumping in Tibet and the Chinese population transfer policy into Tibet have done a great deal to erode the credibility of Chinese publicity on these issues.

The demonstration and vigils organized by the TSGs either to commemorate the 1959 Tibetan uprising or to protest the visit by various Chinese leaders have brought about a great deal of media coverage on the Tibet issue, and definitely contributed to the increasing awareness of Tibet in the United States.
The release of Gendun Rinchen, the successful campaign to prevent China from hosting the year 2000 Olympic Games, the huge media splash made by nine Tibetan women at the UN world women's conference in Beijing, the signature campaign for the release of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the new Panchen Lama, the ongoing Toycott campaign (the boycott of toys made in China), the mushrooming of Students for Free Tibet across the campuses of America, and the recognition by the Government of the power of various Tibet support Groups as potent pressure groups all testify to the co-ordination and effectiveness of the worldwide movement for Tibet, and to the strength of the TSGs movement.\footnote{Tempa Tsering, Tibet Support Groups Its Achievements And Expansion, DIIR, CTA, Darmsala, p.62}

The efforts of TSGs have enabled the Tibetan to hold several productive and extremely meaningful dialogues with pro-democracy Chinese groups in the United States. These meetings have not only contributed to the increasing understanding of the Tibet issue by the potential leaders of a democratic China but have also increased Tibetan's admiration for those brave Chinese men and women who have a vision of China which may not be incompatible with the hopes and aspirations of the Tibetan people.

Also because of the sincere and consistent campaigns launched by the Tibet Support Groups, several Tibetan prisoners and human rights activists have received the prestigious Reebok Human Rights Award, which has given hope and courage to million of Tibetans. Several Tibetan prisoners have also been adopted as prisoners of conscience not only by various TSGs but also by human rights organizations.
Members of Tibet Support Groups in the United States have also documented, at risks, human right abuses in Tibet. This has not only contributed to the increased international understanding of the Tibetan tragedy but has also given a hope to Tibetans that their present tragedy will come to an end one day.

Increasing number of newsletters brought out by an increasing number of Tibet Support Groups go a long way in educating people of the United States on the Tibet issue. The untiring lobbying assistance of the TSGs has resulted into congressional and international organizational resolutions on the questions of Tibet.

Success of the TSG movement is the vindication of the true strength and power of the citizens of the United States. This is what democracy all about: that the strength of conviction of either one individual or a group of individuals will become the rallying cry for a cause bigger than the government, bigger than the military might of a powerful nation.

2. MEDIA

Due to increasing concern for Tibet in the United States, media coverage of Tibet has increased enormously. Important contributing factors to the increase of both the quality and quantity of media coverage of Tibet are efforts of Tibet Support Groups, Tibetan communities in exile, offices of Tibetan government- in- exile and other organizations addressing Tibet issue. Media has increasingly been able to rely upon the more professional organizations and offices, and are thus not as likely to run with stories based solely on information from Chinese government sources.
A greater accuracy and objectivity have matched the quantitative increase in media coverage. Myth of Tibet's “peaceful liberation” has been shattered and the media routinely refers to the Chinese “occupation” of Tibet. Ten years ago in the US the Dalai Lama was regarded much more as solely a religious figure. Today he is leader of the Tibetan people and head of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

Newspapers and Journals have been generously giving space to the news and views on Tibet. For last many years the US press has published several editorials and articles on Tibet. Target of these articles is general public, US Congress and US administration.

Sometimes, to save itself from Chinese criticism, US administration does not highlight or criticize human rights abuses and religious repression in Tibet. At that time media comes to the help of Tibet and they courageously bombard the world with these news. Many times these reports are based on the information deliberately leaked by governmental agencies.

(a) Press:

Among all above-mentioned mediums, press is no doubt the most vocal and effective as far as voicing Tibetan cause is concerned. Here are some selections from the press for our observations.

Historical and legal status of Tibet and right of Tibetans to self-determination and US stand on this issue is one of the issues, press in the United States has given its attention to. Let us examine few selected press clippings on this issue:
Edward Lazar wrote in San Francisco Examiner "As long as the Chinese occupy Tibet there will be human rights violations there. Only if the basic political rights of self-determination is respected by the Chinese will there be a chance to truly end human rights abuses". He further writes, "Tibet has a history of independence that is matched by only a handful of the member states of the United Nations. Tibet has a unique culture, language, religion, and history, which is over 2000 years old, and its status as a unified nation dates back to the seventh century."

