

The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union

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On 10 March 1959 an anti-Chinese and anti-Communist popular revolt erupted in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, which had been under the reign of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since 1951. One week later, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tibet's political and spiritual leader, fled the capital to avoid a Chinese crackdown. In the meantime, the revolt in Lhasa rapidly escalated into a full-scale rebellion. The authorities in Beijing kept the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Tibet on the defensive for ten days, but on 20 March they ordered the army to crush the rebellion. The CCP also hurriedly transferred more PLA units to Tibet from other parts of China.

In subsequent weeks, the PLA ruthlessly mopped up the resistance in Lhasa and many other parts of Tibet.¹ On 28 March, Zhou Enlai, the premier of the People's Republic of China (PRC), formally announced the dissolution of the Kashag (the Tibetan local government), putting political power in Tibet into the hands of the "Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region." Zhou also called on the people of Tibet to "unite" in "seeking to construct a democratic and socialist new Tibet."² Three days later, on 31 March, the Dalai Lama and his followers crossed the border to take refuge in northern India. By the end of May 1959, as many as 7,000 Tibetan refugees had entered India to seek asylum there, causing serious tension in Sino-Indian relations—relations that until 1959 had been characterized by friendship and high-level cooperation. In the fall of 1959, two clashes between Chinese and Indian garrisons erupted along the border, and the long-existing yet hitherto well-controlled Chinese-Indian territorial disputes immediately

1. Until late 1961, however, the Chinese were unable to suppress other rebellions in Tibet.

2. See Zhou's remarks in *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 28 March 1959, p. 1. Real power in Tibet lay with a "Military Control Committee" established on 23 March 1959.

made international headlines. What is more surprising, though, is that the PLA's suppression of the rebellion in Tibet not only caused a souring of Sino-Indian relations but also sparked acrimony and recriminations with the Soviet Union. The two Communist allies criticized each other's policies toward Tibet and India. Consequently, the events of 1959 along the Sino-Indian border were, in some sense, the beginning of the collapse of the "great Sino-Soviet solidarity" that was once claimed to be "indissoluble" and "eternal," pushing the global Cold War into a new and different stage.

Why did a large-scale rebellion erupt in Tibet in the spring of 1959? How did Beijing's leaders, particularly Mao Zedong, perceive the rebellion? What were the PRC's strategies to cope with the rebellion and defuse the crisis with India? Why did the Tibetan rebellion not only cause Beijing's disputes and conflicts with New Delhi but also deepen and accelerate its split with Moscow? By drawing on newly available Chinese-language sources, this article will offer some preliminary answers to these questions.

Historical Background

The Tibetan rebellion began in March 1959, but the seeds of it had been sown a decade earlier, when Chinese Communist forces entered and occupied Tibet. To understand the environment in which the rebellion was shaped, we must first briefly review the historical development of China's relations with Tibet, especially during the PRC's first ten years.

The relationship between China proper and Tibet was long and tortuous. One of the earliest Chinese-Tibetan contacts occurred during the Tang Dynasty (618–907) in the seventh century when King Songtsen Gampo unified Tibet and received a Chinese princess as a bride. Both China and Tibet were under the rule of the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.³ The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), despite conferring many honorary titles on prominent members of the Tibetan elite, made no substantial effort to extend Chinese administrative control to Tibetan territory. Not until the Qing or Manchu Dynasty (1644–1911) did the imperial court in Beijing exert more formal control over Tibet, especially after the Qian Long Emperor (c. 1735–1795) stationed two Qing imperial envoys (*amban*), with the protection of Qing garrisons, in Lhasa. In addition, the Qing, through political and military maneuvering, brought several Tibetan-inhabited border

3. China's official history of Sino-Tibetan relations claims that Tibet became a part of China during Yuan times. See, for example, *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang* [Contemporary China's Tibet] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1991), Vol. 1, pp. 40–43; and Wang Gui et al., *Xizang lishi diwei bian* [A Discussion on Tibet's Historical Position] (Beijing: Minzu, 1995), ch. 4.

areas under the jurisdiction of Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces, thus creating a distinction between “Political Tibet” and “Ethnographic Tibet.”⁴ In general, the Qing policy toward Tibet significantly strengthened the connections between China proper and Tibet and reinforced the Chinese conviction that Tibet was part of China. Entering the nineteenth century, with the decline of the Qing in the wake of the Western incursions into China, the authority of the Qing-appointed *ambans* gradually waned, and Tibet increasingly became autonomous, reducing Chinese hegemony over Tibet to nothing more than a symbol.⁵

The 1911 revolution destroyed the Qing Dynasty and led to the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC). Throughout the Republican period (1911–1949), the successive governments were too weak and too busy with more urgent matters to pay attention to the Tibet issue. As a result, until 1949, when the CCP defeated the Nationalists in the civil war and planned to send troops to “liberate” Tibet, the “Land of Snows” enjoyed the status of a de facto independent polity. However, no ROC government had ever given up China’s claim of sovereignty over Tibet, and the government in Lhasa made no real effort to turn Tibet’s de facto independence into a de jure status that would be recognized by the international community.⁶

As the Chinese Communists neared final victory in the Chinese civil war, Mao Zedong and the CCP leadership began to prepare for the “liberation of Tibet.”⁷ On 6 August 1949, Mao instructed Peng Dehuai, commander of the PLA’s First Field Army, “When you attack Lanzhou you should pay special attention to protecting the Panchen [Lama] and the Tibetans living in Gansu and Qinghai, so that you will be prepared to settle the Tibet issue.”⁸ In a tele-

4. “Political Tibet” usually refers to the area that has been continuously ruled by the government in Lhasa, and “ethnographic Tibet” refers to the Tibetan-inhabited regions in the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. See Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. x–xi.

5. See *ibid.*, ch. 1.

6. For an illuminating, detailed discussion of Tibet’s internal and external developments during the Republican period, see Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1989). For an account reflecting the Chinese view, see *Dangdai zhongguo de xizhang*, pp. 64–74.

7. Tibet did not occupy an important position in CCP strategic thinking and policymaking until after 1949. During the early stage of the Chinese Communist revolution, Mao Zedong’s own perception of Tibet’s future relationship with China seemed vague. In an interview with American journalist Edgar Snow in July 1936, for example, Mao reportedly said that Tibet, together with Outer Mongolia and Xinjiang “will form autonomous republics attached to the China federation” after “the People’s Revolution has been victorious.” Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 444. But the idea of a “China federation” disappeared completely in Mao’s and the CCP leadership’s design of the “new China” in the late 1940s.

8. *Mao Zedong junshi wenji* [Collection of Mao Zedong’s Military Papers], (Beijing: Junshi kexue, 1993), Vol. 5, p. 655.

gram dated 23 November 1949, Mao set “fall or winter of next year” as the target date for “the completion of the settlement of the Tibet issue.”⁹ In subsequent months, even when Mao was visiting the Soviet Union to meet Josif Stalin (from December 1949 to February 1950), CCP officials sought to devise a strategy that would allow them to solve the “Tibet issue” quickly. From the beginning, Mao and his colleagues believed “it is impossible to settle the Tibet issue without using military force.”¹⁰ In the meantime, Chinese leaders also were convinced that “although liberating Tibet is a military issue, and therefore a certain number of military forces should be used, it is primarily a political issue in an overall sense.”¹¹ Realizing the complexity of Tibet’s internal conditions and external environment, Mao and his fellow CCP leaders found it necessary and possible to combine military operations with sophisticated diplomatic and “united front” work, especially toward Tibet’s political and monastic elites. (Tibet’s pre-1949 sociopolitical structure was characterized by a form of feudal theocracy, with the Dalai Lama serving as both a secular *and* an ecclesiastical ruler.)¹² Mao’s original plan was that the “military intervention in Tibet should begin in mid-April [1950]” and that “by October the whole of Tibet should be occupied.”¹³

Mao’s eagerness to settle the “Tibet issue” in the shortest possible time was based on several key assumptions and considerations. First, when devising a strategy toward Tibet, Mao and his comrades took for granted that Tibet was part of China and that “liberating” the region was a crucial step they must take in order to complete China’s unification. In internal discussions and in conversations with Soviet leaders, Mao and his colleagues argued that the “liberation of Tibet” was as important as the “liberation of Taiwan” and that if

9. *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts since the Founding of the People’s Republic] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1987), Vol. 1, pp. 152–153 (hereinafter referred to as *Mao wengao*).

10. *Ibid.*

11. “Deng Xiaoping’s Speech at the Meeting of the Commanders of the PLA’s 18th Army, 15 January 1950,” in CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji, 1949–1994* [Important Events in CCP History in Tibet, 1949–1994] (Lhasa: Xizang renmin, 1995), pp. 4–5; and The CCP Committee of the PLA’s 18th Army, “Instructions on Marching into Tibet” (1 February 1950), in CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Heping jiefang xizang* [The Peaceful Liberation of Tibet] (Lhasa: Xizang renmin 1995), pp. 59–60.

12. *Jianguo yilai Liu Shaoqi wengao* [Liu Shaoqi’s Manuscripts since the Formation of the People’s Republic] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1998), p. 2; *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan* [Mao Zedong’s Selected Works on Tibetan Affairs] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian and Zhongguo zangxue, 2001), pp. 9–10; and CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 7–8.

13. *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, p. 208. The CCP leaders decided that the PLA’s military intervention in Tibet should be carried out mainly from the southwest (from Sichuan and Xikang Provinces), and that operations from the northwest (from Qinghai and Xinjiang) should play only a supplementary and supporting role.

either of these two tasks went unfulfilled the mission of the Chinese revolution would not be completed.¹⁴ This issue became even more crucial when Mao proclaimed that the formation of the PRC meant that “we the Chinese people have stood up.”¹⁵ Mao and the CCP saw the reassertion of China’s sovereignty in Tibet as a critical test case for the new Communist regime’s credibility and legitimacy before the Chinese people and indeed the whole world.

Another reason that Mao wanted a quick solution to the Tibet issue is that he understood the region’s strategic importance to China. In internal deliberations, CCP leaders consistently demonstrated an appreciation of Tibet’s strategic value. PLA commanders noted that “Tibet is located in China’s southwest border area, neighboring India, Nepal, and Bhutan and serving as China’s strategic gate in the southwest direction. . . . Both the British and the U.S. imperialists have long cast greedy eyes on Tibet, so Tibet’s position in [China’s] national defense is extremely important.”¹⁶ Mao echoed these sentiments, arguing that “although Tibet does not have a large population, its international [strategic] position is extremely important. Therefore, we must occupy it and transform it into a people’s democratic Tibet.”¹⁷

The CCP’s decision to use military force to occupy Tibet was also based on the assumption that the international environment was conducive to such a strategy. Despite Tibet’s de facto independent status from 1911 to 1950, the international community had never formally recognized it as an independent state. In discussing the PLA’s military plans for the occupation of Tibet, Mao told his comrades that “because Britain, India and Pakistan have now all recognized us [the PRC], it is an auspicious time for [our] military intervention in Tibet.”¹⁸ The CCP leaders believed that using military force to occupy Tibet would not cause serious international repercussions and would certainly not spur foreign powers to send troops to Tibet.¹⁹

CCP officials and PLA commanders realized that their military forces were overwhelmingly superior to those of the Tibetans, and they assumed that by combining resolute military action with shrewd diplomatic and “united front” strategies, the Tibet issue could be swiftly resolved. In a detailed report on “the situation in Tibet,” completed in May 1950, the Tibet Issue Research Office under the PLA’s Southwest Military Region pointed out that Tibetan

14. See, for example, Shi Zhe, “With Mao and Stalin: The Reminiscences of Mao’s Interpreter,” *Chinese Historians*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 1992), p. 41; and *Jianguo yilai Liu Shaoqi wengao*, Vol. 1, p. 2.

15. Mao Zedong, “The Chinese People Have Stood Up” (21 September 1949), in *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, pp. 4–8.

16. The CCP Committee of the PLA’s 18th Army, “Instructions on Marching into Tibet,” pp. 59–60.

17. *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, p. 208.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

19. The CCP Committee of the PLA’s 18th Army, “Instructions on Marching into Tibet,” p. 60.

troops were not well trained and that their military equipment was largely outdated.²⁰ When CCP leaders and PLA officers were devising concrete strategies and tactics for the planned military operations, their main concern was how to maintain logistical supplies for their own troops, not how to crush resistance by the Tibetans.²¹ Mao was fully aware of the long-standing rivalry between the Dalai Lama in Lhasa and the Panchen Lama in Rikaze. From the beginning, the Chinese authorities sought to gain the cooperation and support of the Panchen Lama in order to confer legitimacy on the CCP's "liberation" of Tibet.²²

Yet despite Mao's urging, the PLA was unable to complete its preparations for the planned incursion into Tibet by the late summer of 1950. In addition, the PLA's First Field Army reported that no proper roads led to Tibet from the northwest. (The road across the Tanggula Pass was not constructed until 1954.) CCP leaders therefore decided that the PLA would march southwest (from Sichuan) into Tibet.²³ In early August 1950 the PLA's Southwest Military Region and the Eighteenth Army (which was assigned the task of entering and occupying Tibet) conducted a series of planning meetings that resulted in the strategy of occupying Chamdo (or Qamdo), the southwest entry point into Tibet and the deployment site of the main force of the Tibetan army, by the end of 1950.²⁴ Mao endorsed the plan, but he regarded the operation as far more than a purely military undertaking. He pointed out that "now India has issued a statement to acknowledge that Tibet is part of Chinese territory but hopes that the issue can be solved in a peaceful way rather than through military means." He also noted that "originally Britain did not allow the Tibetan delegation to come to Beijing, and now it has allowed the delegation to do so." Mao thus emphasized that if the PLA could destroy the Tibetan army's main force and occupy Chamdo, "it is possible that the Tibetan delegation will come to Beijing to pursue a peaceful solution [of the Tibet issue] through negotiation." He stressed that "we should carry out the

20. Ji Youquan, *Baixue: Jiefang xizang jishi* [White Snow: A Factual Record of the Liberation of Tibet] (Beijing: Zhongguo wuzi, 1993), pp. 32–33.

21. See, for example, *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, pp. 38–39, 40–41. See also CCP Southwest Bureau and PLA Southwest Military Region, "Instructions on Guaranteeing the Logistical Supplies for Marching into Tibet" (9 February 1950), in CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Heping jiefang xizang*, pp. 62–63.

22. See, for example, *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, p. 450; and *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 19.

