

A Forgotten Chapter in the History of the Northeast Frontier: 1914–36

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ON the fateful day of July 3, 1914, the second Simla Convention was signed and sealed by Sir Arthur Henry McMahon and Lonchen Shatra (actually, while the Lonchen signed and sealed, McMahon initialed and sealed); Ivan Chen, who had initialed the first earlier in April, kept his own counsel. A joint British-Tibetan declaration stipulating that its terms would apply to China only when the latter fell in line with its two other signatories was attached to the Convention. On that same day, in Simla, the new Trade Regulations between British India and Tibet were signed.

In the years immediately following, the Chinese made a number of efforts to resume the Simla basis for negotiations. Three of these initiatives stand out from the rest: 1915, 1916, and 1919—the last being the most elaborate, if formal, and going a long way toward clinching a settlement. None, however, came to anything. Meanwhile, in 1918, in East Tibet, where fighting had been endemic since the October (1911) revolution and, consequentially, Peking's authority had eroded, a truce of sorts and a temporary boundary line were worked out. This was achieved largely through the indefatigable efforts of Eric Teichman, a British consular official then serving in China.

In Delhi, as in Whitehall, the Simla Convention and the McMahon Line, were soon forgotten, and as fate would have it, within days after its conclusion its principal architect, McMahon, had left the Indian shores, never to return. Within weeks, Europe's long-rehearsed dance of death had begun its slow yet certain march in all its tragic grimness. Was it any wonder then that the months and years that elapsed consigned to the limbo of oblivion the busy, hectic parleys at Simla and Delhi and all that had preceded them? The Convention was all but forgotten and, significantly, Delhi's compendium of "treaties, engagements and sanads," the redoubtable Aitchison volumes in their 1928 edition, made no mention of it. Nor, for that matter, did the Survey of India etch the McMahon contours on its maps.

The heavy, deep spell of slumber continued, almost unbroken, for twenty long years when the distant, yet now faintly audible, rumblings of an approaching storm shook the Indian authorities. They, in turn, tried, not always successfully, to rouse their British masters in Whitehall. The pages that follow are largely an effort at reconstructing the sequence of events that revived these old memories, to rephrase Wordsworth, of long, unhappy, far off, things and battles, principally diplomatic, waged long ago.

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During the early months of 1932, the uneasy, albeit now fifteen year old truce in the fighting in Kham was suddenly broken. What started as a series of minor skirmishes, born of rival monastic loyalties across the border, soon developed into full-scale fighting that culminated in the Chinese crossing, in strength, the Teichman Line of 1918. Despite the good offices of the British, which were stoutly spurned in Nanking, and the Lama's own efforts through a direct exchange of messages with General Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese onslaughts continued, and they appeared, for a time, to carry all before them. Later, by June 1933, thanks to the outbreak of a civil war in Szechuan itself, the edge of the fighting was sharply blunted and a settlement of sorts, at the purely local level, was negotiated. In October of that year, the then British Political Officer Williamson, on a visit to Lhasa, informed his principals that the Lama had confirmed that the "terms have been carried out by both sides and that troops have been withdrawn accordingly."¹

Despite his limited success, the Dalai Lama's optimism in negotiating with the local Chinese commanders in Eastern Tibet a successful return of lost Tibetan territory remained a daydream. Here, apart from the traditional Chinese reluctance to oblige, the Lama's death in December 1933 prevented such a consummation. And, with his death, more than a boundary settlement with China was consigned to limbo. Even at the best of times, a political system wherein succession to supreme authority in the state means a long wait for the discovery, installation, and growing into manhood of a new ruler is far from ideal for stability. And Lhasa, on the morrow of the Lama's death, presented the somewhat sorry spectacle of a ruthless struggle for mastery with the Regent and the Kashag arrayed on one side and the Dalai's old favorites on the other. Above them all, in addition, hung the seemingly sinister shadow of the Panchen Lama, whose absence from Tibet, known hostility to the regime in Lhasa, and apparent fondness for Chiang's (Kuomintang) China—on whose political support he leaned heavily—visibly darkened the prevalent gloom.

