PREFACE

Selection of this topic for my doctoral research was guided by the fact that Tibet is the largest remaining relic of the colonial era. And United States of America being the most powerful democracy in the world has a moral responsibility towards the people of Tibet. Importance of US support for the Tibetan cause has been acknowledged by none other than His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the supreme religious figure and head of the Tibetan government in exile. United States has intervened in several countries, Kuwait and Bosnia being two recent examples. Tibet also has the potential to be used as a leverage against China, which is fast emerging as an economic and military superpower and can challenge the supremacy of the United States in the post Cold War unipolar world. I thought, it would be highly interesting and relevant for a student of international relations to study the policy of the United States towards the issue of Tibet.

Occurrence of three events in the year 1989 prompted my selection of the period (1989-97) for my research. First of them was the large scale violent demonstrations in Lhasa in the month of March followed by ruthless suppression by People’s Army and imposition of martial law, which was highly criticized by Western countries. Second event was the crackdown on demonstrators at Beijing’s Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989 in which the People’s Army killed hundreds of pro-democracy students. Tiananmen has cleansed the door of perception, not only with regard to the rule of the Chinese government over ethnic Chinese, but it has also resulted in a new willingness
to listen to the tragic stories of ‘minority people’s such as the Tibetans, one of whom stated that ‘Tiananmen is Tibet and Tibet is Tiananmen’. Third event was the announcement to award Noble Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama in recognition of his continuing nonviolent struggle for Tibetan cause. These three events contributed a lot to the increased international awareness of Tibetan struggle for independence and human rights violations in China and Tibet. These events got tremendous media coverage in the West in general and the United States in particular. This increased awareness coupled with the activities of Tibet Support Groups resulted into many resolutions, in favor of the Tibetan cause, passed by the United States Congress which in turn led to governmental responses. In this sense, period between 1989 and 1997 is the most crucial and recent for the study of United States policy towards Tibet issue.

First chapter of this thesis defines the issue of Tibet and analyzes the factors and process of internationalization of this issue. Clear understanding of various aspects of Tibet issue is necessary to understand the complex nature of the conflict. There has been an attempt to present both the Chinese and Tibetan viewpoint on every aspect. Second chapter is a background chapter, which analyzes the policy and actions of the United States towards Tibet before 1989. Starting with the first contact between the United States and Tibet this chapter traces the changes in US policy towards Tibet with the changing international environment and Sino-US relations. Third chapter analyzes the nature, intensity, impact and agents of public support to the Tibet issue in the United States. Public support has been an important factor in
motivating and influencing Congress to take initiatives in support of Tibetan cause. Thus, it is important to study this public support. Fourth chapter deals with the congressional initiatives during the period between 1989 and 1997 in support of Tibetan cause. This chapter analyzes in a chronological manner, resolutions presented and passed by the US Congress and its impact on governmental policies of the United States and China. Apart from collective initiatives individual initiatives of congressmen have also been dealt with. Fifth and most substantial chapter analyzes the US government’s responses to these congressional initiatives. Overall Tibet policy of the United States, as mentioned in government records and as evident in governmental actions, has been analyzed. The dilemma of the United States to balance its commitment to promote and protect human rights and its trade interests and diplomatic relations with the China forms part of this chapter. It also discusses the Chinese official reactions to these US governmental measures. Final and concluding chapter attempts to make some broad generalizations on the basis of the analysis of facts in previous chapters. This chapter also summarizes the thesis for the benefit of readers.

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