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April 23, 1951

The US Consul General at Calcutta (Wilson) to the Department of State, 'Transmitting Two Additional Monthly Reports of Indian Mission at Lhasa, Tibet'

Citation:

"The US Consul General at Calcutta (Wilson) to the Department of State, 'Transmitting Two Additional Monthly Reports of Indian Mission at Lhasa, Tibet'", April 23, 1951, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Record Group 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Entry UD 2721-A, U.S. Consulate General, Calcutta, India, Classified General Records, 1936-1963, Box 19, Folder: 350 Political (Tibet) 1951, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Contributed by Charles Kraus through Mandatory Declassification Review, Case NW-56266, Document #183463. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/209128

Summary:

Reports of the Indian Mission in Lhasa from February-March 1951.

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Amconsul, Calcutta, India 492 April 23, 1951

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INDEX

ConGen's Secret Despatch No. 429 of March 12, 1951

Transmitting two additional Monthly Reports of Indian Mission at Lhasa, Tibet

I have the honor to refer to the Consulate General's despatch No. 429 of March 12, 1951, transmitting the monthly report of the Indian Mission at Lhasa, Tibet, for the period ending January 15, 1951, and to transmit herewith two additional reports for the period ending February 15, 1951 and the period ending March 15, 1951, respectively, which have just been received from the Office of the Deputy High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, Calcutta. In accordance with the Department's telegram 279 of February 27, 1951, a summary of these two reports has been transmitted to the Department by telegram.

The following are the highlights of the two additional reports:

(1) The entire period under review was relatively uneventful, with little military activity and with recurring reports of the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Eastern Tibet.

(2) The present leaders of Tibet, who "seem to dread far more the contagion of Communism rather than the Chinese for whom they continue to entertain both fear and respect", may in sheer desperation make a deal with the Chinese Communists.

(3) The Chinese have continued to employ subtle methods in their campaign to win over the leaders of Tibet and have completely succeeded in the case of Ngapho Shape.*

(4) The Chinese have been extorting forced loans of barley and other foodstuffs from the Tibetans and upon the delivery of yak-loads of grain have seized the grain and slaughtered the yaks for meat.

*This official has just arrived in Peiping at the head of a delegation which is negotiating with the Chinese Communist authorities.

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(5) Relations between Tibet and Nepal are deteriorating, with the Tibetans complaining that the Nepalese have not acted favorably on the Tibetan request for military assistance.

Evan M. Wilson
American Consul General

Enclosures:
1. Monthly Report of the Indian Mission, Lhasa, for the period ending February 15, 1951.
2. Monthly Report of the Indian Mission, Lhasa, for the period ending March 15, 1951.

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Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch 492 from Amconsul, Calcutta, April 23,1951

MONTHLY REPORT OF THE INDIAN MISSION, LHASA, FOR THE PERIOD ENDING FEBRUARY 15, 1951.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Sino-Tibetan Relations

(i) Wintry conditions, transport problems and difficulties of local procurement of essential supplies seem to have frozen for the moment the military situation in Tibet. During the month under review there were stray reports of the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Eastern Tibet; they are reported to have posted only 25/30 troops under a junior military officer at Shobando and placed a similar garrison at Lhodzong. Obviously, the Chinese do not apprehend any revival in the military strength of Tibet, and these outposts which are equipped with wireless sets serve as observation posts for the collection and transmission of political and military intelligence to Chamdo.

(ii) The precise reason for the withdrawal of Chinese troops from certain areas in Eastern Tibet is not known. This could have been meant as a gesture of good-will in order to create favourable conditions for a peaceful settlement of the Sino-Tibetan question; but unfavourable local conditions might as well have caused the invaders to order temporary withdrawals of their forces.

(iii) Some credit, however, for the general improvement in the situation belongs to Ngapho Shape who has impressed the Chinese by his sincere efforts for peace. In a message received in Lhasa through Lhalu Shape, he has informed the Tibetan Government that their reply to the Chinese terms has been referred to Peking for consideration. Ngapho appears to be optimistic about the outcome of the present talks at Chamdo, and has expressed the belief that there will be an early transfer of the administration of Kham to Tibetan officials.

(iv) Earlier reports from Kham stated that the Chinese were making frantic purchases of provisions and supplies from all over Kham, and paying for these in promissory notes. Yak-loads of barley were being transported from various places for storage at Riweche and Chamdo. The Yaks, however, were not returned to their owners but were slaughtered for meat. It was reported that 20 Yaks a day were being slaughtered at Markham alone. Animals arriving from Kanze with supplies for Chamdo were also being turned into meat.

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(v) A few cases of extortion were also reported. Certain monasteries were forced to surrender their surplus stock of food on loan to the Chinese. The Kundeling monastery alone has to give 8,000 maunds of food grains from their Peshu estate, and they do not seem to entertain hopes of recovering the loan.