23. *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun diyi yazhanjun wenxian xuanbian* [Selected Documents of the First Field Army of the Chinese People's Liberation Army] (Beijing: Jiefangjun, 2000), Vol. 2, pp. 713–714, 716–717; and *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, pp. 475–477.

24. Ji, *Baixue*, pp. 143–144. See also PLA Southwest Military Region, "Orders on Initiating the Chamdo Campaign" (26 August 1950), in CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Heping jiefang xizang*, pp. 87–88.

policy of striving for the Tibetan delegation to come to Beijing while at the same time reducing Nehru's fear [of us]."²⁵

The PLA's military attack on Chamdo that began on 6 October and lasted for two weeks resulted in a decisive victory. The Chinese forces routed the ineptly commanded and poorly prepared Tibetan troops. Because the Tibetans had almost no reserve force between Chamdo and Lhasa, the door to Tibet's capital city was already open for the PLA.²⁶

With the Tibetans no longer in a position to wage any effective military resistance, Chinese leaders shifted the emphasis of their strategy to negotiating with the Dalai Lama and the Kashag in Lhasa.²⁷ From the beginning, the CCP made clear that a prerequisite for any peaceful solution of the Tibet issue was Lhasa's acceptance of Tibet as an integral part of the PRC. Chinese officials also emphasized that in the long run Tibet would have to be transformed into a "people's democratic" society—a phrase that in the Maoist discourse meant destroying Tibet's traditional political, economic, and social structures and replacing them with socialist ones. But to ensure that a peaceful settlement in Tibet could be achieved, Mao was willing to accept a series of key compromises, including temporarily allowing the feudal economy and polity to exist in Tibet, in exchange for the Dalai Lama's acknowledgment of Chinese sovereignty.

The Tibetan government had no means of military resistance, and its appeals for help to the international community—including the United Nations, the United States, India, and Britain—failed to elicit any response.²⁸ Consequently, the Tibetans had no choice but to send a delegation to Beijing in the spring of 1951.²⁹

On 23 May 1951 the Tibetan negotiators in Beijing signed the "Seventeen-Point Agreement," which began with the statement that "the Tibetan people shall unite and drive imperialist forces from Tibet and shall re-

25. *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, pp. 475–477.

26. For a detailed account of the Chamdo military campaign, see Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, ch. 18. For an official Chinese account, see Han Huanzhi et al., *Dangdai zhongguo jundui de junshi gongzuo* [The Military Affairs of the Contemporary Chinese Army], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1990), pp. 212–215.

27. The Dalai Lama left Lhasa on 19 December 1950 and was then staying at Yadong, a small town close to the Tibetan-Indian border.

28. For an informative discussion, see Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, chs. 19–20; and Qiang Zhai, *The Dragon, the Lion, and the Eagle: Chinese-British-American Relations, 1949–1958* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), ch. 3.

29. The Tibetan government had tried to hold the negotiations at a "neutral location," but Beijing firmly rejected any such effort. Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai repeatedly emphasized that the negotiations had to take place in Beijing and that the Tibetan delegation would have to travel there. See, for example, *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, p. 369; and Li Ping et al., eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1949–1976* [A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai, 1949–1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1997), Vol. 1, p. 43.

turn to the big family of the Motherland—the People’s Republic of China.” The Chinese government, for its part, agreed that it would maintain “the established status, functions, and powers of the Dalai Lama,” refrain from altering Tibet’s feudal and theocratic political, economic, and social systems, and adopt “various reforms” in Tibet only if the Tibetan people so demanded and only after consultation with “the leading personnel of Tibet.”³⁰ The Dalai Lama, who had been in Yadong, a border town near India, since late 1950, approved the agreement and returned to Lhasa on 17 August 1951. That fall, PLA units moved into Lhasa and many other parts of Tibet without encountering resistance.

The Path toward Rebellion

The Seventeen-Point Agreement opened a new era in Beijing’s relations with Tibet. The agreement, by all appearances, laid out a series of mutually acceptable principles that defined Tibet’s relationship with the PRC. The Tibetans were obliged to accept China’s claim to sovereignty over the “Land of Snows,” thus joining the “big family” of the Chinese motherland. The PRC, in turn, was supposed to treat Tibet differently from other “minority regions,” including Xinjiang. Most important of all, the CCP promised not to carry out sweeping social and political changes in Tibet for a certain period. In the interim, the Communist regime would respect and coexist with Tibet’s existing political, social, and monastic systems.

Although the Seventeen-Point Agreement was seemingly based on equality, the commitments undertaken by the two sides were in fact highly unequal. The Tibetans’ commitment to accept Tibet as an integral part of the PRC was permanent and irreversible, whereas the PRC’s commitment to respect and coexist with Tibet’s existing political, social, and monarchic systems was conditional and provisional. To many Tibetans, especially the political and monastic elites, the signing of the Seventeen-Point Agreement and the coming of the Chinese Communists held out a future of great uncertainty.

Not surprisingly, almost immediately after the PLA entered Tibet, tensions developed between the Chinese Communists and many Tibetans. Although the PLA followed Mao’s instructions and sought to avoid provocations, the presence of several thousand Chinese Communist soldiers in Lhasa and its surrounding areas imposed a great burden on the limited local re-

30. For the text of the “Seventeen-Point Agreement” (“Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet”), see Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 449–452.

sources (and food supplies in particular) and caused a surge of inflation in Lhasa.³¹ The conservatives among Tibet's political and monastic elites, who had never been happy with the Seventeen-Point Agreement, tried to exploit popular discontent to squeeze concessions from the Chinese Communists. In late March and early April 1952 the newly formed "People's Representatives" organized a series of demonstrations and protests against the Chinese Communist presence in Tibet.³²

Mao and his fellow CCP leaders regarded the turmoil in Lhasa as a warning signal. They adopted a dual-track policy to handle the situation. On the one hand, they instructed the CCP's "Tibet Work Committee" to put pressure on the Dalai Lama and force him to dissolve the "People's Representatives" and dismiss Lukhangwa and Lobsang Tashi, the two Tibetan officials (*Silons*, or Prime Ministers) who the Chinese Communists believed were behind the recent turmoil.³³ On the other hand, Mao emphasized that the Chinese Communists should not hastily push for reforms and changes in Tibet but should work patiently with the local Tibetan elites while at the same time laying the groundwork for future reforms. In a long inner-CCP instruction titled "Concerning Policies toward the Work in Tibet," which was drafted by Mao himself, the Chinese leader acknowledged that "we lack a material basis in Tibet, and, in terms of social power, they [Tibetan elites] are stronger than we are, a situation that will not change in the near future." He argued that "for the time being [we should] leave everything [in Lhasa and Tibet] as it is, let this situation drag on, and not take up these questions until our army is able to meet its own needs through production and wins the support of the masses a year or two from now." Mao believed that the CCP would face "two possibilities" in the future development of Tibet:

One is that our united front policy toward the upper stratum, a policy of uniting with the many and isolating the few, will take effect and that the Tibetan people will gradually draw closer to us, so that the bad elements and the Tibetan troops will not dare to rebel. The other possibility is that the bad elements who believe we are weak and can be bullied around may lead the Tibetan troops to rebel and our army to counter-attack in self-defense and deal them a telling blow. Either will be favorable for us.

31. Mao and the CCP leaders were aware of the situation. See, for example, "The CCP Central Committee's Instructions on the Work Issue in Tibet" (1 April 1951), in *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 60; and *Heping jiefang xizang*, pp. 139–140.

32. Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, pp. 102–111; and Wang et al., *Xizang lishi diwei bian*, pp. 504–508.

33. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, pp. 67–79. Mao emphasized the necessity of "using the recent events to conduct a political counteroffensive." In particular, he wanted to force the Dalai Lama to agree that Lukhangwa and Lobsang Tashi should resign.

Mao asserted that “[now] apparently not only the two Silons but also the Dalai Lama and most of his clique are reluctant to accept the [Seventeen-Point] agreement and are unwilling to carry it out. As yet we do not have the material basis for this purpose [implementing the agreement] in terms of support among the masses or in the upper stratum, to force its implementation will do more harm than good.” But Mao believed that time was on the CCP’s side:

Things will be different in a few years. By then they [the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan elites] will have no choice but to carry out the agreement in full and reorganize the Tibetan troops. If the Tibetan troops start one or even several rebellions and are repulsed by our army each time, we will be all the more justified in reorganizing them.

Mao concluded that “we should be prepared to make concessions, wait for conditions to become mature, prepare for taking the offensive in the future.”³⁴

Mao’s directive encompassed a series of well-conceived strategies and tactics. He was evidently aware of the extraordinary obstacles the CCP and the PLA would have to overcome in order to incorporate the people and land of Tibet into the Chinese “socialist motherland.” Therefore, he was willing to adopt a policy that was characterized by gradualism and included making multiple concessions to the Dalai Lama and the Kashag. This was a battle concerning the hearts of the Tibetan people that could not be won through military means. Indeed, in Mao’s discussion of the Tibet issue, the chairman even touched upon such details as that “on our part [we should] concentrate on good deeds of production, trade, road-building, medical services and united front work so as to win over the masses.”³⁵ But these measures were no more than temporary tactics. The CCP chairman made clear that the strategic goal of Beijing’s policies toward Tibet was the “complete implementation of the [Seventeen-Point] Agreement.” For Mao, this meant not only that Tibet should become a part of China but also that through political, social, and economic reforms Tibet, like other parts of the PRC, eventually should be transformed into a socialist society.

Mao repeatedly mentioned in his instructions to the CCP cadres in Tibet that although the emphasis of the CCP’s policy should be on gradualism, the Party cadres should also be prepared to deal with serious crises provoked by “bad elements” in Tibet who would rebel against Chinese rule. A scenario of

34. CCP Central Committee (drafted by Mao Zedong), “Concerning the Policy of the Work in Tibet” (6 April 1952), in *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, pp. 61–64. For an English translation of most of the text, see *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1977), Vol. 5, pp. 73–76.

35. CCP Central Committee, “Concerning the Policy of the Work in Tibet,” p. 63.

this sort, he believed, might actually redound to the CCP's advantage. The emergence of a "reactionary" opposition in Tibet could, if properly manipulated, awaken the Tibetan masses, thus allowing the CCP to introduce political and social reforms in Tibet at an accelerated rate.³⁶

In a deeper sense, Mao's management of the Tibet issue during the early stage of the post-1951 period revealed a profound sense of superiority. Although he acknowledged the importance of pursuing "ethnic equality" and avoiding "big Han chauvinism" in Tibet, his fundamental view was that the CCP and the PLA, as the "liberators" of Tibet, would win popular support by transforming Tibet's "backward" political, social, and economic institutions and structures. Mao's otherwise sophisticated analysis of the situation in Tibet was marred by his glaring disregard of Tibet's history and culture—a short-coming that would help precipitate the Tibetan rebellion in 1959.

Mao's generals and cadres in Lhasa sensed from the outset that Mao's gradualism was provisional. For them, the establishment of conditions for political and social reforms in Tibet became a priority. The right opportunity seemed to come in 1956 when a "high tide of socialist transformation and socialist reconstruction" swept across China's cities and countryside. In April of that year, with the CCP Central Committee's approval, Mao set up a "Preparatory Committee for the Tibetan Autonomous Region."³⁷

The next month, the CCP Tibet Work Committee, headed by Zhang Jingwu and Zhang Guohua, reported that "the high tide of the socialist transformation has emerged all over the country" and that "the minority areas neighboring Tibet are all preparing to conduct democratic reforms." The committee believed it was desirable to put the pursuit of "democratic reforms" in Tibet at the top of its agenda. In a report to the CCP Central Committee dated 1 July 1956, the Tibet Work Committee proposed that the reforms in Tibet could begin in the winter of 1956 and spring of 1957, initially in a few places and then extended to the whole of Tibet. To facilitate the reforms, the Tibet Work Committee asked for the establishment of a "public security police force" of 4,000–6,000, an increase in the regular "people's police" and economic police force by 2,400, the raising of 40,000–60,000 cadres from local Tibetans, the recruitment of 20,000–30,000 Tibetans into the CCP and 30,000–50,000 Tibetan youth into the Communist Youth League, and the transfer of another 6,000 Han Communist cadres to Tibet.³⁸ Beginning in July, large numbers of Communist cadres entered Tibet in groups.

36. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, pp. 74–75, 78–79.

37. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 57–58; and *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, p. 218.

38. *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, p. 225.

The sudden acceleration of the CCP's efforts to push for "democratic reforms" in Tibet had tremendous repercussions among Tibetans. Resistance and revolts occurred in Lhasa and, even more, in areas belonging to "ethnographic Tibet," where "democratic reforms" had been introduced earlier and carried out more ruthlessly. In late July, armed rebellions erupted in Chamdo and quickly spread to other areas. Faced with this turmoil, the leaders of the CCP reiterated the importance of maintaining patience and gradualism in the implementation of "democratic reforms" in Tibet. On 18 August, Mao Zedong wrote to the Dalai Lama acknowledging that "the time now is not ripe for carrying out reforms in Tibet."³⁹ Two weeks later, on 4 September 1956, the CCP Central Committee issued the "September Fourth Instruction," emphasizing that "democratic reforms" should be waged in peaceful ways, and that in order to pursue peaceful reforms it was crucial to work on Tibet's upper-classes and elites. The instruction pointed out in particular that "considering the work foundation in Tibet at present, the status of cadres, the attitudes of the upper stratum, and the recent events in the Chamdo area, the conditions for carrying out reforms in Tibet are far from auspicious." The CCP leadership thus concluded that "democratic reforms [in Tibet] certainly should not be introduced during the first Five-Year Plan,⁴⁰ and are unlikely to happen even during the second Five-Year Plan, and possibly may even be postponed to the third Five-Year Plan."⁴¹

For Mao and his fellow CCP leaders, the postponement of the "democratic reforms" in Tibet was no more than a tactical action. In the same "September Fourth Instruction," the CCP leadership also made it clear that making concessions to the Tibetan upper-class elites was by no means a "passive policy design." On the contrary, the CCP leaders emphasized, "we must do our job in active ways." In their calculation,

from now on, until the reforms are carried out, we must grasp tightly the upper stratum of the united front, raise more Tibetan cadres, recruit more [Communist] Party and [Communist Youth] League members, support the production activities of the masses and try our best to improve their quality of life, and gradually democratize the Autonomous Region's political regime, so that we can try to make progress and prepare conditions for the reforms.⁴²

39. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 66.

