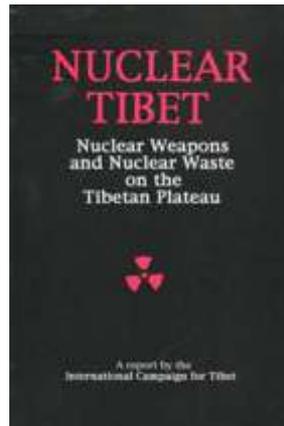




## **50 YEARS AFTER TEST 596: CHINA'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME IN EAST TURKESTAN AND ITS IMPACT TODAY**

**Nuclear Tibet: Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Waste on the Tibetan Plateau**  
Vincent Metten, International Campaign for Tibet (ICT)



Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends of the Uighur Community,

I would like to thank the organizers for inviting ICT to contribute to this conference.

I am not an expert on nuclear matters and have never done any research or academic work on this issue. In case of specific and technical or if you ask very tricky question, I would refer to the nuclear experts present in the room today.

My presentation will address the nuclear issue in Tibet. Its content has been fed by different reports and analysis including by ICT's 1993 report entitled "*Nuclear Tibet: Nuclear Weapons and nuclear waste on the Tibetan Plateau*", result of 1 yearlong research including by a fact-finding mission in Tibet.

### **The role of "the Ninth Academy"**

China entered the nuclear age at a breakneck speed, faster than any other nuclear power.

The origins of China's nuclear usage of Tibet originates in China's frustration at being unable to capture Taiwan for lack of naval and air power. China was determined to equal the nuclear superpowers, long before it had even an ability to mine uranium. The origins of China's nuclear program go back to the foundation of the People's Republic.

The first nuclear facility is known as the Northwest Nuclear Weapons Research and Design Academy, also called the "Nine Academy", because it was under the jurisdiction of the 9<sup>th</sup> Bureau, the most secret organization of China's entire nuclear programme. The Ninth Academy was responsible for designing all of China's nuclear bombs through the mid-1970's.

For this purpose the facility designed and carried out non-nuclear explosions. It also served as a research centre for detonation development, radiochemistry and many other nuclear weapons related activities.

The “Nine-Academy” was the first Chinese nuclear base, constructed end of the 50’s in Qinghai Province few miles away from the Kokonor Lake, the largest Tibetan lake. Parts of the facility were located underground to deter detection and possible destruction in the event of an attack.

The lake was chosen for the testing of submarine launched nuclear missiles, the invulnerable symbols of great power status. Enormous capital was invested in this quest, and was not interrupted by the Cultural Revolution, except for a perilous period when competing revolutionary factions almost destroyed the work.

Today the facility is declassified and open to public. It was closed in 1987 and given to the local government in 1993. Some of its premises can be visited. A museum was established nearby.

### **Nuclear Missiles and weapons :**

ICT’s report underlined that the first nuclear weapon was brought on the Tibetan Plateau in 1971 and stationed in North East of Amdo (basin de Tsaidam = Qaidam).

According to our report, at least 3 nuclear missiles sites were located in Tibet in the year 1993.

For the French expert on Tibet Anne Marie Blondeau, 4 nuclear missile launch sites are located in the Qinghai Province today.

In 2008, according to Hans Kristensen, the director of the nuclear information project of the Federation of America Scientists: “Analysis of new commercial satellite photos has identified an extensive deployment area with nearly 60 launch pads for medium-range nuclear ballistic missiles in Central China ».

### **Prison labor in construction of Nuclear facilities**

There is wide speculation that the massive labor camps which held millions of prisoners during the 60s and 70s provided a steady pool of forced labor for construction of Qinghai’s nuclear facilities and the necessary transport facilities. Therefore prisoners were possibly exposed to unsafe level of radioactivity.

Harry Wu, a former prisoner and China prison expert, reported that labor camps in Qinghai used prisoners to excavate radioactive ore and that prisoners were forced to enter nuclear test sites to perform dangerous work.

Other reports detail the use of common and political prisoners in nuclear facilities in Lanzhou, Gansu Province. According to ICT’s nuclear report there were 10 regiments engaged in constructing Lop Nor facilities, and of the ten to twenty companies in each regiment, only 4 to 5 were composed of volunteers and the rest composed mainly, if not mostly, of prisoners. The use of prison labor to construct nuclear facilities has precedence in the former Soviet Union where the KGB oversaw construction by forced labor following WW2.

In Qinghai, placement of huge prison labor camps adjacent to nuclear missile sites were observed on the Tibetan Plateau.

### **Uranium Mining activities, radioactive Waste and Health effects**

According to a communist party official (Yin Fantang), possibly the largest deposits of uranium in the world are allocated around Lhasa. Other uranium deposits are also located in other parts of Tibet (in Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai Provinces).

In its 1993 report, ICT said that the Chinese government is responsible of the death of at least 50 Tibetans living near uranium mines in North-West of Gansu Province (24 named). The report also highlights the case

of cancers of children living in the proximity of the nuclear research centre that caused their white blood cell to rise uncontrollably.