Lodi Gyari writes in The Boston Globe "It is not difficult for the US government to reexamine its Tibet policy. It is reluctant to do so for fear of Beijing's criticism of any move toward recognizing China's occupation of Tibet for what it is. US acknowledgement of Tibet's occupied status would also bolster the world's confidence that the US supports just causes even where US interests are not immediately affected."

Richard Gere writes in New York times "we have an obligation to Tibet because it's morally right and because we are subsidizing communist rule in China and Tibet through a $ 19 billion trade deficit for 1992 and because America betrayed Tibet as part of a deal to normalize relations with China. The past five administration looked the other way as China destroyed all but seven of Tibet's 6000 monasteries, sent tens of thousands of Buddhist monks off to die in labor camps, deployed nuclear weapons to intimidate South Asia clean cut the forests and set about to sinocize generations of

13 San Francisco Examiner, (San Francisco), 26th June 1989.

14 Tibet Press Watch, Volume-3, No. 2, p. 26
Tibetan youth. Now Beijing is facilitating a huge Chinese population influx into the area. Recent administration rarely said anything about the brutality; when they did, their words were couched in diplomatese. Instead of speaking openly for self-determination, State Department bureaucrats blithely reiterated that the US considers Tibet to be part of China. This is a lie and the Clinton's Administration has a golden opportunity to correct it. Bill Clinton and Al Gore spoke strongly about Tibet during the campaign change. The Dalai Lama is coming to Washington at the end of April. Let us hope the administration will not be foxhole by Beijing and will stand with Congress, which unanimously passed a resolution declaring Tibet an occupied country.15

Washington Post writes “American government sees Tibet as a human rights issue to be resolved by overall Chinese democratic reform, not as a political issue best addressed by application of the principle of self-determination. This reflects to the one China policy – formed first in reference to Taiwan – held by all administrations of the last 20 years. It is our view that far from being an unassailable position – there is much wrong with it. American officials can be expected to be pressed harder to explain why Tibetans should not enjoy the choices regarded as right and natural for other peoples.”16

Boston Globe writes in its editorial “aware that Tibet has great strategic value to Beijing, the United States and other nations have accepted Chinese rule there. Tibetans have no leverage on their Chinese rulers other than pressure from abroad.

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Foreign friends of China have an obligation to explain the authorities in Beijing that colonialism is incompatible with modernization.\textsuperscript{17}

New York Times writes on 10\textsuperscript{th} March 1989 "Tibetans are a distinct people with their own religion and culture and have been largely independent of China through much of their history. The United States like other countries accepts Tibet as an integral part of China. It recognizes the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled leader as a religious figure without political authority. The least the State Department can do is acknowledge that the Dalai Lama has political standing in his country and support his request for cultural and religious autonomy."\textsuperscript{18}

Panchen Lama controversy, in which China did not recognize Gedhun Chokeyi Nyima selected by the Dalai Lama as new Panchen Lama and later selected another boy, is another issue, which attracted media attention. Chinese authorities arrested the Panchen Lama selected by the Dalai Lama and his whereabouts is still unknown.

Commenting on the Panchen Lama controversy George Wehrfritz writes in his article contributed to Newsweek "By challenging the Dalai Lama's authority on something as sacred as reincarnation, Beijing is once again playing tough in Tibet. China annexed Tibet in 1950 and spent nearly three decades trying to stamp out Buddhism."\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Tibetan Review, February 1989, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{18} Tibetan Review, April 1989, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{19} Newsweek, 11\textsuperscript{th} Dec. 1995.
Pico Iyer who has visited Tibet many times writes in his articles that the Chinese presumption in overruling the Dalai Lama, who has selected a different boy in May, is as absurd as if Fidel Castro tried to appoint the next pope. "What makes the Panchen Lama disputes so important is that the ongoing chess game between the most populous nation in the world and a tiny government-in-exile is nearing its endgame. The Tibetans have already lost their country and much of their heritage, and now they are in danger of being striped of their spiritual leadership. If China's selection of the Panchen Lama is not universally challenged, its leaders will have won by showing that spirit can be trumped by politics. From the time Chinese troops entered into Tibet in 1950, they have tried to hit Tibetans where it most hurts, in the heart of their belief. Not just by killing 1.2 million Tibetan and by destroying all but 13 of the country's 6254 monasteries. And not only by diluting Tibetan racial stock through forced intermarriages that amount to "ethnic cleansing" but most effectively by broadcasting their contempt for faith itself. Mr. Iyer says, "celibate monks have been forced to copulate in public and to use sacred texts as toilets paper". Then he suggests the world in general and United States in particular "we must ask ourselves how far we are willing to acquiesce in the remorseless eradication of a culture."

