

TIBET
AT BAY

A. H. STANTON CANDLIN

American-Asian Educational Exchange

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Foreword

In 1968, the American-Asian Educational Exchange inaugurated a new series of monographs on contemporary Asian affairs to provide timely materials on problem areas and issues having special significance for the Asian policy of the United States. The series has been designed primarily for the academic community, both teachers and students at the college level, and for the informed citizen who gives serious attention to the main problems of international politics. The present volume, *Tibet at Bay*, is the seventh title to appear in this Monograph Series.

The tragedy of Tibet has already been forgotten by most people. This ancient theocratic state, hidden in the vastness of the world's highest mountain ranges and traditionally aloof from the politics of the nations, was suddenly invaded in 1950 by the newly installed Chinese Communist regime and conquered in the name of a spurious Chinese claim to "sovereignty." Here was the first dramatic example of the kind of international conduct that the world might expect from the "New China."

In the pages that follow, A. H. Stanton Candlin reviews the history of that infamous conquest, and carefully analyzes the brutal record of Communist China's occupation of Tibet over the past two decades. It is a history of unexampled ferocity and the violent repression of a peaceful and harmless people, amounting in the author's judgment to virtual genocide. The Tibetans have resisted their conquerors heroically, and even today the flame of that resistance still burns. But Mr. Candlin concludes that "their prospects over the longer term give cause for the gravest concern. What they apparently face is an irrevocable Communist determination to obliterate their race and culture."

The American people would do well to ponder again this melancholy record. In recent months, there has been a good deal of wishful thinking about the future of United States relations with the

mainland regime. The expulsion of the Republic of China on Taiwan from the United Nations, and the seating of a Chinese Communist delegation, have been hailed by many as a "necessary step" toward international "stability." Perhaps so; but the Tibetan people—whose desperate pleas for help were twice ignored by the same United Nations—would hardly agree. The Chinese Communists are now strongly entrenched in the Roof of the World, which they have transformed into a powerful military bastion. If their forward policy in Tibet is the true face of the New China, then the peace of Asia stands in permanent jeopardy.

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Frank N. Trager, *Chairman*
American-Asian Educational Exchange

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1

Introduction

Tibet, the "Roof of the World," with an area of about five hundred thousand square miles, occupies a position of the highest strategic importance in Asia. It is bounded to the northwest by Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan), on the west by Ladakh (Kashmir), on the east by China (Szechuan, Yunnan, and Kansu), and on the south by India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Assam. It is a key to the struggle for Asia, now proceeding; and although seemingly a captive nation within the bondage of Communist China, it is still a combatant in that struggle.

The enslavement of the Tibetans under conditions designed to subjugate and even extirpate a people accustomed to freedom and independence from the earliest times, was the subject of an impartial investigation by the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva. On the title page of its report, *Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic*, published in 1960, there appears a quotation from a remarkable and prophetic statement made in the Political Testament of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, who died in 1933:¹

"It may happen here in the center of Tibet, that the religion and the secular administration will be similarly attacked from without and within, and the holders of the Faith, the glorious rebirths will be broken down and left without a name. As regards

¹ Quoted in Sir Charles Alfred Bell, *Portrait of the Dalai Lama* (London: Collins, 1946), p. 30. The "Great Thirteenth" had been influenced by his knowledge of events in Outer Mongolia after the Bolshevik Revolution.

the monasteries and the priesthood, their lands and properties will be destroyed. The officers of state, ecclesiastical and lay, will find their lands seized and their every other property confiscated, and they themselves made to serve their enemies or wander about the country as beggars do. All beings will be sunk in hardship and fear, and the nights will drag on slowly in suffering."

All the terms of this prophecy have sadly come to pass. In its report, the International Commission of Jurists severely condemned the flagrant violation of human rights by the Chinese Communists in Tibet, including "evidence of a systematic design to destroy religious belief" and "to destroy a religious group;" "inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction;" "measures designed to prevent births" (i.e., operations carried out on individuals without their consent); and the "forcible transfer of children to another group."

Since the date of this report, conditions have substantially worsened.

The presence of a strong European power in India before 1948, in the shape of the British-controlled Government of India, aware of its responsibilities for the defense of the subcontinent against aggression either from Russia or from China (or, later, Japan), acted as a guarantee of Tibetan independence and security. The absence of that power after the partition of India and the upsurge of Communist power in China led inevitably to the Chinese incursions into Tibet in 1950 and to the eventual Tibetan uprising in 1959.

The Tibetans have always insisted upon their country's sovereignty. In a letter addressed to President Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1943, a Tibetan Regent wrote that "Tibet has been free and independent from earliest history." This was a statement of fact that has often been disputed by China, which has sought to assert its overlordship and authority in Tibet throughout history. In 1943, the geographical situation of the country had special significance because of the Allied desire to use its routes as a means of supplying China during World War II. But it proved impossible to do so because of Tibetan opposition and Lhasa's determination to protect not only its

sovereignty but also its neutrality in the war. Such attitudes only served to underline its actual independence and the weakness of Chinese claims to influence in Tibetan affairs.

On the other hand, it is a matter of historical fact that under the Mongol (1280-1368) and Manchu (1644-1911) dynasties, the Dalai Lamas—the “God-Kings” ruling Tibet—had participated in a special relationship with the Chinese sovereigns which can only be understood in terms of Chinese feudal law. This relationship implied Chinese “suzerainty,” which, however, did not convey any sense of loss of independence by Tibet. Thus, the protocol observed when meetings took place between the rulers of China and Tibet during these periods was of a kind that clearly reflected the independent status of the Tibetan government. In any case, the relationship between the Chinese emperors and the Lamaist potentates was episodic rather than continuous; and it also needs to be remembered here that the Chinese throne tended to regard all with whom it came in contact as inferiors and as tribute bearers. Under the traditional arrangement, acts of the kind now being perpetrated throughout the country would have been unthinkable; although it is true that in the last days of the Manchus, a punitive expedition under General Chao Erh-feng, with a force of about two thousand troops, entered Tibet as far as Lhasa in order to reimpose the “suzerainty” of the failing dynasty.

The immediate reason for this invasion was Chinese dissatisfaction with the attitude of the Tibetans, who had become reconciled to a new relationship with the Government of India that had developed after the British Younghusband Expedition to Lhasa in 1904. That expedition, in turn, had been brought about by evidence of Russian activity in Tibet which centered around the activities and the machinations of a mysterious figure named Agvan Dorjief, a lama and also a Russian citizen who came originally from Buryat Mongolia. Through him, the Russians were gaining influence with the Dalai Lama—or so the British believed—in a manner which they were not prepared to tolerate. But the actual result of the British invasion was not the weakening of Tibetan independence, but rather the creation of a situation which strengthened it. This was the effect of the bilateral treaty signed by the British commander and the Tibetan government after the capture of Lhasa. Its very nature, and even the

exaction of an indemnity, were a recognition that Tibet was, in fact, independent of China.²

Thereafter, the Tibetans never left in doubt that they intended to assert and maintain their independent status. When Yuan Shih-kai, the President of the new Republic of China, sent a telegram to the Dalai Lama in 1912 expressing regret for the excesses of Chinese troops in Tibet during the Chinese Revolution, and offering to "restore" the Dalai Lama to his former rank, the Tibetan government took grave exception to this patronizing suggestion. The Dalai Lama replied that he did not need to ask the Chinese for any rank, and that he would continue to exercise both temporal and ecclesiastical rule in Tibet. This was, in effect, a general declaration of independence for Tibet, and one which only took account of a situation that had already existed for some time. Hugh Richardson, the last British Representative in Lhasa, who subsequently represented the new Indian government after Partition, wrote in 1959:³

"When the Manchu Dynasty collapsed in 1911, Tibet completely severed that link and until the Communist invasion in 1950 enjoyed full *de facto* independence from Chinese control."

Traditionally, there had been a nearly stabilized triangle of forces in Asia, with Tibet as the pivot and whose sides diverged towards

² The so-called Lhasa Convention was signed on September 7, 1904, by the British commissioner, Colonel F. E. Younghusband, and the Tibetan plenipotentiary, Gaden Tri-Rimpoche, who affixed the seal of the Dalai Lama.

While the Tibetans undoubtedly suffered a severe shock at the time of the Younghusband expedition, they soon realized that the British had no major territorial designs on their country. They also came to recognize that the Government of India's desire to maintain the integrity and national independence of Tibet as a buffer state embodied very important advantages for Lhasa's own policy of restraining Chinese influence to the extent possible.

The Lhasa Convention contained important provisions connected with the right of access to Gyantse, Gartok, and Yatung, where trading markets were to be maintained. It imposed an indemnity on the Tibetans, as well as certain restrictions on fortifications in the frontier areas and along the route from India to Lhasa. Most importantly, it committed the Tibetan government to the following undertakings, which it would not infringe without the previous consent of the British government:

- "a. No portion of Tibetan territory shall be ceded, sold, leased, mortgaged, or otherwise given for occupation to any foreign power.
- b. No such power shall be permitted to intervene in Tibetan affairs.
- c. No Representatives or Agents of any Foreign Power shall be admitted to Tibet.
- d. No concessions for railways, roads, telegraphs, mining, or other rights shall be granted to any Foreign Power or the subject of any Foreign Power. In the event of consent to such concessions being granted, similar or equivalent concessions shall be granted to the British government.
- e. No Tibetan revenues, whether in kind or in cash, shall be pledged or assigned to any Foreign Power, or to the subject of any foreign power."

For the full text, see Hugh Edward Richardson, *Tibet and Its History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 253-257.

³ Hugh Edward Richardson, *Red Star over Tibet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

Moscow, Delhi, and Peking. With the assumption of power by the Congress Party and the exit of the British from India, it was obvious to many, the Tibetans certainly included, that there would be a displacement of this pattern of forces, since Indian ideas about the role of Tibet were likely to be so different from those of their predecessors. At an early stage, much damage was done to the Tibetan position during Sino-Indian discussions on Tibet and other frontier problems. The Chinese came to realize the weakness of India's attitude and New Delhi's apparent inability to distinguish between "suzerainty" and "sovereignty." It became clear that the Indians would not oppose any move that the Chinese might make in Tibet.

The first Indian ambassador posted to Peking, K. M. Pannikar, wrote of his mission in the following terms:⁴

"I knew like everyone else that with a Communist China, cordial and intimate relations were out of the question, but I was fairly optimistic about working out an area of collaboration by eliminating causes of misunderstanding, rivalry, etc. The only area where our interests overlapped was in Tibet and, knowing the importance that every Chinese government, including the Kuomintang, had attached to exclusive Chinese authority over the area I had, even before I started for Peking, come to the conclusion that the British policy (which we were supposed to have inherited) of looking upon Tibet as an area in which we had special political interests could not be maintained. The Prime Minister had also, in general, agreed with this view. So there was nothing which I could then foresee that would make my mission unduly difficult, exciting, or troublesome."

In short, the Chinese Communists would quickly learn from conversations with the new Indian representative that they would be entirely free to embark upon the subjugation of Tibet, and that the Indian government would not attempt to enforce the policies designed by the British to safeguard the independence of Tibet.

There was little doubt that the approach of the new regime in Peking would also be very different, although few could have visualised at that time the extent of the difference or the imminence of the

⁴ Quoted in J. P. Mitter, *Betrayal of Tibet* (Bombay and New York: Allied Publishers, 1964), p. 52.

threat which it implied. The Chinese Communists took no account of Tibetan claims to independence and neutrality, and looked to the rapid assertion of direct control over the country. In part, this was justified in terms of alleged British and American designs on Tibet:⁵

“Their thoughts now turn to Nehru of India. They hope to use India as their Asian base to resist the new democracies of Asia. They have earmarked Tibet exactly like Taiwan as a part of their defense system. To preserve their rule over India, they must control Tibet; that is the real program of imperialism.”

In January 1950, only a few days after the Indian government had recognized the Peking regime, Marshal Chu Teh, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army, made an announcement to the effect that the “liberation” of Tibet was imminent. The first move in this direction was the occupation of Tachienlu, the gateway to Lhasa; and thereafter, intense preparations were set in train to improve the condition of roads leading into Tibet. A series of frontier skirmishes began between Chinese and Tibetan border troops.