40. The first Five Year Plan in the PRC covered the period of 1953–1957.

41. CCP Central Committee, "September Fourth Instruction" (4 September 1956), in *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, pp. 226–227; and CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 67. See also Mao Zedong, "On Correctly Managing the Contradictions within the People" (27 February 1957), in *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: People, 1977), pp. 386–387. The first Five-Year Plan in the PRC covered the period 1953–1957.

42. *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, p. 227.

For the CCP leaders, the pursuit of political and social reforms in Tibet remained an unchangeable goal.

This goal shaped the CCP's response to the visit by the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama to India in November 1956. The visit originated with an invitation issued by the Indian government to celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the birth of Buddha. When the CCP leadership considered whether the Dalai Lama should be allowed to go to India, many CCP cadres in Tibet opposed the idea on the grounds that the Dalai Lama might refuse to return to Lhasa, Mao conceded that the Dalai Lama might stay in India and might even make anti-Communist statements there, but the Chinese leader said that even if the Dalai Lama decided not to return to Tibet, this might actually benefit the CCP insofar as it would provide another reason to enact reforms in Tibet. "We will never initiate the offensive," stressed Mao, "and will instead allow them to initiate the offensive. We will then launch a counteroffensive and mercilessly crush those who started the offensive."⁴³

When it appeared that the Dalai Lama would indeed seek asylum in India, the CCP leadership actively tried to attract him back. Premier Zhou Enlai traveled to India and met with the Dalai Lama to persuade him to return to Lhasa. During the meetings, Zhou, in conveying Mao's sentiment, promised to the Dalai Lama that reforms would not be introduced in Tibet (including the Chamdo area) without consulting with Tibet's upper-class elites. He also promised that no reforms would be carried out during the second Five-Year-Plan; that is, for another six years. Whether any steps would be introduced after that six-year period, Zhou told the Dalai Lama, "is an issue that will be determined by you in accordance with the situation and conditions at that time."⁴⁴ The Dalai Lama, believing that he could do more for Tibetans from within Tibet, decided in February 1957 to return to Lhasa, arriving first in Yadong on 15 February and then eventually to the capital on 1 April.

All of this, however, was insufficient to forestall a profound crisis. For the Tibetans, Zhou's promise not to embark on any reforms over the next six years was no more than a short-term palliative. It created even greater uncertainty about the region's long-term future. For the CCP leaders, these events underscored the party's weak position in Tibet, thus pushing them to step up their preparations for a definitive resolution of the Tibet problem. On 5 March 1957 the CCP Central Secretariat met to discuss policy toward

43. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

44. Li et al. eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 650–651; *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji, 1949–1994*, p. 70; and *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, pp. 230–231.

Tibet. The meeting was also attended by leading members of the CCP Tibet Work Committee, including Zhang Jingwu, Zhang Guohua, Fan Ming, Zhou Renshan, Wang Qimei, Ya Hanzhang, and Mu Shengzhong.⁴⁵ On the basis of the meeting's discussion, the CCP Central Committee adopted its "Remarks on the Tibet Work Committee's Decisions on Future Work in Tibet." The CCP leaders recognized that "suitable conditions for carrying out democratic reforms in Tibet do not yet exist." However, they stressed that

although the commitment not to enact reforms for at least the next six years is naturally a major concession to the upper stratum in Tibet, this concession is not intended to restrict or hinder our work, let alone to forsake the positive goals [of our policies]. Making necessary concessions now is intended solely to create favorable conditions to achieve our positive goals in the future.

The document set the basic tone of the CCP's policies toward Tibet over the next six years, emphasizing that major efforts should be made in five areas:

First, we should continue to carry out united front work vis-à-vis the upper stratum, with the Dalai Lama's clique as the main target. Second, we should continue to pay attention to recruiting and educating Tibetan cadres. In addition to developing some through local work, a small number of young people can be sent to study inland. Third, we should continue to operate economic and cultural enterprises that are welcomed by the masses, endorsed by the upper stratum, in good condition to operate, and likely to have a beneficial impact on the masses. Fourth, we should continue to insist that national defense, foreign affairs, and national defense highways be placed under the control of the Central Government. Fifth, we should use a variety of proper means to undertake patriotic education in the Tibetan upper stratum and masses, while opposing the activities of separatists.⁴⁶

This statement reflected the real nature of the "concessions" that the CCP leaders believed they were making to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan political and monastic elites in 1956–1957. The measures were intended to strengthen the CCP's own position in Tibet, as well as to prepare for an offensive in the future. If possible, Mao preferred to use peaceful means to achieve Tibet's transformation, but if that did not work he was determined to ensure that the CCP would be able to control Tibet no matter what happened.⁴⁷

45. *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, p. 231; and CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 73–74.

46. *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, p. 232; and CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 75–76.

47. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 154.

Complicating the situation further was the Chinese authorities' view that the "Seventeen-Point Agreement" and the moderate policy toward Tibet should be applied only to "political Tibet." When Zhou Enlai promised not to pursue "democratic reforms" in Tibet for at least six years, he intended this only for "political Tibet." In the Tibetan-inhabited areas of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Qinghai, "democratic reforms" were promptly introduced despite the "no reforms for at least six years" pledge. By 1958, as the "Great Leap Forward" swept across all of China, more radical "reforms" were enacted in these areas. As a result, many Tibetans, from both upper and lower classes, rebelled against Chinese rule and formed the "Four Rivers and Six Ranges" guerrilla group.⁴⁸ The rebels, as we now know, received various kinds of support from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).⁴⁹ When they were attacked by the PLA, a large number of them fled to Lhasa to seek protection and to urge the Kashag to take a firmer stand against the Chinese. Together with the many Tibetan troops in Lhasa who had long been upset by the Chinese Communist military presence, the rebels posed a significant challenge to the CCP's efforts to pursue a path of gradual change in Tibet.

By late 1958 and early 1959, Lhasa and many other parts of both political and ethnographic Tibet had become volatile. Although Mao and his fellow CCP leaders continued to stress in public that "no democratic reforms would be carried out for at least six years," their internal discussions focused mostly on ways of dealing with a large-scale rebellion in Tibet. On 24 June 1958, Mao Zedong, in commenting on the CCP Qinghai Provincial Committee's "Instructions on Suppressing Rebellions Spreading throughout the Province," indicated that the party had to be "prepared to deal with the prospect of a full-scale rebellion that is likely to break out there." He emphasized that "if the reactionary forces in Tibet dare to start a full-scale rebellion, this without any doubt will mean that working people [in Tibet] will benefit from an earlier liberation."⁵⁰ In mid-July, the CCP Central Committee reiterated this point in an instruction to the CCP Tibet Work Committee:

48. Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snow*, pp. 165–170.

49. For a highly informative account of the CIA's involvement in supporting the Tibetan rebels, see John Kenneth Naus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999). According to Naus, Washington made the decision to support the Tibetan resistance in the summer of 1956 (pp. 139–140), and the first group of Tibetan rebels was secretly brought to Saipan for training in December 1956. The trainees were then sent back to Tibet in 1957 to help the Tibetan rebels to establish contacts with the CIA and to join the resistance themselves. Available Chinese sources give no indication that the Chinese Communists were aware of America's secret involvement in promoting the rebellion in Tibet during this period.

50. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 80–81.

Our policy is to strive for peaceful reforms in Tibet. But if the reactionary elements insist on starting an armed rebellion, we will definitely use force to suppress the rebels. Rebellion by a small group of reactionaries will spark [a response by the CCP that will result in] the relatively comprehensive liberation of the overwhelming majority of the working people. So if a rebellion breaks out, it will not necessarily be a bad thing for the Tibetan people. If the Central Committee properly handles [its response to] the rebellion, this bad thing will be turned into a good thing for the Tibetan people.⁵¹

On 22 January 1959, with the situation in Tibet continuing to deteriorate, Mao issued further instructions:

In the Tibetan area over the next several years, the enemy side and our side will compete for the [support of the] masses and test the ability of the armed forces. After several years—for example, three to four years, or five to six years, or seven to eight years—it is inevitable that a great showdown will occur. Only then can the problems be thoroughly resolved. Initially, the military forces deployed by the Tibetan rulers were quite weak, but now they command a rebel force of 10,000 whose combat spirit is relatively high. This is a dangerous enemy for us. But this is not necessarily a bad thing; rather, it could be a good thing because it enables [us] to resolve the problem through war.⁵²

In early February 1959, the Xinhua News Agency described in an internal report how “the revolts in the Tibetan region have gathered pace and developed into a nearly full-scale rebellion.” In mid-February the CCP Central Committee’s Administrative Office circulated the Xinhua item in a “situation report” for top CCP leaders. When Mao read it on 18 February, he commented: “The more chaotic [the situation] in Tibet becomes the better; for it will help train our troops and toughen the masses. Furthermore, [the chaos] will provide a sufficient reason to crush the rebellion and carry out reforms in the future.”⁵³ The next day, the Chinese leader saw a report from the PLA General Staff’s Operations Department describing rebellions by Tibetans in Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Qinghai. He again stressed that “rebellions like these are extremely favorable for us because they will benefit us in helping to train our troops, train the people, and provide a sufficient reason to crush the rebellion and carry out comprehensive reforms in the future.” He concluded that “in a military sense we should not be afraid of a rebellion and should

51. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

52. “Mao Zedong’s Remarks on the CCP Central Committee’s Instruction on Mobilizing 2,000 Youth to Enter Tibet for Participating in Production” (22 January 1959), in *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 164.

53. *Mao wengao*, Vol. 8, p. 46.

instead welcome it, although we must be prepared to suppress a rebellion promptly at any time.”⁵⁴

Mao’s optimistic assessment of Beijing’s capacity to cope with a large-scale rebellion in Tibet was reinforced by reports from Lhasa that the CCP was enjoying ever greater support and cooperation from the Tibetans. On 13 November 1958 the CCP Tibet Work Committee informed Beijing that the Communist Party had significantly expanded its influence among the Tibetan population. “Over the past eight years,” according to the Tibet Work Committee, “we have absorbed and trained a total of 6,128 Tibetan cadres, attracted 1,190 Tibetans to join the Party and another 1,934 to join the League, and established and developed many patriotic organizations involving young people and women.” The committee claimed that “this development signifies the emergence of a fresh revolutionary force that no one can ignore in the realization of the Tibetan people’s complete liberation, and it also constitutes our most valuable resource in carrying out the democratic reforms in Tibet and in building a new Tibet.”⁵⁵ The committee told the CCP leaders in Beijing that even among Tibet’s political and monastic elites there existed some “progressives,” such as Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, and that the CCP would protect them so that “the strength of the progressives will be consolidated and expanded.”⁵⁶ The CCP leaders fully shared the Tibet Work Committee’s view that the party had to pursue the “further expansion of support and cooperation among the [Tibetan] masses while at the same time isolating the [Tibetan] reactionaries.” The CCP leaders also believed that “these issues [winning support and cooperation among the Tibetans] cannot be thoroughly resolved unless there is a general showdown [with the reactionaries].”⁵⁷

Consequently, by early 1959, with many Tibetans increasingly determined to use force to defend what they saw as their basic values and way of life, and with Mao equally determined to resort to force to pursue a definitive resolution of the Tibet issue, the stage had been set for the emergence of a major crisis in Tibet. Even a small spark could ignite a wider conflict.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

55. CCP Tibet Work Committee, “Report on a Basic Summary of the Work in the Past Eight Years in Tibet and the Policies and Tasks in the Next Four Years” (13 November 1958), in CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 84–85. See also *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, pp. 233–234.

56. CCP Tibet Work Committee, “Report on a Basic Summary of the Work in the Past Eight Years in Tibet”; and CCP Tibet Work Committee, “Instructions on Protecting the Progressives” (27 February 1959), in CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 84, 88.

57. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 87.

The Rebellion and Beijing's Strategy of Crisis Management

Early on the morning of 10 March 1959, a strange atmosphere prevailed in Lhasa. After sunrise, thousands of Tibetans (including a large number from the Tibetan army) began to gather around the Dalai Lama's summer residence, Norbulingka, where he was staying at the time. The huge crowd had gathered in response to a rumor that the Chinese Communists were planning to invite the Dalai Lama to a cultural performance at the PLA's headquarters and then arrest him when he showed up. The Tibetans in the crowd wanted to prevent the Dalai Lama from visiting the Chinese camp and to protect him. By mid-day, the turmoil had evolved into a large-scale popular revolt. The insurgents roamed the city of Lhasa holding banners proclaiming "independence for Tibet" and "Chinese go away" and attacking Han Chinese cadres and the Tibetan officials who sided with Beijing. Sampho Tenzin Dhondup, one of the highest-ranking Tibetan officials in the PLA's Tibetan Military Commission, was brutally stoned to death by the rebels, and Khundhung Sonam Gyamtso, another high-ranking Tibetan cadre, was severely injured.⁵⁸

Official Chinese sources and Tibetan accounts differ on who initiated the Dalai Lama's visit to PLA headquarters. Although many top Tibetan officials later said they did not know about the visit until 9 March, Chinese sources claim that the Dalai Lama proposed the visit on 7 February. On that day, according to the Chinese sources, the Dalai Lama and General Tan Guansan, who was then the PRC's acting representative in Tibet, attended a religious dance to commemorate the end of the Male Earth Dog Year. Tan reportedly mentioned to the Dalai Lama that a new dance troupe of the PLA's Tibetan Military Commission, after receiving training in China's inland, had recently returned to Lhasa. According to Tan, the Dalai Lama expressed strong interest in seeing the group perform. Tan first suggested that he could arrange a performance at Norbulingka, but the Dalai Lama responded that Norbulingka did not have a suitable performance facility and that it would be better if the show were staged in the newly completed auditorium at PLA headquarters. Finally, after a few exchanges, 10 March was set as the date for the Dalai Lama's visit.⁵⁹ Neither the CCP officials nor the PLA commanders in Lhasa anticipated that this event would trigger a popular rebellion.

On 9 March, the day before the scheduled visit, the rumor that the Dalai

58. Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snow*, p. 192; and *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, p. 251.

59. *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, pp. 250–251. The Dalai Lama provides a very different account. See Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), pp. 129–132.

Lama was in danger of being kidnapped by the Chinese Communists began to spread in Lhasa. Although CCP officials insisted that the “reactionary upper stratum” in Lhasa was responsible for the rumor, there is no way at this point to identify the precise source. Irrespective of how the rumor started the simple fact that thousands of Tibetans could be so easily inspired to join a popular revolt indicates the extent to which tension had accumulated between the Communist authorities and Tibetans from a wide range of backgrounds.