Extension of Most Favored Nation trading status provides an opportunity to the press to comment on Chinese repression in Tibet and criticize the US administrations policy of extending this status despite no improvement in the human rights situation in Tibet. Press has been extremely vocal on this issue.

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San Francisco Chronicle writes in its editorial "Clinton in June approved a one-year US renewal of China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status. An extension this June depends in part on significant improvement in protecting Tibet's unique religious and culture heritage. But a report by human rights monitor Asia Watch says that in 1993, a continuing Chinese government campaign of repression against peaceful pro-independence activities by Buddhist monks and nuns, sharply intensified. China has a population 100 times larger than Tibet's but 80 percent of those arrested on political reasons last year were Tibetans. As he inks China's MFN renewal, Clinton should think of the thugs in Tibet."

Valerie Strauss recommends in the Washington Post "Clinton must decide by early June, 1993 whether to extend China's MFN status. Legislation introduced in the Senate would link MFN extension for China to improvement in human rights conditions, including China's population transfer policies in Tibet. 21"

On September 22, Moura Moynihan writes in the Washington Post "Those who insist that linking trade and human rights will endanger rule of law should visit occupied Tibet to understand the reality of China's capitalist police state."

The issue of human rights violations by Chinese authorities in Tibet and the policy of the United States has probably got the largest space in the American press. Efforts of TSGs and human rights organizations have given boost to media coverage on this issue.

21 Tibet Press Watch, May 1993, P. 20
Cindy Galbraith Curley writes in ST. Louis Post-Dispatch on December 8, 1989: "The US government has ignored the plight of Tibet for 39 years. Unless this policy is turned around, a distinct civilization may be destroyed by the political and economic repression of communist Chinese government." 22

Boston Globe dated 27th February 1992, writes: "Human right groups are surprised and dismayed that the Bush administration is not supporting a resolution on China’s human right abuses in Tibet that the UN Human Rights Commissions in Geneva is considering. The President stance contradicts the US State Department’s annual human rights report, which condemned the Chinese government for persistent abuses in Tibet. If Bush sabotages the Geneva resolution of Tibet to placate his clients in Beijing, he will give the impression that America is governed by politics." 23

A. M. Rosenthal writes in Washington Post dated 12th March 1989, "Chinese policy over the years has resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Tibetans, relentless attack on Tibetan culture and religion, continued human right violations and the staged influx of Han Chinese people into areas where many Tibetans live. President Bush’s recent visit to China left a certain sour impression that he had failed to press the matter of Chinese human rights violations with sufficient personal vigor. American cannot fail to protest against the official acts of repression in Tibet." 24

22 Tibet Press Watch, Volume-2, No. 4, p. 22
23 Tibetan Review, April 1992, p. 18
24 Tibetan Review, April 1989, p. 16.
Noble Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama in 1989 got a widespread coverage in the press. This coverage has a major contribution in the popularity of the Dalai Lama in the United States.

Wall Street Journal dated 6th October called the Noble Peace Prize a Noble for the oppressed. "Dalai Lama is both the leader of his people and a profoundly spiritual person. He has always counseled nonviolence, despite the agonies of Tibet, where the Chinese military occupation murdered one-sixth of the population and destroyed thousands of monasteries."25

US visits of the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan representatives and the nature of their official reception by the successive American administrations have also attracted media attention.

A. M. Rosenthal writes in New York Times dated 4th March 1990, "not one American President has had the courtesy or the courage to receive the leader of the Tibetans, the symbol of godliness for them and many other Buddhists around the world." He further writes "the tiny band of Tibetan representatives in Washington is not welcome at the State Department where emissaries of tyrannies are welcomed, honored and stuffed everyday."26

Jeane Kirkpatric writes in New York Times "George Bush broke precedent to receive Tibet's remarkable spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama believes Washington can help in saving Tibet more than the US government realizes.

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A foreign Policy of human rights is something new. No government has ever done it. Republicans and Democrats in the Congress and the White House are off to a reasonably good start.  

