



Facts About the 17-point "Agreement"
Between Tibet and China

***'Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet'
or the '17-Point Agreement'***

Context and Consequences

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It will soon be 50 years since some representatives of the Tibetan Government signed with China an '*Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet*' better known as the '*17-Point Agreement*'. It is said that this agreement was signed under duress in Beijing on 23 May, 1951 by Ngabo Ngawang Jigme who was the Governor of the Eastern Province of Kham but had been taken as a prisoner a few months earlier when the Chinese troops crossed the Upper Yangtse and captured Chamdo, the capital of the province.

We shall look at the context in which the Tibetan delegates were 'trapped' into this Agreement in Beijing and the implications of their signature. The consequences for Tibet would be most momentous; Tibet would lose its independence. It was the first time that the Land of Snows agreed to be a 'part of China' and to content itself of an 'internal' arrangement between the Central Government in Beijing and what was now called the 'local' Tibetan government. We shall also discuss the significance for India which lost her buffer zone with China and suddenly acquired a new neighbour at her borders.

The Context

The Year of the Iron-Tiger: 1950

For centuries Tibet remained the most isolated place of the world. As the nation's energies and time were consecrated to achieving spiritual goals, its defence was

neglected. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, nobody, except perhaps the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, had bothered much about international developments. In a way, formal recognition or boundary delimitation had been forced on the Tibetans by Younghusband's invasion¹ and later by Sir Henry McMahon at the Simla Conference.² At the end of the forties, Tibet had begun to wake up at the sight of the dark clouds gathering around the Land of Snows: an atheist "east wind" was threatening to blow over the sacred Shangri-La. Earlier, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had mentioned the danger; in 1932, in his last Testament, he had warned his people:

Precautions should be taken at a time when the forces of degeneration are most prevalent and when Communism is on the spread. Remember the fate that befell the Mongolian nation when Communists overran the country and where the Head Lama's reincarnation was forbidden, where property was totally confiscated and where monasteries and religion were completely wiped out. These things have happened, are happening and will happen in the land of harmonious blend of Religion and Politics.³

Nobody listened! The Iron-Tiger year and the following years were to be fateful for Tibet. For India too, the repercussions of these year's events would be incalculable.

It began on New Year's day of 1950 or rather on New Year's eve, when the Government of India decided to hurry through the recognition of the Communist regime in Beijing.

The first consequence was a warning note heard the next morning in the broadcast of the New China News Agency. It proclaimed, "The tasks for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for 1950 are to liberate Taiwan, Hainan and Tibet... Tibet is an integral part of China. Tibet has fallen under the influence of the imperialists."

The next day, the green light to attack Tibet was given to Deng Xiaoping by Mao from Moscow; all preparations were left to Deng.

On Jan 10, 1950, Mao is said to have sent another telegram to the Second Field Army:

ordering that the preparation of the liberation should be accelerated, and agreeing with Deng Xiaoping's proposal that the liberation of Tibet should be started simultaneously from all directions — from Sichuan in the east, from Yunnan in the south, from Qinghai in the north and from Xinjiang in the west.⁴

During the following months China would to assert again and again that Tibet was a part of China's territory. On January 22, an interesting conversation took place in Moscow between Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin:

Mao Zedong: I would like to note that the air regiment that you sent to China was very helpful. Let me thank you Comrade Stalin, for the help, and ask you to allow it to stay a little longer so it could help transport provisions to (Chinese Communist Central Party Committee member and commander of the PLA's Second Field Army) Liu Bocheng's troops, currently preparing for an attack on Tibet.

Joseph Stalin; It's good that you are preparing the attack. The Tibetans need to be subdued. As for the air regiment, we shall talk this over with the military personnel and give you an answer.⁵

During the first months of 1950, the only thing which was not known to the Chinese was the degree of resistance by the Tibetans: would the Second Army of One-eyed Liu⁶ march triumphantly into Tibet as the liberators, or would Tibet have to be 'liberated' by force?

By the end of 1949, the Red Army had already entered certain areas of Eastern Tibet, mainly in Amdo Province, but though the 'liberation' of Tibet had started, the full-fledged invasion had not yet begun. The Chinese knew that the real test would be the 'liberation' of Kham.

This was what was at stake in the negotiations to be held between the Chinese and the Tibetan Mission in Delhi. Had the negotiations succeeded, the PLA would have come to Tibet 'invited'. The leaders of the Tibetan Mission were aware of it and for several months, though the Chinese had given the Mission an ultimatum

to 'conclude' the negotiations by September, they were not keen to go to Beijing for talks.⁷

For the Chinese, if Tibet accepted to be a part of China, there would be no problem since China would only be entering its own territory.

The Negotiations that Never Were

Both parties were keen to negotiate, but for different reason. Tibet wanted to settle its eastern border with China as indicated in a letter of the Kashag's to Mao⁸ and regain its 'lost' territories while China wanted to 'liberate' Tibet as smoothly as possible.

The Chinese first suggested Hong Kong as the venue for the negotiations as it was 'close to China' and 'neutral' for the Tibetans. The first hurdle came when the British refused a visa to the Tibetan delegation to enter Hong Kong.

The questions confronting British officials in London were: should the British Government help the Tibetans to negotiate a settlement with Communist China? If so, should they grant a diplomatic or an ordinary visa to them, and this on a Tibetan travel document or on some other document?

A very ordinary problem, a simple visa, became an affair of state and had to be dealt with at the highest political level. The visa was eventually refused. A couple of months later Nehru explained why he thought the British had refused to grant visas for Hong Kong: "...this was because they did not like to give the impression that they were taking part in the talks."⁹ For the Indian Prime Minister, India also was clearly not ready to 'give the impression' that India was interested.

He therefore did not press to have the talks in Delhi.

The Tibetan Foreign Office in Lhasa took the opportunity to clarify the aims of the mission: they wanted to find an arrangement with the Chinese Government for the continuation of Tibet's existing independent status.

The Tibetans had received information from eastern Tibet that the People's Liberation Army was close to the Upper Yangtse which was, at that time, the

border between the Lhasa Government's jurisdiction and Chinese's controlled area.

They also knew that the Chinese government was ready to offer Tibet full autonomy within the People's Republic but Lhasa was certainly not prepared to accept such a proposal.

It was only the pressing military situation in Eastern Tibet which had caused the Mission to accept the risk of going to Hong Kong. They certainly preferred to negotiate in Delhi on more solid ground.

On June 17, a message from the Kashag finally arrived to say that Lhasa had agreed that the negotiations could be held in Delhi, though the Tibetan delegation had to wait and see if the Chinese would agree to conduct the talks through their newly appointed ambassador to India.

The possibility of defending militarily Tibet was formally discussed at that time, by the US and British Government. The conclusion was that it was not easy to help the Tibetans as the terrain was not favourable and that in any case it was up to the Indian Government to decide since the arms or equipment would have to be brought in through India. The British made it clear once more that their interest in Tibet arose from its proximity to India and that interest was now vested with the Indian Government.

In September the Mission came to Delhi to meet the Indian Prime Minister who enquired about the progress of the talks. Nehru seemed unaware that the talks were supposed to have been held in Hong Kong. The minutes of the meeting said:

The Prime Minister enquired why they should be reluctant to go to Peking now when they were willing to go there three or four months ago. Mr. Shakabpa explained that they had instructions then to go to Hong Kong only and not to Peking. The Chinese had agreed to send a representative to Hong Kong to talk to them, with the understanding that all important questions would be referred by him to Peking.¹⁰

It is strange that Nehru did not know that the talks were fixed in Hong Kong and not in Peking.¹¹

The Prime Minister told them that although India was perfectly agreeable to Delhi being the venue, it was not for him to suggest this to the Chinese. It was for China and Tibet to settle where the talks should be held.

Shakabpa pointed out the precedent of the Simla Convention in 1914 when the British had invited the Tibetans and the Chinese for a Tripartite Conference and asked "why this could not be arranged now?" Nehru only repeated that "it was not possible for India to urge Peking to hold the talks in Delhi. This would mean that India had a dominant position over China and Tibet."