The rebellion posed a serious challenge for Communist officials and PLA commanders in Lhasa and for CCP leaders in Beijing. Although the unrest should not have caught Mao and his fellow CCP leaders completely unawares, as they knew clearly that the situation in Tibet had been deteriorating and had thus anticipated that a showdown was only a matter of time, they for the most part were caught off-guard by the event and hurriedly had to try to bring the crisis under control.

On the evening of 10 March, the CCP Tibet Work Committee reported by telephone to Beijing that “the rebels stopped the Dalai Lama from attending a cultural show at the military headquarters compound.”⁶⁰ At every subsequent stage of the crisis, CCP officials and PLA commanders in Lhasa maintained close communications with Beijing. Every action they took had to be cleared in advance by the central authorities.⁶¹

Mao Zedong was away from Beijing for an inspection tour in Wuhan, a city near the midpoint of the Yangzi River. In Mao’s absence, Liu Shaoqi, the CCP’s second in command, took primary responsibility for Beijing’s response to the crisis. On the evening of 11 March, Liu chaired a meeting of senior CCP officials, including Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Peng Dehuai, Chen Yi, Yang Shangkun, and Xu Bing.⁶² They viewed the crisis in Tibet not so much as a threat as a potential opportunity—one that would expose the reactionary elements and create the necessary conditions to proceed with long-delayed “democratic reforms” in Tibet. Hence they believed that

60. *Yang Shangkun riji* [Yang Shangkun’s Diaries] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 2001), p. 363.

61. Mao and the CCP leadership had repeatedly emphasized to the CCP Tibet Work Committee that “concerning the various things you have done related to the Tibetans, for every decision you should consult the central leadership in advance and get approval, and then you can put it into implementation.” During the early stage of the PLA’s presence in Tibet, Mao told CCP officials in Tibet that “this is a strict order that has to be carried out and should never be ignored.” *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, pp. 65, 83, 92.

62. Zhou Enlai was then CCP Central Committee vice chairman and PRC premier; Deng Xiaoping was CCP Central Secretariat general secretary; Peng Zhen was a CCP Politburo member, a member of the Central Secretariat, and mayor of Beijing; Peng Dehuai was a CCP Politburo member and minister of defense; Chen Yi was a CCP Politburo member and minister of foreign affairs; Yang Shangkun was head of the CCP Central Committee’s Administrative Office; and Xu Bing was head of the CCP Central Committee United Front Department.

until the situation in Lhasa became clearer, the PLA should not hastily take any offensive action but should “strengthen vigilance and combat readiness, be fully prepared for any eventuality, and not fire the first shot.”⁶³ After the meeting, the CCP leadership instructed the CCP Tibet Work Committee to emphasize that “Tibet is a permanent part of China and that no reactionary forces can change this fact. If the [Tibetan] reactionaries betray the motherland, the Central Government will take resolute actions to suppress the rebellion.” Concerning the Dalai Lama, the CCP leaders ordered the committee to “make every possible effort to win him over,” but added that “we should not be afraid that the enemy might kidnap him. If the enemy does so, with or without the Dalai Lama’s agreement, it will not produce any bad results for us.”⁶⁴

After receiving more detailed reports about the revolt in Lhasa, Liu Shaoqi chaired another meeting of senior CCP officials on 12 March. The discussion focused on the PLA’s military deployments in Lhasa and other parts of Tibet. The Chinese officials decided that PLA units in Tibet “should take all necessary measures to hold our own ground while staying on the defensive and being prepared to repulse the enemy’s offensive at any time.” They reiterated that the PLA should not fire the first shot and should let the rebels “fully expose themselves.” In the meantime, more PLA units would be dispatched to Tibet to help control the situation and, if necessary, to suppress the rebellion.⁶⁵

Mao kept in close touch with his fellow CCP leaders in Beijing. He shared their view that the revolt in Lhasa was more an opportunity than a crisis. He claimed that the turmoil had been provoked by Tibet’s “reactionary upper-class clique,” who took this action “probably because they believed we are vulnerable and thus can be pressured to make concessions [to them].” Mao anticipated that the revolt would expand further and, therefore, that Beijing must be prepared to carry out “democratic reforms” in Tibet ahead of schedule.⁶⁶ He averred that “the Tibet Work Committee should adopt a strategy of remaining on the defensive militarily while taking the offensive politi-

63. Liu Chongwen et al., eds., *Liu Shaoqi nianpu, 1898–1969* [A Chronological Record of Liu Shaoqi] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1996), Vol. 2, p. 453; *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 364; Wu Lengxi, *Yi Mao zuxi* [Remembering Chairman Mao] (Beijing: Xinhua, 1995), p. 119.

64. *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 364.

65. *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, p. 253.

66. Mao based his judgment on the assumption that further expansion of the revolt in Lhasa was by no means a bad thing. He stressed that “if the situation develops in this direction, it is possible that the Tibet issue could be forced—and, if forced, it would be a very good thing—to be solved at an earlier time.” *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, Vol. 1, p. 253.

cally” in order to ensure that “the upper stratum will be divided and the lower stratum will be educated.”⁶⁷

Assessing the Dalai Lama’s attitude and deciding how to deal with him was an important issue that Mao, like his fellow CCP leaders, had to consider. In a telegram to Beijing on 12 March, Mao said that although the CCP should try to “win over” the Dalai Lama and should be ready to handle his possible departure from Lhasa, these steps need not restrict the party and the PLA in their actions. “If the Dalai Lama and his entourage flee [the Tibetan capital],” Mao wrote, “our troops should not try to stop them. Whether [the Tibetans] are heading to southern Tibet or India, just let them go.”⁶⁸ From 10 to 16 March, Tan Guansan exchanged three rounds of letters with the Dalai Lama.⁶⁹ The three letters from Tan were reviewed and approved by leaders in Beijing before being sent. Mao not only regarded these letters as a means to win over the Dalai Lama but also thought of using them for propaganda purposes. In a telegram to the CCP Central Committee on 15 March, he said that Tan Guansan should keep all his correspondence with the Dalai Lama because it would “allow us to maintain the initiative in a political sense.” Mao indicated that Tan’s letters to the Dalai Lama should be written in such a way that they could “be published in the future.” The Chinese leader stressed that the Dalai Lama should be advised to “follow the Seventeen-Point Agreement, fulfill the various promises he made in the past, and maintain an identical stand with the Central Government.” If the Dalai Lama failed to live up to any of these provisions, “the Tibetan people will be harmed and [he will] eventually be abandoned by the people.”⁷⁰

After receiving instructions from Mao and the CCP leaders in Beijing, the CCP Tibet Work Committee and the PLA Tibet Military Commission adopted a strategy of “not firing the first shot” and “preparing to repulse the enemy’s attack at any time.” Lhasa was divided into eight “defense zones,” with all PLA units, government agencies, and other institutions organized into a unified combat system. All of these deployments were made for the purpose of “waiting for the enemy to expose himself more fully.”⁷¹

As the unrest in Lhasa continued to escalate, Mao and his colleagues increasingly considered using the revolt as a pretext to carry out “democratic reforms” in Tibet. On 16 March, Mao conveyed further instructions regarding

67. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 91. See also *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 364; and Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, pp. 119–120.

68. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 91.

69. *Concerning the Question of Tibet*, pp. 28–35.

70. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 165. See also Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, pp. 120–121.

71. *Dangdai zhongguo de xizang*, pp. 253–254.

the CCP's strategy in Tibet. Expressing his approval of Liu Shaoqi and the other CCP leaders' management of the crisis, Mao emphasized that "by dealing with [the situation] in this way, a good result has emerged, and finally we have seized the initiative in a political sense." He reiterated that keeping the Dalai Lama in Lhasa should not be a priority: "We should try our best not to let the Dalai Lama leave. We may let him leave in the future because in the final analysis he is under our control; but even if he leaves now that will not matter." Mao proposed that more troops should be dispatched to Tibet to surround Lhasa and that their mission should be directly tied to the introduction of "democratic reforms" in Tibet:

[we] should only say suppressing the rebellion, but not say carrying out the reforms, and the reforms should be carried out under [the banner of] suppressing the rebellion. A policy of differentiation should be introduced: Where the rebellion happens first, the reforms come first; where the rebellion happens later, the reforms come later; and if there is no rebellion, the reforms will not come [for the moment].⁷²

After receiving Mao's instructions, Liu Shaoqi chaired another CCP Politburo meeting on 17 March to discuss the Tibet issue. The agenda concentrated not only on how to suppress the uprising in Tibet but also, and more importantly, on how to use the crisis to push forward "democratic reforms" in Tibet. At the meeting, both Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping argued that Tibet had been liberated in a peaceful way for eight years and that "democratic reforms" had been delayed "largely because we wanted to wait for the self-awakening of the upper-class elites." Both officials emphasized that because some of the upper-class elites had incited and taken part in the rebellion "this has left us with little choice but to carry out the reforms." In describing the steps that should be taken, they said the first priority was "to be prepared to quell the rebellion resolutely." Once that task was taken care of, the CCP would reorganize the government in Tibet, to restructure the Tibetan army, to separate the political and religious spheres of Tibetan life, and, on the basis of all of these measures, to carry out sweeping "democratic reforms" throughout Tibet.⁷³

The CCP Politburo members also discussed what to do about the Dalai Lama. They agreed that although "every effort should be made" to persuade him to remain in Lhasa, his possible "flight from Lhasa and Tibet" should "not be regarded as a grave matter." The CCP leaders reasoned that "the emphasis of our work now is no longer on waiting for the self-awakening of some

72. *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 366.

73. Liu et al., eds., *Liu Shaoqi nianpu*, p. 453; and Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, p. 121.

of the upper-stratum members of the Tibetan local government, but upon suppressing the rebellion resolutely and carrying out comprehensive reforms.” Like Mao, Liu Shaoqi and his colleagues did not regard keeping the Dalai Lama in Lhasa to be a matter of critical importance.⁷⁴

According to Wu Lengxi, editor-in-chief of *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily] and one of Mao’s political secretaries in attendance at the Politburo meeting, the CCP leaders learned before the meeting ended that the Dalai Lama had indeed left Lhasa. They sensed that the revolt in Lhasa would expand further and that a large-scale rebellion was probably imminent. The Politburo decided to dispatch more troops into Tibet immediately and to reaffirm the orders to PLA units in Lhasa “not to fire the first shot.”⁷⁵

In his memoirs, the Dalai Lama described how reluctant he had been to leave Lhasa.⁷⁶ He and others have reported that one of the decisive factors prompting him to leave on 17 March was the explosion of two artillery shells near Norbulingka, presumably fired by the PLA, which posed a great threat to the Dalai Lama’s safety.⁷⁷ Official Chinese accounts at one time firmly claimed that if such an explosion actually occurred, it could not have been the PLA’s work. Now, with new, albeit still limited, access to the CCP leaders’ deliberations about the Dalai Lama, we are in a better position to understand this issue. Almost certainly the artillery firing was not ordered by Beijing. The action was in sharp contradiction to the CCP Politburo’s repeated instructions that—for political reasons—the PLA should not “fire the first shot.” It is also unlikely that senior CCP officials and PLA commanders in Lhasa intentionally ordered the firing. To have done so would have meant a serious violation on their part of an explicit and strict instruction from Beijing. Judging from the information now available, the incident was most likely an accident caused by PLA soldiers or lower-ranking officers whose nerves were at the breaking point because of the extreme tension created by the popular revolt.⁷⁸

74. Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, p. 120. See also Liu et al., eds., *Liu Shaoqi nianpu*, p. 453.

75. Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, p. 120. According to Yang Shangkun, it was the CCP Tibet Work Committee that informed the CCP leadership that “Dalai has escaped toward the south on 16 or 17 [March].” *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 367. In a telegram to the CCP Central Committee on 19 March, the CCP Tibet Work Committee further reported: “It is now confirmed that the Dalai Lama, together with a group of upper-stratum reactionaries, has escaped on the evening of the 17th. However, the few upper-stratum reactionaries who have remained in Lhasa have not formally announced the Dalai Lama’s departure. Instead, they have continually tried to confuse us politically while enhancing their own preparations for military operations.” CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 94.

76. Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile*, pp. 135–138.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 136. See also John F. Avedon, *In Exile from the Land of Snows: The Definitive Account of the Dalai Lama and Tibet since the Chinese Conquest* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), p. 54; and Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, p. 200.

78. According to one Chinese source, it was Zeng Huishan, a low-level police officer at a transportation station located north of Norbulingka who, under great pressure when his station was repeatedly

Whatever the case may be, the Dalai Lama's departure caused the situation in Lhasa to spiral further out of control. Reportedly, beginning on 19 March, the insurgents in Lhasa started attacking Communist administrative and military targets, resulting in a larger and more violent rebellion. At 5:00 a.m. the next day, the PLA commanders in Lhasa convened an urgent meeting to discuss the situation. They believed that because the Dalai Lama had already left Lhasa, the violence would escalate and the rebels would begin moving toward southern Tibet. The only way to eliminate this threat, they concluded, was by launching a massive counteroffensive. General Tan Guan-shan wanted the PLA to begin the crackdown at 10:00 that morning.⁷⁹

On the morning of 20 March, the CCP Central Secretariat in Beijing held another meeting to discuss the crisis in Tibet. The Secretariat quickly decided to send more troops to Tibet ahead of schedule, stipulating that the advance units should arrive in Lhasa by 30 March.⁸⁰ At 9:30 a.m. on 20 March, in a telegram to PLA commanders in Lhasa, the CCP Central Military Commission formally gave the green light for a "comprehensive counteroffensive" in Tibet. The political leaders emphasized that "the outbreak of fighting in Lhasa and the escape of the Dalai Lama are not bad things at all for the settlement of the Tibet issue." They ordered the PLA commanders in Tibet to "do their utmost to assert control of all strategically important points, cutting off the enemy's route of retreat from the north to the south, doing everything possible to hold the enemy's main force in the Lhasa city limits, and preventing [the rebels] from escaping [from the capital]." This strategy, the officials in Beijing declared, would ensure that "with the arrival of our reinforcements, the enemy will be thoroughly eliminated."⁸¹

The PLA's "general counteroffensive" in Lhasa began at 10:00 a.m. By late afternoon, the leaders in Beijing received word that the PLA already controlled several strategically important sites in Lhasa and that all the exits on the city's southern edge connecting to roads to the Tibetan-Indian borders had been "tightly sealed."⁸² At 6:00 p.m., the CCP Central Military Commission ordered the PLA units in Lhasa to continue the counteroffensive and occupy the whole of Lhasa.⁸³ In the meantime, the CCP Central Committee

attacked by the rebels, "fired the two artillery shots as a counterattack measure without due authorization." See CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 93.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

80. *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 367.

81. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 95.

82. *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 367; and CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 95.

83. CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, p. 95.

instructed the Party's Tibet Work Committee that it "should not include the Dalai Lama as one of the leading traitors for the moment" and should instead "propagate the notion that he has been kidnapped by the traitors' clique."⁸⁴

The next day, Liu Shaoqi chaired another meeting of CCP leaders, including Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Peng Zhen, Chen Yi, Huang Kecheng, Yang Shangkun, Wang Feng, and Xu Bing. Liu and his colleagues all believed that the time had arrived to dissolve the Kashag, and they discussed how to announce this decision to the Tibetan people, as well as to the whole world.⁸⁵ That same day, after Zhou Enlai revised and approved a draft, the CCP Central Committee issued its "Decisions on Several Policy Issues Concerning the Implementation of Democratic Reforms by Crushing the Rebellion in Tibet." The document affirmed that

The Kashag in Tibet has betrayed the motherland, and the situation has forced us to get into a showdown with the reactionary upper stratum in Tibet ahead of schedule. Naturally we are no longer in a position to adhere to the policy of deferring any reforms for six years. We must resolutely do everything possible to mobilize the masses to introduce democratic reforms now.

The document further emphasized that "the democratic reforms must be carried out thoroughly under the slogan of crushing the rebellion." Regarding the procedures for implementing the reforms, the CCP Central Committee stated that "the suppression of the rebellion should be pursued together with reforms—in areas where the rebellion has been crushed, reforms should be carried out; and in areas where the rebellion has not yet been quelled, reforms should be postponed." Although the document mentioned that "reforms should be introduced with due regard for Tibet's special characteristics" and that "the policy of respecting freedom of religious belief should continuously be upheld," the CCP left no doubt about "the class line that should be adopted with the democratic reforms—to depend on the laboring people, to unite with all the forces that can be united, and to eliminate the feudal serf system step by step and with proper distinctions."⁸⁶

Beginning on 25 March, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and other leaders took part in an enlarged CCP Politburo meeting in Shanghai. The planned topic of the multi-day session was bringing the

84. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

85. Liu et al., eds., *Liu Shaoqi nianpu*, p. 452.

86. CCP Central Committee, "The Decisions on Several Policy Issues Concerning the Implementation of Democratic Reforms by Pacifying the Rebellion in Tibet" (21 March 1959), in Li et al., eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, Vol. 2, pp. 212–213. See also CCP History Material Collection Committee in Tibet, *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashi ji*, pp. 96–97.

“Great Leap Forward” to a “higher stage,” but Mao devoted the opening day to the Tibet issue. This was the first time since the start of the uprising in Lhasa that all of the CCP’s top leaders were gathered in the same place to discuss Tibet. Deng Xiaoping, representing the CCP Politburo Steering Committee, explained how the leading CCP officials perceived and managed the Tibetan crisis. He insisted that over the previous eight years the PRC Central Government and the PLA units in Tibet had faithfully abided by the Seventeen-Point Agreement and that it was the “upper-stratum rebellious clique” in Tibet that “tore up the Agreement, betrayed the motherland, used force to resist the Central Government, and attacked the People’s Liberation Army.” All of this, in the CCP leaders’ view, had opened the door for the introduction of comprehensive reforms in Tibet. Deng stated that “our slogan now is to construct a new Tibet of democracy and socialism,” stressing that “we should announce confidently and with a perfect sense of justice that we are to carry out democratic reforms and that we are to build socialism in Tibet.” Deng also indicated that when denouncing the “upper-stratum rebellious clique” CCP officials should avoid any direct condemnations of the Dalai Lama. “We should continue to claim that the Dalai Lama has been kidnapped by the rebellious clique” but should “replace him with the Panchen Lama as the acting chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the Tibetan Autonomous Region.”⁸⁷

The CCP leaders decided that the Xinhua News Agency would issue a formal statement about the rebellion in Tibet, and Wu Lengxi was assigned the task of drafting it.⁸⁸ Mao subsequently made many revisions in the draft.⁸⁹ On 28 March, the Xinhua News Agency formally released a “Communiqué on the Rebellion in Tibet,” and Zhou Enlai, representing the PRC State Council, ordered the dissolution of the Tibet “local government,” the dismissal and punishment of “traitors” who were involved in the rebellion, and the formation of a new Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region with the Panchen Lama as the acting chairman.⁹⁰

In the meantime, the PLA had effectively and almost completely eliminated the armed resistance in Lhasa. Beginning in late March, several PLA units moved into southern Tibet, approaching the borders with India. With the rebellion essentially over as CCP leaders perceived it, the real challenge facing them was how to carry out thorough political and social revolutions in

87. Wu, *Yi Mao zuixi*, p. 121; and *Yang Shangkun riji*, p. 369.

88. Wu, *Yi Mao zuixi*, pp. 121–122.

89. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 167.

90. “Communiqué on the Rebellion in Tibet,” *Renmin ribao* (Beijing), 28 March 1959. For English translations of the Xinhua communiqué and Zhou’s order, see *Concerning the Question of Tibet*, pp. 1–15.

Tibet. Mao was confident that history was on his side, and, hence, nothing could stop him and the CCP.⁹¹

The Emerging Conflict between China and India

Almost immediately after the revolt broke out in Lhasa, tensions emerged in China's relationship with India. When the Dalai Lama and his followers fled to India and were given asylum there, the frictions between China and India gradually turned into hostility. In a few short months, punctuated by two bloody clashes between border garrisons, the two hitherto friendly countries became bitter adversaries. This development was one of the most dramatic turns in state-to-state relations during the Cold War era.

After the PRC was founded in October 1949, India was one of the first non-Communist countries to recognize the new Chinese regime and establish formal diplomatic relations with it.⁹² Throughout the 1950s, the PRC maintained friendly ties with India. In 1954–1955, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and PRC Premier Zhou Enlai jointly introduced the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” or *Panchsheel*,⁹³ greatly enhancing relations between Beijing and New Delhi while at the same time strengthening the PRC's international status.

Nonetheless, the friendly relationship between the PRC and India in the 1950s was not wholly free of problems, especially regarding Tibet. When Beijing and New Delhi were exploring the possibility of mutual diplomatic recognition in 1949–1950, differences in their attitudes toward the Tibet question already caused a degree of suspicion between the two governments. Throughout the 1950s, even during the heyday of Sino-Indian friendship, Beijing and New Delhi were never able to escape the shadow of the Tibet issue. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the relationship became increasingly complicated as a result of the two governments' different views of the Sino-Indian borders. In 1959, when the PLA's suppression of the Tibetan rebels allowed Beijing to extend its military and political control to Tibet's entire territory, the combination of this issue and the border disputes led to a severe crisis in Sino-Indian relations.

91. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, pp. 175–180, 183–185, 195–200.

92. The Indian government recognized the People's Republic of China on 30 December 1949, less than three months after the PRC was founded. The two countries established diplomatic relations on 1 April 1950.

93. The five principles were mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, nonaggression, noninterference in another country's internal affairs, equal and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

When the CCP leaders made plans to “liberate” Tibet in 1949–1950, India was a major factor in their deliberations. The PLA’s military incursion into Chamdo in late 1950 prompted Indian leaders to express strong concern. In August–November 1950, India repeatedly sent official memoranda and notes to the PRC expressing “deep regrets” about the PLA’s armed intervention in Tibet. The Indian leaders argued that the PLA’s military operations in Tibet would worsen the already tense international situation, especially in south Asia; adversely affect the friendly relationship between China and India, and create a pretext for countries opposing the PRC to deny it a seat at the United Nations (UN).⁹⁴

Because Mao realized how important India’s attitude toward Tibet could be, he personally oversaw the PRC Foreign Ministry’s dealings with the Indian government. When K. P. S. Menon, India’s deputy foreign minister in charge of relations with China and Tibet, expressed India’s concern over the PLA’s entry into Tibet in October 1950, Mao drafted the Chinese response on behalf of the PRC Foreign Ministry, stating that “Tibet is Chinese territory, and the Tibet issue is exclusively part of China’s internal affairs. The People’s Liberation Army must enter Tibet, but in the first place [we] hope to enter Tibet without fighting a war.”⁹⁵ In late October 1950, when India’s ambassador to China, K. M. Panikkar, mentioned that the PLA’s military operations in Tibet might hinder the PRC’s efforts to be accepted by the UN, Mao instructed the PRC Foreign Ministry to “reply [to him] that Tibet is China’s internal issue, and no foreign country has the right to interfere.”⁹⁶ When Menon responded by expressing further “regret” about the PLA’s entry into Tibet, Mao instructed Zhou Enlai and the PRC Foreign Ministry that “our attitude [toward India] should be even tougher. We should say that the Chinese troops must enter any part of Tibet they may enter, irrespective of whether the Tibetan local government is willing to negotiate [with the Central Government] and what the results of the negotiation will be.”⁹⁷

Following Mao’s instructions, the PRC Foreign Ministry rebuffed New Delhi’s “concerns” and “regret” about the PLA’s entry into Tibet. In an official response dated 16 November 1950, the PRC Foreign Ministry averred that the Chinese government “has repeatedly made clear that Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory” and that “the Tibet issue is exclusively an internal

94. Margaret Carlyle, ed., *Documents on International Affairs, 1949–1950* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1953), pp. 550–556; and “Exchanges between China and India on Tibet and Chinese-Indian Borders, 1950,” 102-00051-01, in Chinese Foreign Ministry Archive (hereinafter referred to as CFMA).

95. *Mao wengao*, Vol. 1, p. 108.

96. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 33.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

matter for China.” Therefore, the authorities in Beijing were “greatly surprised” by New Delhi’s attempt to “influence and obstruct the Chinese government’s exercise of its sovereign rights in Tibet” and were “deeply regretful” that New Delhi “has treated a domestic problem of the Chinese government, namely, the exercise of its sovereign rights in Tibet, as an international dispute calculated to increase the present deplorable tension in the world.”⁹⁸

Beijing’s dismissal of New Delhi’s concerns over the Tibet issue in late 1950 could have caused serious animosity and, in the worst case scenario, even a conflict between the two countries. But largely because of Indian Prime Minister Nehru’s conciliatory attitude, the two sides did not have a falling out. Although Nehru, like many of his colleagues in the Indian government, worried that the PLA’s military presence in Tibet would impair the region’s function as a buffer between China and India and thereby diminish India’s security, he believed “it is reasonable to assume that given the very nature of Tibetan geography, terrain, and climate, a large measure of autonomy is almost inevitable.”⁹⁹ Therefore, in Nehru’s view, “the best way to prevent China from establishing a large military presence in or direct political rule over Tibet was by convincing Beijing that there was no need for such measures.”¹⁰⁰ When the Dalai Lama was staying in Yadong for several months in 1951, only a few miles from the Indian border, Indian officials urged him to return to Lhasa and seek a peaceful settlement with Beijing, hoping that this would enhance Tibet’s autonomy.¹⁰¹ Consequently, New Delhi, despite its expressions of unease about the PLA’s entry into Tibet, did not make any substantial effort to stop the PLA’s military march.

After the signing of the Seventeen-Point Agreement in May 1951, India had to recognize the PRC’s sovereignty over Tibet in principle. An issue that immediately emerged between Beijing and New Delhi was how to settle the “special interests in Tibet that India had inherited from Britain.”¹⁰² In the bi-

98. “Note of the PRC Government Delivered by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu to Ambassador Panikkar,” 16 November 1950, 102-00051-01, in CFMA. See also Song Enli et al., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao dashi ji, 1949–1956* [Important Events in the Diplomacy of the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1956] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi, 1997), p. 60.

99. B. N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal* (Bombay: Allied Publication, 1971), p. 80.

100. John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 49.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

102. In February 1952, the Indian government submitted to the PRC a memorandum, “Current Status of India’s Interests in Tibet,” in which New Delhi summarized India’s “special interests” in Tibet in seven categories. In a response on 14 June, Zhou Enlai responded that after the PRC was founded, India’s “special interests” in Tibet inherited from Britain were no longer legitimate; however, Zhou also claimed that Britain, rather than India, bore responsibility for “the current status of the relationship

lateral negotiations on this matter, both sides pursued broader objectives. India was eager to obtain China's support for the leadership role that Nehru hoped to play in the nonaligned movement, and the PRC needed New Delhi's friendship and cooperation to end the Chinese Communist regime's international isolation and to improve the PLA's supplies in Tibet.¹⁰³ On 29 April 1954 the two sides signed the "Agreement on Trade and Transportation between India and the Tibet Region of China."¹⁰⁴ For the Chinese leaders, the agreement meant not only that India's "special interests" in Tibet had officially ended but also, and more importantly, that India had formally accepted Chinese sovereignty over Tibet by agreeing to the formulation of the "Tibet Region of China". For Nehru, however, a crucial premise for the agreement was Beijing's implied acceptance of Tibet's de facto autonomous status—although the term *autonomy* did not actually appear in the text.

The preamble to the agreement set forth the five principles of peaceful coexistence, which both Beijing and New Delhi agreed should be the basis of all state-to-state relations. Because Indian officials were eager to claim a leadership role in the non-Western world by emphasizing their nonaligned policy, and because Chinese leaders were—at least at the moment—interested in creating an image of the "New China" as a peace-loving country on the international scene, the two countries were more willing to stress their common interests and more reluctant to allow their relationship to be derailed by potential disputes. Consequently, when the Dalai Lama visited India in late 1956 and early 1957 and seemed likely to stay permanently in the country, Nehru urged him "to return to Tibet and to work with the Chinese on the basis of the [Seventeen-Point] Agreement."¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, even at the height of Sino-Indian friendship and cooperation, several crucial differences between the two countries were never resolved—differences that over the long term were bound to threaten their relationship. First, complicated border issues between China (Tibet) and India

between India and China's Tibet" and that Beijing was willing to solve all the remaining problems with New Delhi through diplomatic negotiations. Xue Mouhong et al., *Dangdai zhongguo waijiao* [Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1987), p. 175.

103. After the Chinese entry into Tibet, the PLA's purchase of food from local markets led to a sharp rise in inflation. Before the completion of new roads that would bring food and other supplies into Tibet, the Chinese had to rely on trade with India to get precious supplies into Tibet.