On May 22, Peking Radio addressed an appeal to the Tibetan government and people asking them to “achieve the peaceful liberation of Tibet.” The broadcast contained an assertion of Chinese overlordship of Tibet which was described as “Chinese territory.” There was also a statement to the effect that geographical remoteness constituted no obstacle to the PLA. This was an unmistakable threat which the Tibetan government took so seriously that it posted a mission to Kalimpong in Bengal (India) in order to provide a negotiating channel as necessary with the newly appointed Chinese ambassador in New Delhi.

At about the same time, apart from the normal intelligence reports available to the Indian government, the New China News Agency issued an extremely aggressive statement in August on behalf of General Liu Po-cheng, then Chairman of the Southwest Military Affairs Commission and Commander of the Second Field Army, in which he declared that Chinese forces would soon enter Tibet to liberate the territory and to drive out “the aggressive influence of

⁵ *New Construction* (Peking), September 22, 1949.

British and American imperialism," and to bring Tibet back to the "motherland big family." No one cognizant of the situation could possibly have regarded these as idle threats, least of all Nehru. It seems evident that his government willingly acquiesced in the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese.

During the Summer of 1950, the Chinese offered the Tibetans a choice between peaceful surrender or military conquest. It is much to their credit that, knowing their own military inadequacy and lack of preparedness, and having, besides, the greatest aversion to the use of armed force, the Lhasa government was prepared to resist rather than surrender without a fight. Tibetan attempts to establish lines of communication through a neutral intermediary, in order that they would be in a position to negotiate, were blocked by Peking; and large-scale hostilities began in October.

The Chinese Assault on Tibet, 1950

On October 7, 1950, Mao Tse-tung ordered the People's Liberation Army to invade Tibet. The local Chinese commander, Chang Kuo-hua, promptly led fifty thousand seasoned troops across the Yangtse to attack nine Tibetan *taipen* or regiments⁶ in position around Chamdo. In view of the disparity of the forces engaged, and the absence of much Tibetan will to resist (apart from that shown by Khamba tribesmen), the result was a foregone conclusion. After several engagements, the Chinese stormed and captured Chamdo on October 19. Immediately thereafter, the Southwest Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party and the Second Field Army issued a political directive professing magnanimity toward the Tibetans and instructing all Chinese troops in the country to observe the utmost moderation. Nevertheless, alarm spread throughout Tibet; the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa and took refuge in Yatung.

When the Chinese assault began, the Indian government could hardly have adopted a more accommodating posture. New Delhi had, in fact, been advised of the impending invasion as early as August

⁶ A *taipen* was a Tibetan military unit usually described as a regiment, but in fact more comparable to a battalion and disposing of only five hundred to six hundred effectives. There were thirteen *taipen* in the Tibetan Army serving under the *Ma Chi Kang* or Supreme Command.

31, 1950, in a note from the Peking regime to the effect that the PLA was "going to take action soon in West Sikang (i.e., Tibet), according to set plans."⁷ The Indians did issue a number of ex-postulatory messages on the affair, but these could only have been received with derision in Peking. Thus, on October 21, New Delhi addressed a note to the Chinese stating that:⁸

"They (the Government of India) feel that an incautious move at the present time, even in a matter which is within its own sphere (*sic*), will be used by those who are unfriendly to China to prejudice China's case in the United Nations and generally before neutral opinion."

This, of course, conceded the main point. Such sentiments could hardly have been more at variance with previous British policy as expressed in the Simla Convention of 1914,⁹ which disputed China's right to enter Tibet in force in order to settle any differences with

⁷ Quoted in Jirilal Jain, *Panch Shila and After* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1960), p. 49.

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁹ This accord arose out of discussions between the British, Chinese, and Tibetan governments, ending in 1914, to deal with the crisis resulting from China's invasion of Tibet in 1912. The Tibetans had claimed total independence at the time of the revolution in China, and one of the first acts of the new Republic was to attempt to assert dominance over Tibet.

Among the most important articles of the Convention were the following:

"*Article 2.* The Governments of Great Britain and China recognizing that Tibet is under the suzerainty of China and recognizing also the autonomy of Outer Tibet, engage to respect the territorial integrity of the country and to abstain from interfering in the administration of Outer Tibet (including the selection and installation of the Dalai Lama which shall remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government).

The Government of China engages not to convert Tibet into a Chinese province. The Government of Great Britain engages not to annex Tibet or any part of it.

Article 3. Recognizing the special interest of Great Britain in virtue of the geographical position of Tibet, in the existence of an effective Tibetan Government and in the maintenance of peace and order in the neighborhood of the frontiers of India and adjoining States, the Government of China engages except as provided in Article 4 of this Convention, not to send troops into Outer Tibet, nor to station civil or military officers, nor to establish Chinese colonies in the country. Should any such troops or officials remain in Outer Tibet at the date of the signature of this Convention, they shall be withdrawn within a period not exceeding three months.

The Government of Great Britain engages not to station military or civil officers in Tibet (except as provided in the Convention of September 7, 1904, between Great Britain and Tibet), nor troops (except the Agent escorts), nor to establish colonies in that country.

Article 4. The foregoing Article shall not preclude the continuance of the arrangement by which, in the past, a Chinese high official with suitable escort has been maintained at Lhasa, but it is hereby provided that the said escort shall in no circumstances exceed three hundred men."

The Convention was initiated by all three powers but later repudiated by the Chinese. Its validity thereafter was always disputed. The general interpretation was that China had thereby surrendered its rights to intervention in Tibet; but this was very far from being the Chinese attitude. For the full text of the Convention, see Hugh Edward Richardson, *Tibet and Its History*, pp. 268-272.

the Tibetans. Nevertheless, they elicited at least one tart reply from Peking:¹⁰

“Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory, the problem of Tibet is entirely a domestic problem of China. The Chinese People's Liberation Army must enter Tibet to liberate the Tibetan people and defend the borders of China . . . No foreign influence will be tolerated in Tibet . . .

“Therefore, with regard to the viewpoint of the Government of India on what it regards as deplorable, the Chinese government cannot but consider it as having been affected by foreign influences hostile to China in Tibet, and hence it expresses its deep regret.”

This correspondence was not published at the time; but it soon became public property, and a considerable outcry ensued over the way in which this dangerous situation had been allowed to develop.

Finding the attitude of the New Delhi government both unrealistic and unsympathetic to Tibet, the latter decided to appeal to the United Nations. A cable to the President of the General Assembly dated November 11, 1950, stated that “the armed invasion of Tibet for her incorporation within the fold of Chinese communism through sheer physical force was a clear case of aggression.” Lhasa also repudiated categorically the Chinese claim that Tibet had always been a part of China. The message went on:¹¹

“Chinese troops without warning or provocation crossed the Dre Chu river, which has for long been the boundary of Tibetan territory, at a number of places on 7th October 1950. In quick succession, places of strategic importance such as Demar, Kamto, Tunga, Tshame, Rimochehtyu, Yakalo, and Markham fell to the Chinese. Tibetan frontier garrisons which were not maintained with any aggressive design but as a minimal protection were all wiped out. Communist troops converged in great force on Chamdo, the capital of Skham (Kham), which fell soon after. Nothing is known of the fate of a Minister of the Tibetan Government posted there

¹⁰ Quoted in Chanakya Sen (editor), *Tibet Disappears* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1960), pp. 71-72.

¹¹ UN Document A/1549. Quoted in Bureau of the Dalai Lama, *Tibet in the United Nations* (New Delhi: 1961), p. 1.

... This unwarranted act of aggression has not only disturbed the peace of Tibet but is also in complete disregard of a solemn assurance given by China to the Government of India, and it has created a grave situation in Tibet and may eventually deprive Tibet of its independence."

But this initiative came to nothing. The representative of El Salvador, Hector David Castro, sought energetically to have the question placed on the agenda of the Fifth Session of the General Assembly that Fall, pointing out that although Tibet was not a member of the UN it was "also a clear fact that the responsibilities of the organization are not limited to the maintenance of international peace among member states but, on the contrary, they are extended to the whole world."¹² He called on the Assembly to condemn Communist China's "act of unprovoked aggression against Tibet."¹³ The British delegate (Kenneth Younger), however, was apathetic toward the request for debate, stating that both the situation in Tibet and the legal position of that country were "not clear." It could still be hoped, he thought, that the "existing difficulties could be settled amicably by all concerned."¹⁴ India's spokesman, the Jam Saheb of Nawangar, was also equivocal. He declared that "the Peking government has not abandoned its intention to settle these difficulties by peaceful means."¹⁵

In many ways, the British attitude was quite inexplicable, particularly since London was exceptionally well informed about Chinese intentions and movements. The most charitable interpretation is that, having just recognized Communist China and arranged the partition of India, London wanted no further part of the problems presented by the Himalayan frontier, and leaned over backwards not to infringe on India's newly won sovereignty. It should also be remembered that there was some doubt at the time as to whether India would stay in the Commonwealth. It may be surmised that the nature of this new relationship played its part in aligning British and Indian policies regarding Tibet.

¹² Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³ UN Document A/1535, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴ UN Document A/1534, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ UN Document A/1534, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 11.

As a result of the above proceedings, the efforts of the Tibetans, supported by El Salvador, came to nothing; further discussion was postponed, and the question of Tibet was not inscribed on the agenda of the General Assembly. This decision on the part of the General Assembly caused consternation in Tibet, and led its government to address a further desperate appeal to the United Nations:¹⁶

“Are we to believe in the justice of Chinese arms over our liberty merely because they happen to be strong in arms? . . . In consequence, the constant threat of being overpowered hangs ominously over us, and our meager resources, so long devoted to peaceful ends and to our religion, are now strained by the need of protecting our country from being submerged by a force which is lethal to its values long cherished by our people. We are convinced that it would be the height of cowardice to bow to superior force. We would rather be overpowered by its blind rage than to accept it with a show of reverence.”

It was not until 1959, after years of great suffering by the Tibetans at the hands of their conquerors, that the Lhasa government again communicated with the United Nations.

Capitulation

After the first failure of the United Nations and the international community to intervene on behalf of Tibet in 1950, the only recourse left to the Lhasa government was to try and make the best terms it could with the Chinese. In consequence, a delegation was sent to Peking in April 1951; and on May 23, a Seventeen-Point Agreement was signed. Its principal terms, spelled out after a long Preamble which defined the historical background of the status of what the Chinese Communists were pleased to call the “Local Government of Tibet,” contained the following operative clauses:¹⁷

- “1. The Tibetan people shall be united and drive out the imperialist aggressive forces from Tibet (so) that the Tibetan people shall return to the big family of the Motherland — the People’s Republic of China.

¹⁶ UN Document A/1658, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁷ For details of the agreement, see Union Research Institute, *Tibet 1950-1967* (Hong Kong: 1968), pp. 19-23.

2. The Local Government of Tibet shall actively assist the People's Liberation Army to enter Tibet and consolidate the national defenses.
3. In accordance with the policy towards nationalities laid down in the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Tibetan people have the right of exercising national regional autonomy under the unified leadership of the Central People's Government.
4. The Central Authorities will not alter the existing political system in Tibet. The Central Authorities also will not alter the established status, functions, and powers of the Dalai Lama. Officials of various ranks will hold office, as usual.
5. The established status, functions, and powers of the Panchen Erdeni shall be maintained.
6. By the established status, functions, and powers of the Dalai Lama and of the Panchen Erdeni is meant the status, functions, and powers of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and of the Ninth Panchen when they were in friendly and amicable relations with each other.
7. The policy of freedom of religious beliefs laid down in the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference will be protected. The Central Authorities will not effect any change in the income of the monasteries.
8. The Tibetan troops will be reorganized step by step into the People's Liberation Army and become a part of the national defense forces of the People's Republic of China."

(The remaining clauses 9-17 were primarily concerned with domestic issues.)

Chinese troops arrived in Lhasa as an occupying force on September 9, 1951, and the Dalai Lama had no alternative but to give tacit approval to the terms of an agreement which can only be described as a capitulation in the face of *force majeure*. The Seventeen-Point Agreement really represented the surrender of Tibetan independence.¹⁸

¹⁸ It is perhaps worth noting that the Tibetan seal affixed to the document was a forgery manufactured by the Chinese.