Tibet supporters successfully campaigned against the Chinese bid to host the 2000 Olympic games. American press did not lag behind in its effort to pressurize the concerned authorities and to generate public opinion against Chinese bid.

Richard writes in Herald Tribune "If China wants the privilege of hosting the games, then its government first demonstrate respect for the most basic and universal norms of human rights."

Many problems and shortcomings however still remain. The Tibet movement continues to have some problems with inaccurate or exaggerated claims. One of the most significant obstacles to better media coverage continues to be the lack of access to Tibet by the Beijing Press Corps and other journalists. Another problem is that although Tibetans do manage to get photographs in the media, very little text in the story goes along with them.

Despite these problems media has played an effective role in making the people of the United States more aware of and sensitive to the Tibet issue.

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27 Tibetan Review, June 1991, p.18

28 Tibet Press Watch, July 1993, p. 11
(b) Films and documentaries:

Over the years, many films and documentaries have been made on Tibet. These audio-visual productions are more effective since they are more interesting and credible.

On October 28 1997, the United State's local PBS stations aired a marvelous documentary "Dreams for Tibet", which was received enthusiastically by its audience in North America. This documentary is an update of the 1994 front line documentary, "Red Flag over Tibet". Similarly on October 30, the San Francisco based TSG organized a premier show of a documentary film on its freedom concerts held in San Francisco. It was later shown in many campuses in North America. In December 1997, Washington based A&E cable channel program devoted its hour to the life of the Dalai Lama. The program included interviews with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lodi Gyari (Special Envoy of the Dalai Lama in Washington, DC), Professor Jeffrey Hopkins of Winsconsin University, Bob Thurman, and actor Richard Gere.29

Hollywood films like 'Seven years in Tibet' and 'Kundun' was screened in hundreds of theatres around the globe. Tibet support Groups distributed thousands of action kits to moviegoers in the United States.30 Kundun is a movie, which Beijing does not want people to see because the film offers a compelling and self-bound

29 Tsering, A progress report on International Support Groups, n. 12, p.15.

30 Ibid, p.4
portrait of the profoundly spiritual culture of Tibet. It portrays the early life of the 14\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama, based on his first autobiography and shows Tibet, when it was independent.

(c) Books:

Similarly many powerful books on Tibet have been released such as 'The Voice That Remembers: The Heroic Story of a Woman's Fight to Free Tibet' by Ama Ashe, 'Pilgrim' by Actor Richard Gere, 'Kundun' by Mary Caig, 'Fire Under the Snow' by Palden Gyatso, 'Tibet: My Story' by Jetsun Pema, ‘Sky Burial: An Eyewitness Account of China’s Brutal Crackdown in Tibet” by Blake Kerr and hundreds of other books and novels.

3. TIBETAN BUDDHIST CENTERS

Buddhism is not bound to any culture, society or country because emphasis in Buddhism is on internal- as opposed to external- practice. It spreads very easily from one culture to another because of their emphasis on inner mind rather than the way they dress, the kind of food they take, the way they wear their hair, and so on.

Tibetan Buddhist Lamas came to the United States in late 50's. Geshe Wangyal of Gelugpa tradition was the first Tibetan Lama to arrive in the US at the invitation of the world church and Kalmuk, the Mongolian community in New Jersey. By 1958 he founded Labsum Shedrub Ling, the first Buddhist monastery in the United States.
Interest in Tibetan Buddhism swelled during the 1960's along with western interest in many eastern religions. By 1962 Geshe Wangyal, in consultation with the Dalai Lama, sponsored several Lamas in New Jersey. At that time American society was facing a crisis. Vietnam War and materialism had led to disenchantment from life and society. At that time Tibetan lamas did a great service of resolving the crisis of life among rebellious American youth through meditation, philosophical and religious discourses. This work of these lamas was highly appreciated by the American society. A good groundwork done by these lamas could be capitalized during the Dalai Lama's visit. By 1989 the Dalai Lama became popular in the United States.

United States has hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist centers and retreats. These centers encourage practice of meditation, offer classes and seminars on Tibetan Buddhist religion and philosophy. Important lamas visit these centers from all over the world. To understand the activities of these religious centers few of them are discussed in little detail.