The Chinese certainly did not want the negotiations to take place in India.

The minutes of the same meeting mention:

Mr. Shakabpa stated that his Government had written to the Chinese Government suggesting Delhi as the venue. This letter had been returned from Hong Kong, probably by the post office. Similarly, a telegram containing the same suggestion had failed to reach Peking.

On the front in Eastern Tibet, preparations were progressing smoothly, Mao Zedong and his Political Commissioner in Sichuan had long since decided to invade the Land of Snows; the detailed plans for the final 'liberation' of Tibet were being implemented.

An interesting information is given by Warren Smith in his *Tibetan Nation: a* Scottish missionary, Beatty working in eastern Tibet affirmed that he was told by a PLA officer that "*large numbers of yak, wild and domestic animals would be needed to feed the PLA troops [in Tibet]. The PLA officers and men talked of going on to India once Tibet was in their hands.*"¹²

It was certainly Mao's plan, but he had to start from the beginning and soon, "the task of marching into Tibet to liberate the Tibetan people, to complete the important mission of unifying the motherland, to prevent imperialism from encroaching on even one inch of our sovereign territory and to protect and build the frontiers of Motherland"¹³ would be achieved.

The Role of India

During the first months of 1950, K.P.S. Menon, the Indian Foreign Secretary was not keen on the negotiations. Most probably Menon was not happy to have them happen so close to China. He also understood that they would have a great impact on India's security and India would certainly like to be consulted, which would be logistically difficult in the far-away Hong Kong.

Having himself been posted in Chungking and Nanjing, Menon knew fairly well the 'trap' into which the Tibetan delegates had fallen in 1946 during the Goodwill Mission in Nanjing and the one that they had just avoided in 1948 when Shikabpa had led the Trade Mission. Menon had enough knowledge of the Chinese way of functioning to guess that if the Tibetans were to go to Hong Kong, the Chinese would certainly find ways to pull them to the mainland where they would be at a great diplomatic disadvantage. It would ultimately mean a treaty or an agreement to which India would not be a party, which might have serious strategic implications, considering the length of the border between India and Tibet.

Further, we should remember that Tibet and Independent India had ratified the Simla Convention and both parties were bound by this treaty.

It was perhaps a hot potato¹⁴ for Nehru, but nevertheless Article V¹⁵ must have been in the Indian Government's mind. India had stepped into the Britain's shoes and this Article remained valid.

However during those days, the general motto seemed to be to "remain vague as far as possible." Undeniably it was easier for the Indian Prime Minister to let the weak Tibetan nation be devoured by the Chinese Dragon than to stick India's neck out for a weak and non-violent people.

In reality, the stakes were higher for India. Nehru's government had inherited the British treaties and the British borders: that is to say the McMahon Line and the border in Ladakh.

In Beijing, the scene was different, Panikkar, the Indian Ambassador had most probably managed to convince his contacts in the Chinese government that all 'white men' were imperialists and that it was time for the Asian nations to reject the hostile imperialist forces. He must have assured Zhou Enlai that India was against the use of force.

The Chinese leadership knew that in occupying the Roof of the World, China would dominate the other Asian nations and India in particular.

Since the telegram of Mao in January, it took only eight months for the 18th Corps of the Second Field Army to get ready to cross the Yangtse and defeat the ill-equipped and poorly motivated Tibetan army.

A blend of forceful diplomacy and display of strategic tactics as well a better knowledge of the enemy were chiefly responsible for the advance of the PLA in Tibet.¹⁶

For Panikkar and Nehru, the loss of Tibet was worth the price of liberating Asia from 'Western dominance'. In London, Nehru's friend, Krishna Menon¹⁷ had also begun the same litany against Western dominance.

It was the beginning of the non-aligned policy of the Government of India, a policy which amounted to India opposing whatever came from America or the West and very often supporting whatever came from Moscow or Beijing.

By September, the negotiations had failed to bring the desired result for the Chinese and strategically Deng had to attack Tibet before the winter; after that, it would have been impossible for the young PLA to advance into the Roof of the World.

During all these months the Chinese leaders, particularly the mild-mannered Zhou Enlai, kept on assuring India through Panikkar that "China has no intention of using force against Tibet," though he mentioned in August that it was China's sacred duty to liberate Tibet. By the end of the September, everything was ready for the advance on Chamdo.

The Invasion of Kham

The attack occurred on October 7, 1950.

The main border post at Gamto Druga was overrun by the Chinese who used the same strategy as in Korea. Wave after wave of soldiers soon overpowered the Tibetan defenders, who fought well but were finally massacred.

In the meantime another Chinese regiment crossed the Yangtse above Dengo and advanced rapidly towards Dartsedo (Kanting), marching day and night.

In the South, the 157th PLA Regiment crossed the Yangtse and attacked the Tibetan troops near Markhan. When they reached Markhan, the local Tibetan Commander, Derge Se, surrounded by the Chinese troops, surrendered his force of 400 men.

The net (or Karma) was slowly closing on Tibet.

The northern front lost ground day by day and the headquarters of the central zone was soon lost to the waves of young Chinese soldiers. They caught the fleeing Tibetans at night in a place called Kyuhung where the Tibetans were decimated. The road to Chamdo was open.

Lhasa was finally informed on October 12 that the Yangtse had been crossed and that the Chinese had begun to 'fulfill' their promise to 'liberate' the Roof of the World.

At the same time, the opera season was in full swing in Lhasa. The aristocracy and the Government were busy. For the Tibetan officials opera and picnic were sacred!

In Chamdo no one panicked, though the number of prayers was increased. More and more lay people joined the monks and began circumambulating around the monastery, the incense smoke went higher and higher in the sky, the gods had to be propitiated. Ford said that the monks believed that "only the gods could give Tibet victory - which was unanswerable - and they were doing their bit by praying. They would pray twice as hard, or rather twice as often, and that would be of more use than taking up arms." ¹⁸

"The gods are on our side," was the most often repeated mantra in the town.

In the meantime, Lhasa continued to keep the news of the invasion secret. Ten days after the Chinese had crossed the Upper Yangtse, Ford heard an announcement from Delhi: Shakabpa and the Tibetan delegation were denying any attack on Tibet.

For 19 days the world would not know about the events in Kham.

Tibetans were simply not living in the reality of this world. But their world was disappearing, without their realizing it.

On 26 October, a news report from Calcutta stated:

Tsepon Shakabpa, leader of seven-man delegation to Peking told PTI today that this delegation was proceeding to Peking irrespective of the reported Chinese Communists invasion of Tibet. He had received final instructions from Lhasa to conduct negotiations in Peking on future Sino-Tibetans relations only last Sunday, he said. The Delegation had not discussed the future of Tibet with the Chinese Ambassador in New Delhi during their stay there. They had only informal talks. A member of the delegation said that they were more interested in religion than in foreign affairs. He thought Tibet was of no significant strategic importance for military point of view. ¹⁹

We shall see that the delegation was perfectly informed, but they still did not want to break the news. Tibet was sending a delegation more interested in religion than in foreign affairs to discuss with Mao the future of their nation!

On 27 October, *The Hindu* in Madras published the following piece:

The Tibetan Delegation which left New Delhi this morning en route to Peking remained unperturbed over the reported entry of the Chinese troops into Eastern Tibet and the leader of the delegation pointed out that the area in question was always disputed territory, both China and Tibet claiming it as part of their territory.

The negotiating team was still pretending that nothing had happened, except some small dispute about 'disputed territories'.

The analysis of Ford may be correct when he said:

I could only think it was a matter of habit. The Lhasa Government was so used to the policy of saying nothing that might offend or provoke the Chinese that it kept it on after provocation had become irrelevant. It was still trying to avert a war that had already broken out.²⁰

But on October 25 the Chinese themselves had announced to the world that Tibet was being 'liberated.' A brief communiqué of the New China News Agency (Xinhua) said: "People's army units have been ordered to advance into Tibet to free three million Tibetans."

