

March 31, 1959

Report by Yuri Andropov, 'On the Situation in Tibet'

Citation:

"Report by Yuri Andropov, 'On the Situation in Tibet'", March 31, 1959, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 49, d. 238, ll. 42-48 (R. 8929); translated from Russian by David Wolff. Published in CWIHP Working Paper No. 30.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/118751>

Summary:

Report on Tibet, detailing the history of PRC-Tibetan relations since 1949 and the social and economic work of the PRC in Tibet. Discusses the activity of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, and the political unrest in the region. Notes the relations of China, Tibet, and India.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

To the Central Committee of the CPSU

We present this report "On the situation in Tibet," prepared on the basis of information provided by the Chinese friends on the latest events, and [using] other materials available to the [International] Department of the CC CPSU.

Head of CC CPSU Department of ties with communist and worker parties in socialist countries. IU. ANDROPOV

31 March 1959

On the Situation in Tibet

Tibet is one of the largest territories of the border provinces of China, occupying more than 1.2 million square kilometers. According to the 1953 census, the Tibetan population in the PRC numbers 2.775 million. In Tibet itself, however, less than half is concentrated (1.27 million). The remainder live in the areas of the PRC next to Tibet and are autonomous (autonomous districts and provinces in Qinghai, Sichuan, and others).

In the past Tibet was long the object of English and then American influence. The Indian bourgeoisie also had significant interests in Tibet. Tibet's leadership cultivated ties with these countries and came up with the idea of creating an "independent Tibet." When the Guomindang regime fell in 1949, the Tibetan ruling circles tried to realize the idea of Tibetan independence. They asked all governments for help "in the struggle for independence," drove out the Guomindang men, refused the peaceful suggestions of the PRC and prepared for military action against China.

In 1951 PRC troops entered Tibet and these leaders had to end their resistance. Officially, Tibet was liberated peacefully on the basis of an agreement concluded in Beijing in May 1951 between the PRC central government and the Tibetan local government. The Tibetan delegation to the negotiations was headed by Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, who had previously handed over Eastern Tibet to the PRC troops. The Panchen Lama also took part in the negotiations. He had established contact earlier with the Chinese friends and was interested in returning from exile to Tibet to recoup his position as second only to the Dalai Lama.

The agreement contained the following planned measures: as a part of China, Tibet's troops would be reorganized and integrated into the PRC's armed forces, while in Tibet a military-administrative committee would include representatives of the local Tibetan government. The agreement also stipulated continuation of the political system in Tibet and also the functions and powers of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama as well as preserving the religion, language, writing and customs of the Tibetan people. Foreign affairs were concentrated in the hands of the PRC central government. An agreement on realizing national autonomy under the leadership of the PRC government was achieved. The agreement noted that the Central People's Government of China would not force matters regarding reform in Tibet and that the carrying out of one or another reform would be agreed upon [in advance] with the Tibetan authorities. Measures for helping Tibet to develop its economy and culture were also planned.

Although in recent years the PRC government has carried out several measures to raise its economy and culture, Tibet remains, even today, one of the most backward provinces of China. Some of the most important enterprises are the completion of major highways: Xikang- Tibet (length 2255 km), Qinghai- Tibet (2100 km) and Xinjiang-Tibet (under construction). Local industrial enterprises, several state farms, and experimental agricultural stations have been established. Much has been accomplished in providing the population of Tibet with goods and food. Previously,

there were no lay schools in Tibet. Now there are over 60 schools, including one middle school in Lhasa. Much has also been done in public health, including the training of some Tibetans.

Despite some successes achieved by the Chinese comrades, the political situation in Tibet remained complicated. There were periodic disturbances. Major unrest occurred in 1954-56. In 1955, the CC CCP sent Deputy Premier and Politburo member Chen Yi to Tibet. To calm things down a part of the Chinese organization and troops were withdrawn from Tibet. The region of Chamdo, populated by Tibetans, was joined to Tibet. The military-administrative committee was reorganized into a preparatory committee for the creation of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, with the Dalai Lama at its head.

The Dalai Lama and his reactionary retinue continually prevented democratic transformation. Because of this, in Tibet neither land nor other democratic reforms have been carried out. Land remains in the hands of the monasteries, lay and spiritual feudals [feodaly]. In the socio-political realm, the feudal-serf order under the rule of religion, monasteries, and lamas remains almost untouched. There are over 100,000 lamas in Tibet constituting the basic reactionary force actively supporting the Dalai Lama. Even now there are no elective organs of popular power in Tibet. In this respect the PRC Constitution has not yet been extended to Tibet.

In his 1957 speech "On the question of the correct solution of contradictions within the people," Com. Mao Zedong pointed out that conditions for democratic changes in Tibet were not yet ripe, and therefore they would not be carried out in the Second Five-Year Plan (1958-62). In Mao's words, the Tibetans themselves would decide on carrying them out in the Third Five-Year Plan.