Nor was Nanking slow in capitalizing on this god-sent opportunity. Before long it announced the despatch of a high-power mission, headed by General Huang Mu-sung, then President of its Committee for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs. General Huang's ostensible purpose was to mourn the 13th Dalai Lama's death but, in reality, his aim was to coax or cajole the new regime in Lhasa into accepting a Chinese hegemony. The wilful, errant, child who had defied his parents so long might yet be persuaded to return to the fold.

Despite his six months (April to October, 1934) of interminable negotiations, interlaced with generous helpings of gold and liberal promises to buy any known recalcitrants, Huang Mu-sung's achievement was far from impressive. In the words of Norbu Dhondhup, the British official in Lhasa, who on behalf of his master, Williamson, kept a close watch on men and affairs while the Huang mission was around, Tibet's admission of Chinese overlordship was to the following effect:

On repeated pressure from Hunag Mu-sung and in order to show the outside world and as Tibet adjoins Chinese territory we admit that we are subordinate to

¹ Williamson to India, October 14, 1933, in *IOR, L/P&S/12/577*.

Abbreviations: *IOR*: India Office Records; *JRCAS*: Journal Royal Central Asian Society (London); *IO*: India Office; *FO*: Foreign Office.

China, but all our external relations and internal administration will be carried on by Tibet.²

Here was a paper admission, however qualified, of Chinese suzerainty that the 13th Dalai Lama would perhaps have never accepted. Besides, however vague, theoretical, and face-saving a formula, Tibet's acceptance of its subordination to China was viewed by Nanking as a "sufficiently definite," meaningful, concession. Nor was that all. From the point of view of the virtual independence it had enjoyed for more than a score of years, the presence in the Tibetan capital of two members of Huang's mission, who were left behind with the wireless installation, and also a Chinese official from Kansu, were compromises which were profoundly disturbing, not least to Tibet's southern neighbor. To meet what seemed a deliberate, high-powered Chinese offensive, Williamson, then Political Officer in Sikkim, suggested that he visit Lhasa, "sufficiently supplied with money," to offer the regime

1. exemption from payment for munitions for three years in the first instance;
2. training of more Tibetan officers and troops at British expense;
3. allowing it to buy more arms.³

Further, Williamson's brief stipulated that should a permanent Chinese representative appear at Lhasa, the question of appointing a British counterpart was to be "seriously considered." Again, the desirability of "becoming a party" to any agreement reached between Tibet and China was to be kept in mind. Tibet was to be treated as completely autonomous, and no negotiations were to be entered into with China without Lhasa being fully represented "on equal terms."

It followed that every possible effort was to be made to buttress Tibet's morale in resisting Chinese pressures and to "save her from domination" by the Nanking regime; for while the

re-establishment of Chinese control might not be an actual military danger [it] would be at least a source of constant irritation and annoyance along our North-East frontier.⁴

Out of the blue, the British suddenly became aware of their Indian empire's north-east frontier which had, over the years since the Simla Conference, been largely neglected, if perhaps forgotten. This awareness was now the greater in that the political vacuum in Lhasa, created by the Dalai Lama's death, boded ill for the stability of the new regime. It may be useful to summarize these intervening developments since 1913-14, if only in passing, because they help to put in proper perspective the brief given to Williamson on his visit to Lhasa in 1935.

The agreement at Simla, including the terms of the Convention, the Tibet Trade Regulations, and the maps showing the India-Tibet and the Inner-Outer Tibet boundaries, did not, for a variety of reasons, become widely known for many years. Apart from the fact that barely a month after they had been concluded, the onset of World War I thrust them completely in the background, there was the fateful departure of McMahon from the Indian scene—he was appointed High Commissioner in Egypt. Besides, in the initial stages the view held was that until an under-

² Williamson to India, January 20, 1935, in *IOR, L/P&S/12/36/12*.