(a) **Karma Thegsum Choling**

Established in 1981 at Scottsdale (Arizona) the main purpose of the center are to encourage practice of meditation, to apply principles of mindful awareness to everyday life, to develop initiation, and to provide a teaching center for visiting Tibetan Buddhist lamas. Discussion and oral teachings on the Buddhist path and group meetings, linking Buddhist philosophy to other paths and to western ways of life, are organized.
(b) Nyingma Institute

Established in 1973 at Berkeley this institute has meditation rooms, library, and bookstore that support an atmosphere for study and practice. For over fourteen years people from throughout the United States and abroad have come here to study the teaching of Tarthang Tulku.

(c) Ewam Choden Tibetan Buddhist Center

Ewam Choden was established in 1971 at Kensington to provide an opportunity for the practice and study of Tibetan religion and culture. Center is especially interested in maintaining close relations with the Tibetan community in India by sending students to study there with the few remaining great teachers, and through lending sorely needed aid to refugees.

(d) Maitreya Institute

Maitreya Institute establishes in 1985 at San Francisco was founded by H. E. Taisitu Rimpoche, one of the four incarnate regents of Kagyu lineage. Besides Tibetan Buddhism, the institute offers cross-cultural programs in psychology, spirituality, geomancy, health and healing, economics, and music.

(e) Kagyu Changchub Chuling

The center maintains a daily schedule of meditation practices in the Kagyu tradition of vajrayana Buddhism. Special events include daylong and weakened retreats, full moon offering ceremonies, and Tibetan language and ort classes.
(f) Rigpa Fellowship

Rigpa is an association of people who study under the guidance of Ven. Lama Sogyal, Rinpoche, an incarnate lama and meditation master from Tibet.

(g) Sakya Monastery of Tibetan Buddhism

Located in Seattle since 1974, the monastery is an international seat of the nonsectarian teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Some of the monastery's traditional activities are the bestowing of refuge, initiations, personal audiences and instruction, translation and publication of texts, Tibetan languages and religious music classes, and ethnic craft festivals. The central practice of Sakya Monastery is the generation of love and compassion through meditation on Chenrezi (Avlokiteshvara).

Apart from these religious centers there are some academic organizations offering courses in Tibetan Buddhism, cultural organizations and Tibetan Refugee Aid Societies, ecumenical centers, government offices, libraries, museums and publication which provide knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism and culture. Activities of few important among above-mentioned organizations can be discussed.

(h) Naropa Institute, Department of Buddhist Studies

The Naropa Institute is a private, non-sectarian, accredited upper-divisional college and graduate school. In BA and MA, Buddhist studies programs Buddhism is studied as a living tradition from both historical and doctrinal perspectives. The Buddhist studies program is inspired both by the scholar practitioner traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and by the critical methods of modern western scholarship.
(i) Tibet House, New York

Tibet House is a cultural center dedicated to preserving full spectrum of Tibet's cultural and religious heritage, to present to the West Tibet's ancient traditions of philosophy, art and science. The vital culture of Tibet is presented through a wide range of special events and public programs produced with leading museums, educational institution, performing arts centers, television stations and book publishers. Tibet House organizes travelling exhibitions of Tibetan arts and artifacts, presents seminars of Tibetan History, culture and religion by western and Tibetan scholars, and co-ordinates major conferences on all aspects of Tibet.

(j) Tibetan Cultural Center (Tibet Society)

The Tibetan Cultural Center and Tibet Society were established in Bloomington, Indiana, in order to preserve Tibetan culture and heritage. The Tibet society sponsors charitable, cultural and educational activities that are intended to aid Tibet's cultural heritage. Special support is given to the study and publication of works on Tibet and Tibetans.

Americans who come into contact with these Tibetan Buddhist Centers develop a sense of belonging towards Tibet. Many persons associated with these centers also join Tibet Support Groups active in their localities. A sympathy and respect for the Buddhist religious tradition lead to political and financial support to Tibet movement. These followers not only attend meetings of H. H. the Dalai
Lama and other important Lamas but also take part in protest marches and demonstrations.

4. MOVIE STARS

Over the years many Hollywood movie stars have joined the Tibet movement. Some of them have adopted Tibetan Buddhism as their religion. Richard Gere, Pierce Brosnan, Stevan Seagal, Harrison Ford, Melissa Mathison, Meg Ryan, Cindy Crawford and Sharon Stone are important among these Hollywood personalities associated with the Tibet movement.