2

The Rise of Tibetan Resistance

Indian Reaction

The government in New Delhi did not immediately grasp the significance of these events for India's long-term security. Messages exchanged with Peking during the 1950 crisis contained important points of contention and obvious differences of viewpoint. But a major confrontation was still several years off.

On November 10, 1950, the Peking government issued the following statement:¹⁹

“Chairman Mao Tse-tung of the Chinese People's Republic and Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh of the People's Liberation Army are deeply concerned about the prolonged oppression of the Tibetan people by British and American imperialism and by Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary government and have accordingly ordered our army to move into Tibet to shake off the oppressive forces.

“All the religious bodies and people of our (*sic*) Tibet should immediately unite to give the PLA every immediate assistance so that the imperialist influences may be driven out and allow the national regional autonomy to be realized; fraternal relationships of friendliness and mutual aid may be established with other nationalities in the country so that a new Tibet within the new China may be built up with their help.”

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, observed at the time:²⁰

¹⁹ Quoted in Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²⁰ Radio broadcast from New Delhi, November 9, 1950.

“To use the sword against the traditionally peaceloving Tibetan people was unjustified. No other country in the world is as peace-loving as Tibet. The Chinese people did not follow India’s advice to settle the Tibetan issue peacefully. They marched their armies into Tibet and explained their action by talking of foreign interests intriguing in Tibet against China. But this fear is unfounded.”

But in general, the Indian leadership seems not to have been alarmed by the Chinese invasion.

The principal responsibility for Indian policy must be fastened on Nehru himself, whose illusions about Communist China in spite of all warnings were apparently still intact. Nehru defined his Tibetan policy before the Indian parliament in the following terms:²¹

“Our broad policy was governed by three factors: (1) the preservation of the security and integrity of India; (2) India’s desire to maintain friendly relations with China; (3) India’s sympathy for the people of Tibet.”

It should have been obvious to the Indian government, as it was to many apprehensive analysts of the Tibetan question in India and elsewhere, that it was only a matter of time before intolerable Chinese pressures would develop on the Himalayan frontier, and that Tibet would ultimately come to pose a major military threat to India. To some, convinced by conventional military arguments about logistic and topographical difficulties, the threat did not seem fully credible in the 1950s. It took the spectacular Chinese Communist irruptions into the NEFA area and Ladakh in 1962 to shake such complacent attitudes as to the security of the northern frontier.

²¹ Statement to the Lok Sabha, September 30, 1950, quoted in Mitter, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

A main reason why no confrontation developed during the initial crisis involving the fall of Chamdo and the subsequent advance of the PLA to Lhasa was that much of the relationship between India and China and their policymaking were conducted at the summit of government rather than at the working level. While in India, the armed services, the intelligence community, and diplomatic personnel at the medium or working level were for the most part intensely concerned about events in Tibet and their implications for India, their seniors were not. Moreover, the smiling visage and ineffable charm of Chou En-lai, together with his euphoric doctrine of “Panch Shila” (which conditioned political thought in India until 1959 and the Lhasa Uprising), produced an almost hypnotic effect which effectively masked the actual intentions of the Chinese.

Failure of the "Protectorate"

For a time after the signing of the Seventeen-Point Agreement, a semblance of authority was left to the Tibetans. Chinese policy was to avoid violent reactions. In consequence, there was a period of uneasy calm in the country lasting for several years.

Nevertheless, the long-range aim was the elimination of traditional forms of government and other national institutions of all kinds. The first serious moves in that direction were connected with the visit of Chen Yi, then Vice-Premier and Member of the State Council, to Tibet in March 1956. His purpose was to inaugurate the Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet (PCART). This involved a complete reorganization of the administration of Tibet to bring it into line with forms obtaining elsewhere in Communist China. In fact, it meant absorption. It was certainly no coincidence that the years 1955 and 1956, which witnessed the planning and organization of PCART, were also those in which Tibetan resistance began to take a more positive and militant form. This was also a period of intense pressure on the Tibetan church, whose authority the Communists intended to destroy. Another factor contributing to the growth of dangerous tension was the traditional attitude of condescension shown by the Chinese, who lost no opportunity to make clear that they considered the Tibetans a backward, uncivilized, and inferior race.

The first organized and significant revolt against the Chinese authority took place during these years. This was an uprising of the Ngoloks, a seminomadic tribal group who lived in a mountainous region of the same name on the borders of China's Kansu, Tsinghai, and Szechuan provinces. Although small at first, the revolt soon spread. In June 1956, So Kuan-ying, Chinese satrap in the Agha Autonomous *Chou* in western Szechuan, admitted that:²²

"A number of feudal lords had exaggerated some of the shortcomings in our works as pretexts to create antagonisms among races, resulting in the occurrence of revolts in individual areas."

Another Communist functionary, Wang Hai-min, in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous *Chou* not far from Agha, also acknowledged that out-

²² *Jenmin Jihpao* (People's Daily) (Peking), June 29, 1956.

breaks had occurred in his *chou* "in individual areas where our work was weak." The uprisings in Ngolok, Ahpa, and Liangsan Yi took place in late 1955 and early 1956, and were of only peripheral importance to the general Tibetan situation. Yet they were indicative of the trend of events, and of the inevitable consequence of Chinese repressive measures which, applied in other areas, would lead to much more tragic and far-reaching results. The Chinese took these outbreaks very seriously; some fifty thousand Chinese soldiers were detailed to pacify the areas in question, against the opposition of perhaps 5,500 Tibetan irregulars.

In February 1956, a serious revolt broke out in Sikang Province, spearheaded by the Khambas, a tribe of ferocious and highly independent mountaineers. Peking subsequently admitted the uprising, but claimed that it had been a purely local affair, that it had not seriously interfered with communications, and that it was soon "settled." In fact, the events in question were much more violent than has ever been officially admitted. When the Chinese Communist garrison at Litang, southeast of Chamdo, was attacked by a powerful force of Khambas, the entire garrison of 850 men is said to have been wiped out. Khamba units also attacked Chamdo, Batang, and Kantse, and succeeded in holding all three for a time. The Yaan-Lhasa road passing through Chamdo was cut in many places, and the Khambas took control of large tracts south of that route. The Khambas were, in fact, among the most successful combatants in the guerrilla actions of a war of resistance which grew in intensity over the years and which, originally sporadic and spontaneous in nature, in time assumed more and more the characteristics of a well-planned and coordinated series of campaigns in a war of protracted resistance.

The Khamba revolt ultimately provoked strong reprisals from the air. In June 1956, Litang was bombed by the Chinese Air Force, resulting in the destruction of monasteries and the loss of about four thousand lives in the secular and religious communities. Despite this reverse, the Khambas continued with unremitting vigor their hit-and-run and harassment tactics. Some of their bands even carried out offensive raids from Sikang into Yunnan, Tsinghai, and Tibet proper.

Meanwhile, the Chinese were embarrassed by another major uprising in Tsinghai Province. In this instance, their opponents were

the Yushu²³ people of Yushu Autonomous *Chou*, a race akin to the Tibetans, whose forces occupied several towns and engaged in a struggle with the PLA which lasted for about four months. The revolt completely closed the land access routes connecting western China with Tibet, where the occupation forces were obliged to resort to an airlift to maintain their supplies.

The Mimang Tsongdu

During 1956, the resistance movement came increasingly under the control of an organization known as the Mimang Tsongdu, which ultimately converted the numerous spontaneous uprisings into a widespread and concerted campaign of armed resistance on a national scale.

The Mimang came into existence at about the time that the Chinese moved into Tibet from Chamdo in 1951. It was organized by a group of prominent Tibetans with the aim of preserving the country's independence and way of life, and it received growing support from the lamas and the local authorities as Chinese pressure grew. Its attitude became more obvious when, early in 1952, posters appeared all over Lhasa asking the Chinese to leave. Riots broke out, and continued in spite of stringent curfew orders. Then, on April 1, 1952, the Mimang boldly sent a deputation to the Chinese Resident, Chang Ching-wu, asking that the Chinese remove all their troops from Tibet. The Tibetans even resorted to a show of force when units of their army surrounded the Resident's house. This resulted in strong Chinese representations to the Dalai Lama, and to the dismissal of two of his ministers.²⁴

As the strength of the resistance grew and the membership of the Mimang Tsongdu continued to increase, its influence began to make itself felt all over the country. Incidents multiplied in the monasteries and on trade routes. In an effort to deal with the situation, the Chinese decided to "invite" the Dalai Lama to Peking. He departed for the Chinese capital on July 11, 1954, amid demonstrations of the most

²³ The term "Yushu" is one used to designate the people of the Jyekundo district, this being the Chinese name for that city. They have always been regarded as Tibetans by the Lhasa government.

²⁴ *China News Analysis* (Hong Kong), no. 282, June 26, 1959.

fervent loyalty and adoration on the part of the Tibetan public. These manifestations were so striking that it is probable that the Chinese decided then and there to destroy the remnants of Tibetan independence.

Their method was to supplant the residual Tibetan administration and to rivet on the country the fetters of direct rule. When the Chinese first occupied Tibet, they had divided it into three administrative zones, all of which were then included within a single military area designated the Tibet Military Region. The three administrative zones were (a) the central and western portions of the country, which remained under the authority of the Dalai Lama; (b) the Shigatse area, which was placed under the Panchen Lama; and (c) the eastern part of the country, known to the Tibetans as Kham but to the Chinese as Sikang, which was placed under a Chinese military commander. The Dalai Lama was allowed to return to Lhasa in March 1955, in company with the Panchen Lama.²⁵ But as the two religious leaders left Peking, the Chinese announced that a new body would soon be set up called the Preparatory Commission for the Tibet Autonomous Region (PCART). In effect, it was to be the new government of Tibet.

²⁵ Without some insight into the nature of the institution and office discharged by the Dalai Lamas of Tibet, it is difficult to understand the great significance attached to these personages by the Tibetans, or why they have played such a quintessential part in the history of the country.

The title "Dalai Lama" means "Vast as the Ocean," and its possessor is at once a monarch and high priest, and also, according to Tibetan belief, a divine incarnation. It is, in fact, the last attribute that is most important to the Tibetans, because they regard him as the vehicle of the protective power of Chenrezig, the guardian diety of Tibet. This is the name given by the Tibetans to the bodhisatva or incarnation (in Mahayana Buddhist belief) who is known in Sanscrit as Avalokiteswara. Sir Basil John Gould, *The Jewel in the Lotus* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957) gives an interesting description of the methods followed by the Tibetans to discover a newborn child somewhere in the country who is the new incarnation of the Dalai Lama. After identification, the child has always (up to now) been brought to Lhasa and installed in the Potala Palace. There he is brought up and initiated into the Yellow Hat order of the Lama priesthood. In his capacity as the highest of the Lama Tulkus (Living Buddhas) of Tibet, the priest-king reigns as spiritual and temporal ruler over his country. The term "Dalai Lama" is Mongolian and not much used by the Tibetans, who rather refer to him as "Precious Ruler," or simply as "Kundun" or "Presence."

In a similar way, another Living Buddha, the Panchen Lama, is regarded as the embodiment of the Being named Amitabha in the Mahayana Buddhist canon and known as Opagmed in Tibet. It is a matter of history that the Chinese have often sought to gain ascendancy in Tibet by playing the Panchen Lama off against the Dalai. This has not usually worked, however, because the Tibetans have always insisted on the supreme importance of the Dalai Lama, whom they place in an entirely different category from the Panchen. The Chinese Communists also attempted this stratagem by diminishing the Dalai Lama's area of temporal jurisdiction while giving the Panchen virtually equal status with his capital at Shigatse. To his great credit the Panchen Lama, who was often regarded as a compliant instrument of the Chinese, eventually rebelled against them. He is said to have suffered public humiliation by being beaten and removed from office. His downfall came after the Lhasa Uprising, and the Panchen is now believed to be dead.

“Socialist Transformation”

Direct rule in Tibet, as exercised through PCART as soon as that body was set up, involved the introduction of a program of “Socialist transformation” designed to destroy the bases of traditional life in Tibet and to pave the way for the hordes of Chinese settlers who now began to descend on the country like a swarm of locusts.

