

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

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China and Tibet¹

Question: Regarding Tibet, have the Chinese Government shown any change in their attitude in recent times?

Jawaharlal Nehru: Change from what?

Q: From the attitude they took up in the notes they presented to us in reply to our notes to them?²

JN: I don't think I can answer that very precisely. The Chinese attitude has been throughout that Tibet is an integral part (when I say throughout. I mean in the last quarter of a century or more) of the Chinese State but an autonomous part. Now what measure of autonomy etc, there was or there may be is a matter to be clarified. So broadly speaking, the attitude has been the same. But it has varied I suppose from time to time. I presume that it is on that basis that talks are likely to take place-I am not dead sure-

¹ Remarks at a press conference, New Delhi. 13 March 1951. PIB. For other parts of the press conference, see pp.67-69, 103, 153, 295.355-356, 361-366. 482-484, 502-505.

² Early in October 1950 the Chinese Government took military action and Chinese troops entered the eastern parts of Tibet. On 26 October the Government of India sent a note expressing "surprise and regret" at the invasion of Tibet, and at the fact that China sought a solution of her problems with that country "by force instead of by the slower and more enduring methods of peaceful approach." The Chinese reply of 30 October asserted the Communist Government's claim that Tibet was "an integral part of Chinese territory" and said the matter was "entirely domestic problem of China." A second Indian protest was sent on 31 October and the Chinese answer dated 17 November merely reiterated that China possessed "sovereign rights" in Tibet.

but I have an idea that some representatives of the Dalai Lama are proceeding to Peking for the purpose.

Q: By a change of attitude I meant that when the Dalai Lama's representatives were willing to talk the Chinese were not prepared to do so and instead sent their troops. Has there been a change in that regard, say for withdrawal of troops?

JN: I don't know about any change in particular attitude but the Chinese troops, to begin with, came in just a very small distance in Eastern Tibet. I cannot speak of individuals straying further. I replied to a question in Parliament yesterday about some Chinese soldiers coming into India. As a matter of fact one unfortunate Chinese soldier lost his track and penetrated into Indian territory by mistake. That was exaggerated as some kind of Chinese forces coming in. But, in fact for the last, may be six months, I forget the period, to our knowledge there has been no movement of Chinese troops at all except that initial movement that took place, and there they have been. And whatever other methods they have adopted, they have not been military methods.

Q: What is the strength of the Chinese troops in Tibet?

JN: The Chinese troops who came into Tibet were relatively small in number. In China proper there is no doubt there are large numbers.

Q: In settling terms is Tibet likely to be intimidated?

JN: Any small country dealing with a big country is likely to be intimidated.

Q: The present situation in Tibet would not have arisen if the Tibetan delegation had left before September.³

JN: Possibly not.

Q: The delegation should have been advised to go in September.³

JN: We advised the delegation to go to Peking. We did not mention dates.

Q: The Peking Government wanted the Government of India to advise the delegation about it.

JN: No question of any date. The question came up later. It is true the Chinese Government wanted the Tibetan delegates to go there. And independently of that, even before that, we did advise the delegates to deal with the Chinese but no dates were before us anywhere.

Q: Is our Ambassador in Peking coming here for consultations with regard to Tibetan affairs?

JN: No, There is no such idea yet.

Q: Why did Chinese troops come to Rima on our border?

JN: Rima is not our border post. Rima is in Tibetan territory. As far as I can remember, a single detachment was reported to have reached Rima.

³ In April 1950, a seven-men Tibetan Mission, appointed by the Dalai Lama's Government in Lhasa arrived in India to make preliminary contacts with representatives of the Peking Government with the aim of establishing better Sino-Tibetan relations and reaching a settlement or the differences between the two countries. Early in June the Mission made arrangements to fly to Hong Kong for negotiations with the Peking Government. As visas were denied to it by the British authorities, the Mission remained in India throughout the summer and autumn of 1950.

Q: Was it regarded as a danger?

JN: It has never been our border.

Q: India has long-standing relations with Tibet on trade and other matters. If there is a change in the set-up in Tibet, what would happen to these relations?

JN: There has been considerable trade between Tibet and India and though not prevented by anybody, it has been affected somewhat by changing conditions and apprehensions. Nevertheless, it is continuing and as soon as any kind of normality is restored, I have no doubt it will continue. Of course, if by any chance some kind of new order interferes, then you have to see. At the moment, there is nothing to prevent it.

Q: But what about Indian troops there?

JN: I am not aware of any Indian troops in any territory which is Chinese, regarded by Chinese as her soil.

Q: In Gyantse?

JN: This is a different matter. Obviously our troops, two detachments, are there. They were kept there under treaty arrangements for the protection of the trade route.⁴ They will stay so long as other arrangements are not made for that protection. We are there with the goodwill of the people concerned. We are not there in occupation of any foreign territory but in order to give protection to our trade routes with the consent of the Governments

⁴ India had the right to maintain an agent in Lhasa and establish trade agencies at Gyantse and Yatung, for the protection of which a military escort not exceeding 225 was authorized to be "stationed along the (West Bengal) Lhasa trade route."

concerned. If the Governments concerned make adequate provisions for their protection, then the necessity for further protection does not arise. Anyhow, we can remain there by agreement, not by force of arms

The Sino-Tibetan Agreement⁵

Question: Now, Tibet

Jawaharlal Nehru: 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.⁶ 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. 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.

Q: Will the presence of Chinese troops in Tibet hinder preservation of India's interests?

JN: The facts are rather vague about the presence of forces, etc, and to

⁵ Remarks at a press conference, New Delhi, 11 June 1951. PIR. For other parts of the press conference, see pp.51-57, 247-248, 323-325, 39~397, 433-434, 450-452, 462-463, 470, 487-468, 525-526.

⁶ The 17-point agreement between China and Tibet signed on 23 May 1951 at Peking legalised the stationing of Communist Chinese troops in Tibet. Peking promised not to interfere in the "present internal administration" in Tibet or with the position of the Dalai Lama as Tibet's spiritual ruler.

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

Q: Is there any indication of interference taking place towards India's interests?

JN: No interference whatever.

Q: Did you have any account from our Ambassador in Peking about the Treaty terms?

JN: The only account we had were some celebrations in Peking. Celebrations in the sense of some meeting or 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...