There are various different basis of attraction towards Tibet for these movie stars. Those who felt disenchanted with their own complicated lives were consoled by the idea that in one isolated spot lived a people who still held the key to happiness, peace, and spiritual salvation. Orville Schell, author of 'Virtual Tibet: Searching for Shangari -La from the Himalayas to Hollywood', believes that likes of Stevan Seagal, having triumphed over “adversity” themselves, identify with the Dalai Lama and Tibetans as underdogs – the little guy against the big bully.

There is another possibility implied in Schell’s book: the ambivalence of imperialism. Some of the more sensitive imperialists realized what they are destroying, or at least changing forever by their presence, and ended up idealizing it. Hollywood’s imperialism is not real, of course, in the sense of territorial conquest. It is a virtual empire.
For Richard Gere, the famous actor of Hollywood films ‘American Gigolo’, ‘Breathless’, ‘An Officer and a Gentleman’ and ‘Pretty Woman’, Tibet is his spiritual homeland since 1974 when he first embraced Buddhism. Inspired by the Dalai Lama, Richard Gere was instrumental in setting up Tibet House in New York, a cultural center dedicated to preserving full spectrum of Tibet’s cultural and religious heritage.

In 1993 Academy awards show Gere, presenting the Oscar for Best Art Director, gave an impromptu lecture on Chinese oppression in Tibet. Justifying his speech at Oscar ceremony he wrote in New York Times on April 13, 1993: “As long as our Government betrays us by remaining silent and perpetuating the lie that Tibet is a part of China Tibet’s friends are morally obligated to speak.”

Richard Gere was one of the forces behind ‘International Year of Tibet’ celebration. He was instrumental in organizing many conferences, seminars, lectures, exhibitions, cultural programs and film shows throughout the year 1991. He has also been raising funds for Tibet’s cause through photo exhibitions, charitable dinners and of course his personal donations.

Richard Gere has also testified before Congressional Committees. In the first Senate hearing ever devoted to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Gere said that the Chinese were engaged in “systematic genocide” in Tibet. He cited

31 Document No. 34, DIIR Documentation Center, CTA, Dharmsala.
the government-subsidized transfer of millions of Chinese settlers into Tibet, Chinese human rights violations and the destruction of Tibet’s environment.\textsuperscript{32}

Melissa Mathison, one of the celebrated screenplay writers of Hollywood who wrote script of famous film ‘Kundun’ portraying early life of the Dalai Lama, has been actively associated with the Tibet movement. Along with her husband Harrison Ford she visited Tibet in 1992 and came into contact with Gendun Rinchen, a human rights activist. When Gendun Rinchen was later arrested and imprisoned by Chinese authorities, Melissa Mathison wrote articles, organized rallies, wrote letters to human rights organizations, members of Congress in an effort to get him released. She wrote in The New York Times on October 2, 1993 “Rinchen did not speak to us of overthrowing his government or of Tibetan independence. His concern appeared to be more basic: the treatment of human beings. Now he may be one of the Tibetans he has worked so hard to save.”\textsuperscript{33} She has also testified before the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1995.\textsuperscript{34}

In one of her articles Melissa Mathison wrote in The New York Times on October 3, 1993 “no one knows exactly how many prison and labor camps are spread across Tibet. Nor do we have an estimate of the damage done to the

\textsuperscript{32} Tibet Press Watch, July 1992, p. 24
\textsuperscript{33} Tibet Press Watch, September 1993, p. 17
\textsuperscript{34} Tibet Press Watch, October 1995, p.7
environment by the clear cutting of ancient forests and mining of previously untouched mineral deposits. There are unconfirmed reports that China has been dumping its nuclear waste in Tibet. And there is only the word of anguished Tibetan women who say that they have been the victim of forced abortions and sterilizations." 35

Steven Seagal is another Hollywood actor who embraced Buddhism and has been actively associated with the Tibet movement in the United States. Orville Schell quotes him in his book “I have kept my spirituality secret because people don’t understand it. Friends have never gotten this part of my life, but there are many great lamas who recognize me as something strange and from another time, who refer to me as one of them. I feel a kinship beyond words with them, something really deep.” Not only does Seagle go wobbly at the sight of the Dalai Lama, but he claims that His Holiness also goes wobbly at the sight of him. The Dalai Lama, in Seagal’s account, kissed the action man’s feet as a tribute to a fellow deity. Such a deep association and identification with Tibetan Buddhism and lamas naturally translates into political action when it comes to making appeals to the public and government about Tibet issue and to make them act for it. Stevan Seagle has been associated with many rallies, exhibitions etc. in support of Tibetan cause.