The Chinese moved rapidly to open up the country. They began an extensive program of road construction and airfield development. Agrarian reform meant the end of private enterprise on the countryside. Schools and medical dispensaries proliferated. Large numbers of Tibetans, mostly young people, were rounded up and sent to China for indoctrination and training. A new Tibetan Communist Party was organized as a branch of the CCP. Above all, a great influx of Chinese took place, whose purpose was eventually to transform the racial balance of the country.

In a letter to an English friend, a Khamba tribesman described the impact of the Chinese in the following terms:²⁶

“Their greedy eyes are everywhere. The fair lands and all they contain do not escape their murderous purposes. Whether belonging to monk or layman, these lands are appropriated and a credit document is given. When the persons concerned claimed the value in money on the strength of the signed document, what happened? They were given an outright refutation accompanied by threats. They were snarled at and told that the eaters of tsampa were the only ones clamoring for money. After all, they were not the only persons to be satisfied. There were many instances of persons making such complaints being arrested and put in prison on the grounds of being a nuisance. Nothing more were heard of them; they simply disappeared. People began to be afraid, and they stopped reclaiming their land and property for fear of meeting the same kind of fate.”

The same letter detailed measures being applied to the Tibetan clergy:²⁷

²⁶ George Neilson Patterson *Tibet in Revolt* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

“Threats and intimidations of various kinds were used against the monks and their teaching to diminish their influence and support among the people; and, in this way, the pillars of Lamaism are being destroyed. Taxes were increased and compulsorily levied, thus crippling the monasteries’ trade and income. This in time affected the monks’ subsistence, and they were then forced to do secular work.”

Another Tibetan has described the Chinese use of terror in suppressing religion. The following events took place at Tratsang Monastery, Doi Gyatsang, in 1953:²⁸

“Two men named Chophel Gyaltsse and Dolma Kyap were also arrested by the Chinese. They were not particularly wealthy but were very devout. They frequently made religious offerings. The Chinese told them that they were a bad example to the people because they gave to religious causes and had nothing left for the Communists. The people were called to witness their fate. A board was attached to their backs displaying their names over their heads. The Chinese announced that these were two people who had faith in religion and had given all their wealth to the lamas. As such, they were useless to the Communists, and letting them live would affect young people’s minds by bad example. They were to be shot and the same fate would await those who did the same. At this time, the two men were tried to a tree. Then they were set free and taken to the edge of a trench, and there shot in the back of the head. The people were told that if they had no patriotic feeling for the Chinese, and if in clinging to religion they gave money to the lamas, this would happen to them.”

The same witness describes how, during the same year, the local population was divided into five strata: landowners, other wealthy people, village and district leaders, middle class, and poorer class. His account continues:²⁹

“Men in the first three grades numbering about five hundred were arrested. The people were summoned to a large field, where

²⁸ Quoted in International Commission of Jurists, *Tibet and the Chinese People's Republic* (Geneva: 1960), p. 272.

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 272-273.

about three hundred men from the first three strata were brought. The Chinese announced that these people were blocking the road to reform, that they had faith in religion, and that they must be eliminated since they would otherwise affect the minds of the younger people. They were to be shot, and anyone from the bottom two strata would be shot if they had a similar view. Children also would be asked if they had faith in religion; and if they had, they would be shot. If they had any money, this should be offered to the Chinese and not to the monks and lamas . . . The remaining two hundred would be put to work and not shot, because they were not such serious cases as the other men. These three hundred were lined up and shot, one by one, in front of the people.”

In his perceptive and remarkably well-informed volume *Tibet in Revolt*, George Patterson describes some of the techniques employed by the Chinese Communists to bring about the “Socialist transformation” of Tibet:³⁰

“The social benefits introduced into Tibet supplied active centers of Chinese Communist propaganda. The primary schools with a claimed enrollment of two thousand Tibetan students taught more and more Chinese language, history, and customs to the exclusion of things Tibetan. The five hundred Tibetan young men and women who had been selected and sent to study in the Central Nationality Academy were subjected to intensive Communist indoctrination; and Tibetan dress, customs, and aspirations were publicly ridiculed. Radio stations which had been set up in Lhasa and Chamdo broadcast a steady stream of Chinese comment on current affairs, domestic and foreign. Film projector teams showed Chinese documentaries throughout the country.”

He also quotes a revealing article in the Communist publication *Chinese Women* that unwittingly discloses the kind of forced labor imposed on the Tibetans to accomplish various construction projects:³¹

³⁰ Patterson, *op cit.*, p. 98.

³¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 99.

“During the past several years, patriotic women’s associations were formed one after the other in such big cities on the Tibetan plateau as Lhasa, Shigatse, and Gyangtse. Tibetan women of all levels are enthusiastically studying nationality policy, the constitution of the People’s Republic, and the geography and history of the fatherland . . . The broad masses of the Tibetan laboring women have positively participated in the various construction projects in Tibet . . . the Sikang-Tibet Highway, the Lhasa-Shigatse Highway, and the Shigatse-Gyangtse Highway, struggling stubbornly against lofty cliffs, torrential currents, and muddy swamps . . . Several thousands of Tibetan women from various villages and pastoral areas have organized themselves into auxiliary transportation teams delivering on time millions of cattles of provisions, materials, and roadbuilding tools to the construction sites along narrow winding paths.”

Chinese Communist policy in Tibet has amounted to cultural genocide. This systematic and ruthless suppression of the Tibetan people has been exhaustively investigated by the International Commission of Jurists at Geneva. A report in 1960 found that “the Chinese authorities in Tibet had violated the following human rights . . . considered to be standards of behavior in the common opinion of civilized nations:³²

“Article 3. The right to life, liberty, and security of person was violated by acts of murder, rape, and arbitrary imprisonment.

Article 5. Torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment were inflicted on the Tibetans on a large scale.

Article 9. Arbitrary arrests and detention were carried out.

Article 12. Rights of privacy, of home, and family life were persistently violated by the forcible transfer of members of the family and by indoctrination turning children against their parents. Children from infancy upwards were removed contrary to the wishes of the parents.

Article 13. Freedom of movement within, to, and from Tibet was denied by large-scale deportations.

³² International Commission of Jurists, *Tibet and the Chinese People’s Republic*, pp. 4-5.

Article 16. The voluntary nature of marriage was denied by forcing monks and lamas to marry.

Article 17. The right not to be arbitrarily deprived of private property was violated by the confiscation and compulsory acquisition of private property otherwise than on payment of just compensation and in accordance with the freely expressed wish of the Tibetan people.

Article 18. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion were denied by acts of genocide against Buddhists in Tibet and by other systematic acts designed to eradicate religious beliefs in Tibet.

Article 19. Freedom of expression and opinion was denied by the destruction of scriptures, the punishment of members of the Mimang group, and the cruel punishment inflicted on critics of the regime.

Article 20. The right of free assembly and association was violated by the suppression of the Mimang movement and the prohibition of meetings other than those called by the Chinese.

Article 22. The economic, social, and cultural rights indispensable for the dignity and free development of the personality of man were denied. The economic resources of Tibet were used to meet the needs of the Chinese. Social changes were introduced adverse to the interests of the Tibetan people. The old culture of Tibet was attacked in an attempt to eradicate it.

Article 24. The right to reasonable working conditions was violated by the exaction of labor under harsh and ill-paid conditions.

Article 25. A reasonable standard of living was denied by the use of the Tibetan economy to meet the needs of the Chinese settling in Tibet.

Article 26. The right to liberal education primarily in accordance with the choice of parents was denied by compulsory indoctrination in Communist philosophy, and sometimes by deportation.

Article 27. The Tibetans were not allowed to participate in the cultural life of their own community, which the Chinese have set out to destroy."

In a 1959 report on the same subject, the International Commission of Jurists summarized Chinese Communist policy in Tibet in the following terms:³³

“In short, almost all the rights which together allow the full and legitimate expression of the human personality appear to be denied to the Tibetans at the present time, and in most cases for some time past. On the basis of the available evidence, it would seem difficult to recall a case in which ruthless suppression of man’s essential dignity had been more systematically and efficiently carried out.”

Mounting Resistance

It did not take long for the Tibetans to discover what was really intended by “Socialist transformation.” Their resistance became stiffer than before. Riots occurred all over the country, including the frontier areas which bordered on Sinkiang, Szechuan, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, and Kansu. These could be described as low-level violence rather than military operations. Descriptive of this scale of events was the following report from Chinese Communist sources:³⁴

“Rural cadres and activists were tied up and beaten during a riot; reactionary officers in Chunching County stored up arms and ammunition and gathered together the rich landlords and rich peasants and started an uprising; the Secretary of the Party Branch in Mileh County was hacked to death by a counterrevolutionary; all nine members of the family of Cheng Cheng-mei, a People’s Deputy of Huitse County, were slaughtered. . . . The cooperatives in Mengtse County was set on fire eleven times. . . . In Sinkiang, martial law had to be introduced to deal with the situation resulting from widespread resistance to Communist rule.”

The events described in this report occurred in Chinese provinces bordering on Tibet rather than in Tibet proper. But these provinces had substantial Tibetan minorities, and the report appeared to reflect the situation in Tibet itself. Here a veritable reign of terror had been imposed.

³³ International Commission of Jurists, *The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law* (Geneva: 1959), p. 59.

³⁴ *Yunnan Jihpao* (Yunnanfu), April 10, 1956.

In such circumstances, the Tibetan resistance grew rapidly. In this process, the Mimang played the part of organizational base and catalyst in stimulating the growth of what became a national movement. By 1959, it was obvious that a clash of historic proportions was imminent. Early in that year, the leaders of the Mimang published an open letter setting forth their main charges against the Chinese:⁸⁵

1. *Rape of the Land.* Our people in the east and northeast (i.e., the parts of Szechuan and Sikang inhabited by Tibetans) are face-to-face with starvation. The Chinese Communists have taken away what little grain was left in our hands. . . . They have also robbed us of gold and silver.
2. *In the south and central parts, the Communists have destroyed thousands of acres of farmlands* on the pretext that national highways and barracks and arsenals were to be built there. In the east and northeast, the Communists have introduced the Communist-style land reform. Half of the people in that area are farmers and the other half are herdsmen . . . on realizing their land reform, (the Communists) moved in large numbers of immigrants and allocated to them the land of the Tibetans. Thus they imposed collective farms on us.
3. *Slave Labor.* A Tibetan farmer was made to work twelve hours a day and yet he could not earn enough to feed himself and his family. The Chinese Communists, who had proclaimed the ration system, did not even give us Tibetans the blankets, houses, and clothing so badly needed by us.
4. *Religious Persecution.* The Communists forced the lamas to abandon their natural rights to obtain food. They were tortured, they were starved. The Communists wanted them to abandon their faith.
5. *Day and night the Communists told us monks and people alike that religion is falsehood* having only the transient effects of opium. They forced many monks into building highways and barracks like any other slave laborers. The monks, because they had to earn their food, stopped their work in the temples. Thousands of them starved to death.

⁸⁵ Quoted in *The Tibet Revolution and the Free World* (Taipei: Asian Peoples' Anti-Communist League, 1959), p. 21.

6. *The Communists forced many of our monks to get married and then move to the hinterland of China for a living. They imposed a reign of terror over the temples of Lhasa and levied taxes on the images of Buddha. The Marxists have, therefore, negated our spiritual traditions.*
7. *They wanted to subvert the Buddhist teachings. Between 1949 and 1958, Communist propaganda pamphlets and literature have been flooding Tibet selling communism to us. In the famous Khampo temple, the Chinese Communists actually forced our lamaist leaders into studies of Marxism. They applied their materialistic dialectics to ordinary monks. They shut the monks in cubicles and asked them to pray for food. If the food did not materialize miraculously, the Communists said that would prove that God did not exist.*
8. *Political Hegemony.* During the 1953-54 period, the Communists tried to establish their military and political commission (which was called for by the Seventeenth-Point Agreement) in order to abolish the Tibetan government. But our people resisted them heroically and they had to stop.