³ *Loc cit.*

⁴ *Loc cit.*

standing with Russia had been arrived at, the latter could legitimately object to the terms of the Convention.⁵ Despite the more pressing preoccupations of the War, there might have been an element of urgency to seek such an understanding if the Chinese had agreed to sign the compact. Since they had refused, Russia was officially informed and assured that it would be consulted before the British acted upon any of the provisions of the 1914 Convention which came into conflict with the 1907 Agreement between the two countries. This happened on July 11, 1914, a little over a week after the Simla negotiations had broken down. As the Chinese had persisted in their refusal to sign throughout the year 1915, the British Foreign Office held that the

Tibetan question has since been modified so profoundly. . . . that the acceptance by the Russian Government of its [Convention of 1914] provisions in the limited form proposed last summer would no longer seem to possess the same value as an off-set to a revision in their favour of the existing arrangement with regard to Northern Afghanistan, as it did when the negotiations were suspended.⁶

The above view was shared by the then Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, who felt that India's interests in Tibet were

safeguarded for the time being by the Anglo-Tibetan declaration and there appears no prospect of China signing the Convention in near future. I therefore strongly deprecate any concession whatever to Russia as price of her prospective consent to Convention on the chance of its eventually being signed by China.⁷

There was a slight flaw in this line of reasoning insofar as Russia could, strictly speaking, object to the British availing themselves of the Anglo-Tibetan declaration of July 3, 1914, on the plea that insofar as it conflicted with the 1907 Convention, it was "invalid." Further, Russia could also refuse to amend the 1907 Convention "except in return for a quid pro quo" in Afghanistan.⁸

In the thick of World War I, with Russia on the brink of a mighty revolution, the India Office was playing with the idea of securing Russian consent to a revision of the 1907 clauses in return for the British accommodating them on a freer access to the Dardanelles. Thus in 1916, India was to suggest that Russia might "reasonably agree" to

our continuing the present practice, to which she has as yet taken no exception, and allow us directly to advise and assist the Tibetan Government—in despite of Article II of the Tibetan Agreement of 1907—and herself abstain from all interference in this country.⁹

Later in October 1917 this course of action was ruled out by the British Minister in Petrograd; he held it to be a "most inopportune moment" to negotiate,¹⁰ con-

⁵ Grey to Buchanan, July 10, 1914, in *IOR, L/P&S/10/455*. In a communication to the India Office on July 14, 1914, the Foreign Office made it clear that HMG "can only act upon the initialled (Simla) Convention so far as it does not violate the 1907 Agreement." For details *IOR, L/P&S/10/344*.

⁶ *FO to IO*, April 30, 1915, in *IOR, L/P&S/10/455*. Earlier, the Russian Ambassador in London had submitted a memorandum suggesting that questions relating to Afghanistan "be settled in accordance with the wishes then (namely, 1914) formulated by the Russian Government." *Loc cit.*

⁷ Viceroy to Secretary of State, May 13, 1915, in *IOR, L/P&S/10/455*.

⁸ Secretary of State to Viceroy, May 17, 1915, in *ibid.*

⁹ Extract from secret letter, No. 85, from India, September 29, 1916, in *ibid.*

¹⁰ Buchanan to Balfour, October 2, 1917, in *IOR, L/P&S/10/3260/1917*, Parts 1-3.

sidering the forceful impact of events which had intervened. By the end of the year, the Foreign Office deprecated any suggestion regarding British representation at Lhasa lest it should offer Russia an excuse for tearing up all agreements concerning Afghanistan, a contingency "of which the disadvantages would be greater than any advantage" accruing in Tibet.¹¹

By 1918 while outlining the Indian "Desiderata for Peace Settlement," the Political Department of the India Office noted that it was necessary to

wait until there is a Russian Government with which we can negotiate and then endeavour to get rid of the self-denying ordinance in Tibet without the embarrassing conditions that the Tsar's Government, desired to impose in 1914.¹²

This, however, was not to be. Contrary to a good deal of wishful thinking, the Bolsheviks stayed on in power and, in the initial stages at any rate, scrapped all treaties and agreements—both secret and open—to which Tsarist Russia had been a party. Later, in 1921, the British Foreign Office ruled that the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 was no longer to be regarded as valid and, therefore, such restrictions as it imposed on British action in Tibet would not operate any longer.¹³