23 October 1950: A Telegram from Lhasa

We recently came across an extraordinary original document²¹: a coded telegram from the Tibetan Kashag in Lhasa to the Tibetan representative in Delhi. The cable was sent through the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and forwarded to the head of the Tibetan mission with a covering letter stating "with compliments".

One can first remark that this telegram, routed through the MEA, shows to what extent the communications to and from Tibet were in fact a monopoly of Nehru's government.

The document also raises many other interesting questions; the cable is addressed to "Mr. Chatsi, Leader of the Tibetan Delegation". It means that Shakabpa was not, as usually assumed, the leader of the Tibetan Delegation to India. Mr. Chatsi (Thubten Gylapo) was the monk official administering the revenue of the Potala and it appears that the Government of India considered the monk official as the head of the delegation.²²

The telegram came as an answer to a cable sent by the Delegation to Lhasa. Thubten Gyalpo and his colleagues had asked for directions in the talks with Yuan, the Chinese Ambassador who, on September 16, had proposed a three-point plan to solve the Tibetan issue. During this first meeting with the Tibetan delegates, Yuan had threatened that China would invade Tibet if the following points were not immediately accepted:

1. Tibet must accept that it is a part of China.
2. Tibet's defense must be handled by China
3. All political and trade matters concerning foreign countries must be conducted through China.

The delegates were bluntly told that if the answer was not favourable, the Chinese troops massed on the eastern bank of the Yangtse would attack Tibet, while if the Tibetan accepted the proposal, Tibet would be 'liberated' peacefully.²³

The Tibetans tried to gain time and referred the matter to Lhasa who took more than one month to answer; for Tibet, it was a vital question of survival.

By the time, the reply from Lhasa came (23 October), the Chinese had already crossed the Yangste, Chamdo and fallen and Ngabo, the Governor had been taken prisoner. Here is the answer from Lhasa:

On the eleventh day of the ninth moon, we sent a telegram, instructing you to proceed immediately to Beijing with our response to the three points. The response—as decided through a discussion between the ruler and ministers, and referred to the National Assembly—was cabled to you so that you would have no problem in carrying out your mission. Now that you have received the telegram, you must be preparing to leave. However, His Holiness the Dalai Lama suggested that we should consult the unfailing Gems through a dough-ball divination to decide whether or not to accept the first Communist demand for suzerainty over Tibet, this being an important issue relating to the well-being of our religious and political affairs, and needing a decision that would not harm our short- and long-term interests. Seeing the important merit of this suggestion, a dough-ball divination was conducted in front of the statues of Mahakala and Palden Lhamo in the Mahakala shrine at Norbulingka. The divination predicted that out of the three demands of the Communist government, the first one for Chinese suzerainty over Tibet should not be accepted as this will harm our religious and political interests in the short- and long-term. Since the dough-ball divination is unfailing, you should proceed to Beijing without delay, as instructed in the earlier telegram.

The instructions are very clear: the Chinese suzerainty over Tibet should not be accepted.

The decision which took more than a month was taken in consultation of all the different parties involved in decision-making in Lhasa, including the young Dalai Lama, the Kashag, the National Assembly and the god-protectors. The telegram continues:

There, you should meet important leaders of the Communist Government and regularly report their statements to us. In order to make your work convenient, we will reply immediately to each point of your report. On the first point, concerning the demand for acceptance of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet, you should not make the mistake of using any word that may suggest acceptance. The second and third points should be discussed without deviating from the instruction in the earlier telegram.

As it is the last document available regarding the policy to be followed for negotiations with the Chinese, we can assume that some of the modalities for the negotiations remained the same. It is very clearly stated here that the delegates should "regularly report their statements to us [Lhasa]. In order to make your work convenient, we will reply immediately to each point of your report". We shall see that the procedure laid down was never followed during the negotiations in Beijing²⁴.

The telegram went to mention a letter sent to Mao. It is not clear if it is the same letter supposed to have been sent in 1949 claiming all the 'lost' Tibetan territories west of the Yangtse river.²⁵

Your telegram of last night said that the National Assembly's letter to Mao Tsetung would cause harm. But this letter was the product of a unanimous decision at the Tibetan National Assembly. Therefore, you should take this letter and hand it to the concerned person immediately on your arrival in Beijing. As a matter of fact, you are well aware that you were selected from the best ecclesiastical and lay officials. The dough-ball divination confirmed your selection, showing that your karma puts you in the position to undertake this

mission. Now, as this is a matter of our national interest, you should not be faint-hearted and narrow-minded in your discussion with the Chinese. If you keep the instruction of your government, as spelled out in the earlier telegram, in your mind and develop courage and farsightedness, our polity will not suffer in the long run. Therefore, you should work with sincerity and diligence. You should not worry since we over here have been conducting a great deal of ritual prayers.

On the twelfth day of the ninth moon in the Iron Tiger year [23 October 1950]

The last remarks can be explained by the reluctance of Shakabpa to go to Beijing due to the bad experience he had in 1948 during the Trade Mission's visit to China and further because he did not agree with Lhasa intransigence. He felt, for example, that Tibet had no choice but to accept the first point.

This telegram was the last instructions given to the Mission while in India. The following week, the delegates were told not to proceed to Beijing as battle was shifted to the United Nations where an appeal was made.

The Appeal to the United Nations

During the last days of October, Lhasa sent feelers to Delhi to see if India would be ready to sponsor the Tibetan appeal in the UN. The Tibetan Government was quite confident that Nehru's government, which had always taken the side of oppressed people against imperialist and colonialist powers, would cooperate. India's reply was that it would certainly support an appeal from Tibet, but would not like to sponsor the appeal.

On November 7, a formal letter was sent from Kalimpong by the Government of Tibet to the General Secretary of the UN appealing to the world body to come to Tibet's help.

The well-drafted appeal stated that the problem was not of 'Tibet's own making' and that "the Tibetans were racially, culturally and geographically far apart from the Chinese." It compared their situation with Korea.

In Lhasa, the Tibetan Foreign Office nominated a delegation including Surkhang Dzaza and Trunikchenpo Chomppel to plead the Tibetan cause at the UN. It is not clear what happened to the delegation, but they never reached the seat of the UN. If they had, it would have certainly made a difference, but who was interested to see Tibetan delegates in New York?²⁶

Till mid-November the position of the Government of India was clear: India would support the Tibetan case if raised by any other nation. Then India's position began to vacillate. Here we should remember that Nehru who must have had the Kashmir issue fresh in his mind had suddenly become quite disillusioned about the effectiveness of the UN.

At the same time he had a great ambition to play a role in the Korean issue. It appears from the archives that Nehru decided to sacrifice Tibet, in order to continue to be a mediator between China and the West in the Korean war.

In the course of the negotiations in New York, most of the representatives indicated that India was the nation most concerned and that they would follow India's lead.

The British point was that "the situation in Tibet is one which primarily concerns the Government of India and for this reason we would not ourselves wish to take the initiative."

Finally on November 24, at the request of tiny state of El Salvador, the matter came up for discussion in the General Committee of the United Nations. India and Great Britain moved for postponing the matter: Jam Saheb of Navanagar, the Indian Representative, said that "the Indian Government was certain that the Tibetan question could still be settled by peaceful means, and that such a settlement could safeguard the autonomy which Tibet enjoyed for several decades while maintaining its historical association with China."

The matter was adjourned. The noose had tightened on Tibet.

Fifty years later, the case is still 'adjourned'!

The door of the United Nations had been closed in the face of Tibet.

On December 30, Henderson, the American Ambassador in Delhi cabled the Secretary of State Acheson to inform him that:

Representatives GOI had repeatedly assured us it intended do so [support Tibetan appeal]. Now appears views B.N. Rau and other Indian officials who do not wish India make any move in present world context which might offend Communist China have prevailed and GOI continues postpone taking initiative re Tibet in UN. Seems likely Communist China will have taken over Lhasa and have fastened firmly its grip on Tibet before GOI prepared take lead in UN.²⁷

He concluded:

We seem faced with choice supporting some power other than India taking initiative or of continuing postpone hearing Tibetan pleas until autonomous Tibet ceases exist. We are wondering whether this would be to credit UN. Is it logical for UN which gave Indonesia which was under Dutch sovereignty hearing to ignore Tibet? Will India, for instance, have greater respect for UN if merely out of deference to it, UN gives Tibet no opportunity present case?