104. Indian Ministry of External Affairs, *Notes, Memoranda and Letters between the Governments of India and China, 1954–1959: White Paper I*, New Delhi, 1959, pp. 98–101. See also Zhou's account in "Minutes, Zhou's Meeting with Nehru," 19 October 1954, 204-0007-03, in CFMA; Xue et al., *Dangdai zhongguo waijiao*, pp. 176–177; and Wang Hongwei, *Ximalayashan qingjie: Zhongyin guanxi yanjiu* [The Himalaya Sentiment: A Study of Chinese-Indian Relations] (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue, 1998), p. 95.

105. Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile*, pp. 117–118, 120.

remained. The leaders of the two countries had deliberately set aside border issues when they decided to concentrate on issues of common interest.¹⁰⁶ But the border dispute remained, and as China continued to reinforce its military presence and control in Tibet (which meant that India's borders with Tibet increasingly became borders with China), the border issue loomed larger and larger in Sino-Indian relations.

Second, Beijing's and New Delhi's perceptions of Tibet remained fundamentally different. Although the Indian government had formally recognized the PRC's sovereignty over Tibet, policymakers in New Delhi firmly believed that "India's national security interests require it to exclude, eliminate, or at least minimize a Chinese military presence in Tibet."¹⁰⁷ Indian leaders continued to view Tibet as a "buffer" between India and China. If Nehru accepted China's sovereignty claim to Tibet in the early 1950s, that was mainly because he had profound doubts about China's ability to establish effective control over the vast territory of Tibet, which was geographically and culturally unique, and because he believed the best way to help Tibet maintain its autonomous status was to avoid hostile actions toward Beijing.¹⁰⁸ Later, when Nehru's assumptions turned out to be wrong, the outlook for Sino-Indian relations became clouded.

Third, Beijing's and New Delhi's visions of their respective positions in the world, particularly in the non-Western world, were divergent. Whereas Nehru was extremely interested in pursuing a larger leadership role for India in international affairs through the introduction of the *Panchsheel* and a series of principles underlying the nonaligned movement, Mao and his comrades were eager to reclaim China's central position in the world by promoting an Eastern, or even a global, revolution à la the Chinese Communist revolution. In light of the great historical and cultural traditions of India and China, it is not surprising that Nehru and Mao had developed such self-centered and superior perceptions of their own countries' great mission in the modern world. But when these perceptions clashed and the border issue came to the fore, a wider conflict was bound to erupt.

The revolt in Lhasa in March 1959 brought to the surface all the potential problems that had long existed between Beijing and New Delhi. Under the pressure of India's public opinion, which was overwhelmingly sympathetic toward the rebels in Lhasa and was extremely critical of the Chinese clamp-

106. During Nehru's visit to Beijing in October 1954 and Zhou Enlai's visit to New Delhi in November–December 1956, the Chinese and Indian leaders touched on the border issues but did not put them atop the agenda for their meeting.

107. Garver, *Protracted Contest*, p. 41.

108. For insightful analysis on this issue, see *ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

down, Nehru tried to strike a delicate balance between his management of the crisis and India's overall policy toward China. On the one hand, he avoided sharp criticism of Beijing's policies and voiced respect for China's "special interests" (but not necessarily its sovereignty claim) in Tibet. On the other hand, he expressed sympathy for the Tibetans, particularly the Dalai Lama, and deep concern about Beijing's response to the unrest.

From Mao's perspective, the subtleties of Nehru's attitude toward Tibet did not make any sense. Because the Chinese leader did not appreciate India's democratic and pluralist political system, he regarded all the criticism from India (including from the Indian media) as indications of the Indian government's support for the rebels. When top CCP leaders discussed the situation in Tibet at a Politburo meeting on 17 March, Zhou Enlai claimed that the rebellion was connected with the Indian government. He speculated that both Britain and the United States had provided active support to the rebels behind the scenes and had worked with India as a frontline state. According to Zhou, "this is why the commanding center of the rebellion has been established in Kalimpong on Indian territory."¹⁰⁹

When Mao and the other CCP leaders met in Shanghai on 25 March to discuss Tibet, China's relations with India were a prime concern. Deng Xiaoping asserted that the Indian government, and Nehru in particular, had been deeply involved in the rebellion in Lhasa. Nonetheless, Deng argued that the time had not yet come for Beijing to voice public criticism of India and "settle accounts" with it. This was not because he believed that the Indian government's actions were acceptable. On the contrary, Deng insisted that several of Nehru's speeches about the Tibetan situation, together with the fact that the headquarters of the rebellion was located in Kalimpong, left no doubt that the Indian government was behind the rebellion. In explaining India's behavior, Deng said that Mao had quoted an age-old Chinese proverb to the effect that "one is committing suicide if one has done many unjust things." He said that public rebukes of New Delhi or of Nehru personally, would spark premature debates with the Indians and that "we are now letting the Indian authorities do more unjust things, and, when the times comes, we certainly will settle accounts with them."¹¹⁰

On 27–28 March, on the eve of Zhou's decree dissolving the Tibetan "local government" that was to be issued along with the Xinhua News Agency's announcement that the rebellion in Tibet had been crushed, Chinese leaders considered the possible international responses to these moves. Mao repeat-

109. Liu Wusheng et al., *Zhou Enlai junshi huodong jishi*, p. 497.

110. Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, p. 121.

edly instructed the Xinhua News Agency to pay special attention to reactions from the Indian government.¹¹¹ As the PLA began to extend its presence to the Sino-Indian borders, Mao realized that the CCP would have to monitor India's response.

The PRC's irritation with New Delhi increased further when the Dalai Lama and his followers received a cordial reception after they crossed the border into India. In the 7 April edition of *Cankao ziliao* [Reference News], an internal publication of the Xinhua News Agency, Mao read several reports by Indian journalists reflecting "India's involvement in the preparations for a rebellion in Tibet over the previous several years." He mentioned these reports to Zhou Enlai, pointing out that "they are unfavorable to Nehru" and suggesting that they be republished in *Renmin ribao*.¹¹²

The next day, Mao convened a high-level meeting in Hangzhou. Originally, the meeting was intended to discuss the Chinese government's report to the National People's Congress later that year, but Mao shifted the agenda to focus on Tibet and India. He pointed out that although the Tibetan rebellion had been quelled, the matter was far from settled. Mao noted that the revolt had provoked "concern both at home and abroad" and that "Britain, the United States and India are now making all kinds of noises and engaging in a big anti-China chorus opposing China's suppression of the rebellion." He proposed that Beijing launch "an open counteroffensive" justifying its stand on Tibet.¹¹³

Mao's comments revealed that Chinese leaders were having a difficult time trying to define China's policy toward India in the wake of the Tibetan rebellion. On the one hand, Mao did not regard India as an "imperialist country" and believed that attacks on Nehru and India would risk increasing the strength of the enemy camp and further isolating the PRC in the international community. On the other hand, Mao was convinced that the Indian government had incited the rebellion and that by exposing a foreign government as the instigator of the rebellion, China could further justify its suppression of the unrest.

If Mao harbored any reservations about the risks of publicly criticizing India and Nehru, his doubts vanished when the Dalai Lama, reportedly with the assistance of the Indian government, issued a statement on 18 April calling for Tibet to be independent of China and proclaiming that he had left Ti-

111. *Ibid.*, 121–122.

112. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 172. Following Mao's instructions, *Renmin ribao* on 23 April 1959 published these reports along with an "editor's note" pointing out that the documents "once again prove that Kalimpong has been the center of conspiracy activities toward Tibet in the past several years."

113. Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, p. 122.

bet of his own free will and was grateful to the Indian government for granting him asylum. Mao now believed that the time had come to expose India's perceived role in the Tibetan rebellion. On 25 April, Mao instructed the CCP propaganda apparatus to change its tone about India and Nehru:

For a long while we have said that "the imperialists, Jiang Jieshi's bandit gang, and foreign reactionaries have instigated the rebellion in Tibet and interfered in China's internal affairs." This is completely inappropriate and should be retracted and changed to "the British imperialists have acted in collusion with the Indian expansionists to intervene openly in China's internal affairs, in the hope of taking over Tibet." We should directly point to Britain and India and should not avoid or circumvent this issue.¹¹⁴

Mao's instructions were crucial. After weighing the pros and cons he had decided to identify India as the main culprit behind the rebellion. By branding the Indians as "expansionists," he was claiming that they had adopted the British colonial tradition. According to this new depiction, the Tibetan rebellion was fomented not by the Tibetans themselves but by the "Indian expansionists" and the British imperialists standing behind the Indians.

From 25 April to 5 May, Mao chaired a series of enlarged CCP Politburo meetings to discuss China's policy toward India. He set the tone at the first meeting on the evening of 25 April:

We will begin a counteroffensive against India's anti-China activities, emphasizing a big debate with Nehru. We should sharply criticize Nehru and should not be afraid of making him feel agitated or of provoking a break with him. We should carry the struggle through to the end.

Mao believed that open criticism of India and Nehru would now be desirable because it would help clarify the causes of the Tibetan rebellion and provide a justification to the world for the actions taken by the PRC to subdue the unrest and enact "democratic reforms" in Tibet. Mao claimed that India had been interfering in China's internal affairs in Tibet for a long time, but that China had sought "to maintain the friendship between China and India" by refraining from publicly criticizing India. Mao believed that China should now adopt a strategy of "pursuing unity through struggle" vis-à-vis India and Nehru, voicing criticism "of a just nature, advantageous to ourselves, and with due restraint." The Chinese leader argued that a campaign against India and Nehru was necessary "to help the Indian people learn the truth, to justify [China's stand] in the international struggle around the Tibetan rebellion, to crush the rebellion and promote democratic reforms in Tibet, and to

114. *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 186.

preserve Chinese-Indian friendship and compel Nehru to abide by the five principles of peaceful coexistence toward China.”¹¹⁵

After discussing how to conduct a “big campaign of criticism” against India and Nehru, the CCP Politburo decided that a special group should be organized under Mao’s political secretaries, Hu Qiaomu and Wu Lengxi, to draft a comprehensive essay explaining Beijing’s perspective on India’s involvement in the Tibetan rebellion. On 2 May, Mao and his colleagues spent an afternoon working out the main points of the essay. They decided they must emphasize that the social and political systems in Tibet had been barbaric and backward and that ordinary Tibetans had long yearned for reforms, but that Nehru and the Indian government had blocked social reforms in Tibet. They also decided to stress that India had long harbored territorial ambitions in Tibet, reflecting the impact of British colonial rule on India’s policymakers. Finally, they decided that they must expose Nehru’s policy as self-contradictory and show how he, on the one hand, recognized Tibet as part of China, and, on the other hand, looked on Tibet as a buffer between China and India.¹¹⁶ After repeated revisions, including some by Mao himself, the essay was published under the title “The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru’s Philosophy” on 6 May 1959.¹¹⁷ Beijing’s conflict with New Delhi thus flared into the open.

The two countries’ border disputes soon resurfaced, adding to the tension. On 22 March 1959, Nehru sent a letter to Zhou Enlai stating that India’s borders with China (Tibet) had been well established and that PRC maps had mistakenly included large parts of Indian territory within the Chinese boundary.¹¹⁸ Chinese leaders did not immediately respond to Nehru’s letter, but the PLA, after suppressing the rebels in Lhasa, gradually approached disputed sections of the Tibetan-Indian borders. As a result, the possibility emerged for the first time since 1951 that Chinese and Indian troops might come into conflict along the borders between the two countries.

On 4 May, in a conversation with Fei Yimin, a pro-Communist “democratic figure” in Hong Kong, Zhou Enlai vowed not to yield to New Delhi’s challenge but expressed concern that the Tibet question might trigger a deeper conflict between China and India on the border issue:

We must carry out a counteroffensive against India. It is they who initiated the whole thing. They have been waging a cold war. We must pay them back in the

115. Wu, *Yi Mao zuxi*, pp. 125–126.

116. *Ibid.*, pp. 127–128.

117. “The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru’s Philosophy,” *Renmin ribao* (Beijing), 6 May 1959, pp. 1–2. For an English translation of the essay, see *Concerning the Question of Tibet*, pp. 239–276.

118. Indian Ministry of External Affairs, *Notes, Memoranda and Letters*, p. 56

same currency. Our strategy in this fight should be on just grounds, to our advantage and with due restraint, and should combine struggle with unity, so that unity can be achieved through struggle. On the Tibet question, it seems that Nehru has developed some illusions, hoping to use the Dalai Lama as a bargaining chip [on the border issue]. When our troops entered Tibet in 1950, India's interference was barely concealed. Only after our troops won the Chamdo campaign and forced the Tibetan upper stratum to come to the negotiating table did the Indians call it quits. Now our troops have reached the borders [with India] and will seal them to trap the rebels. We must carry out a counteroffensive. The Indians may put the Tibet question aside to launch an anti-Chinese and anti-Communist wave [on the border issue]. So we must be mentally prepared.¹¹⁹

On 25 August 1959, a bloody incident occurred between Chinese and Indian border garrisons at Longju, a point north of the McMahon Line on the Sino-Indian border's eastern section. One Indian soldier reportedly was killed, and another was wounded. The incident immediately sparked tensions between China and India, and both Beijing and New Delhi claimed that the other side had crossed the border and fired the first shot and should therefore take full responsibility for the incident. Less than two months later, on 21 October, a more serious clash occurred at the Kongka Pass on the western section of the Chinese-Indian border, resulting in a further deterioration of Sino-Indian relations.¹²⁰ Less than eight months after the Tibetan rebellion, the friendship and cooperation that had so benefited Beijing and New Delhi throughout the 1950s had collapsed.

Tibet and Beijing's Deteriorating Relations with Moscow

The crisis in Tibet occurred at a time when Beijing's strategic alliance with Moscow had begun to fray. Although the rebellion itself did not cause any significant problem between China and the USSR, the deterioration of the Sino-Indian relationship and particularly the border clash between the two countries sparked a major bilateral rift, resulting in a further decline of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

Chinese and Soviet leaders signed a treaty of alliance in February 1950, only four months after the PRC was founded. Beijing's strategic cooperation

119. Liu et al., *Zhou Enlai junshi huodong jishi*, p. 496.

120. For an informative account of the Longju and Kongka Pass incidents, see Xuecheng Lin, *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute and Sino-Indian Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 26–28.

with Moscow provided the PRC with much-needed military equipment, economic assistance, and technological support. When Chinese troops moved into Xinjiang and Tibet, they received substantial help from the Soviet Union. In particular, the Soviet air force assisted the PLA in transporting personnel and equipment.¹²¹ After the PLA occupied Tibet, Moscow provided extensive support to Beijing to help the Chinese Communists establish and enhance communications with and transportation to Lhasa.¹²² In 1954–1955, when the PRC and India introduced the five principles of peaceful coexistence, the Soviet Union expressed strong support.¹²³ Throughout the early and mid-1950s, Beijing's friendship and cooperation with New Delhi seemed highly compatible with the interests of the Sino-Soviet strategic alliance.