Release from Russian anxiety was to mark the beginnings of a new phase in which China took the place of Russia as far as British sensitivity was concerned. Initially, it may be recalled, the publication of the 1914 Convention had been held in abeyance in the hope that China might, at some stage, accept it—albeit, in a modified form. There was also a lurking suspicion that if it were to be published in its entirety, it would not only ruin such chances as there were of reaching an accommodation with China but also give the latter a handle to mount a strident anti-British campaign of "imperialist designs" on Tibet.

As early as February 1920, the Foreign Office in London, desirous of including the texts of the Simla Convention and the joint Indo-Tibetan declaration of July 3, in the forthcoming issue of "State Papers," asked the India Office about the "expediency" of publishing them.¹⁴ In reply, the then Secretary of State for India, Mr. Montagu ruled that

so long as there remains any prospect of a final settlement of the Tibetan question by negotiations with the Chinese government it will be better not to give unnecessary publicity to the provisional arrangements of 1914.¹⁵

Publication was accordingly withheld.

Five years later, in 1925, the India Office informed the Foreign Office that although the India-Tibet Trade Regulations of 1914 might be regarded as being in force between the two countries, their publication may be held up for fear it would

¹¹ FO to IO, December 21, 1917, in *ibid.*

¹² Indian "Desiderata for Peace Settlement," (Note by Political Department, India Office), para 23, in *ibid.*

¹³ The 1907 Convention was formally cancelled by Article II of the Anglo-Russian Treaty of August 7, 1924.

¹⁴ FO to IO, February 26, 1920, Proc 134 in *Foreign*, External B, May 1920, 134-135.

¹⁵ IO to FO, March 8, 1920, Proc 135 in *ibid.*

“have the effect of arousing in China renewed public interest in Tibet, and anti-British comments.”¹⁶

Publication, however, was to be permitted if the Government of India thought it “desirable” or attached “importance to it.”¹⁶ Delhi, of course, did neither.

Three years later, in 1928, when the Tibet chapter of Aitchison’s Treaties was being revised, the Government of India omitted any explicit reference to the Trade Regulations of 1914 lest

publication now of the facts of the Declaration of July 3, 1914 (though it seems unlikely that China is still unaware of its existence) may force her to take overt notice of it, and so afford a fresh handle for anti-British propaganda.¹⁷

The result was that Aitchison’s new edition carried a colorless narrative that omitted not only all mention of the Trade Regulations but also of the Convention itself and the joint Declaration by Britain (for India) and Tibet! Significantly, this was a position in which both the India as well as the Foreign Office concurred.¹⁸

In 1934, the question presented itself in yet another form, for a Declaration in Council was deemed necessary in regard to the British Trade Agents’ entitlement to exercise of foreign jurisdiction in Tibet. Since the Trade Regulations of 1914 from which this authority was derived had not been agreed to by the Chinese Government, it was felt that if they were now specifically cited in the “Declaration” in question, the Chinese might conceivably take exception to it. As Walton at the India Office pointed out, “It has been our policy in recent years to avoid raising questions relating to Tibet with China as far as possible and to let sleeping dogs lie.”

Two alternatives presented themselves: the first, to cite in the proposed Order-in-Council the authority of the Trade Regulations of 1914 (and the fact that these were not published, “could not matter”); or second, to mention the Trade Regulations of 1908, to which China had agreed, and which appeared to be “just as extensive.” But as far as the latter were concerned

a possible disadvantage of referring to them might be that China on 9 October, 1928 had addressed a note to His Majesty’s Minister, Peking, which China might represent as constituting the demand for revision referred to in Art. XIII of the Trade Regulations.