Nehru did not realize at that time that by 'dropping' the Tibetan issue, his own reputation with other small Asian and African countries would be tarnished.

The Discussions in Yatung

In November, the newly enthroned Dalai Lama decided to flee Lhasa and take refuge near Yatung in the Chumbi valley, in a place close enough to the Sikkimese border to be able to take refuge in India at short notice. He was following the example of his predecessor, who in 1910 had taken refuge in Kalimpong after some Chinese troops had invaded Tibet.

In December 1950, Shakabpa and his colleagues were recalled to Chumbi Valley to discuss the new situation with the Kashag. The main debate was: should the Dalai Lama seek asylum in India (or the West)? The Great Monasteries were very opposed to the Dalai Lama leaving the Land of Snows. They felt that without the Dalai Lama, the already low fighting spirit would be completely dissolved. In

addition, they thought that the presence of the Dalai Lama was a sort of a guarantee that the Chinese would honour an eventual agreement.

After he gave his report Shakabpa left immediately for Kalimpong, leaving Thubten Gyalpo [Mr. Chatsi] to handle the discussions with the officials. Goldstein said Shakabpa found the atmosphere 'unfriendly'. It was most probably not to the taste of everybody, that a relatively junior officer (Tsepon) had taken so much of importance during the previous months.

However, with all doors for assistance closed (Western support, Indian mediation, appeal to the UN, etc.), it was finally decided to send a delegation to Beijing to hold talks with the Chinese.

Surkhang was still in India and before returning to Yatung, he met Nehru in Delhi. The Tibetan government was still keen that India should participate in a Sino-Tibetan Agreement, at least as a guarantor. Nehru's advice was that Tibet should admit that Tibet was part of China²⁸, but strongly urged them not accept to have Chinese troops stationed in Tibet. He felt that the Tibetans should insist on keeping the control of defence matters.²⁹ It shows the blindness of Nehru. He was sending the little lamb to the butcher and at the same time requesting the lamb to plead India's case! When Nehru was not ready to help Tibet, how could he expect the weak Tibetans to defend India's security interests?

It is not clear how Delhi expected that once the Tibetans had accepted that Tibet was part of China, the PLA would remain outside the 'Chinese' territory. Beijing had made it clear from the beginning that the main task of liberating Tibet was to protect their 'western borders'.

The Delegation to Beijing

At the end of the discussions in Yatung, it was decided to send a delegation to Beijing to discuss the status of Tibet with the Communist leaders. A ten-point proposal was prepared as the basis on which the delegates were to negotiate. A cable from Henderson explains the state of mind of certain Tibetan officials:

... because Tibet had received no response from the United Nations and some of its member states with respect to its appeal regarding Communist China's invasion of Tibet in October 1950, the Tibetan authorities had fallen into a dejected and fatalistic frame of mind and appeared to be convinced that they would have to accede to the demands of Communist China regarding Tibet. However, the Dalai Lama did not give his representatives any plenipotentiary powers. They were asked to refer any important decision back to the Kashag in the Chumbi Valley and were also requested to establish a wireless link between Yatung and Beijing to keep a daily contact. Unfortunately this was not to happen. In late March, the different parts of the team began to proceed to Beijing. From Yatung, Kheme Dzaza³⁰ and Lhautara, a monk official sailed from Calcutta to Beijing soon after Surkhang's return from Delhi.

Two delegates left Lhasa for China via Chamdo to pick up Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, who had just been released after a short period of indoctrination. He was now Vice-Chairman of the 'Chamdo Liberation Committee'. While prisoner in Chamdo he is supposed to have told the Chinese: "We have been defeated and we are now your prisoners. Whether you keep me under arrest or not, my hope was that we could have a good negotiation and a peaceful settlement. That's all I can say."³¹

At the same time the Chinese troops began their propaganda.

With serious concern for the people of Tibet, who have suffered long years of oppression under American and British imperialists and Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary Government, Chairman Mao Tse-tung of the Central People's Government and Commander in Chief Chu Te of the People's Liberation Army ordered the People's Liberation Army troops to enter Tibet for the purpose of assisting the Tibetan people to free themselves from oppression forever.

All the Tibetan people, including all lamas, should now create a solid unity to give the People's Liberation Army adequate assistance in ridding Tibet of imperialist influence and in establishing a regional self government for the Tibetan people.

The fact that Ngabo had been in the hands of the Chinese for the past five months should have disqualified him automatically to be part of the team. It has not been explained why the Tibetan Kashag selected Ngabo to lead such tricky negotiations knowing that he had been under indoctrination by the Chinese. At the end of April, Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Prime Minister went himself to receive Ngabo and the Lhasa delegates at the Beijing station. Ngabo did not follow the Tibetan tradition of presenting scarves to the Chinese leaders, he most probably felt ashamed of this old custom. He had cut his long hair to show the Chinese revolutionaries that he was a modern leader. This must have immensely pleased the Communist Government to see that at least one of the delegates was rejected the "olds".

The Negotiations

The negotiations finally started on April 29, 1951. The delegations were sitting on either side of a huge table. The Chief negotiator for the Chinese was Li Wei-han, the Chairman of the National Minorities Commission.³² Ngabo Ngawang Jigme in his capacity of Governor of Kham was the leader of the Tibetan delegation. Baba Phuntsok Wangyal³³ was the official Chinese translator.

When the meeting opened, Li asked Ngabo if he had prepared a statement of position. Ngabo, who was not keen to present the ten Point Plan sent by the Kashag from Yatung, said he had no agenda. Li disbanded the meeting saying that the Chinese agenda would be presented the next day. The following day, the Tibetans were presented by the Chinese with a draft agreement which was not acceptable to them³⁴.

We must remember that the delegates from Yatung had brought a ten Point Plan to be presented to the Chinese. Ngabo felt it was unrealistic and that it may anger the Chinese, so he decided not to present it. He was also of the opinion that the delegation should take all the responsibility without referring the details of the talks to Yatung or Lhasa as the delay could annoy the Chinese who would be forced to take military action against Tibet.

As with his hair cut, Ngabo wanted to present a modern Tibet, a Tibet which had thrown away its backwardness and understood the rapid evolution of outside world.

Like many in India, he most probably felt that the communist system was, after all, not so bad and that it could bring positive changes in Tibet.³⁵

As a result of Ngabo's approach and the Chinese threats, there was no real negotiation except on minor points: As put by Sadutshang:

Everything was more or less forced on us, because we had only one option [the Chinese one]. We were discussing point after point: the minor point, of course there was not any problem. But for the major points, whenever the Chinese wanted something and that the Tibetans did not want to give them what they wanted, the Chinese would say "we can not accept this. And if you keep on insisting the only alternative is that we will give an instruction, we will immediately send a telegram and tell the army to move in. And it will be the end. There won't be any question of talk or agreement. We will occupy your country and will dictate the terms."

After several days of debate with each party sticking to its stand, the Tibetan delegation finally rejected the draft proposal.

To 'unlock' the situation the leader of the Chinese delegation introduced an 'amended' draft which was in fact more or less the same as the previous one. This time the Chinese made it clear to the Tibetan delegation that they had no choice but to sign it.

In the words of the Dalai Lama, "It was not until they returned to Lhasa, long afterwards, that we heard exactly what had happened to them."³⁶

The Dalai Lama added:

This was presented as an ultimatum, our delegates were not allowed to make any alterations or suggestions. They were insulted and abused and threatened with personal violence, and with further military action against the people of Tibet, and they were not allowed to refer to me or my government for further instructions.

This draft agreement was based on the assumption that Tibet was part of China. That was simply untrue, and it could not possibly have been accepted by our delegation without reference to me and my government, except under duress. But Ngabo had been a prisoner of the Chinese for a long time, and other delegates were also virtual prisoners. At last, isolated from any advice, they did yield to compulsion and signed the document. They still refused to affix the seals which were needed to validate. But the Chinese forged duplicate Tibetan seals in Peking, and forced our delegation to seal the document with them.