(vi) These gastronomic activities of the Chinese have caused consternation amongst the Khampas whose earlier admiration for the conquerors seems to be dissolving in fear of famine. If the Chinese continue to slaughter Yaks at the present rate, it might adversely effect the economy of Kham and ruin the prosperity of the local peasants.

(vii) On 1st January 1951, the Chinese were reported to have held a grand inauguration ceremony for the new council of administration for Kham set up by them. The occasion was marked by inspired public celebrations. Chamdo has now a supply of electricity which is exclusively for the use of the Chinese occupation forces. Regular theatrical performances and operas are staged for the entertainment of Chinese troops stationed there.

(viii) It is also understood that the Officer Commanding, Chinese forces, at Chamdo has been reprimanded and relieved of his command for the looting that followed the capture of Chamdo by Chinese troops.

(ix) Towards the end of January, the Chinese made a dramatic offer to Lhalu Shape. They tried to lure him into their camp with the promise of re-instating him as one of the Commissioners of Kham provided he repented his past and agreed to co-operate with them in their future programme for Tibet. The matter was referred to Lhalu to Yatung for orders. Lhalu does not seem to be very happy at Giamdo with his flanks exposed, and has been importunating the Tibetan Government to allow him to withdraw particularly as his presence in Giamda is no longer of any consequence.

(x) Earlier Lhalu has sent back the 10 representatives from 3 large monasteries near Lhasa, who were despatched by the Tibetan Government to assist him in his work and to stiffen the morale of his troops. They returned to Lhasa on the 20th January in an impressive procession followed by their 70 personal servants but without the knowledge of the Tibetan Government at Yatung who most certainly were not pleased.

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(xi) Reegashar, who was holding the northern route from Sining to Lhasa, left Dam for Shigatse on 10th January. It is not known why he had to decamp, but the general tendency amongst officials in and around Lhasa is to abandon their posts and move to areas of relative security. It is possible that the Yatung authorities had ordered him to reinforce their troops at Shigatse.

National Assembly

In an emergency session of the National Assembly summoned on the 31st January 1951, the following matters were discussed:-

(a) A request from the Chinese officer who came from Sining with the Taktser Rimpochhe for permission to visit Lhasa. He, his wife and an assistant were being detained at Nedong. In his letter to the Tibetan Government the Chinese Officer threatened to return to Chamdo if the Tibetans refused his request. After a prolonged discussion in the Assembly, it was decided to allow him to come to Lhasa.

(b) The Assembly also discussed a request from the Nepalese Legation in Lhasa for permission to use their wireless set which is already in Lhasa. The permission was refused on the ground that the Nepalese Government had not replied to the Tibetan Government's request for military aid.

Internal

(i) 3 abbots from Sera, Drepung and Ganden left for Yatung ostensibly to pay their respects to the Dalai Lama. They are reported to have said prior to their departure that the Dalai left Lhasa in such haste that they could not offer him the customary parting gifts. At any rate, without their presence the National Assembly at Yatung will not have the requisite quorum. It is also possible that they might persuade the Dalai Lama to return to Lhasa, but it is unlikely that the Dalai will return unless he is assured of an honourable peace.

(ii) The Tibetan New Year fell on the 7th February 1951. The customary celebrations are taking place on a modest scale. The monks from the neighbouring monasteries moved into Lhasa on the 4th day of the Iron Hare year, and Lhasa is now under the rule of monk-officials.

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(iii) The Chinese officer who was granted permission to enter Lhasa was put up on his arrival here at Kitopa House the former quarters of the K.M.T. Mission in Lhasa. Subsequently, however, he declined to stay there and moved to Tshatrul Tshang. He has not been having any consultations with the Tibetan Government but is reported to be spending most of his time loitering in the bazaar. A band of unruly young monks mobbed him on the streets of Lhasa but he was rescued by the local police. The new year festivities (the Monlam) will last for about a month.

(iv) Except for the seasonal glut of brawls and armed robberies, Lhasa has remained quiet.

Economic

The rupee has steadily declined in value to 3 Sangs and 7 Shokangs. Rupees are not much in demand in Lhasa, and trade on the whole is dull.

Social and Personal

Yolbuz Khan, ex-General of the Sinkiang Army, came to lunch on the 14th January.

On the 1st anniversary of the Indian Republic (26th January 1951) the following guests were invited to lunch and tea :-

Chikhyap Kenpo, 2 Acting Shapes, Kundeling Dzasa, Doring Theiji and his wife, Major Nayan Bahadur and his Subba, Dukt Lochak, the Bhutanese representative, 2 Foreign Bureau assistants, the Kashag's staff of 5 junior officials, and a few Ladakhis. They brought with them about 50 servants who had also to be entertained.

Miscellaneous

(i) Yolbuz Khan applied for entry visas for himself, his 2 sons, his Chinese Secretary, a Sinkiang official and a servant. The party left Lhasa on the 21st January for Yatung, where they intend to wait for their visas.

(ii) 23 White Russians, who also arrived in Tibet from Sinkiang, approached this Mission for assistance in evacuating them from Tibet. However, on the advice of the Government of India, we have informed these White Russian refugees that they may approach the I.R.O., Geneva, direct for help.