By the beginning of 1958, when the movement had begun to consolidate its position, the membership of the Mimang totalled about twenty thousand. A year later, when a full-scale rebellion broke out, the organization had upwards of three hundred thousand Tibetan supporters (not all of whom were armed) under its flag in Tibet proper and in the neighboring provinces of China. Large numbers of priests and even nuns took part in its operations, although by far its most formidable element were the Khambas.

The Mimang was particularly active and successful during 1958. Its forces temporarily occupied Chamdo and Dinching, east of Lhasa, Nagchu to the north and Lhoka to the south of the capital. So impressive were these operations that the Chinese several times asked the Dalai Lama to direct the Kashag, or Tibetan Cabinet, to institute suppressive military measures against the resistance. But to no avail. The stage was now set for the Battle of Lhasa in March 1959.

3

The Uprising of 1959 and the Flight of the Dalai Lama

The crisis leading to the March 1959 uprising was provoked by the Chinese themselves. The latter were extremely disturbed by the growing strength and influence of the Mimang Tsonqdu, and the increasing evidence of coordinated planning and action apparent in the revolutionary moves endorsed by that organization. Many of these were taking place not only in Tibet proper, but—to the consternation of the Chinese—in provinces adjacent to the “autonomous region” as well. Just before the outbreak of the rebellion, Lhasa was in a state of turmoil and full of rumors to the effect that the Chinese intended to depose or abduct the 23-year-old Dalai Lama. The general attitude and behavior of the Chinese representative, General Tan Kuan-san,³⁶ at this time seemed to afford ample grounds for this belief. In consequence, there were widespread manifestations of public feeling in support of the Dalai Lama. Defying Chinese regulations against carrying arms, a crowd of about ten thousand Tibetans bearing weapons marched on the Potala³⁷ and the Norbu Lingka.³⁸ Their aim was to protect their sovereign from the Chinese and to demonstrate against Communist rule in Tibet.

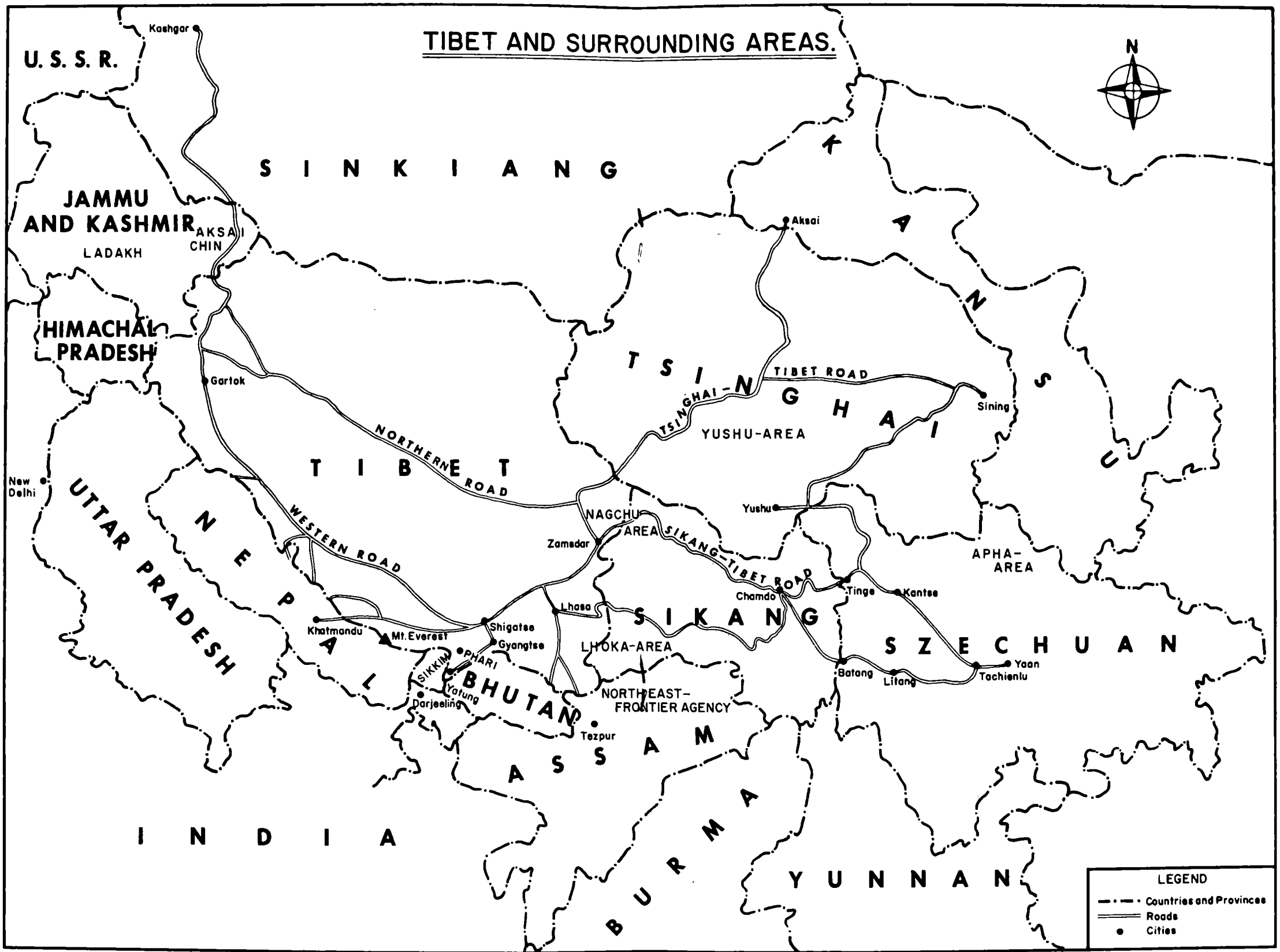
The Chinese soon realized that they not only had a popular uprising to contend with, but that the Tibetan government itself was

³⁶ Political Commissar of the PLA, Chairman of the Tibet Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Deputy Secretary of the Tibet Work Committee of the CCP, member of PCART, and Chairman of the Tibet Physical Culture and Sports Commission.

³⁷ The Potala is the main palace of the Dalai Lama.

³⁸ The Norbu Lingka is a palace and a seat of government in Lhasa.

TIBET AND SURROUNDING AREAS.



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publicly turning against them. Protected by a cordon of units of the Tibetan Army, the Cabinet (Kashag) met in emergency session in the Norbu Lingka, and decided that the moment had arrived to resist the Chinese to the uttermost. The Kashag announced the abrogation of the humiliating Seventeen-Point Agreement with the Chinese; demanded that all Chinese troops leave Tibet immediately; urged all Tibetans to rise up against the Communists forthwith; and proclaimed March 10 to be Tibetan Independence Day.

Mounted messengers were immediately dispatched from the Norbu Lingka to all parts of Tibet to announce the decisions of the Kashag, and proclamations to the same effect were posted all over Lhasa. Within the capital, the response of the population was jubilant. The Tibetan Army, assisted by many volunteers, moved into positions around such key points as the Potala and the Norbu Lingka, and posted detachments threatening the Chinese establishment. The offices of the PCART organization were occupied, and almost all Tibetan officials assigned there resigned their appointments and declared their loyalty to the Dalai Lama.

Tan Kuan-san was initially at a disadvantage in dealing with this defiance. Although well briefed on outlying disturbances, he totally underestimated the potentialities of the local situation in Lhasa. At first, Tan took little action other than placing his troops on alert. On the night of March 10, there were sporadic exchanges of small arms fire and some minor skirmishing, but no major clash. Part of Tan's reluctance to take decisive action at once doubtless stemmed from his awareness of the deteriorating situation outside Lhasa, which complicated the difficulties in which the Chinese in the capital now found themselves. By March 12, Tan knew that the important region south of Lhasa was in full revolt, and that Tibetan units had occupied Yatung, on the border of India, as well as Gyantse. Columns of rebels were converging on Lhasa from several directions. In the east, Khambas carried out determined assaults on the Chinese garrisons in Dinching, Tinge, and Chamdo; and in the north, the revolt centered on the Nagchu area.

But in spite of a few initial successes, which were largely the result of Chinese unpreparedness, it was obvious to most realistic Tibetans that a gesture of defiance had been made which could only

result in heavy reprisals. They entertained little hope of any sustained success, particularly when it became known that the Chinese were moving in heavy reinforcements from Tsinghai.

On March 14, Tan Kuan-san issued an ultimatum to the Dalai Lama and the Kashag demanding an end to the Tibetan resistance. He also trained his guns on the Potala, the Norbu Lingka, and the monasteries of Drepung and Sera. Since it was clear that a final struggle was about to begin which could well result in the capture of the Dalai Lama and his ministers, the leaders of the resistance decided to urge their sovereign to leave Lhasa at once and seek refuge in India, together with a "government-in-exile."

The Dalai Lama was reluctant to leave; but after some mortar rounds had exploded within the grounds of the Norbu Lingka, he acceded to the plan and effected his escape from Lhasa on the night of March 17 in the simple garb of a monk. His departure was aided by bad weather conditions and a dust storm which masked his movements to the south. Strong contingents of Khambas were given the task of covering the flight of the Dalai Lama's party.

The journey into exile lasted about two weeks. There had been an intention at one point of seeking refuge in Bhutan; but after learning that the Chinese Communists might be lying in wait for him on the borders of that country, the Dalai Lama headed for India. In order to cover their own confusion, the Chinese circulated rumors to the effect that the Dalai Lama had been brought out under duress by his own people. After arriving in Tezpur, he therefore issued a statement which read, in part, as follows:⁸⁹

"The Dalai Lama would like to state categorically that he left Lhasa and came to India of his own will and not under duress. It was due to the loyalty and affectionate support of his own people that the Dalai Lama was able to find his way through a route that is quite arduous."

Tibet's Declaration of Independence on March 10, 1959, the Lhasa Uprising which followed, and the flight of the Dalai Lama

⁸⁹ Quoted in Francis Robert Moraes, *The Revolt in Tibet* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 22.

were world events of the highest importance. Their significance will be more fully understood when their consequences become clearer in the light of history.⁴⁰

Appeal to the United Nations

On September 9, 1959, the Dalai Lama sent a message⁴¹ to the Secretary General of the United Nations, requesting immediate intervention by the world organization and "consideration by the General Assembly, on its own initiative, of the Tibetan issue which had been adjourned." Stressing the independent status of Tibet, the message levelled the following charges against the Chinese:

"Since their violation of the territorial integrity of Tibet, the Chinese forces have committed the following offenses against the universally accepted laws of international conduct:

- (i) They have dispossessed thousands of Tibetans of their property and deprived them of every source of livelihood, and thus driven them to death and desperation.
- (ii) Men, women, and children have been forced into labor gangs and made to work on military construction without payment or on nominal payment.
- (iii) They have adopted cruel and inhuman measures for the purpose of sterilizing Tibetan men and women with a view to the total extermination of the Tibetan race.
- (iv) Every attempt has been made to destroy our religion and culture. Thousands of monasteries have been razed to the ground and sacred images and articles of religion completely destroyed. Life and property are no longer safe and Lhasa, the capital of the state, is now a dead city."

In response to this plea, a further hearing of the case was scheduled for the United Nations General Assembly. On this occasion, the Tibetan cause was espoused by the governments of Malaya and Ireland, who stated in an explanatory memorandum that:⁴²

⁴⁰ Tibetan casualties during the Lhasa Uprising are believed to have been in the order of eight thousand.

⁴¹ UN Document A/4234.

⁴² *Ibid.*

“After study of the material available, the conclusion is inescapable that there exists *prima facie* evidence of an attempt to destroy the traditional way of life of the Tibetan people and the religious and cultural autonomy long recognized to belong to them, as well as a systematic disregard for the human rights and freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“In such circumstances, the United Nations has a moral obligation and a legal right to discuss the situation.”

Following an extensive debate, the General Assembly adopted a resolution⁴⁸ on October 21 (by 45 votes to 9, with 26 countries abstaining) finding that the human rights of the Tibetan people had indeed been violated. But while the result of the debate amounted to a vote of censure on the Chinese Communists, no action could be made to result from it which would assist the Tibetans in their hour of great need.

⁴⁸ UN Document A/4848.