The Communist Party of China has made the realization of Tibetan autonomy depend on the general political situation in that province, the carrying out of democratic transformations and the preparation of new cadres capable of carrying out the party's policy. The joining to Tibet of other areas of the PRC with Tibetan populations also depends on this.

Anglo-American intelligence is always active in Tibet, including around the Dalai Lama. The nearest relatives of the Dalai Lama (three brothers) are abroad and systematically propagandize against the PRC and for the "liberation" of Tibet. [Calls for support from African and Asian countries are detailed.]

The Chinese comrades try to lead a careful policy in Tibet in order to avoid unnecessary complications. Despite these efforts, however, the situation in Tibet recently became more strained. At the end of 1958, disorders and open revolts began in some Tibetan areas. With the help of foreign intelligence agencies, reactionary nationalists began to broaden their subversive work. In January-February 1959 a major revolt erupted in the region of Kham (eastern Tibet). The rebels cut the eastern highway into Tibet and established communication abroad, including with Jiang Jieshi's troops in Burma.

According to Chinese comrades, the situation in Tibet in March took on a military character. On 19 March about 30,000 rebels blockaded the Chinese garrisons of Lhasa and other places and began to fire on them. The internal center of the uprising was Lhasa and the foreign one was the Indian city of Kalimpong. The revolt took place under the battle slogan: "For the independence of Tibet and her separation from China."

According to information held by the Chinese comrades, the Tibetans' actions are inspired by the Americans and English. The Americans are sending help to the rebels

through Pakistan and Burma. India, despite Nehru's assurances of non-interference in Tibetan affairs, also according to the Chinese comrades' information, has not stood aside. Help to Tibet, including cannons and machine guns, is coming from India via Nepal. The Indian consulate in Lhasa took a direct part in organizing the revolt. The uprising's foreign center has been founded in the Indian city of Kalimpong.

In this situation the Chinese friends took decisive measures to put down the uprising.

According to them, the revolt was crushed in Lhasa on 22 March. The Dalai Lama escaped from Lhasa and his whereabouts are still not known. In other parts of Tibet the uprising continues, but the Chinese friends are sure that they will soon re-establish order throughout Tibet. This is made easier, because the Panchen Lama, the above-mentioned Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, is on the PRC's side. The friends intend to rally the workers of Tibet around him and other Tibetan progressive figures to carry out reforms, agricultural, first of all. The friends for political reasons intend to draw the Dalai Lama to their side again.

From the Chinese friends' communications, we can see that the uprising in Tibet has a national-religious tint. In the main, the central, eastern, and southern areas of Tibet are involved in the uprising. The main forces of the Tibetan counter-revolution are religious circles, who have drawn local Tibetan military units and one of the Tibetan mountain tribes, the Khampa, to their side. Spies from imperialist countries were the inspirers and, in large part, the organizers of the uprising. We can also assume that the majority of the population, especially laboring peasants stayed away from the action, supporting neither side. Here we clearly need to find the reasons in aspects of CCP policy in Tibet. First of all, it is necessary to note that eight years after liberation [by the PLA], Tibetan peasants remain in serf-like dependence, while in other minority regions, socialist transformations have already been carried through, with the party's policy receiving broader social support there. In Tibet the main effort was through peaceful solution of all problems by agreement with the feudal-theocratic circles and their "re-education". In the main, the working masses saw few real results from living in a socialist state.

The Chinese friends are aware that the wide publicity of the Tibetan events in the capitalist world may bring certain international complications for China. In their opinion, England and the US will try to use the Tibetan events for inimical propaganda against China to strengthen the "cold war," possibly [including] putting the Tibet question in front of the UN. It is possible that the escaped rebels with the aid of the US and other imperialist states will create a Tibetan emigre government. This will become even more complicated, if the Dalai Lama is hiding abroad.

As can be seen from the Chinese friends' messages, they are especially concerned about PRC relations with India and the events in Tibet. Since Indian circles were mixed up in the Tibetan events, it will effect Chinese-Indian relations in some measure. Recently, the reactionary parties and groups in India are demanding a parliamentary discussion of the Tibetan events. The Indian Popular-Socialist Party is organizing anti-Chinese meetings and demonstrations. Many Indian newspapers have begun an anti-Chinese campaign. Religious circles in India also are trying to use the Tibetan events to aggravate relations between India and the PRC.

Since Nehru in his 23 March speech separated himself from the events in Tibet, the Chinese friends plan for the moment to withhold from publication the information in their possession on the interference of India in Tibetan affairs. In the present situation, said Chen Yi, the main task is to neutralize India and then attract her to our side ... [An overview of "bourgeois" press coverage of the Tibetan uprising follows, in which Tibet is described as an "Asian Hungary." Special attention is paid to official remarks by Nehru, the U.S. State Department, and Jiang Jieshi.]

The Chinese friends are more concerned about the international aspects of the disturbances in Tibet. Here, evidently, sooner or later they will have to make appropriate statements and take practical steps.