Harrison Ford is another actor who has been actively associated with the Tibet movement in the United States. He has visited Tibet and has

35 New York Times, October 2,1993,
interacted with Tibetans who have been suffering under Chinese oppression. While testifying before the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Harrison Ford called on members of Congress and the President to meet with the Dalai Lama when he came to Washington. In his own words “His Holiness is a great man; to meet with him brings dignity to America and to us all.” Harrison Ford, who spoke on behalf of International Campaign for Tibet, also testified regarding his own personal experiences in Tibet. He has also been associated with the campaign for the release of Gendun Rinchen, a human rights activist who was arrested in by Chinese authorities in Lhasa in 1993. Harrison Ford served as the host of ‘A Tribute to Tibet’, an evening celebration honoring the people of Tibet for their nonviolent struggle to preserve their cultural heritage and regain their freedom. The event was held on April 28, 1993 in Washington and was attended by members of Congress, social and business leaders, members of Tibetan community, press and the general public. At that event he said “In the spirit of compassion let us believe that the world is ready to right a wrong long ignored. We have only an instant, a moment left, to save the Tibetan culture – that fantastic, unique civilization, that most gentle and spiritual races.”

5. CULTURAL PROGRAMS AND ARTISTS

A three-day Festival of Nations was organized in April 1990 in Minnesota. Thupten Dadak and his wife from Minnesota organized a Tibetan

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36 Tibet Press Watch, October 1995, p. 7
exhibit for the first time. With the advice of His Holiness, the help of the Office of Tibet in New York and volunteers they were able to create an exhibit that reflected the true culture.

The exhibit was not a political forum but the questions asked were political. The exhibit staff explained how much suffering the Tibetans have endured since 1959 and the number of Tibetans killed since then. They also had many books to show pictures of current conditions and told the people about the prisoners inside Tibet.37

On June 16, 1996 Milarepa Fund organized a “Freedom Concert” at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Many famous rock bands played their music. Between acts, such speakers as Palden Gyatso, a political prisoner for 33 years, showed the audience the cattle prods and thumbs cuffs used in his torture by Chinese guards, and Robert Thurman, a professor of Tibetan Buddhism at Columbia University, gave an eloquent primer on the history of the suppression of Tibetan culture and nationalism. In addition, slogans like “Free Tibet” were posted around the fairground and in the middle of the field was a tent where different orders of Tibetan Buddhist monks performed mostly deep, draining one-voice chording and made sand painting.38

Milarepa Fund organized its second concert in New York in June 1997. Thousands of youngsters who participated in these two concerts had an ample

37 Document No. 21, DIIR Documentation Center, CTA, Dharmasala.
38 The New York Times, June 18, 1996
opportunity to be educated on the issue of Tibet. They had also demonstrated a sample of tools that people can use to get involved in helping and supporting the Tibetan people.

David Shever had put up an exhibit of 16 portraits of Tibetan exiles, along with the stories of their persecution. Shever, a 23-year-old former Pensacolian, spent ten months in India, working for the Tibetan Government – in-exile as a photographer, information specialist and special assistant.

Shever's exhibit was seen in Philadelphia in November 1991 as part of an Amnesty International anniversary tribute. It has also been displayed at the Martin Luther King Library in Washington, D.C. and in the House of Representative wing of the US Capitol in Washington. These exhibits aim to enlighten Americans about a repressed society.39

6. INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVES

Apart from organized collective efforts individual initiatives like that of Grace Spring who started her one-woman vigil for Tibet are highly praiseworthy. Every Friday without fail she continues to stand in front of the Chinese Embassy in Washington D.C.40

Of late former US President Richard Nixon has advocated US support for Tibet. In his new book, ‘Seize the Moment’ he says, “The people of Tibet

40 Tsering, Tibet Support Groups It’s Achievement And Expansion, n.12, p. 62
represent a separate case. Conquered by the Chinese in 1950, occupied brutally by troops who killed thousands, desecrated local cultural and religious sites and denied reasonable demands for autonomy, Tibetans have elicited much sympathy but little support from the outside world. In addition to raising the issue of Tibet in bilateral talks, we should establish Radio Free Tibet so that it's people though isolated, will no longer feel abandoned."\(^41\)