4

Internal Developments After the Lhasa Uprising

After the 1959 revolt, the Chinese lost no time in carrying out sweeping changes intended to eliminate all remnants of Tibetan autonomy and to substitute direct rule closely supervised by Peking. By a decree of the State Council on March 28, 1959, the "Local Government of Tibet" was dissolved, and PCART became the principal instrument of Chinese rule. At the same time, the Chinese elevated the Panchen Lama to the nominal chairmanship of that organization in place of the Dalai Lama.

Extensive purges and other measures of reorganization ensued. The country was divided into seven regions (Nagchu, Chamdo, Lingtse, Gyantse, Shigatse, Ari, and Lhasa); and further subdivided into 72 rural districts, four urban districts, and two suburban districts in the capital. The obvious purpose of this move was to undermine the traditional system of land tenure and civil administration. In order to fill the numerous new posts thus created, numbers of "reconstructed" Tibetans who had been undergoing indoctrination in China were brought back and appointed to the new administration. By 1965, the official designation of Tibet Autonomous Region was conferred on the country; and at its inauguration on September 9, 1965, the leading Tibetan collaborator, Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, was elected as its Chairman. Peking's principal aim, at this point, was the full integration of Tibet with China proper.

Even after the flight of the Dalai Lama to India, the suppression of his government in Lhasa, and Peking's abandonment of the attempt at indirect rule, Tibet remained in a truculent mood. The populace was far from subjugated; and during the ensuing years, sporadic outbreaks occurred in many parts of the country. According to re-

liable reports,⁴⁴ for example, no less than fifteen such episodes took place in the nine-month period between February and October 1965, including an attempted coup in Lhasa on September 1, 1965, the date on which the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region was officially inaugurated.

The "Cultural Revolution" in Tibet

During 1966, the strange movement known as the Cultural Revolution was set in motion throughout China by Mao Tse-tung, Lin Piao, and their allies in a mortal struggle for power that convulsed the country for almost three years. While the causes and consequences of the Cultural Revolution are outside the scope of this monograph, its impact on Tibetan developments is central to our theme. To an extent, that remarkable upheaval loosened the Chinese grasp on Tibet, at least for a time. For example, the Cultural Revolution led to extensive Chinese housecleaning of the local administration, including the dismissal of a large number of their trained Tibetan cadres. One of these, in a vengeful mood, is reputed to have killed seventeen Chinese officials before he himself was apprehended and executed by the time-honored method of *Ling Chih*, the Death of a Thousand Cuts.⁴⁵

At this time, Tibet was in the charge of General Chang Kuo-hua, often called the "King of Tibet" through his control of the Tibet Military Region, the CCP Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region, and the civil administration. While considered pro-Mao in all respects, and very close to Lin Piao as well, Chang also had the reputation for being an unusually independent commander and administrator. He was apparently determined to minimize the impact of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet, and in particular sought to limit the activities of the so-called Red Guards to the extent possible. Charged with responsibility for maintaining law and order and the security of the Chinese military base in Tibet, he was apprehensive of the consequences that could arise from the display of evidences of disorder or division among the Chinese in a country which was not only simmering with widespread incipient revolt but even then was

⁴⁴ Tibetan News Agency (London), vol. 3, no. 1 (January 5, 1966); vol. 3, no. 12 (July 13, 1966); and vol. 4, no. 6 (April 27, 1967).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 4 (March 1, 1966).

subject to sudden outbreaks of Tibetan revolutionary violence. Chang evidently thought that there was more than enough revolutionary activity in Tibet without importing different and rather perplexing varieties from Peking. Events were to prove him right.

The Red Guards movement was set in motion in Tibet during a mass rally in Lhasa on August 13, 1966. The rally seems to have been organized quietly by an advance party of Chinese, who were in position before the arrival of the main contingents, some of whom were said to have been transported from China by air. Tibetans were not involved at first, but some eventually tended to take sides for their own purposes. The result was widespread confusion in Lhasa and a few outlying towns.

Chang Kuo-hua took part in the initial August rally, and was apparently surprised and puzzled by the violent attitudes displayed at it. Later that month, the Red Guards launched their program of destruction aimed at the elimination of the "four olds"—old culture, old customs, old habits, and old thought. On August 25, about a hundred of them moved on the Jo Khang, the main temple of Lhasa, protected by submachine guns of the Chinese militia, and sacked the temple. Clay and mud images were broken and ground into dust, then scattered on the roads. Religious texts and paintings were piled in mounds, and then set afire. Bronze and copper images were smashed and carted away to be dumped in the river. The entire scene was filmed by a team of cameramen brought by the Red Guards especially for the purpose.⁴⁶

After completing their destructive work at the Jo Khang Temple, the youths then proceeded to the Romache Temple, where they beat

⁴⁶ The operations of the Red Guards in Lhasa in the Summer and Fall of 1966 were described enthusiastically in sometimes picturesquely titled dispatches and pamphlets such as: "Revolutionary Masses of Various Nationalities in Lhasa Thoroughly Smash the Four Olds;" "Lhasa Takes on a New Look;" "The Sunlight of Mao Tse-tung's Thought Shines over New Lhasa;" "Comment on Comrade Chang Kuo-hua's Preliminary Self-Examination;" "Comment on the Regional Party Committee's Stand, Viewpoint, and Attitude on the Struggle Between the Two Lines in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution Movement;" and "Inauguration Declaration of the Lhasa Revolutionary Rebel General Headquarters."

Among the various groups which set up the headquarters referred to in the above declaration, the media were particularly well represented. The list included two film units, the Tibet Motion Picture Circulation and Projection Corporation, and the Lhasa Municipal Picture Circulation and Projection Station. While both of these mainly showed and distributed propaganda films connected with the Cultural Revolution, they also possessed their own camera teams which shot important phases of the action in Lhasa for exhibition elsewhere.

up and badly maimed the aged priest-caretaker for bolting the doors against them. The same kind of insane orgy was then repeated there. Following this outburst of iconoclasm, the Red Guards began breaking into private houses and destroying all articles connected with traditional ways of life. In addition, they ranged around the streets of the city smashing road signs and place names in their drive to eradicate all traces of "bourgeois and reactionary concepts and ideology." In the course of these outbreaks, they changed street and place names, names of books, medicines, and ornaments. For example, the Norbu Lingka had its name changed to "People's Park."

There was also a good deal of Red Guards activity at Shigatse, the seat of the Panchen Lama, and at Chamdo, Nagchu, and other places. The rampaging youths ridiculed Tibetans for wearing their hair long and dressing in national robes, and forced them to cut their hair. They demanded that the population remove all prayer flags from their roofs and put up Chinese flags instead.

The activities and general behavior of the Red Guards in Lhasa was eloquently described in the mainland press at that time in the following terms:⁴⁷

"Filled with revolutionary sentiments and united, the Red Guards and revolutionary residents of various nationalities in Lhasa are making revolution today in the ancient city of Lhasa.

"As they removed the names of streets, places, and work units left from old feudal serfdom, they put on revolutionary new ones.

"The whole city of Lhasa is permeated with a vibrant revolutionary atmosphere. The Red Guards and revolutionary masses of the Tibetan, Hui, and other nationalities walked the streets with a strong hatred of feudal serfdom, capitalism, and revisionism. Acting at the suggestion of the little Red Guards generals, the broad masses of poor residents living in the confines of (a certain district) violently complained against the reactionary serf owners who lived in that district before, and against the "Lang Tzu Hsia" (the former reactionary Lhasa Municipal Government) for the crimes that they had committed, and against the reactionary elements who continued

⁴⁷ New China News Agency, from Lhasa, August 28, 1966.

to perpetrate the criminal acts of injuring and exploiting the masses even after the democratic reforms were instituted.”

In early September, further reinforcements of Red Guards began to appear from outside the country in the shape of revolutionary teachers and students from the Tibetan Nationality College in Hsienyang, Shensi, and from other schools. Their aim was to “exchange revolutionary experience” with their associates already in action in Tibet. Understandably, General Chang considered this a dangerous and provocative situation, and he made representations directly to Chou En-lai himself about the probable outcome of this “invasion.” In consequence, the latter ordered the Cultural Revolution organization to desist from sending their teams into Tibet. In their turn, the disappointed Red Guards appealed to Lin Piao and Chiang Ching (Mao Tse-tung’s wife), both of whom placed themselves in opposition to Chou’s orders. These were then ignored by the Red Guards, who continued to swarm into the country despite specific orders issued by the State Council on November 16, 1966, and repeated on December 20, instructing all Red Guards in Tibet to return to their places of origin. In order to reinforce their position, they sent messages to the Red Guards headquarters run by Chiang Ching and Chen Po-ta requesting authority to stay in Tibet because of the “strong resistance encountered” and the “counterrevolutionary line of the bourgeoisie.”

The essential conflict of attitude between the representatives of the Cultural Revolution and the regular administrative authorities was spelled out in a statement appearing in a Red Guards leaflet published in December 1966, when the controversy was at its height:⁴⁸

“In the course of the struggle through the last month, the revolutionaries, strongly in favor of repudiating the reactionary lines, have become increasingly numerous and increasingly determined. Comrades who had, in the beginning, looked back in making each step have also changed their attitude and plunged themselves into the struggle. Those who have proposed to impose such labels as ‘having ulterior motives’ cannot but also stutter, ‘I was also in favor of repudiating the reactionary line.’ The situation is truly excellent.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *Tibet 1950-1967*, p. 613.

“The Tibet Autonomous Region Party Committee, which formerly had kept long silence on the repudiation of the reactionary line and thought that the problem could be solved by silence, can no longer remain silent in the face of the mighty revolutionary masses. Its principal leading comrades such as Chang Kuo-hua and Wang Chi-mei cannot but admit their mistakes in orientation and line. The revolutionary masses armed with Mao Tse-tung’s thought have shown their truly infinite power.”

At about this time, the Maoists in Tibet set up a combined headquarters representing five radical organizations active in the country and called it the Tibet General Headquarters of Revolutionary Rebels. This move coincided with a decree from Cultural Revolution headquarters in Peking allowing the Red Guards to remain in Tibet. Chang Kuo-hua attempted to cope with the situation in a variety of ways. Thus, for example, he incited the militia of the Linchi Forestry Commission (one of a number of collectives that had its own paramilitary organization) against the Red Guards. Infuriated by the casualties sustained in the clashes that ensued, the Tibet General Headquarters of Revolutionary Rebels promptly demanded of Peking that General Chang be relieved of his posts. The latter also resorted to the strategy of setting up his own units of Revolutionary Rebels to do battle with the Maoists. They were endowed with a variety of exotic names, such as “Literature and Art Combat Headquarters of Mao Tse-tung’s Thought” and “Lhasa Headquarters for the Defense of Mao Tse-Tung’s Thought;” and they immediately placed themselves in opposition to the factions that had set up the Tibet General Headquarters of Revolutionary Rebels. Both sides claimed to be the sole defenders of the Maoist revolution.

The resulting confusion, produced by the violent competition of factions all of which claimed to be defenders of Mao’s “thought,” resembled that in China itself. But in Tibet, the situation was further complicated by Tibetan elements joining both sides of the struggle, sometimes in order to exacerbate the conflict.

In the early stages, the Maoists seemed to be gaining the upper hand. General Chang Kuo-hua received orders recalling him to Peking, but declined to obey them. For some time, the Red Guards had been infiltrating the organs of local government. Encouraged now that they were winning the struggle for Lhasa, the Red Guards

under the direction of their Tibet General Headquarters of Revolutionary Rebels seized the Lhasa Broadcasting Station and the publishing facilities of the *Tibet Daily*. In addition, they attacked and seized the offices of the New China News Agency in order to substitute their own communiques for others of a more official nature. The situation rapidly got out of hand. In rapid succession, the Revolutionary Rebels took over the Cultural Division of the Political Department of the Tibet Military Region, the Secretariat of the People's Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region (after which they accused the Secretary, Chen Ching-po, of being a "revisionist"), the buildings of the Lhasa CCP Committee, and the Public Security Department of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The end result was that within one week, the Revolutionary Rebels succeeded in taking over the organs of power despite the fact that the regular authorities in Tibet had at their disposal more than three hundred thousand troops. A "Command of the Revolutionary Rebels of the People's Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region" was instituted which momentarily supplanted the previous administration of Chang Kuo-hua. Since the Maoists had no armed forces and owed their success primarily to the factor of surprise, combined with the astonishment of their opponents who could not believe what was happening, it was obvious that the situation was far from stable. It was, however, something of a tribute to the audacity, revolutionary skill, and offensive morale of the Red Guards; and it must also have been extremely encouraging to the Tibetans to observe the discomfiture of their oppressors.