Neither I or my government were told that an agreement had been signed. We first came to know of it from a broadcast which Ngabo made on Peking Radio. It was a terrible shock when we heard the terms of it. We were appalled at the mixture of Chinese clichés, vainglorious assertions which were completely false, and bold statements which were only partly true. And the terms were far worse and more oppressive than anything we had imagined."³⁷

By signing this 'Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet', Tibet lost her two-thousand-years old independence.

The preamble stated:

The Tibetan nationality is one of the nationalities with a long history within the boundaries of China, and like many other nationalities, it has done glorious duty in the course of the creation and development of the Great Motherland.

Then India and the Western powers were targeted — the Agreement affirmed that the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet.

...in order that influences of aggressive imperialist forces in Tibet might be successfully eliminated, the unification of the territory and the sovereignty of the Chinese People's Republic (CPR) accomplished, and national defence safeguarded; in order that the Tibetan nationality and people might be freed and return to the big family of the PCR.³⁸

The preamble repeats twice that the Tibetan delegation had full powers to negotiate, but we have seen that this was not correct. The delegation was

supposed to refer back to the Kashag and the Dalai Lama for further orders and they never did so.

One sometimes wonders if the Chinese themselves really believed in imperialist influences in Tibet, but the repetition of the argument, gave it the strength of a mantra.

It certainly had an effect on the Indian Government and in particular on Panikkar, who would soon repeat it himself: "I do not think that there is anything wrong in the troops of Red China moving about in their own country."

The Agreement authorized the entry of Chinese forces into Tibet and empowered the Chinese Central Government to handle the external affairs of Tibet. The Tibetan Army was to be integrated into the Chinese forces and a Committee was appointed in Lhasa to implement the Agreement.

One should note that no mention was made of India, even though many parts of the Agreement contradict certain articles of the Simla Convention which was still in force at that time.

The announcement

A few days later, the Dalai Lama heard the announcement of the signing of the 17 Point Agreement through Beijing Radio. He had not heard anything from Ngabo. When asked to comment on this, Phuntsok Tashi Taklha made this comment:

The reason why the Dalai Lama got the news through Radio and not through Ngabo can be seen from the same angle as why the Dalai Lama was not approached during the decision making process. The Delegation did not want to give an official "approach" [stamp]. They had to make a very difficult choice. One choice was not to sign and have the Chinese taking over Chamdo and Tibet. The other choice was to wait for the Dalai Lama's order, in which case the Tibetan Government would give a negative response and if this had happened the army would invade Tibet and the delegation would have failed in

its duties. So Ngabo and the delegation felt: "Right now, we will not make it an official version, we will not give it an official appearance, we will not consult the government. Later the Tibetan Government could say: "This was a private move initiated by this private group and they did not have the approval at all of the Tibetan Government and in case later on a foreign power intervene [get involves] they can say that with a clear conscience."

After hearing the news of signing of the Agreement, the Dalai Lama telegraphed his delegation in Beijing that the agreement was not acceptable. He did not repudiate immediately because he wanted to obtain a full first-hand report of the delegates. Unfortunately for Tibet, when the report finally came, it was too late; the Chinese had already started to implement it. The Chinese troops had reached Lhasa.

However, at the end of September 1951, the National Assembly discussed the Agreement. Ngabo and his five colleagues were present: Ngabo is said to have declared:

If you think it is wrong, then you can punish me, saying that we have ignored the inner instruction. For the five of us [the delegates] whatever you want to take, our body, life, property, whatever you have to do, go ahead and do it and we will have no regrets.³⁹

It seems that after a very long discussion in which the big monasteries felt that the Agreement would protect their interests and the religious and monastic life would be safeguarded, a majority of the members of the Assembly accepted to give it a try.

Tass Agency said that the Dalai Lama sent a telegram to Mao in October to inform him of the decision. It is doubtful if the telegram quoted by the Soviet Agency was ever sent by the Dalai Lama for the good reason that it is couched in such communist jargon which was completely foreign to the Dalai Lama and his administration in 1951. The Telegram is stated to have said:

The local Government of Tibet, the monks and the entire Tibetan people expressed their unanimous support for this agreement. Under the leadership of

Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the central People's Government, they are actively helping units of the PLA which entered Tibet for the strengthening of the national defences, the driving out of imperialist forces from Tibet and the guaranteeing the sovereignty of the entire territory of the motherland.⁴⁰

The Chinese were far superior at the game of the propaganda war.

It was only after crossing the Indian border to take refuge in India in April 1959 that the Dalai Lama was free to repudiate the 17-Point Agreement.

The Consequences

The first and foremost consequence of the signature of the 17-Point Agreement was that the Land of Snows was losing its sovereignty; Tibet had become a part of the 'Great Motherland'. It was that the first time in its 2000 year-old history, Tibet had, in an official document, consented to be a province 'within the boundaries' of China.

We have seen that the Tibetans were practically put in front of a *fait accompli*.

An Internal Matter?

A few years back, we asked the Dalai Lama if he considered the 17-Point Agreement as an 'unequal Treaty' on Tibet.⁴¹ He made an interesting point:

Even the Chinese (as far as the Tibetan language [of the Agreement] is concerned), have made a clear distinction between Treaty and Agreement. The Tibetan word for Treaty is "Chingyig", they [the Chinese] always say the 17 Point Agreement is not "Chingyig" but it is "Droetun": an agreement between the Central Government and the local Government. It is not a Treaty. Treaty is between 2 independent states. So, the very concept is like ("unequal"). And then the way it was signed: under duress. There is no doubt about it.

Ngabo, the head of the Tibetan delegation in 1951 (and since then in the hands of China), emphasized a similar point in a recent declaration to Xinhua News agency:

He [Ngabo] stressed that the agreement, known as the 17-article Agreement, is a document that falls into the category of domestic agreements, because it handles the relationship between the central government and a local government.

For the Chinese it was the main victory. Ngabo added:

Early in the talks, representatives of both parties disagreed over questions such as whether PLA troops should march into Tibet. The five Tibetan

representatives finally agreed that since major issues had been solved, such as the recognition of Tibet as part of China's territory, all other issues were minor. Representatives of both sides soon reached an agreement on the march of PLA troops into Tibet.

Though the Chinese propaganda⁴² pretended that the entry of the Chinese troops into Tibet was a 'minor' issue, the fact that Ngabo accepted that Tibet was a region of China, gave Beijing a free hand to enter in their 'own' land.

Under international law, what qualifies a state for an independent status is its ability to conduct a separate and independent foreign policy and to sign treaties on its own.

Having accepted to sign an 'internal agreement' with the People Republic of China, Tibet had surrendered its autonomous existence. Did Ngabo understand this legal point?

Michael van Walt van Praag, in his *The Status of Tibet*⁴³, rightly argued that the Agreement was not legally valid because the Chinese used war to settle the Tibetan issue and under the *General Treaty for Renunciation of War* to which the Chinese government was also a signatory, no dispute should be settled 'except by peaceful means.' He made another valid point; in international law, an agreement, treaty or contract is valid only if both contracting parties sign by free and mutual consent, which was hardly the case for the 17-Point Agreement. However, the legal position did not change the physical situation in Tibet and the occupation by the PLA.

The Conditions under which the Agreement was signed.

But let us have a look at the conditions under which this 'unequal treaty' was signed. The Dalai Lama as well as most of the historians (except the Chinese) termed the Agreement as signed 'under duress'. The first question therefore is: was there duress or not?

In this regard, two points are clear: one, there was no physical personal duress on the delegation and two, the Tibetan representatives were under constant

threat that the invading troops would continue their march to Lhasa. The Chinese leaders repeatedly told them that if they did not sign on the dotted line, dire consequences would follow. One can only ask: which consequence would have followed if the delegates had not sign?⁴⁴

But more importantly, we should remember that Ngabo was a prisoner of war when he left Chamdo for Beijing to participate to the talks. It is rather strange that a prisoner is suddenly requested to conduct negotiations of such an importance. Ngabo was not known to be a courageous leader. In fact, many people who have worked with him (like Robert Ford) did not think too much of him. They felt that he had a too high opinion of himself and he did not possess the acumen of someone that Lukhangwa⁴⁵ .