As it happened, the 1928 “note” had been ignored. But, it was now argued, a reference to the 1908 Trade Regulations “might conceivably” bring the Chinese into the field.¹⁹

The long and short of it was that “a general recital of treaty rights” in the Order-

¹⁶ IO to FO, July 3, 1925, in IOR, L/P&S/10/857. Also IO to India, August 13, 1925, and FO to IO, July 27, 1925, both in *ibid.*

¹⁷ India to IO May 22, 1928, in IOR, L/P&S/10/1192.

¹⁸ India Office approved of the Government of India’s suggestion, as did the Foreign Office. For details, IO to FO, June 19 and FO to IO, July 5, 1928, both in *ibid.*

¹⁹ India Office minute, Walton to Legal Adviser, September 28, 1933 in IOR, L/P&S/10/575. Also see Foreign Department, Simla to Chief Secretary, Punjab, July 1, 1933; Panjab to Foreign Department, June 27, 1933; Chief Secretary, UP, to Foreign Department, June 19, 1933 and FO to IO, August 18, 1933, all in *ibid.*

in-Council, in place of any specific mention of the Regulations of 1908 or of 1914, was deemed adequate for the purpose, a viewpoint with which India concurred.²⁰

A footnote may be added here. Repeated references in the preceding lines to the Trade Regulations are borne out by the nature of the documentary evidence alone. These should not, however, lead to any loss of perspective. For what is patent is that for nearly two decades after 1914, the dubious risk of attracting Russian, and later Chinese, attention continued to be the principal reason for the non-publication of the Simla Convention and its adjuncts, the Trade Regulations and the India Tibet boundary agreement.

In 1935, the Foreign and Political Department in New Delhi seemed suddenly to awaken to the realities of the situation. Part of the explanation may perhaps lie in the fact that the travels of W. F. Kingdon-Ward, the botanist, brought into bold relief the question of the McMahon Line. Kingdon-Ward who, in 1934-35, traversed Monyul, in Balipara, caused New Delhi considerable embarrassment²¹ by his highly critical views on the "casual way" things were being done. Inter alia, he revealed

that while the main [Himalayan] range might be de jure frontier, there would be no doubt that the de facto frontier lay much further south since the Tibetan Government, through Tsona Dzong and Twang, was actively. . . . administering the whole of Monyul, while the influence of the Tibetan Church extended almost to the edge of the Assam plains—that is, into territory which had nothing to do with Monyul except propinquity.

The solution he proffered was "direct" administration and "effective occupation by 1939, or at the latest, 1940. . . . The alternative is complete retreat."

He forecast the future with a grimness that sounds almost frightening,

sooner or later India must stand face to face with a potential enemy looking over that wall into her garden—or fight to keep her out of the Tsonpo valley. With Monyul a Tibetan province, the enemy would already be within her gates.²²

And although Captain Nevill, then Political Officer at Balipara had, after a visit, sounded a similar note as early as 1928: "Should China gain control of Tibet, the Tawang country is particularly adapted for a secret and early entrance into India,"²³ the botanist's warning was to prove more effective.

Not long after Kingdon-Ward, the astounding "discovery" was made that in Assam there had been "considerable misunderstanding" as to where the international frontier between India and Tibet lay. In a letter to Shillong on November 28, 1935 New Delhi asked whether it would

²⁰ The Legal Adviser in the India Office was of the view that the Trade Regulations of 1914 "being completed and operative" between India and Tibet "would be sufficient foundation" for an Order-in-Council. Minute, September 29, 1933 in *ibid.* Also see Viceroy to Secretary of State, January 16, 1934 in *ibid.*

²¹ Gould noted that as a result of Williamson's visit to Lhasa, in August-November, 1935, "The attitude of mind engendered. . . . facilitated a friendly settlement of the Kingdon-Ward escapade which otherwise might have tended to prejudice. . . ." Gould's report on "British Mission to Lhasa, 1935," in *IOR, L/P&S/12/36/12.*

²² F Kingdon-Ward, "The Assam Himalaya: Travels in Balipara," *JRCAS*, XXV, 4, October, 1938, 610-19 and XXVII, 2, April, 1940 211-20. Ward's addresses to the RCAS, reproduced in the *JRCAS*, were based on the earlier (1934-35) travels, referred to in the text.