In their capacity of successful usurpers, the first moves made by the Red Guards were to go on the offensive with all the propaganda media which they could mobilize against the remaining party and military establishments. Early in February 1967, they also launched a strong attack on Chang Kuo-hua, accusing him of derelictions of duty, "following the capitalist road," and "empire-building" in Tibet, "making Tibet into a watertight needleproof independent kingdom," and "behaving like an indigenous emperor."

Although he was seized and briefly held by the Red Guards, Chang managed to weather this assault. Units of the People's Liberation Army under his direct command were able to organize quickly for a counterattack; and on February 6, they began to move against

the Maoists. Four days later, martial law was declared. Several key leaders of the Revolutionary Rebels were arrested, and their followers ejected from the office of the CCP Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region. By the middle of March, Chang had regained control of the situation. A consequence of these events was the complete militarization of the Tibet administration. Chang himself was soon transferred to Szechuan, where at first he remained nominally responsible for Tibet as well. In due course, however, a new commander of the Tibet Military Region was appointed.

For more than a year, Tibet replicated the confusion that characterized China itself, as revolutionary factions struggled among themselves for supremacy, some of them overtly supported by units of the PLA. Hostilities early in 1968 were sufficiently brisk to necessitate the recall of PLA border contingents to the Lhasa area. Observers compared the situation to that which had obtained in the capital at the time of the 1959 uprising. In September, the fighting was reported as focussing mainly in the vicinity of Shigatse, Gyangtse, Nagchu, and Chamdo. A good many Tibetans were recruited by both sides, often being pressed into service at gunpoint.

Not until September 1968 had the situation stabilized sufficiently to permit the formation of a Revolutionary Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region. This was the new structure of provincial government being developed in China proper to institutionalize the apparent outcome of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a political compromise in which the People's Liberation Army had acquired a senior if not the dominant voice. An earlier attempt to set up a Revolutionary Committee for Tibet in mid-1967 had failed because of still irreconcilable differences among the contending factions. By mid-1969, revolutionary committees at the local level had been established only at Nagchu, Chamdo, Kerimo, Lhasa, and in one district in the Lhoka area, which indicated the difficulties the Chinese were having in reasserting their control. Some of this was reflected in a speech made by Tang Chen-tsao, Chairman of the Nagchu Revolutionary Committee:⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Tibetan News Agency, vol. 6, no. 12 (September 10, 1969).

It may be noted that most of these places are strategic points guarding major routes of ingress into Tibet from China. Thus, for example, Chamdo lies on the border on the Chengtu-Lhasa highway; while Nagchu is an important junction linking the Tsinghai-Lhasa and Chengtu-Lhasa roads, and commanding the route into western Tibet. Their control was essential if the Chinese were to suppress the disorder raging in these regions during the immediately preceding period.

“Although we have established the Revolutionary Committee, the class struggle is far from over. Under the leadership of the party, we must sharpen our weapons against all class enemies.”

Aftermath of the Cultural Revolution

The general loosening of Chinese authority during the Cultural Revolution period inevitably encouraged the Tibetan resistance. In August 1966, for example, there was a serious outbreak in the mountainous Kungpu region, where seven thousand Tibetan youths from Lochiaputu and Lachiajen carried out an assault on Chinese occupation forces in the area. There were five days of heavy fighting, during which several hundred Chinese soldiers lost their lives. Especially after the Chinese began to fight among themselves, there were also increasing opportunities for widespread sabotage, such as the demolition of bridges, the interruption of military highways and other supply routes, the destruction of telegraph lines, and arson aimed at government facilities of all kinds.

The period saw the defection of growing numbers of Tibetan collaborators, many of them cadres who had received training in China. In a speech in March 1968, on the ninth anniversary of the Lhasa Uprising, the Dalai Lama commented on them:⁵⁰

“For those of our countrymen remaining in Tibet, the struggle is both physical and moral. The Chinese have used every ruse and force to beat down the resistance of the Tibetan people. The fact that they have not succeeded is admitted by China and is evidenced by the number of Tibetans who escape into India and other neighboring countries every year in spite of incredibly stringent border controls imposed by the Communist Chinese. Only recently, five hundred Tibetans died while trying to flee to India. They knew that the chances of their bid for escape were well-nigh insuperable, and yet they preferred to face the risk. Is it conceivable that a people who the Chinese claim are content with the regime under which they live would resort to such drastic measures?”

⁵⁰ Statement issued by the office of the Dalai Lama, Dharmasala, March 10, 1968.

“With every year that passes, the Chinese have unsuccessfully tried to indoctrinate thousands of Tibetan children by forcibly abducting them from their parents and sending them to China, where they are alienated from everything Tibetan and are taught the doctrines of Mao and made to deride and ridicule the Tibetan way of life. But, contrary to Chinese expectations, a great majority of these are now resisting Chinese rule in Tibet. As long as a man has the capacity to think and as long as they seek after truth, the Chinese will not completely succeed in indoctrinating our children. There is no doubt that Chinese treatment of the minority nationalities is a clear case of Han chauvinism. However, far from succeeding in their aims, the Chinese are only adding to the flame of nationalism. It is for this reason that even young Tibetan Communists are solidly lined up with the rest of the country against the Chinese.”

Many Tibetans took part in the fierce struggles of competing Chinese factions, often against their will. In these clashes, they were reported to have killed many Chinese in the ranks of the opposing faction, but often many others as well on whatever side they happened to be.

The resistance reached a peak of intensity during 1968. Transport and communications throughout the country were paralyzed, and even mail service to Lhasa was suspended. Khamba tribesmen, directed by the Mimang movement, were particularly active in southern Tibet. Their use of the northern frontier areas of Nepal as a base area caused some embarrassment to the Khatmandu government. One of the Khamba leaders, on being questioned during an illegal visit to Nepal, was quoted as saying:⁵¹

“If we had enough arms and ammunition and sufficient money to buy horses, we could make it impossible for the Chinese to stay in Tibet.”

Much of the intensification of resistance that flared up through 1968 was due to the impact of the commune system in Tibet and the massive influx of Chinese population. When the communes were established, virtually all property belonging to Tibetans was confiscated, and the Tibetans were reduced to the status of serfs working for starvation wages in a subordinate condition to the Chinese

⁵¹ Private communication to the author.

commune workers. As in China itself, the new system turned out to be a monstrous failure.

The struggle continued throughout 1969. In September, an important conference was held in Peking to discuss the insurgency.⁵² No doubt one of the subjects discussed was a massive jailbreak at Shigatse the month before. Some three thousand Tibetans held there for alleged anti-Communist activities staged a well-organized mutiny, overpowering their guards (of whom ten were killed), and then escaped. The local population gave full support to the escapees with food, clothing, and concealment. According to the Tibetan News Agency:⁵³

“Young intellectuals . . . used the confusion raging among the Chinese occupation forces to form small guerrilla bands which were reinforced by escaping prisoners. They were able to set fire to a fuel store and damage a good many installations at the Chinese barracks in the area, and then retreated into the Kualan Mountains, where they were based.”

Comparable assaults took place in widely separated parts of the country. At the same time, Chinese revolutionary factions continued to do battle with each other, in spite of all admonitions from Peking. In May 1969, a large-scale clash in which machine guns and rockets were employed, resulted in heavy casualties. This situation apparently continues down to the present. As late as July 1971, the Central Committee of the CCP proclaimed that the rival factions were “organizations of the masses,” and should stop fighting.⁵⁴ While the the PLA-dominated Revolutionary Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region has achieved a harassed ascendancy on the surface, the Chinese power struggle has clearly not played itself out.

The death of the Panchen Lama in a Manchurian prison toward the end of the year, after five years as a captive of the Chinese, further outraged the Tibetan population. The Panchen was an early collaborator with the Communists; but he later recanted, and suf-

⁵² Tibetan News Agency, vol. 6, no. 12 (September 10, 1969).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, no. 14 (December 3, 1969).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 11 (October 6, 1971).

ferred the consequences of public humiliation, imprisonment, and torture for his refusal to act as a Chinese puppet.

Following the conference in Peking alluded to above, Chinese repressive measures intensified throughout Tibet. In May 1970, there were reports of massacres in Lhasa, Shigatse, Gartok, and Yatung.⁵⁵ Refugees at Darjeeling (India) in August 1970 also told of beatings, extorted "confessions," and executions in the Dromo area.⁵⁶ In the face of continued and resolute resistance, the accent of Peking's policy seems to be increasingly on the virtual elimination of the Tibetan people. This is the implication both of the violence of Chinese suppression, and of the steady influx of Chinese settlers, whose numbers may someday simply inundate the indigenous population.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 22, no. 6 (June 3, 1970).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, no. 8 (August 6, 1970).

5

The Chinese Military Base in Tibet

From the outset, the Chinese have been developing Tibet as a major military bastion. It provides them with a base from which to project their power and influence into the border region with India and Pakistan: Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Assam, and the NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) region; and it also affords an important adjunct to their defensive posture in Sinkiang *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union.

The Chinese have maintained a garrison of about 250-300 thousand troops in Tibet, a force level that is apparently considered sufficient to cope with internal security problems and the "pacification" of Tibet, and to deal with the possibility of hostilities against India. Their occupation has always been plagued by serious logistical problems, and this has necessitated an intensive effort to improve the communications network, including truck roads, the construction of air bases, and the development of an air supply system.

When the Chinese occupied Tibet in late 1950, they began the construction of two major highways to connect the country with China proper.⁵⁷ The Sikang-Tibet highway (or South Military Road) is 1,413 miles in length, and is probably the world's highest road (average height, thirteen thousand feet). It crosses fourteen high ranges and twelve major rivers, including the Salween and the Mekong, and connects the Chinese province of Sikang to Lhasa. The Tsinghai-Tibet road, which crosses the difficult swamps and deserts fifty miles northwest of Lhasa. There is a junction between the two highways at Zamsdar, whence the Sikang-Tibet highway is extended of northern Tibet, runs from Sining east of Kokonor to Zamsdar,

⁵⁷ See map, pp. 34-35.

southwest to Shigatse, and thence to Gyangtse. For the most part, these roads were built by Tibetan forced labor.

Subsequently, the Chinese also consolidated preexisting routes into the so-called Western Road, which now runs from Ladakh in an easterly direction more or less parallel to the entire Sino-Indian border to the NEFA area. Lastly there is the Northern Road, which connects Tibet with Sinkiang. The Chinese have made much more use of this road for the control of Tibet than would at first be supposed. The more direct routes from western China have been subject to constant ambushes, while such attacks have been less frequent in western Tibet. In addition, the Chinese have an important base at Kashgar, which serves most of their supply needs in Central Asia including Tibet.

One of the most important and, of course, the most provocative aspects of this immense road development program was the extension of the Western Road across the Aksai Chin, which New Delhi claims to be Indian territory. Construction began in March 1956, and was carried out by frontier guards supported by a civilian labor force of three or four thousand men. Work on the 750 miles of road, across tremendous country, was completed in nineteen months. About 112 miles lay across territory claimed by India. It is not entirely clear that the Chinese were even aware that they were trespassing. Chinese maps show the Sino-Indian border as following the Karakoram range, and even some Survey of India maps are quite inexplicit as to the boundary in this region. If the Chinese did know of Indian claims, they simply ignored them. New Delhi was apparently quite unaware of the project until construction was well advanced. While this may seem surprising, it is to be explained largely by the nature of the terrain. This is largely untravelled country, and practically uninhabited. Under conditions prevailing at the time, moreover, the Aksai Chin was far more accessible to the Chinese than to the Indians.

