

'Democracy' NGO Targets China Through Nepal

by Ramtanu Maitra

Fresh from orchestrating the anti-Chinese riots in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, the American non-governmental organization National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is now planning to take up the cudgels against the autocratic Nepalese King Gyanendra. This was reportedly disclosed to Nepalese politicians by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca, during her recent visit to Nepal.

In all likelihood, Nepal is a pretext for the NED to situate itself in a very sensitive area between two Asian giants—India and China—which are trying to work out a process of peaceful cohabitation for maintaining their fast-growing economies. The divisive role used in the past by the NED, under the pretext of establishing democracy in nations who were not “friendly” to the United States, has got both New Delhi’s and Beijing’s attention.

While New Delhi is concerned about its unstable north-east region and its developing relations with Myanmar, which is under sanctions from the United States, nonetheless it is Beijing that should be more worried about NED’s new moves. NED’s presence in Nepal next door to sensitive Tibet has not been overlooked in China. The NED makes no bones of its concerns about Uyghur Chinese, and has funded generously anti-China forces in Tibet.

There is no question that there exist within India some strong promoters of the NED. During the year 2000 visit to India by President Clinton, a proposal was made to set up an Asian center for democracy jointly by the two countries. The center, to be based in New Delhi, is named the Asian Center for Democratic Governance, jointly set up by the Confederation of Indian Industry and the NED. The point man for this outfit is Gautam Adhikari, a former Washington correspondent of the *Times of India* and a member of the NED.

The development worries India’s security and military officers. One reason is that at various times in its two-decade history, the NED has been accused of being a covert CIA front, although it openly receives special appropriations from the U.S. Congress. What no one can doubt is the influence that the NED presently wields in the corridors of power in Washington. Formed during the Reagan era in the 1980s, the NED is also a favorite of the Bush Administration. In his Jan. 22, 2004 State of the Union message, President Bush vowed to double the NED budget.

The NED’s Money Power

One particularly disturbing aspect of the NED is its recent role in the “color-coded revolutions” around Central Asia and in the backwaters of Russia. Those “democratic revolutions” were designed to help Washington, and antagonize Moscow and Beijing. The most notable of the NED’s “conquests” in recent months was Kyrgyzstan. In a March 30, 2005 article, “U.S. Helped to Prepare the Way for Kyrgyzstan’s Uprising,” *New York Times* correspondent Craig S. Smith pointed out that most of the money for the operations there came from the United States, which maintains the largest bilateral pro-democracy program in Kyrgyzstan. The money earmarked for democracy programs in Kyrgyzstan totalled about \$12 million last year. Hundreds of thousands more filters into pro-democracy programs in the country from other U.S. government-financed institutions like the NED. That does not include the money for the Freedom House printing press or Kyrgyz-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a pro-democracy broadcaster, Smith wrote.

The NED’s attention was drawn towards Nepal not only after King Gyanendra’s unilateral assumption of power on Feb. 1, 2005, when he dismantled the democratic institutions and began a brutal repression of the Nepalese Maoists. In fact, almost 16 months after his assumption of power, Peter M. Manikas, Director of Asia Programs, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, in his testimony before the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus, had pointedly criticized the Nepalese King for his anti-democratic activities.

Based on the figures available for 2003, NED doles out over 300 grants per year, with the average grant amount topping \$50,000, and it has four principal initial recipients of funds: the International Republican Institute (IRI); the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI); an affiliate of the AFL-CIO (such as the American Center for International Labor Solidarity); and an affiliate of the Chamber of Commerce (such as the Center for International Private Enterprise). According to NED tax returns, these four groups each received \$4,606,250 in 2001, which they in turn handed out to pro-democracy groups as they saw fit. The idea behind funneling equal amounts to these four groups is to stress the “non-partisan” nature of the NED. Along the same lines, the NED’s board consists of bigwigs from both the Democratic and Republican parties, including 2004 Democratic Presidential hopeful Gen. Wesley Clark (ret.) and Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.).

China’s Concerns

There is little doubt that China is a target of the NED. Reports have confirmed the identification, looting, and arson of Chinese and Turkish properties in Bishkek, the evening the “Tulip Revolution” took to the streets and drove out Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akayev.

China wanted Bishkek to clamp down on the Uyghur diaspora inside Kyrgyzstan. Hitherto China had been very successful in persuading Akayev to repress any Uyghur agitation. In return, Akayev was seeking Chinese investment, foreign aid, and military-political support. If the NED-driven new regime, which professes to be more “democratic,” comes to rule the roost, Beijing fears it might be inclined to support Uyghurs across the border.