In fact, it is certain that if Lukhangwa had been in Beijing, the Agreement would not have been signed without reference to the Dalai Lama in Yatung.

But history cannot be rewritten.

Nevertheless, let us not forget that though the Mission had been strongly advised not to give away the autonomy of Tibet (as well as defence and foreign affairs), Ngabo hushed up the Agreement without consulting the Tibetan Cabinet in Yatung. He bluntly lied when he recently declared:

Moreover, in accordance with the instructions of the Tibetan local government, the representatives were authorized to act as they deemed necessary and to deal independently with matters related to negotiations.

From all other sources, it has been proved that the delegation had no power to take such important decision without referring the matter to the Tibetan Government, but Ngabo added:

Negotiations proceeded in a friendly and open atmosphere. Sometimes we had different views on some questions. But I think this was quite normal. The agreement signed is reasonable and acceptable.

Another point to note is that Ngabo refused to present the ten-Point plan which was supposed to be the basis for the negotiations. Ngabo can be considered the epitome of the policy of appeasement. This political theory professed that more

you are able to please the Chinese (or anybody else), kinder they will be with you.

Many Indian and Tibetan leaders were of the opinion that to get the best deal from the Chinese, it was better not to antagonize them.⁴⁶

After fifty years, one can see the results of this policy and the misery and the suffering it has triggered.⁴⁷ He had nothing to do with Buddhist tenets on non-violence.

The 17-Point Agreement: a pretext?

Though considered by Ngabo and the Chinese as 'reasonable and acceptable', the fact remains that none of the 'religious and cultural' clauses of the Agreement were implemented or respected during the following years.

The Dalai Lama recently told us:

The agreement has not been relevant [for us]. I should put this way, as a result of signing the 17 Point Agreement, during few years, Tibet enjoyed some benefits in the sense that a certain autonomy in our way of life [for example in the fields of culture, religion] was granted; it was guaranteed in the Agreement. Later, in late fifties, all these guarantees were disregarded and the agreement became worthless. ... For some years, we derived some benefit, but later, it became plain military occupation.⁴⁸

From the Russian and other archives as well as from the Chinese leaders' declarations, it is clear that Tibet was going to be 'liberated' anyway. Even the schedule for the operation was fixed and it depended more on the climatic conditions than anything else. Chamdo had to fall before the winter; this was done without any 'agreement' or negotiations.

Again Ngabo is wrong, when he said that: "The central government [Beijing] sent troops into Tibet in accordance with the agreement. So there does not exist the question of one party forcing another to do anything."

The PLAs first entered Tibet in October 1950 and only six months later the agreement was signed! The Liberation Army advanced towards Lhasa during the

next summer after having taken Chamdo 'on schedule'. For the Chinese, the ideal outcome of the Beijing talks was that the Tibetans would agree to be 'part of the Motherland'. They could then enter their 'own' territory. After it had happened (once the 17-Point Agreement signed), the 'liberation' proceeded smoothly.

India's Reaction: a philosophical acquiescence

In a telegram sent to Washington in early January, Henderson had noted:

GOI however, appears to have abandoned hope, and in view this fact and its anxiety not to offend Peking it would not be easy to prevail on it to extend further assistance or to permit armed shipments through India for Tibet.⁴⁹

Though the Agreement meant an obvious loss of the autonomy for Tibet which India had wanted to preserve, the attitude of hopelessness prevailed during the following months in New Delhi. At the same time, Nehru was trying to solve 'more important' problems.

Bajpai, the Secretary General of the Ministry of External Affairs told Henderson⁵⁰ on January 25 that "GOI at present so immersed in problem maintaining world peace it was giving little thought to Tibet; in fact, he did not recall that Tibet was even mentioned during recent Commonwealth Conference."

It explained the Indian Government's lack of interest for their small and weak neighbour which was in the process to be devoured by giant China.

The American archives tells us that it is only on May 28⁵¹ that the chancelleries got to know about the agreement:

Importance underlined by May 28 press reports re Sino-Tibetan agreement (Embattle 3380, May 28). Embassy has no confirmation and unable estimate accuracy. Reports have thus far emanated from Peiping, Hong Kong, London and Kathman (Embdesp 389, 390, 391, May 29). It may be reports based on agreement which Tibetan delegation at Peiping accepted and Tibetan Government considers agreement still requires approval or ratification by Dalai Lama and Tibetan Government at Yatung.

It was still obvious for everyone (except for the Chinese) that the Tibetan Cabinet had to approve the deal.

On May 31, Henderson met with Bajpai to ascertain the position of the Indian Government regarding the Radio Beijing announcement. It makes an interesting reading because we shall see that two weeks later, Nehru will pretend to have no information about the content of the Agreement:

Bajpai⁵² stated text agreement just recd from Panikkar agreed with press version in all substantial respects. Panikkar had commented very briefly, emphasizing that agreement provided for trade and friendly relations with neighboring countries. Bajpai intimated that Panikkar had failed to secure any info during course of negots, and Steere⁵³ gained impression GOI taken by surprise at extend Tibetan capitulation.

The fact remained that the Indian government was not only surprised, but very unhappy of the turn of events. Nehru had briefed the Tibetans before their departure for Beijing that defence matters should not be relinquish by them. It was now too late:

Bajpai endeavored gloss over fact GOI disappointed at Tibetan failure secure better terms and gave unmistakable indication that GOI feels helpless in face this development and is likely accept it without protest. He said India was heir to Brit policy which had sought achieve buffer state in Tibet against Russia and Chi. GOI however was not disposed create or support buffer states.

The American ambassador also stated that "US under no illusions that current attitude GOI is more sympathetic to Tibet cause than shown by actions to date". It is however not clear on which facts are based this information.

The future will not prove the veracity of this statement. However, Henderson's advice to the Tibetans was the "high desirability to enlist support GOI Tibetans" though they should "be under no illusions likewise that mil⁵⁴ assistance can be obtained for them".

Four days later⁵⁵ Henderson cabled again his assessment of the situation to the Secretary of State:

Although GOI surprised and apparently somewhat shocked at stiff conditions which according to announcement from Peiping, Communist China had imposed in Sino-Tibetan agreement, indications now are that it is inclined adopt attitude philosophic acquiescence. According to members UK HICOM who have discussed matter with responsible Indian officials latter inclined rationalize that in view historic and present friendship between India and China, Communist Chinese political and military control Tibet not likely have adverse effect on security India.

2. UK HICOM considering advisability suggesting Foreign Office authorize it urge GOI not remain passive in matter which involves danger for SOA.

Members UK HICOM would like be able argue with Indian officials that if GOI bow Communist China "blackmail" re Tibet, India will eventually be confronted with similar blackmail not only re Burma but re such areas as Assam, Bhutan, Sikkim, Kashmir, Nepal.

But the Government of India did not react to the 'Agreement', even though some clauses were in clear contradiction with the Simla Convention⁵⁶.

On June 11⁵⁷, three weeks after the Agreement was signed, Nehru pretended at a press conference that he knew nothing. It was untrue as we earlier saw:

I do not know much more about it than you probably know. The story about an agreement being reached between the People's Government in China and the Tibetan authorities has reached us too. That is all; no further development has taken place to our knowledge. It is not proper for me to react to something which is not complete, which is not fully known.

He remained extremely vague when asked about the status of Tibet:

Throughout this period some kind of Chinese suzerainty has been recognised in the past as well as Tibetan autonomy. We have certain interests there which are not political but which are cultural, etc, which we should like to preserve. These are our approaches and we should like to preserve our cultural and trade interests in a friendly way with the people concerned.

Then a journalist asked him: ""Will the presence of Chinese troops in Tibet hinder preservation of India's interests?"