²³ Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam, 1883-1941* (Shillong, 1942), p. 291.

accept the latter [the India-Tibet frontier] 'as delimited by Sir Henry McMahon and accepted by Tibet' as a correct presentation of the position as regards the frontier between Assam tribal areas and Tibet.²⁴

At the same time, New Delhi had told the Political Officer in Sikkim what it thought of Assam's ignorance of its territorial limits in the context of the boundary dispute with Bhutan. The matter, New Delhi argued, was complicated by a likely claim that Tibet might stake

to the area in the foothills between the Deosham and the Dhansiri Rivers and his [Williamson's] recommendation is apparently coloured by the thought that it might be expedient to cede to Bhutan, whose foreign relations we control, an area in these hills before Tibet, a less controllable neighbour, can present an effective claim.

Since, in the Kingdon-Ward case Tibet was said to have reaffirmed the Red (namely, McMahon) Line, it appeared that it (Tibet) "could not in any case put forward a claim to sovereignty over any territory in the foothills east of Bhutan."

But even if it did, neither the "presentation" nor the "acceptance" of such a claim by Tibet was to cloud the issue of the "inviolability" of the Indian frontier.²⁵

On February 6, 1936, New Delhi categorically informed Assam that it was

now clear that the whole of the hill country upto the 1914 McMahon Line is within the frontier of India and is therefore a tribal area under the control of the Governor of Assam acting as Agent for the Governor-General.

At the same time Shillong was asked if in the course of the last 20 years it had exercised "any measure of political control" in this area; and whether, to its knowledge, the Tibetan government honored the frontier, more particularly in the vicinity of Tawang.²⁶ To all this Shillong's reply was that to ascertain the precise situation, it had asked the Political Officer, Balipara, to tour the tribal area south of the McMahon Line.²⁷

On April 9, 1936, New Delhi communicated its "findings" to London and underscored the fact that the matter was deserving of urgent attention for

there is a real danger that important matters of this kind may go wrong if we refrain any longer from publishing our agreements with Tibet. . . . the Government of India think that there would be advantage in inserting in their published record copies of the 1914 Convention, the exchange of notes on the boundary between Sir Henry McMahon and the Tibetan Government and the Trade Regulations.²⁸

Three arguments were adduced. One, that failure to publish might well be used by the Chinese "in support" of their argument that "no ratified agreement between India and Tibet" was in existence. Two, in the context of India's new (1935) constitution it was necessary to define the tribal areas in the northeast which it was

²⁴ Caroe to Hutton (Chief Secretary, Assam), November 28, 1935, in *IOR, L/P&S/12/36/23*, Part I.

²⁵ Caroe to Batty (Trade Agent, Gyantse), November 28, 1935, in *ibid.* Also see Williamson to India, June 10, 1935, in *ibid.*

²⁶ Caroe to Dawson (Chief Secretary, Assam), February 6, 1936 in *IOR, L/P&S/12/36/12*.

²⁷ Dawson to Caroe, February 28, 1936, in *ibid.*

²⁸ Caroe to Walton (India Office), April 9, 1936, in *ibid.*

proposed to place under the political control of the government of Assam. And finally, the impending separation of Burma, which was responsible for a part of the frontier, made such a definition imperative.

Nor should any more time be lost, for failure hitherto to show the correct frontier had meant that such atlases as the *Times* delineated it wrongly—along the foothills of Assam.

Reaction in Whitehall was far from enthusiastic. Walton noted that the proposal was not “free from doubt” and that the arguments advanced were “unconvincing.” The “only thing” that went in its favor, he remarked, was the “not improbable” assumption that the Chinese, aware of the Indo-Tibetan declaration of July 3, 1914, would view its non-publication as an argument “that we doubt” the agreement’s validity. Walton’s conclusion, therefore, was that there was “no strong balance” of argument “either for or against” publication and that if the Foreign Office were willing, “we *might perhaps* decide to publish.”²⁹

Denys Bray, then a Member of the Secretary of State’s Council in London, while generally agreeing with Walton put in a rider. Inter alia, he stipulated that

Ostentatious publication would be unwise and unless the Government of India are contemplating a re-issue of the Aitchison volume, they should. . . . wait for it. But the maps might be corrected in any case, in the absence of any special objection.³⁰

The Foreign Office concurred and India was informed accordingly. Writing to Olaf (later Sir Olaf) Caroe, then Deputy Secretary in the Indian Foreign Department, on July 16, 1936, Walton, however, queried, “would it not suffice to arrange for publication when the next edition of Aitchison’s treaties is produced in normal course?”