After the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), Nikita Khrushchev, launched a de-Stalinization campaign in 1956, Mao expressed major reservations. In dealing with the Polish and Hungarian crises later that year, Chinese leaders urged Khrushchev and his colleagues to issue a statement concerning the basic principles of relations between socialist countries. In the wake of the Polish and Hungarian crises, Mao and his colleagues developed a strong sense of superiority, believing that they were more qualified than the CPSU to occupy a central position in the international Communist movement.¹²⁴ In 1958, in an effort to strengthen the Soviet Union's strategic capacity in the Asia-Pacific region, Khrushchev proposed to Beijing a joint Soviet-Chinese submarine flotilla and joint construction of a long-wave radio transmitter on Chinese territory. Mao regarded the proposals as evidence of the Soviet Union's "big power chauvinism" and claimed that Khrushchev and his colleagues were out to "control China."¹²⁵ In late August 1958, Mao did not inform Soviet leaders in advance that he had ordered PLA units in Fujian Province to conduct large-scale artillery shelling of the Nationalist-controlled Jinmen Islands, leading to a serious international crisis and the risk of a direct

121. See, for example, *Mao Zedong xizang gongzuo wenxuan*, p. 25; and "Record of Conversation between Comrade I. V. Stalin and Chairman of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China Mao Zedong" (22 January 1950), *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996), p. 9.

122. See, for example, "Transcript of Stalin–Zhou Enlai Conversation" (3 September 1952), *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996), p. 17.

123. "The Joint Sino-Soviet Communiqué on Sino-Soviet Relations and Various International Issues," *Renmin ribao*, 12 October 1954, p. 1.

124. For an extended discussion, see Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, ch. 6.

125. For a more detailed discussion, see *ibid.*, pp. 73–77. See also *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996), pp. 155–157.

Sino-American military showdown. Mao's failure to inform Soviet leaders caused further distrust between Beijing and Moscow.¹²⁶

When the Tibetan rebellion broke out in March 1959, the PRC kept Soviet leaders closely apprised of developments in Tibet. The Soviet Union generally supported the PRC's efforts to contain the situation and quell the unrest.¹²⁷ Chinese sources indicate that when the PLA was mopping up the Tibetan resistance, the Soviet Union provided the CCP with valuable intelligence concerning the rebels' movements.¹²⁸

However, when the Chinese authorities began publicly criticizing India and Nehru, Soviet leaders were placed in an uncomfortable position. Chinese officials noticed that the Soviet media eschewed any mention of India's alleged connections with the Tibetan rebellion and instead published many reports by Western news agencies "attacking China's policies toward Tibet and India."¹²⁹

To give the other "fraternal countries" a better understanding of China's policies toward Tibet and India, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Chen Yi (the PRC foreign minister) met with senior officials from the Soviet Union and ten other socialist countries on 7 May. A main theme of the discussions was Tibet and Beijing's policy toward Nehru and India. Zhou spent a good deal of time explaining Beijing's perception of the nature of the Tibetan rebellion and India's connection to it, arguing that Nehru's "unspoken purpose" was "to establish a 'buffer zone' [in Tibet], to prevent reforms from being implemented [there], and to force the PLA to withdraw [from Tibet]."¹³⁰ Mao emphasized that Beijing's criticism of Nehru was not meant to push the Indian leader into the arms of the imperialists. Instead, it was designed to educate the Indian people and, if possible, Nehru himself:

Who is Nehru? He is a middle-of-the-roader of the Indian bourgeoisie, and he is different from the rightists. In my estimation, the overall situation in India is not so bad. India has 400 million people, and Nehru cannot ignore the will of these 400 million. The Tibet question has become a major event and has turned into a tremendous source of turmoil. It will last for a while; at least for half a

126. Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, ch. 7.

127. David Wolff, ed., "One Finger's Worth of Historical Events," Working Paper No. 30, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 1998, pp. 60–63.

128. See, for example, Ji Youquan, *Xizang pingpan jishi* [A Factual Record of Suppressing the Tibetan Rebellions] (Lhasa: Xizang renmin, 1993), p. 87.

129. Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan: 1956–1966 zhongsu guanxi huiyilu*, p. 204.

130. *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxian* [Zhou Enlai's Diplomatic Papers] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1990), pp. 268–276.

year, and it will be even better if it lasts for a year. It is a pity that India does not dare to go on. Our strategy is to provide working people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America with an opportunity to be educated, so that the Communists in these countries will learn not to be scared by ghosts.¹³¹

The relationship between Beijing and Moscow was complicated still further when, on 20 June 1959, the Soviet Union informed the Chinese that the U.S.-Soviet negotiations in Geneva to ban nuclear weapons tests and the upcoming summit at Camp David between Khrushchev and U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower would compel the Soviet Union “for the time being” to stop providing assistance to Beijing on nuclear weapons technology. Soviet officials told the Chinese that “over the next two years” they would not be in a position to honor some of the obligations specified in the agreement signed by the two countries on 15 October 1957, including the requirement to give nuclear bomb prototypes and technical data to the PRC.¹³²

On 6 September 1959, after the Chinese-Indian border clash at Longju, the Chinese Foreign Ministry summoned Sergei Antonov, the Soviet chargé d'affaires in China, for a briefing on the incident. The Chinese authorities insisted that the Indians had initiated the clash and that China's policy was to avoid any further escalation of the conflict.¹³³

Two days later, the CCP Politburo met to discuss the border confrontation with India. Mao and his colleagues reached four main conclusions: that the Sino-Indian border had never been formally established, and the “McMahon Line” was illegal; that the Sino-Indian border clash was caused by Indian troops who crossed the border (including the “McMahon Line”) into Chinese territory; that China should be prepared to settle the border problems through negotiations with India; and that prior to the negotiations the two sides should not take any military steps and should maintain the status quo.¹³⁴ Because Chinese leaders apparently still believed that the Soviet Union

131. *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* [Mao Zedong's Diplomatic Papers] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian and Shijie zhishi, 1994), pp. 374–375.

132. Li Jue et al., *Dangdai zhongguo he gongye* [Contemporary China's Nuclear Industry] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue, 1987), p. 32; Cong Jin, *Quzbe fazhan de sui yue* [The Years of Tortuous Development] (Zhengzhou, PRC: Henan renmin, 1989), p. 352; and Zhou Wenqi and Zhu Liangru, eds., *Teshu er fuza de keti: Gongchan guoji, sullivan he zhongguo gongchandang guanxi biannian shi, 1919–1991* [A Special and Complicated Subject: A Chronological History of the Relations between the Comintern, the Soviet Union, and the Chinese Communist Party] (Wuhan, PRC: Hubei renmin, 1993), p. 516.

133. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 210; Qian Qichen, ed., *Xin zhongguo waijiao wushi nian*, p. 874; Wang Taiping et al., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi, 1957–1969*, p. 228; “Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu's Introduction of the Chinese-Indian Border Issue to Diplomats from Fraternal Countries,” 9 September 1959, 109-00870-01, in CFMA; and Zhou and Zhu, eds., *Teshu er fuza de keti*, p. 5.

134. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 212.

would accept Beijing's explanation of the causes of the Sino-Indian border clash, the CCP Politburo did not give much consideration to Moscow's possible reactions.

Shortly after the meeting, however, the CCP Central Committee received a letter from the CPSU Central Committee. The letter challenged Beijing's version of how the clash at Longju began, contending that because the Chinese-Indian borders ran through mountainous areas it was difficult to establish the exact location of the border in certain regions. The letter further mentioned that the Indians had suffered casualties during the clash, thus implying—at least as Beijing viewed it—that the Chinese should take the main responsibility for the conflict.¹³⁵

On 9 September, Antonov made an appointment with Foreign Minister Chen Yi to deliver to him a draft statement on the Sino-Indian border clash that the TASS news agency was planning to issue the following day. The statement expressed “regret” about the “tragic” incident between China and India. After reviewing the statement, Chen reminded Antonov that a few days earlier China had given the Soviet Union detailed information about the Sino-Indian border clash. Hence, in Chen's view, there was no need for Moscow to issue any statement or make any comments about the Sino-Indian border issue.¹³⁶ After the meeting, the Chinese foreign minister further informed Antonov that Beijing was planning to broadcast a letter from Premier Zhou Enlai to Prime Minister Nehru, together with a series of documents and other materials reflecting the Chinese stand. Chen expressed hope that the Soviet Union, after reviewing the documents released by the Chinese government, would take appropriate actions to support China.¹³⁷ On the evening of 9 September, after the Xinhua News Agency formally published Zhou's letter to Nehru, China's Deputy Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei met with Antonov to inform him that Zhou's letter had been published. The Chinese official urged the Soviet government to consider China's stand on the Sino-Indian border issue and to refrain from publishing the prepared TASS statement.¹³⁸

However, to the great surprise and anger of the Chinese, the Soviet Union ignored Beijing's repeated requests and decided to let TASS issue the

135. Qian, ed., *Xin zhongguo waijiao wushi nian*, pp. 874–875; and Wang et al., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi*, p. 228.

136. Wang et al., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi*, p. 228; and Qian, ed., *Xin zhongguo waijiao wushi nian*, p. 875.

137. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, pp. 212–213; and Wang et al., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi*, p. 228.

138. Qian, ed., *Xin zhongguo waijiao wushi nian*, p. 875. See also “Vice Minister Zeng Yongquan's Meeting with Antonov,” 10 September 1959, 109-00873-12, in CFMA.

statement on the evening of 9 September (Moscow time), a day earlier than originally scheduled. When Chinese officials read the Soviet statement, they noticed that it took a “strange stand of neutrality” toward the Sino-Indian border issue. Mao and his comrades were particularly annoyed by the Soviet government’s claims that the Sino-Indian border clash “has hindered the relaxation of international tensions” and might complicate the prospects for agreement between Khrushchev and Eisenhower. From Beijing’s perspective, the Soviet government’s decision to publish the statement meant that “Khrushchev is indeed unhappy with China and unwilling to trust China.”¹³⁹

In further deliberations, the Chinese leaders connected Moscow’s attitude toward the Sino-Indian border clash to the Soviet Union’s decision a few months earlier not to provide nuclear weapon samples to China. Mao and his comrades firmly believed that the two matters were linked and that Khrushchev was “wholeheartedly pursuing the settlement of all issues in world affairs through cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union.”¹⁴⁰ Mao gave voice to his resentment in a letter from the CCP Central Committee to the CPSU Central Committee on 13 September. The letter accused the Soviet Union of “accommodationist compromises on important matters of principle” and claimed that “the TASS statement showed to the whole world the different positions of China and the Soviet Union in regard to the incident on the Indian-Chinese border, causing glee and jubilation among the Indian bourgeoisie and the American and English imperialists, who are in every way possible trying to drive a wedge between China and the Soviet Union.”¹⁴¹ Mao never forgot the “debt” that Moscow “owed” to Beijing and repeatedly mentioned that “in September 1959, during the Sino-Indian border dispute, Khrushchev supported Nehru in attacking us.”¹⁴²

After Khrushchev visited the United States and met with President Eisenhower, he traveled to Beijing on 30 September to participate in celebrations of the PRC’s tenth anniversary. The visit was overshadowed by the growing mutual distrust between the Chinese and Soviet leaders. At a state banquet hosted by Zhou Enlai on 30 September, Khrushchev delivered a forty-minute speech. Completely ignoring the mood of his Chinese hosts, he emphasized the “spirit of Camp David,” which in his view would contribute to the relax-

139. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 217; and Wang et al., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi*, pp. 228–229.

140. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, pp. 215, 217.

141. “CC CPC to CC CPSU, Concerning the Incident on the Indian-Chinese Border,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 252.

142. Mao Zedong, “Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee,” in Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 190.

ation of East-West tension.¹⁴³ Mao and his colleagues were aghast at Khrushchev's comments—how could the Soviet leader bring up such a topic at an occasion that was supposed to be devoted to commemorating the victory of the Chinese Communist revolution? When Khrushchev mentioned in his speech that “it is unwise to use military means to test the stability of the capitalist system,” Mao assumed that the Soviet leader meant to insult him and to belittle the great Chinese revolution.¹⁴⁴

The Soviet delegation held an important meeting with Mao and other Chinese leaders on the evening of 2 October. This meeting, which lasted for seven hours from 5:00 p.m. to midnight, was supposed to be an opportunity for the Chinese and Soviet leaders to figure out ways of overcoming their disagreements, but, as it turned out, the meeting quickly degenerated into vitriolic quarrels.

After heated debate about issues such as Beijing's refusal to free several American citizens who had been held as spies in China and Beijing's shelling of the Nationalist-controlled Jinmen Islands in the summer of 1958, Khrushchev shifted the conversation to Beijing's policy toward India and Tibet. He declared that Chinese leaders were wrong in trying to solve their disputes with New Delhi by military means. He argued that “you have had good relations with India for many years, but suddenly a bloody incident occurs, and, as a result, Nehru finds himself in a very difficult position. We may say that Nehru is a bourgeois statesman, but . . . if he leaves the scene, who will be better than he is?” Khrushchev challenged China's claim to sovereignty over certain areas along the unsettled Chinese-Indian border and said that it was foolish to be competing with India over “a few square kilometers of barren land.” Concerning Tibet, Khrushchev ridiculed the Chinese for “having committed a serious mistake in allowing the Dalai Lama to escape to India.”

In response, Zhou Enlai disparaged Khrushchev for his “inability to tell right from wrong.” Chen Yi angrily reproached Khrushchev, saying that although it was necessary for socialist countries to unite with nationalist countries, it was a mistake for the former to yield to the latter's wrongdoing. Chen singled out the Soviet government's statement of 9 September that characterized the Chinese-Indian border conflict as “a huge mistake.” Khrushchev told the Chinese that he would never accept the Chinese claim that the Soviet Union had sided with India. Mao, in turn, announced that the Chinese would never accept the Soviet stand on India and Tibet.¹⁴⁵

143. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 220. See also the report in *Renmin ribao* (Beijing), 1 October 1959, p. 1.