Again he preferred to remain vague when security of India was at stake:

The facts are rather vague about the presence of forces, etc, and to what extent they might or might not hinder is also therefore not clear to me. Nothing of that kind has been suggested. Once the subject comes up, we shall naturally discuss it.

He also pretended that he had no news

The only account we had were some celebrations in Peking, celebrations in the sense of some meeting or some other occasion, where the signing of the treaty was celebrated by toasts to various peoples including the Dalai Lama -- both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama.⁵⁸

Western governments were quicker to react: on June 6, 1951 Kenneth Younger, the spokesman of the British Government, commented that although the Agreement guaranteed Tibetan autonomy, he had grave doubts about the value of the guarantees. The British Government was convinced that India was bowing to 'communist blackmail'; however it decided to go along with the policy of the Government of India.

The United States government sent secret communications to the Chumbi valley and urged the Dalai Lama to repudiate the Agreement, to leave Tibet and take asylum in a 'friendly' country like the United States or Sri Lanka.

After considering the possibility of leaving Tibet and taking refuge in India, the Dalai Lama bowed to the advice of some of his ministers and the pressure from the great monasteries. On 17 August, after the visit of the Chinese General Chang in Chumbi Valley, the Dalai Lama finally decided to return to Lhasa in the hope of renegotiating the 17-Point Agreement.

The end

On September 9, 1951, several thousand Communist troops of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Lhasa under the command of General Wang Chi-Mei. Subsequently 20,000 troops began to occupy the most strategic points on the Tibetan Plateau.

Once the military take-over of Tibet had been 'legalized' by the 17-Point Agreement, the communist plans unfolded. The next step for Beijing was to subdue the Indian government with a well-orchestrated propaganda of 'eternal friendship' (followed by 'brotherhood' or *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai*) between the two Asian giants.

With no objection from the Government of India to the take-over of Tibet, Mao wanted the supremacy of the PLA to be established on the ground and for the purpose he began to build motorable access roads to the new 'borders' of China. However, the influx of fresh troops brought with it the first real problem in the new co-existence between the Chinese occupants and the Lhasa government. The first test arose over the availability of food. It was the most important logistical problem.

The years which followed, saw one of strangest upshots of the so-called 'liberation' of Tibet and the nascent 'eternal' friendship between India and China, the supply by India of grain for the Chinese troops stationed in Tibet.⁵⁹

For the first time in its history, the arrival of the PLA produced a breakdown of the Tibetan economy and it soon became difficult for the Tibetan (and the Chinese) Government to deal with the problem.

Lukhangwa, the courageous Tibetan Prime Minister attempted several times to raise the matter with the Chinese authorities; he argued that it was unfair to put such a burden on the Tibetan poor and that it was not necessary to keep so many troops around Lhasa. Chinese General Chang became so furious that he requested the Dalai Lama to immediately remove Lukhangwa from Office since he "was obstructing their welfare program".

Chang told the Dalai Lama that the Tibetans had signed an agreement which mentioned that "*Chinese forces should be stationed in Tibet* " and he added that

the Tibetan Government was *"therefore obliged to provide them [the Chinese] with accommodation and supplies"*. He added that the Chinese *"...had only come to help Tibet ... to protect her against imperialist domination and that they would go back to China.... when you can stand on your feet, we will not stay here even if you ask us to."*⁶⁰

The Dalai Lama had no alternative but to dismiss Lukhangwa. It was the first breach of the Agreement.

India Leans Towards China

We have seen that the main problem at that time was that India was much too preoccupied with more 'pressing' and 'important' problems such as mediating in the Korean war.

For months and years to come India would champion the cause of China and try to promote the entry of China into the United Nations in every possible forum.

In September 1951, India refused to participate in the San Francisco Conference to sign the Japanese Peace Treaty, as it did not incorporate a clause for restoring Formosa to China.

Up to the time of 1962 attack on India, Nehru's Government tried to appease China in every possible way. Panikkar being the chief advisor to Nehru on Chinese matters took the lead in defending the Communists. The Communist revolution in China was, for him, part "of the great Asian Resurgence." 'Asian Solidarity' and 'Sino-Indian friendship' would soon become the two most popular slogans for many Indian politicians.

But, the Chinese had planned their campaign with scientific perfection. After having forced the 17-Point Agreement on the Tibetan government, they consolidated their military position in Tibet. Their strategy was clear: now that the matter had been 'legalized' and since there had been no objection from the Government of India, the supremacy of the PLA had to be militarily established.

Very important construction work began immediately. Priority was given to motorable roads: the China-Lhasa via Nagchuka and the western Tibet road which

would later become the Tibet-Xinjiang Highway. The first surveys were done at the end of 1951 and construction began in 1952.

Downgrading of the Indian Mission

In the exchange of Notes with the Chinese government, which occurred after the entry of the Chinese troops in Tibet, India never insisted on the rights that she had inherited from the Simla Convention.

In the early fifties, she still enjoyed several privilege in Tibet; apart from its Mission in Lhasa, there were three Indian Trade Marts with Agents posted in Gyantse and in Yatung. These agents were both entitled to a military escort. The Post and Telegraph Service and a chain of rest-houses were also under the Indian Government's control.

Ideologically, Nehru was not happy about these 'imperialist' benefits, though he admitted that they were useful for the trade. However, on the ground, the Indian government was finding it more and more difficult to keep these advantages after the arrival of the Chinese troops. The visitors and traders from India were harassed and put to hardship.

Soon after the agreement, the Chinese began pressing the Indian government to withdraw its Political Representative in Lhasa though it was only in September 1952 that the Indian Representative was re-designated as a Consul-General under the Indian Embassy in Beijing.

This was a most serious and direct consequence of the 17-Point Agreement.

The Indian Mission meant that Tibet was an autonomous entity, by downgrading it, the Indian Government was accepting officially and legally that Tibet was part of China.

Panikkar was proud that "the main issue of our representation at Lhasa was satisfactorily settled".⁶¹ He was finally transferred from Beijing, but before leaving he declared that "there was no outstanding issue between us and the Chinese".⁶²

Richardson saw this development differently:

That decision adroitly transformed the temporary mission at Lhasa into a regular consular post. But it was a practical dimension of the fact that Tibet had ceased to be independent and it left unresolved the fate of the special rights acquired when Tibet had been in a position to make treaties with foreign powers and enjoyed by the British and Indian Governments for half a century.⁶³ At that point in time, the Government of India decided to renegotiate some of the arrangements it had with Tibet.

Though Panikkar had boasted that there were no outstanding issues, Delhi took the initiative and proposed negotiations in Beijing to resolve certain issues such as the trans-border trade and pilgrimage facilities. In December 1953, talks began; they were expected to last six weeks, but went on for six months. On 29 April 1954, the representatives of the two countries signed the '*Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India*'.⁶⁴ It was described by Acharya Kripalani as an agreement 'born in sin'.⁶⁵

When the Panchsheel Agreement was signed it was considered by many as Nehru's final capitulation to China, though Nehru considered it the best thing he had ever done.

It was the last and perhaps the most important consequence of the 17-Point Agreement, Tibet, an independent state for 2000 years, had become "Tibet, region of China" and this was sealed in a Treaty between two independent nations: India and China.

Tibet as an autonomous nation did not exist anymore.

Fifty years later, the situation remains the same.

¹ In 1904.

² In 1914.

³ Tibet.

⁴ See *Cold War International History Project Bulletin: (Winter 95/96)* on <http://cwihip.si.edu/default.htm>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Liu Bocheng.

⁷ Beijing had always been a trap for the previous Tibetan delegations.