All of these roads are capable of taking seven-ton loads. (Moreover, the Chinese have also been building railways into Tibet; and the acquisition of transport aircraft from foreign suppliers has greatly reduced their air-logistic problems.) The Chinese put this road system to good use in their attack on India in 1962. The Indians had not developed a comparable network, and found themselves

with virtually no military access roads to the battle areas. In the days of British rule in India and of Tibet's status as a buffer state, such roads had been unnecessary; and the Indians had not reacted to the Chinese occupation of Tibet by improving their northern defenses. This situation has been much improved since 1962, and India is now able to reinforce its border garrisons and keep them supplied; although, as yet, there is no lateral road on the Indian side skirting the whole Himalayan frontier.

Across that frontier, on the Tibetan side, there are now about 25 airfields and airstrips. By 1963, three large airbases had been built at Sangcoling, Donpha Ingendi, and Tasiako, together with nine other airbases near the frontiers of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim. Chinese aircraft operating from these fields are much restricted in their payload by the height of the bases. In addition, their use in sustained operations would present problems in logistics and maintenance. Radar early warning is affected by the configuration of the mountain barriers on the frontier; in this connection, it is reported that the Chinese have recently been giving considerable attention to the positioning of electronic gear on mountain peaks which is supposed to be connected with an early warning or tracking capability.

A large and important forward supply depot has been built at Dakmar two miles from the Nepal border on the newly built section of the Lhasa-Khatmandu highway. Complexes of storage bunkers, a huge arsenal, and other underground structures have also been reported in that area. After the onslaught on India in 1962, further construction proceeded on a number of jet fighter and bomber airfields in the vicinity. This program is supposed to have been substantially completed by 1965.

In 1968, the Chinese were reported to be constructing a massive system of tunnels and trenches in the Tanghri area just on the Tibet side of the border from Mount Everest. Natural caves were being linked by tunnels large enough to permit wheeled traffic in both directions. These complexes were said to be well camouflaged against aerial reconnaissance. The purpose seems to be to provide facilities for sheltering whole regiments of troops with their supplies, ammunition, and vehicles; there are known to be counterparts in other strategic border areas in China itself which would enable large

concentrations of troops to assemble unobtrusively before a surprise attack.⁵⁸

China's Strategic Aims

In a recent book, Ginsburg and Mathos have appraised the strategic importance of Tibet in the following terms:⁵⁹

“He who holds Tibet dominates the Himalayan piedmont; he who dominates the Himalayan piedmont threatens the Indian subcontinent; and he who threatens the Indian subcontinent may well have all of South Asia within his reach, and with it all of Asia.”

The underlying motivation for Communist China's assault on India *via* Tibet in 1962 has been much debated. The present writer leans to the view that the Chinese attack was only an opening shot in a confrontation whose later stages had to await a surer grasp on Tibet, the suppression of the national resistance there, and probably also the end of United States participation in the Vietnam War and the withdrawal of American forces from Southeast Asia and of British forces from Singapore. He also accepts the interpretation of V. C. Trivedi, a former Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, as to China's aims in 1962.⁶⁰

- “(a) To demonstrate to Asia and to the world that China was the only power to reckon with in Asia; and, correspondingly, to demolish or weaken India's influence, prestige, and economy.
- (b) To show that the policies of peaceful coexistence and non-alignment were unsound, inefficacious, and transitory, and thus to prove the falsity of Khrushchev's thesis regarding the importance of nonaligned countries.
- (c) To topple Nehru's government and, eventually, to establish in India one or more subservient client states.”

When the Chinese attacked in 1962, it will be remembered that their thrusts were delivered along two different routes, in the NEFA

⁵⁸ Tibetan News Agency, vol. 5, no. 13 (November 14, 1968).

⁵⁹ George Ginsburg and Michael Mathos, *Communist China and Tibet* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), p. 210.

⁶⁰ V. C. Trivedi, “The Defense of India,” in Alastair Buchan (editor), *China and the Peace of Asia* (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1965), p. 131.

area and also in Ladakh. Some students of the situation believe that the Chinese expected backing from the Russians; and when it was not forthcoming, they were obliged to curtail their operations, which would otherwise have run out of supplies. However, in spite of the limited nature of these operations, they were devastating in their effects on Indian military morale; and they have produced an uneasy fear in many quarters that the withdrawal which terminated them was only an example of *reculer pour mieux sauter*.

Since that time, Chinese intentions seem to have become more obvious than ever, and the threat has drawn closer to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Ladakh. There has been increased infiltration into the NEFA area, activity among the tribes in Assam and the Lushai Hills, and underground activity among disaffected elements of the Indian population. Both Tibet and the NEFA area appear to be components in a squeeze which, before long, China will be in a position to exert on India.

Apart from building up their physical assets, the Chinese have also been developing machinery for the type of political or special warfare that has characterized Chinese Communist operations for some time, and that has proved so difficult for regular forces to contend with. So far, they have been primarily concerned with various forms of preparatory infiltration, using Tibet as the base. Thus, for example, a so-called Border Affairs Office has been established in Tibet, with branches at Yatung, Tsona, and the Lammo La. This is a cover organization for offensive intelligence operations directed against Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and India itself. In addition, a number of language schools and other training facilities have also been established.

The personnel chosen by the Chinese to work in these areas have mostly been teams recruited in provinces with bilingual or multilingual populations on the borders of China and Tibet. Instruction has been given to such recruits in English, Nepali, Tibetan, Hindi, and Bengali. In 1962, when the Indian Army encountered the PLA and lost a good many prisoners to the Chinese, the captives were greatly surprised to find themselves being interrogated by fluent linguists speaking all the dialects of the Indian Army, while housed in prison encampments which had obviously been built for the

purpose and completed in good time before the Chinese assault on India.

It is estimated that the Chinese Communists now (1971) station thirteen to sixteen divisions in Tibet, about half of which could be made available for offensive operations, provided that the activities of the Tibetan resistance do not increase in intensity. That number could be considerably augmented, perhaps doubled, if the railroads presently under construction are satisfactorily completed. During the Cultural Revolution period, all phases of Chinese military construction in Tibet slackened; and many seasoned PLA units were withdrawn from border duties. But by 1969, the normal tempo and pattern of military preparations were restored.

According to refugees fleeing from Shigatse into Bhutan early in that year, a new and important strongpoint had recently been completed at Phari Danghla, where conditions of maximum security prevailed. Major construction of some kind was also underway at Thinghri Dzong, near Mount Everest. A considerable amount of barracks construction at Phari was also in hand, in addition to the three complexes already existing there, and another project had been started at Richung Potok Monastery. Cantonments were being built at Aghang, and also at Khambu near Phari Dzong. Trenches and bunkers were much in evidence, some on hilltops in the Dromo area at Ngang Kyo, and others at Dromo Je Mar in the Dromo Valley. Within the Nathu La Pass, at the Tibetan end, there is said to be a large ammunition storage installation.

The Prospect of War

All these manifestations are the evidence of a considerable buildup of Chinese forces manning the frontier. Swaran Singh, the Indian Minister of Defense, stated in 1969 that there were about 150,000 troops of the PLA deployed along the Ladakh and NEFA border sectors.

Since early 1970, there have also been indications of actual war-like preparations in Tibet. Persistent reports have been arriving to the effect that important strategic installations connected with the Chinese nuclear program have been transplanted from areas in Sin-kiang to safer and less accessible regions in Tibet. There have also

been rumors of the installation of anti-aircraft defenses which included surface-to-air missile sites and even launching sites for IRBMs.

Such "war preparations" are not entirely new. Since the early and mid-1960s, exhortations against internal and external "enemies," and measures of closer security and population control based on "scares," have been commonplace in China. For the most part, many of the regulations and procedures involved have been regarded with skepticism. Since the beginning of 1970, however, there has been a new note. The transplantation of nuclear facilities has been carried out with a view to the prospect of war with Russia. The Chinese in Tibet are said to make frequent reference to the possibility of hostilities with Russia, and to use this as an explanation for the ruthless requisitioning and stockpiling of food. These explanations are often accompanied by the rider that it is questionable that Russia would engage in direct attacks, but that they very well might arrange, in collusion with the United States, to induce India to attack China in Tibet. Improbable and indeed fantastic as such contingencies may seem, many observers have testified that the Chinese are taking no chances and are preparing for the worst.

There is, in fact, much evidence that Chinese attitudes relating to defense reflect a deep and underlying concern verging at times on hysteria, and that this concern seems to be genuine. In Lhasa, the Chinese have gone so far as to evacuate important records from offices in the capital to secret caches in the neighboring hills. The same sources have disclosed that elaborate plans are in existence to shift all important departments and offices to secret headquarters at short notice.

As a part of these "war preparations" which, of course, fit into an overall pattern within China itself, trenches, fortifications, and air raid shelters are being constructed throughout the country in all important towns and strategic locations; and there are constant black-outs and civil defense exercises. The population is being told to regard such activities as if they were part of a real emergency, and to disregard them at the peril of being in sympathy with reactionaries or foreign enemies.

Along the Himalayan border with India, Bhutan, and Sikkim, the PLA has been mobilizing almost the entire ablebodied population, male and female, for tasks in support of the troops. These appear to relate to logistic support for combat troops, and to service as a casualty corps and as field hospital orderlies. Some Tibetan manpower considered to be reliable from the Chinese point of view has been recruited into a militia.

Concurrently, there has been a widespread purge of Tibetans, and summary executions evidently intended to terrorize the population into a state of submission.

6

The Prospect Ahead

Throughout much of modern history, Tibet was isolated from the rest of the world by its geographical location and its surrounding ramparts of great mountains and limitless deserts. This was an arrangement that suited both the character of its people and the interests of the great powers, which regarded the Tibetan massif as a convenient buffer for their rival imperialisms. But in its remote isolation, seemingly removed from the currents of world history, the Lhasa government saw no need—until it was too late—to gain general recognition of its status as a wholly independent state. Hence its conquest by Communist China after 1950 went largely unchallenged by the world.

While anyone who has taken the trouble to remain well informed about Tibet under the Chinese occupation must be profoundly impressed by the brave resistance and tenacity of the Tibetan people, their prospects over the longer term give cause for the gravest concern. What they apparently face is an irrevocable Communist determination to obliterate their race and culture. In March 1970, the Indian delegate to the United Nations Human Rights Commission characterized the real purpose of Peking's policy as the "systematic destruction of the Tibetan race, language, history, and culture . . . (including) their social and religious institutions." In view of the vast power and resources at the disposal of the Chinese, it is clear that the Tibetans are confronted by great—and perhaps insuperable—odds.

Nor can we anticipate that the Chinese will soon loosen their grip on the Roof of the World. Writing more than twenty years ago,

before the Chinese conquest, Amaury de Riencourt had this to say about Tibet's strategic value in the modern world:⁶¹

"I was struck by the strategic potentialities of . . . this colossal natural fortress standing in the heart of Asia and almost inaccessible by land. Behind the Cyclopean Himalayas and Kuenlun mountain ranges, Tibet towers on all sides above the three most populated countries in the world: China's five hundred million, India's four hundred, and the USSR's two hundred. Any strong power based on (Tibet) would control the heart of Asia—not only would such bases be but an hour's flight from India's Delhi and two or three hours from China's Chungking, but they would be only eight hundred miles from Tashkent and six hundred from Alma Ata, thus controlling the booming industrial centers of Soviet Central Asia. . . . I became convinced that if ever Tibet was taken over by the Soviets or the Chinese Communists, the whole of India and of Southeast Asia would be strategically untenable and left wide open to an invasion. Nestled in the stratospheric and hardly known valleys of the Roof of the World, as inexpugnable as if they were situated on the planet Mars, Communist armies and air forces could forcibly dominate the largest part of Asia."

The Chinese Communists are entirely aware of the great strategic advantages that accrue from their occupation of Tibet. Already they have made brilliant use of its terrain to launch their sudden and highly successful assault against India in 1962. Their systematic development of airfields, roads, railroads, and base facilities of all kinds indicates the further employment of these assets in the future.

We would do well to heed the Maoist dictum that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Today Tibet stands poised as an arsenal of the most modern weapons pointed at the heart of Southern Asia.

⁶¹ Amaury de Riencourt, *Roof of the World. Tibet, Key to Asia* (New York: Rinehart, 1950), p. 2.

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