George Bush's cousin Elsie Walker has taken the Tibet issue to her heart and trots the globe to generate support for the Tibet. Her initiative aimed at creating an international environment for Tibetan human and political rights. "The current international climate is ready for shifting the Tibetan issue from the periphery into the mainstream" says Ms Walker.\(^42\)

Ms Walker played a pivotal role in the historic meeting between her first cousin, President George Bush and the Dalai Lama in 1991 amid cries of protest by the Chinese government. Elsie Walker was the force behind setting up of the 'Institute for Asian Democracy'. The institute will address itself to democracy in Asia particularly in Tibet, Burma and China. While lobbying for American public opinion on the issues, it will give practical political advice tailored to realistic strategy to groups, minorities and individuals in Asia demanding human rights and liberties. It would study the role of Tibet as the 'psychological center' of Central Asia.

\(^41\) Tibet Press Watch, Volume 3, No. 5, p. 2  
\(^42\) The Times of India, (New Delhi), April 6, 1992
7. SUPPORT FROM OTHER RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

a) Jews Concern for Tibetans:

In June 1990, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the national organization for the reform rabbinate, adopted a resolution that expressed compassion for the Tibetans and condemnation of the Chinese government, which has occupied Tibet since 1959.

CCAR urged President George Bush to invite the Dalai Lama to the House and encouraged Congress to invite him to testify. It also announced that it would invite the Dalai Lama to address a future convention of the organization.

This was result of a brief meeting in September 1989 in New Jersey between the Dalai Lama and six Jewish writers and rabbis. That first formal meeting was initiated by the Tibetan leader, who particularly wanted to learn about Jew's ability to survive in exile.43

National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council adopted a statement of oppression of Tibetans on September 10, 1990. It recommended that its member agencies should:

1. Request the dissemination of this statement to the NJCRAC constituency and members.

2. Seek to form coalitions wherever possible with other organizations concerned about human rights violations in Tibet and work with them to:

43 The Detroit Jewish News, (Detroit), August 31, 1990
(a) Request the US government to place the issue of Tibet and the protection of religious freedom on the agenda of discussion between the US and China;

(b) Raise the Tibet issue in appropriate international forums and;

(c) Encourage Americans to meet the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan leaders. 44

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism adopted a resolution on October 30, 1990 in which it resolved to:

1. Call upon the President of the United States to welcome the Dalai Lama to strengthen the hand of the Dalai Lama and to indicate to the government of the People’s Republic of China that we are sincere in our condemnation of its brutal oppression in Tibet;

2. Condemn the People’s Republic of China for its invasion of Tibet and its desecration and destruction of holy places, its torture and unjustifiable imprisonment of countless persons, including nuns, its defilement of a people;

3. Commend the Noble Committee for conferring the Peace Prize on the Dalai Lama, who is truly a man of peace, committed to the highest ideals of nonviolent resistance, and to whom we reach out in friendship, solidarity and support;

4. Call upon its synagogues, the Religious Action Center and various social action committees to seek an end to the atrocities in Tibet by persuading

44 Tibet Press Watch, Volume 2, No. 8, p. 25
elected officials to make the oppression of the Tibetan people an item of priority.45

The 72nd General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States passed a resolution on July 25 expressing “concern for the safety and future” of the Tibetan people and urging “Direct dialogue” between the Chinese leadership and the Dalai Lama. It also called for “further dialogue with the Chinese Christian Council to develop deeper ties and to seek a better understanding of the situation in China and Tibet.”

Efforts made by these Tibet Support Groups, media, movie stars, Tibetan Buddhist centers, other religious communities and certain individuals has generated a strong public support for Tibet in the United States. This support is evident in gradual increase in the number of individuals and organizations participating in the Tibet movement. A democratic government can not afford to ignore public opinion. Public support to the Tibet movement has influenced the policy makers in legislature and administration of the United States. In the following chapters we will examine congressional initiatives and governmental responses with regard to Tibet issue. Next chapter deals with the congressional initiatives on Tibet issue. Congress and congressmen have brought and passed many resolutions on this issue. Inspirations, nature and impact of such resolutions are be analyzed. Reactions and responses of People’s Republic of China also form part of following chapter.

45 Tibet Press Watch, Vol. 2, No. 9, p. 19