⁸ Letter addressed to Mr. Mautsetung : *Tibet is a peculiar country where the Buddhist religion is widely flourishing and which is predestined to be ruled by the Living Buddha of Mercy of Chenresig [The Dalai Lama]. As such, Tibet has from the earliest times up to now, been an Independent Country whose Political administration had never been taken over by any Foreign Country; and Tibet also defended her own territories from Foreign invasions and always remained a religious nation.*

In view of the fact that Chinghai and Sinkiang etc are situated on the borders of Tibet, we would like to have an assurance that no Chinese troops would cross the Tibetan frontier from the Sino-Tibetan border, or any such Military action. Therefore please issue strict orders to those Civil and Military Officers stationed on the Sino-Tibetan border in accordance with the above request, and kindly let us have an early reply so that we can be assured. As regards those Tibetan territories annexed as part of Chinese territories some years back, the Government of Tibet would desire to open negotiations after the settlement of the Chinese Civil War. [British Foreign Office Records files (FO371/76317).]

⁹ The British would have had to give a visa on a Tibetan passport which was a sort of recognition of the special status of Tibet.

¹⁰ Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN), Series II, Vol. 15, p. 434. Conversation with the Tibetan Delegation, 8 September 1950.

¹¹ A few weeks later, the Tibetan agreed and instructed accordingly the Tibetan Mission to proceed to Beijing.

¹² Smith, Warren W., *Tibetan Nation* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 273 quoted from *Invasion of Tibet by Chinese's Liberation Army*, US National Archives, (793B.00/8-2150).

¹³ Xinhua Communiqué, November 1, 1950, Peking.

¹⁴ The Convention, having been signed in Simla between British India had 'imperialist' connotations for Nehru.

¹⁵ Article V said: "The Governments of China and Tibet engage that they will not enter into any negotiations or agreements regarding Tibet with one another, or with any other Power, excepting such negotiations and agreements between Great Britain and Tibet."

¹⁶ Deng and Liu would be congratulated by Mao a few months later when they came to Beijing to celebrate the first anniversary of the Communist Republic (October 1, 1951). Indeed the 'liberation' had been unexpectedly smooth and without real problems.

¹⁷ He was then the Indian High Commissioner in London.

¹⁸ Ford Robert, *Captured in Tibet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 112.

¹⁹ *The Hindu*, Madras, 27 October 1950.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Collection Jean Lassale, Paris.

²² In the Tibetan tradition, a delegation was always headed by two officials: a monk and a lay. Shakabpa, the lay official was one of the four Tsepons or 'Finance Secretaries'. Thubten Gyalpo (Mr. Chatsi) was the Changzoe (administrator) of the monastic revenue.

²³ Fifty years later, we still do not see the difference.

²⁴ When, a couple of months later, some members of the delegation left Yatung for Beijing, they were again told to keep in daily wireless contact with the Dalai Lama's government in Chumbi valley.

²⁵ See letter printed earlier.

²⁶ It appears that in January 1951, the United States was ready to issue a visa to the Tibetan team, who for some reasons did not take this opportunity. Some scholars think that Surkhang was waiting for an official invitation from one of the big powers.

²⁷ United States Foreign Relations (USFR), Telegram 793B.00/12-3050 dated December 30, 1950. The Ambassador in India (Henderson) to the Secretary of State.

²⁸ Point 1 of Chinese 3-Point proposal.

²⁹ Another informant, Rinchen Sadutshang told us: "We met Nehru and asked for his advice: the Chinese had already marched and occupied Chamdo. The matter was: would they advance further militarily or would there be some peaceful negotiation and there would be no more fighting and killing. Nehru's advice was: "you must negotiate and come to an understanding with the Chinese. There is no way that you can fight the Chinese, but try to get the best terms possible". That was Nehru's advice but at the same time a key point he pointed out: "I would advise you to tell the Chinese that they would have no further danger and the Chinese need not have a huge military establishment in Tibet". He said that we should insist on that. He was foreseeing that if the Chinese had a huge military establishment in Tibet it would become a cause of concern for India."

³⁰ He had led the Congratulation Mission to India in 1946.

³¹ Goldstein, Melvyn, *The Fall of the Lamaist State* (University of California Press: 1989), p.742.

³² It would later be known as the United Front. This ministry still today deals with the so-called "minorities" such as the Tibetans, the Mongols or the Muslims of Xinjiang.

³³ As a young boy had joined the Long March when the Communists passed through Batang and Eastern Kham, he later became the first Tibetan communist leader. He was for some time very close to Mao Zedong and the Chinese leadership until the late fifties when he was sent for 'reeducation' for antiparty activities. He is still living in Beijing today.

³⁴ We owe most of our information on the 'negotiations' in Beijing to late P.T. Takhla, brother-in-law of the Dalai Lama and translator for the delegation (who unfortunately passed away recently) and Mr Rinchen Sadutshang, the English translator. Rinchen Sadutshang was a very young man at that time; though not officially part of the delegation, he was asked to accompany his senior

colleagues to Beijing as he had been the English-Tibetan translator for the delegation in Yatung and in India.

³⁵ It was also probably the opinion of Nehru and some of his close collaborators such as the flamboyant (before 1962) V.K. Krishna Menon and K.M. Panikkar, the Indian Ambassador to Beijing.

³⁶ The Dalai Lama, *My Land and my People* (New York: Potala, 1977), pp. 87-88.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Text of the 17-Point Agreement is available in many publications, one of them being van Walt van Praag, Michael, *The Status of Tibet* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

³⁹ Quoted by Goldstein, op. cit., p 820.

⁴⁰ Clippings in British Foreign Office file FO371/92998.

⁴¹ The Chinese often speak of "unequal Treaties" imposed by the Western Powers (England, Russia, Japan, France) on a weak Manchu dynasty (for example the concession of Hong Kong or Macao).

⁴² Through Ngabo's mouth.

⁴³ van Walt van Praag, Michael, op. cit., p. 165.

⁴⁴ In any case, the Chinese troops entered Lhasa in September 1951. They could have hardly entered earlier.

⁴⁵ He soon was to be nominated as Prime Minister of Tibet.

⁴⁶ This is based on the precept that the Chinese as a people have historically always shown an hypersensitivity and if they feel cornered or at the risk of losing face, they overreact in the opposite direction therefore nothing should be done to displease them.

⁴⁷ This will also be the hallmark of Nehru's China policy in the years to come.

⁴⁸ Interview, 28-3-2001

⁴⁹ USFR 793.00/1-1251 Telegram, The Ambassador in India (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, Secret, New Delhi, January 12, 1951

⁵⁰ USFR 793B.02/1-2551, Telegram, The Ambassador in India (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, Secret, New Delhi, January 25, 1951.

⁵¹ USFR 793B.00/5-2951. The Charge in India (Steere) to the Secretary of State, Top Secret, New Delhi, May 29, 1951.

⁵² USFR 693.93B/5-3151: Telegram from The Ambassador in India (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, 31 May 1951. Interview with Bajpai to ascertain GOI info and attitudes Indo-Tibetan agreement.

⁵³ Charge d'Affaires in the American Embassy in India.

⁵⁴ Military.

⁵⁵ USFR 793.00/6-351 From The Ambassador in India (Henderson) to the Secretary of State Top Secret, Priority, New Delhi, June 3, 1951.

⁵⁶ Particularly the dissolution of the Tibetan Army into the PLA and the establishment of the Army headquarters at Lhasa.

⁵⁷ SWJN, Series II, Volume 16 (1) p. 446. The Sino-Tibetan Agreement.

⁵⁸ Sadutshang told us: "In 1951 we also met Mao. After the Seventeen-Point Agreement was signed, the entire delegation went to meet him and there was a dinner (or a lunch, I do not remember), he was there. It was the first time that we met him. Later on, in 1954 we met him again.

⁵⁹ See Claude Arpi, *Feeding the Enemy Troops*, (Tibetan Review, New Delhi, March, 2001).

⁶⁰ The Dalai Lama, *My Land and my People*, (New York: Potala Corporation, 1977), p. 92.

⁶¹ Pannikar, K.M., *In Two Chinas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), p. 175.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Richardson, H.E., *Tibet & Its History* (Boulder, Shambala, 1984), p. 196.

⁶⁴ Known as the Panchsheel Agreement; couched in Buddhist terms, the preamble of the Agreement stated the five principles of pacific co-existence.

⁶⁵ 'Born in sin' said Acharya Kripalani, 'Born in Sind?' jokingly retorted the Indian Prime Minister.