The amount, the nature and the location of much of the waste may be extremely difficult to estimate. The nature and quantity of radioactive waste generated by the 9<sup>th</sup> Academy remain unknown. One of the obstacles is the absence of systematic studies of health and environmental effects of the Nine Academy's activities and the various uranium mining activities in Tibet.

According to the former Tibet Information Network, Tibetan villagers living near an uranium mine in Ngaba prefecture have reportedly died after drinking water polluted by waste. In between 1990 and 1993, 35 of the approximately 500 people in the village have died within a few hours of developing fever, following by a distinctive form of diarrhea. There have not been such deaths from other villages in the area which are further away from the mines, a villager said.

One important uranium mine in Tibet was opened in 1967 in Gansu Province, and was called Project 792. It was run by the military, annually milled between 140 and 180 tons of uranium-bearing rock until it was officially shut down in 2002.

A private mine company linked to local administration has continued after 2002 to exploit radioactive material for private interests and purposes (operated by Longjiang Nuclear Ltd. – its shareholders a brotherhood of politicians and members of the nuclear ministry).

Sun Xiaodi was a former worker at the No. 792 Uranium Mine and an environmental activist. For more than 20 years, Sun reported on nuclear contamination and the grave impact on the environment and well-being of workers. Sun was honored in 2006 with the Nuclear-Free Future Award. After Sun was awarded the prize, the authorities intensified their monitoring and harassment of him. In July 2009, Sun was ordered to two years of RTL. The RTL decision was based on the authorities' claims that Sun stole information relating to the mine, which he gave to his daughter to supply to overseas organizations, and that he distorted facts, spread rumors, and incited the public with libelous slogans of "nuclear pollution" and "human rights violations." His daughter (Sun Dunbai) was sentenced to one-and-a-half years of RTL on the same charges.

Let me also mention the case of Dolma Kyab, a young Tibetan writer and teacher who was interested in Chinese military camps and in the issue of pollution from mining and the poisoning of rivers by uranium mining. He was sentenced on 16 September 2005 to 10 years prison for 'espionage and stealing or passing state secrets'. He serves his sentence at Chushur prison in Lhasa.

According to a report by Friends of Earth Flanders and Brussels: "Detailed facts on Uranium mining within Tibet is limited due to the secretive nature of the Chinese government occupying the country. There are nine known uranium mines on the Tibetan Plateau, which are used by China's nuclear weapons program and development of nuclear power. Chinese uranium is also one of the country's exports, for example, between 1990 and 2005 it made up 8% of Belgium's total uranium consumption.

Little to no regulations are in place to oversee the disposal of radioactive waste and those hit hardest by such disregard for human and environmental health are local Tibetans. They are excluded from governmental decision on where and how mining is conducted are often displaced and forced to resettle and are not given access to information on the significant health risks associated with exposure to mining waste. China's largest uranium No 792 is reported to dump its untreated irradiated water straight into the Bailong River, a tributary of the Yangtze.

### **Nuclear tests:**

Now on the issue of nuclear tests the core topic of this conference, there are no evidence that any nuclear tests have been, carried out in any Tibetan region (Authenticating Tibet, Thierry Dodin, Question 84). It is unknown how many explosions have been conducted at the Ninth Academy and how many radioactive

material was involved.

As explained by earlier speakers today, tests are well known to have happened at Lop Nor in Xinjiang which is very close to the Qinghai border. According to the website of Nuclear Threat Initiative, 45 nuclear tests have been conducted at Lop Nor (23 in the air, 22 underground).

However, the location of China's nuclear weapons tests at Lop Nor, and the nature of the prevailing winds, mean that northern Tibet received much of the fallout carried by the winds.

In summer, when the Tibetan Plateau, especially bare rock above the vegetation line, heats up, generating a huge low pressure area, the plateau draws in winds from all surrounding areas, including the nuclear testing area in East Turkestan. This wind then circulates around the Tibetan Plateau in an anticlockwise direction across northern Tibet.

This summer wind circulation occurs at the time of the summer monsoon, the main source of rain across Tibet, which means that radioactive isotopes in the atmosphere produced by nuclear explosions would come to earth in rainfall.

Therefore, atmospheric nuclear tests at Lop Nor have regional impacts and may have affected both Uyghurs and Tibetans population.

### **Conclusion**

Tibet is at the centre of South Asia's nuclear states – India, Pakistan and China. The nuclearization and growing militarization of the Tibetan plateau has obvious destabilizing effects on South Asia. Establishing a nuclear weapons free zone on the Plateau thereby partially restoring Tibet as a buffer state would certainly contribute to decrease regional tensions. Nuclear free zone is a complex concept and entity involving the highest level of cooperation, trust and cooperation if they are to be meaningful. There is no doubt that Tibetan plateau is an appealing zone for a nuclear free zone. The Buddhist ethics of its inhabitants, its role as the headwaters for many of Asia's great rivers and its natural role as a buffer in a volatile area make it a logical area.

Thank you for your attention