The NED has long been promoting the anti-Beijing Uyghur rebels’ cause. They hold regular meetings with the Uyghur American Association in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and had been in the forefront in demanding the release of a rebel Uyghur leader, Rebiya Kadeer. She was released from prison by the Chinese authorities just prior to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s trip to Beijing in March.

In the United States, one of the most vocal supporters of the Uyghur independence is the Jamestown Foundation, which has on its board of directors such powerful and anti-China geopoliticians as R. James Woolsey and Zbigniew Brzezinski. Vice President Dick Cheney and Marcia Carlucci, wife of Frank Carlucci, are former board members. The Foundation charges that China has followed a dangerous path of prioritizing economic reform, whereas it should have followed the Russian model of first “introducing freedom and democracy.” (Of course, in the Russia case, the result was the ruthless looting of the economy by a gang of get-rich-quick oligarchs, leaving the population at large in abject poverty.) The Foundation wants the United States to keep China in check if it “misbehaves” with regard to Taiwan, and implies that China is a terrorism-enabling country, because it has failed to exert sufficient pressure on North Korea.

NED’s operations indicate that it is in absolute harmony with the Jamestown Foundation when it comes to China. For instance, Nury Turkel, president of the Uyghur American Association, in a statement issued recently, said: “There are a few glimmers of hope for Uyghurs. In early 2004, the National Endowment for Democracy, the American lifeline for dissidents worldwide, gave my organization, the Uyghur American Association, a grant to begin human-rights research to document human-rights abuses against Uyghurs.

“In November 2004, Rebiya Kadeer, a Uyghur businesswoman, was awarded the Rafto prize, a prestigious human-rights award. Kadeer was arrested in 1997 while on her way to brief a U.S. congressional delegation on Uyghur human rights. She was finally released by the Chinese authorities on March 17, 2005, on ‘medical parole,’ but it was the continued pressure exerted on the Chinese government by the United States and international human-rights organizations—culminating in Secretary of State Rice’s visit to Beijing—that truly led to Kadeer’s release.”

Nury Turkel also pointed out that President Bush, in October 2001, just a month after 9/11, “specifically warned China not to use the fight against terrorism as an excuse to persecute its minorities.”

According to Beijing, the presence of the NED, backed by the Bush Administration, in Nepal raises the specter of aggressive U.S. involvement on the Tibet issue. Over the last ten years, Nepal had rounded up nearly 6,000 Tibetans who were entering Nepal without proper travel documents, but none could be prosecuted because of the country’s flexible immigration laws. The age-old traditions valid in Nepal, as well as in Tibet, do not allow Buddhists to be prosecuted in the kingdom for petty offenses.

China has asked Nepal to cancel the residential permits of Tibetans and make Tibetan tourists register with the authorities each time they visit the country, but especially if they are coming from bordering India and Bhutan. The pressure on the Tibetan issue came to the fore because the Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, reportedly cancelled his Nepal visit during a recent South Asia tour, since King Gyanendra could not satisfy the Chinese demands.

One of the reasons that China is particularly anxious about the Tibetans in Nepal, is the British government’s reaction when Nepal in January closed down the Tibetan Welfare Centre and Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office, which have for nearly five decades worked for the welfare of Tibetan refugees. “We regret the government action,” said Mitra Pariyar, spokesman of the British Embassy in Kathmandu. The Embassy made a representation to the Nepalese Foreign Affairs Ministry. Obviously, London saw the closure as a move by the Nepal government to placate its neighbor China.

Subsequently, Brad Adams, Asia director for the New York-based Human Rights Watch, issued a statement saying the Refugee Welfare Office has been a critical safety net for tens of thousands of persecuted Tibetans. The HRW’s statement has been interpreted in Beijing as representing official Washington’s voice on the subject.

The NED had long been funding the anti-China elements seeking independence for Tibet. Writing for an Indian daily, *The Asian Age*, on Feb. 13, 2001, journalist Seema Mustafa pointed out that the NED has campaigned tirelessly against the “Chinese occupation of Tibet” and the military regime in Myanmar. “It has used India-based organizations to siphon at least \$400,000 in 1999 alone to groups in Tibet and Burma (Myanmar),” she wrote.

She detailed the NED disbursement of funds, including \$150,000 to the Democratic Voice of Burma; \$55,000 to the National Coalition for Democracy to enable the exiled government of Burma to operate centers in New Delhi and Bangkok; \$50,000 to Non-Violence International to support the India-based Committee for Non-violent Action in Burma; \$20,000 for *Tibet Times* newspaper, published in Dharamsala; \$30,000 for the Tibet Multimedia Centre, producing propaganda material for distribution in India Nepal, and Tibet; \$15,000 for the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy; and \$25,000 for the publication of the *Tibetan Review*, based in New Delhi. It is interesting to note that these figures remained uncontested.