Besides, he warned, it was “most desirable” to avoid “unnecessary publicity” and therefore the subject was to be kept from the press or news agencies. Additionally, the text of the declaration of July 3, 1914 was not to be published, its place being taken by an explanatory note. All this notwithstanding, the Survey of India “could show” the frontier correctly “forthwith.”³¹

In the process of formulating its policy in this case, Whitehall was not unaffected by developments in Outer Mongolia. It may be recalled that the conclusion, on March 12 (1936), in Ulan Bator of a “Protocol of Mutual Assistance” between the Soviet Union and Mongolia had provoked a strong protest from China. The latter had maintained that insofar as Mongolia was “an integral part” of the Chinese Republic, “no foreign state” could conclude with it any treaty or agreement. It followed, Nanking maintained, that the Protocol was “illegal” and that China could, “in no circumstances,” recognize it nor was in any way “bound” by it. The Chinese protest was, of course, categorically rejected by the Soviet Union,³² but the India Office felt concerned lest Nanking should take a similar line with respect to any treaty

²⁹ India Office minute by Walton, June 4, 1936, in *ibid.*

³⁰ India Office minute by Denys Bray, June 8, 1936, in *ibid.*

³¹ *FO to IO*, July 8, 1936 in *ibid.* Also see *IO to FO*, June 13, 1936 and Walton to Caroe, July 16, 1936, both in *ibid.*

³² For the texts of China’s protest, April 7, 1936 and of Soviet rejection, April 8, 1936 *IOR*, L/P&S/12/36/23, Part I. The Soviet Union maintained that the new protocol did not change the “formal or actual relations” between China and Outer Mongolia, nor did it affect the “sovereignty” of China “in the slightest degree” for the Peking agreement of 1924 still “retains its force.”

“between us” and Tibet. Mercifully, these considerations did not modify the “tentative support” which Whitehall now gave to India’s “desire to publish.”³³

Nor did New Delhi take long in reaching its own conclusions. It resolved to take “immediate steps” for showing the international frontier in this sector in the Survey of India maps while, and “with as little delay as possible,” a revised edition of vol. XIV of Aitchison was to be published. To have waited for an overall revision of the series, as suggested by the India Office, “would take 15–20 years.”³⁴

In retrospect, in the decades that followed, the “forgotten chapter” had a profound impact on developments in Tibet and on the frontier. For one, it was argued somewhat convincingly that the (British) Indian refusal, or inability, to make the (McMahon) Line good even on paper, and over a span of twenty long years, cast profound doubts on its authenticity. For another, Lhasa—and this despite the conclusive character of the March 1914 exchange of notes—put forth the view that the validity of the Line in general, and the cession of Tawnag in particular, was conditional upon China’s acceptance of the Inner Tibet-Outer Tibet frontier and, by implication, of the autonomy of the Dalai Lama’s regime. The fact that the Chinese, the Kuomintang no less than the Communists who succeeded them, stuck tenaciously to their own political contours of the frontier added a third dimension to a situation already sufficiently complicated. The story of how the Raj papered over the cracks which it bequeathed to an independent India and how the latter failed to emulate that example, belongs to another chapter which, being much more recent, is not nearly that obscure.

³³ India Office minute by Rumbold, July 9, 1936, in *ibid.* This was just a week before Walton wrote to Caroe according Whitehall’s approval to India’s proposed course of action.

³⁴ Viceroy to Secretary of State, August 17, 1936 in *ibid.*