144. Cong, *Quzhe fazhan de sui Yue*, p. 352. See also Mao, “Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee,” pp. 190–191.

145. For an English translation of the Russian version of the meeting transcript (with an introduction by Vladislav M. Zubok), see *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 12/13 (Fall/

The tone of the quarrel between Mao and Khrushchev must have shocked the other Soviet leaders when they had an opportunity to read the transcript. On 11 November, Stepan Chervonenko, the Soviet ambassador to China, requested a meeting with Zhou Enlai. Chervonenko said that Moscow had instructed him to inform Zhou that “as indicated by the meetings between Khrushchev and the CCP leaders during [the Soviet delegation’s] recent visit to China, no difference of principle now exists between the two parties, and the two parties’ opinions about all important issues are completely identical. On a few specific issues, after mutual consultation and ample exchange of opinions, [differences of view] were dispelled.” As a result, “the Presidium of the Soviet Party has decided to destroy the records of the [2 October] meeting in Beijing between the two parties’ top leaders.” Zhou Enlai replied that the CCP leaders had not distributed a summary or transcript of the meeting to the party cadres and rank-and-file. He also noted that after the full and frank exchange of opinions, no differences of principle any longer existed between the two parties.¹⁴⁶

Despite the conciliatory tone, neither Beijing nor Moscow actually changed its attitude about China’s relations with India. When Zhou met with Chervonenko on 11 October, he steered the conversation to Beijing’s border disputes with New Delhi. Zhou argued that although the Chinese government had never recognized the “McMahon Line,” it had been willing to accept the line as a temporary demarcation between China and India until a permanent boundary could be worked out through diplomatic negotiations. Zhou emphasized that “China has done everything possible to resolve the question in a friendly way, but the attitudes of the Indians, for various domestic and international reasons, are not cooperative.”¹⁴⁷ The Chinese premier implicitly directed his criticism of India at the Soviet Union.

The Soviet leaders, however, declined to yield on India and Tibet. On 18 December 1959, Mikhail Suslov, a high-ranking CPSU official who had accompanied Khrushchev at the 2 October meeting in Beijing, prepared a report on the visit for the CPSU Central Committee. In a frank exposition, he claimed that the CCP had committed serious mistakes vis-à-vis India and

Winter 2001), pp. 262–270. The Chinese version of the transcript is still inaccessible in Beijing’s central archives, but detailed accounts of the meeting are provided in the following sources: Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, pp. 221–227; Zhou and Zhu, eds., *Teshu er fuza de keti*, pp. 517–518; Cong, *Quzhe fazhan de suiyue*, p. 354; Wang et al., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi*, p. 229–230; and Liu, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo lishi changbian*, Vol. 2, pp. 64–65. The Chinese accounts are generally compatible with the Soviet transcripts.

146. Li et al., eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, Vol. 2, p. 267; and Wang, ed., *Xin zhongguo waijiao wushi nian*, p. 878.

147. Li et al., eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, Vol. 2, pp. 267–268; and Wang, ed., *Xin zhongguo waijiao wushi nian*, pp. 878–879.

Tibet. Concerning Tibet, Suslov acknowledged that “the Chinese comrades were correct when they decisively suppressed the counterrevolutionary rebels” and that “reactionary circles in India to some extent were probably involved in fomenting the rebellion.” But he also emphasized that if the PRC “had implemented timely democratic reforms and appropriate measures to improve [Tibet’s] economy and culture while taking account of the historical specifics of Tibet, and had been duly vigilant with regard to reactionary elements, . . . the rebellion in Tibet would not have erupted.” Suslov expressed concern that “the imperialists had succeeded” in “making the Tibetan issue a bone of contention first of all between China and India, to pit these two great Asian powers against each other.” He chided the leaders of the CCP for having “failed to take into account this tactic of the imperialists.” Suslov claimed that when the Chinese authorities unleashed “their own propaganda campaign and concentrated their fire mainly on India and personally on Nehru,” they had fallen right into the trap laid by the imperialists. In discussing the Sino-Indian border conflict, Suslov contended that the two military clashes had resulted in loss of life on the Indian side, thus allowing “imperialist propaganda” to create an “uproar about ‘the aggression of red China.’” He insisted that the conflict between Beijing and New Delhi had “led to a diminution of the international prestige of the PRC, to the weakening of [China’s] position in Asia, and to an increased tendency in a number of Asian countries to ally themselves with Western powers, with the USA, despite the deep hatred among the peoples of Asian countries toward their perennial enemies—the colonizers.” In addition, Suslov noted that the first clash had happened only a few days before Khrushchev’s visit to the United States. “The enemy propaganda,” he argued, “did everything it could to exploit the Sino-Indian conflict for the purpose of disrupting the Soviet peace initiative.” Suslov and the other Soviet leaders believed that the Chinese comrades were to blame for all these issues.¹⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, the rift between Beijing and Moscow continued to widen. In January 1960, after Chinese leaders learned that Khrushchev was planning to visit India, Zhou Enlai requested a meeting with Chervonenko. On 19 January Zhou told the Soviet ambassador to remind Khrushchev that the Sino-Indian border clash had been precipitated by the Indian side. He contended that the Indians had been trying to provoke a public split between Beijing and Moscow on this issue. Zhou warned that if Khrushchev touched on the Sino-Indian border issue during his visit to India, the Indian bourgeoisie would be able to exploit the issue to place the Soviet Union in an extremely

148. “Draft Report, ‘On the [October 1959] Trip of the Soviet Party-Government Delegation to the PRC,’ by M. Suslov to CC CPSU Presidium for Presentation to a Forthcoming CC CPSU Plenum, 18 December 1959,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 259–262.

unfavorable position. Zhou thus urged Khrushchev to avoid any mention of the Sino-Indian border issue.¹⁴⁹

The response from Moscow arrived three days later. In a meeting with Chen Yi, Chervonenko indicated that Soviet leaders were “surprised by the worries expressed by the Chinese comrades.” He informed Chen Yi that the Soviet Union, “as it has done in the past and will continue to do in the future,” would observe “strict neutrality” vis-à-vis the Sino-Indian border dispute and would oppose “any third party’s intervention” in the matter.¹⁵⁰

The Chinese leaders were outraged by this position. On 26 January, Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi met with Chervonenko again. Zhou told the Soviet ambassador that he was shocked by the Soviet Union’s “strict neutrality” toward the Sino-Indian border issue. Zhou explained why he was so dismayed: “Within the socialist camp, when a fraternal country has been bullied by a bourgeoisie-ruled country in a border incident, and another fraternal country claims that it will adhere to strict neutrality, this is a new phenomenon in the international Communist movement.” Zhou angrily claimed that Moscow’s “strict neutrality” was tantamount to offering support to India, and he warned that the PRC “will have to make a comprehensive analysis of the reply by the Soviet Party’s Central Committee in order to tell the right from the wrong.”¹⁵¹

The next day, Chervonenko requested a meeting with Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi, explaining that he had mistakenly used the word “neutrality” to describe Moscow’s stand on the Sino-Indian border issue. Zhou, however, rejected this overture. He argued that removing the words “strict neutrality” would not change the nature of his earlier conversation with Chervonenko. Zhou told the Soviet ambassador that “major differences now exist between China and the Soviet Union regarding the Sino-Indian dispute.”¹⁵²

Mao was taken aback by Khrushchev’s behavior at the 2 October 1959 meeting. Although many CCP leaders still believed that the differences between China and the Soviet Union were of only secondary importance compared to their common interests, Mao himself was much less hopeful.¹⁵³ In a speech prepared for a high-level conference of Chinese officials, he wrote:

Khrushchev and his ilk are extremely naive. He does not understand Marxism, and he is easily fooled by the imperialists. His lack of understanding of China

149. Li et al., eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, Vol. 2, p. 280

150. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

151. *Ibid.*, pp. 283–284.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

153. See, for example, Chen Yi’s 27 December 1959 speech on the international situation, in Yang Kuisong, *Mao Zedong yu mosike de enen yuanyuan*, p. 445.

has reached the extreme, and he is unwilling to do any research. He accepts a whole bunch of erroneous intelligence, and he has a big mouth at the same time. If he fails to correct [these mistakes], in a few years (say, in eight years) he will face complete bankruptcy.¹⁵⁴

Mao was clearly aware that a serious confrontation between the CCP and the CPSU was emerging—a confrontation that would widen rapidly over the next few years.

Conclusion

The outbreak of a large-scale rebellion in Tibet in 1959 was by no means accidental. From the time the Chinese Communists asserted control of Tibet in 1951, profound political, social, and ethnic conflicts had divided the Communist authorities from Tibet's aristocratic and monastic elites, as well as from many ordinary Tibetans. Although the Chinese authorities insisted that Tibet was an integral part of the PRC, they were initially willing to adopt a moderate, gradualist policy concerning the social and political transformation of Tibet. Nonetheless, the Chinese leaders' tolerance of Tibet's different—and, in Beijing's view, backward—political institutions and society was limited. After Mao and his comrades set the “liberation” of Tibet as a key goal, they never concealed their intention of eventually introducing profound political and social changes in Tibet. For them, the concessions they made in the Seventeen-Point Agreement were only temporarily binding on them and were made in return for the Tibetans' acceptance of being a permanent part of the PRC. The Chinese leaders believed that any revolution they carried out in Tibet was legitimate. In 1956–1957, the CCP's pledge not to introduce reforms in Tibet within the next six years was an effective reminder to many Tibetans that the status quo would be changed sooner or later. When the Communists subdued widespread unrest in “ethnographic Tibet” in 1957–1958, causing a large number of refugees to flee to Lhasa, and when the Great Leap Forward throughout China in 1958–1959 stepped up the pressure on Tibet's polity and society, the seeds of a popular revolt in Lhasa took root.

The PRC's management of the crisis in Tibet, as revealed by newly available Chinese sources, was characterized by a series of sophisticated efforts to legitimize not only the use of force to crush the rebellion but also the implementation of “democratic reforms” throughout Tibet. For the PRC, the revolt in Lhasa was more an opportunity than a threat. In line with Mao's ideas,

154. Mao Zedong, “Speech Outline on the International Situation” (December 1959), in *Mao wengao*, Vol. 8, p. 601.

Beijing adopted a strategy of “remaining on the defensive militarily while waging a political offensive.” Both politically and militarily, China’s handling of the crisis was highly successful. In the end the CCP not only established firm control over the whole of “political Tibet” but also, as Mao had desired, used the rebellion as a pretext for introducing “democratic reforms” in Tibet. In both name and reality, Tibet was fully incorporated into the “big family” of the PRC.

In a deeper sense, however, Beijing’s management of the Tibet issue was flawed all along by the Chinese leaders’ inability to grasp that Tibet, with its distinctive historical tradition, religion, and culture, could not be subjugated through ordinary military and political means. Because Mao and his colleagues subscribed to the Marxist notion that “all struggles between nations and races are in essence struggles between classes,” they made no real and consistent effort to understand Tibet’s religion and culture. The Chinese Communists had long relied on a “united front” strategy to expand their own influence, and they stuck to this approach in Tibet, showing superficial respect for the Dalai Lama (and the Panchen Lama as well). Mao simply did not comprehend the extent of the Tibetan people’s devotion to and worship of the Dalai Lama. That was why the CCP allowed the Dalai Lama to leave Lhasa in March 1959. Mao’s decision in this instance was based on the calculation that with or without the Dalai Lama, the Chinese Communists would be able to quell the uprising and carry out “democratic reforms” in Tibet. Although the PRC’s political strategy and military power allowed it to claim a great victory in Tibet in 1959, the Tibet issue remains unresolved. Even now, nearly fifty years after the suppression of the violent unrest in Tibet, Beijing’s leaders are dealing with many of the problems that the rebellion highlighted.

The Tibet issue from the outset was closely related to China’s relations with India. Although there is little evidence to support Beijing’s claims that New Delhi inspired and colluded with the rebels in Tibet, the sympathy of the Indians, including Nehru, clearly lay with the Tibetans. When the Dalai Lama and his party entered India and sought asylum, Nehru and his government could not possibly have turned them down. From China’s perspective, however, this action provided ample evidence that New Delhi was to blame for the rebellion. Complicating matters was the long-standing border dispute between China and India. During most of the 1950s, the leaders in Beijing and New Delhi had been willing to keep the border disputes on the back burner, but this was largely because their other concerns had overwhelmed the border issue. The outbreak of the rebellion in Tibet and the ensuing march by the PLA toward the Tibetan-Indian border made it impossible to keep the border issue from becoming a matter of prime concern for the Indian public, for the leaders of the two countries, and for the international community. Al-

though Chinese and Indian leaders repeatedly tried to find solutions to the border issue, their failure paved the way for a major border war between the two countries in October 1962. Consequently, long after the Chinese crushed the Tibetan rebellion (but not the Tibet issue), hostilities between China and India remained. At present, as a result of the complicated relations between the two countries, the prospects for maintaining peace and stability on the Asian subcontinent remain uncertain.

The Tibetan rebellion also occurred at a critical juncture in Sino-Soviet relations. After being closely allied for almost a decade, Beijing and Moscow experienced a growing rift. In 1958–1959, a number of events—Moscow’s abortive proposals to establish a joint submarine fleet with China and to set up a long-wave radio transmitter on Chinese territory, the decision by Chinese leaders to shell the Jinmen Islands without informing Moscow in advance, and the Soviet government’s decision to stop providing China with nuclear bomb prototypes and the technical data for producing a bomb—caused relations between Beijing and Moscow to reach a low ebb. The Tibetan rebellion and the Sino-Indian border clash sparked a further deterioration of ties between the two Communist giants. The Soviet leaders’ reluctance to provide full support to Beijing caused Mao and his comrades to have ever greater doubts about the trustworthiness of their Soviet counterparts—indeed, the Chinese were no longer certain that Soviet leaders could be regarded as genuine Communists. At the historic meeting between Mao and Khrushchev on 2 October 1959—a meeting well known to scholars of the Cold War as a critical turning point in the breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance—Tibet and the Sino-Indian borders were salient points of contention. For leaders in both Beijing and Moscow, the disputes over Tibet and the borders probably mattered less than the fact that the Sino-Soviet strategic alliance was no longer binding the two countries together. Tibet and the Sino-Indian border dispute did not cause the Sino-Soviet split, but they made the split more evident and more difficult to overcome in the long run. Tibet, the Sino-Indian dispute, and the beginning of the Sino-Soviet split combine to mark the year 1959 as one of unusual significance, a year in which a new and very different chapter in the global Cold War began to unfold.