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(iii) A chinese trader, Mr. Tsao Tze Mien, of Lhasa also applied for an entry visa for 3 months stay in India. He proposed to visit India for medical attention. His case has been referred to the Government of India for orders.

(iv) The Ceylonese monk, Jayaverdhane, left Lhasa for India on the 6th February.

(v) I paid new year calls on the following Tibetan officials on the 10th February (the 4th day of the Iron Hare Year) :-

1. 2 Prime Ministers.
2. 2 Acting Shapes.

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NW#:56266 DocId:183463

Wilson Center Digital Archive Original Scan

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Enclosure No. 2 to Despatch 492 from Amconsul, Calcutta, April 23,1951

MONTHLY REPORT OF THE INDIAN MISSION, LHASA, FOR THE PERIOD ENDING MARCH 15, 1951.

March 15, 1951

INTRODUCTION

The period under review has been quiet and uneventful. Tibetans generally enjoyed the respite which was in odd contrast to the hectic days of November and December last. Lhasa officials were busy with the annual ceremonies and festivities of the Monlam which came to an end on March 3. Large crowds of villagers came into Lhasa for the traditional festivities, and monks from the neighbouring monasteries flowed in, while the city itself was placid during the period, as is customary, under the administration of monk officials. Police monks armed with clubs, lathis and whips kept the crowds in order, and miscreants were ruthlessly put to death in public places. The Dalai Lama's absence was keenly felt.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS:

Sino-Tibetan Relations:

On the whole there have been of late signs of improved Sino-Tibetan relations though prospects of a final settlement still appear to be remote. There has been a welcome respite from military activities, and the Chinese have mercifully not unleashed the spring offensive. The nightmarish days of November and December, 1950, are now unpleasant memories of the past. Now there is only a placid acceptance of those events which have deprived the Holy City of its God-King, and life moves on at the usual sluggish pace, while there is still hope--a hope born of despair--of settling the Sino-Tibetan problem through peaceful means. Ngapho Shape's reports from Chando have in no small measure contributed to the present optimistic outlook of Tibetan officials.

And yet Ngapho, after all, is not a free agent, and more often than that Lhasa officials are inclined to think that Ngapho himself is being deceived. The fear that dominates all Tibetan thinking is that whatever the Chinese may now concede to gain their ends will not bind them at a later stage to their numerous assurances. This is a legitimate fear of a weak people whose pattern of existence is brittle with age and is almost indefensible. They seem to dread far more the contagion of communism rather than the Chinese for whom they continue to entertain both fear and respect.

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But with external events shaping themselves against Tibet, or so it appears, and driving them into greater isolation, the present leaders of Tibet in sheer desperation might end this unequal contest and identify themselves with Chinese ideals and aspirations. At this very moment they are probably casting doubts on their policy of procrastination as neither India or Nepal, nor any of the major powers, have wasted their sympathies on Tibet. Besides the patience of the Dalai Lama and his entourage who have gone into voluntary exile in Yatung may now be wearing out.

Conscious of their military victory over Tibet, the Chinese may have veered round to the policy of 'peaceful liberation'. But there is yet no visible evidence of their propaganda having taken root in Tibet. At any rate in Tibet proper (outside Kham) there is no sign of any internal movement in support of the Chinese. However, the Chinese appear to be using subtler methods to wean away the leaders of Tibet from their present uncompromising attitude instead of merely propagating Communism among the people in the hope that they will some day overthrow the firmly established theocracy of Tibet. In Chamdo they have won over Ngapho Shape.

Reports have arrived that the Chinese have released more Tibetan officials who were captured at Chamdo. All officials below the rank of Kunshi are now returning to Lhasa. Almost simultaneously came a report that the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi have reiterated terms originally offered to Shagapa's mission. They include control by China over Tibetan Defense and External Relations. The Tibetans may not mind a loose form of Chinese control over their affairs but they appear to be certain that if the Chinese were to post large bodies of troops at various places in Tibet their internal autonomy would become a sham, and many of them who staunchly opposed Communism would have to die, or spend the rest of their days in exile.

The Chinese officer in Lhasa of whom we have reported earlier has now established cordial relations with the Lhasa administration, and has been accorded the privilege of using the Tibetan Government wireless station to contact Sining and Jyekundo twice a week. The Kashag gave him an interview on March 9 at the Tibetan Foreign Bureau, and Ma Yu Kwei, a Lhasa Chinese acted as interpretor. From all accounts it appears that the Chinese officer is lavish and generous in his entertainments.

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NW#:56266 DocId:183463

Wilson Center Digital Archive Original Scan

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Enclosure 2 to Despatch 492 from Amconsul, Calcutta, April 23, 1951

A request has been sent by the Tibetan Government to the Chinese authorities at Chamdo to allow them to set up a small wireless station for Ngapho Shape's use. Ngapho Shape has also been asked to report on what had happened to the wireless equipment which he had with him when he was captured.

A fresh delegation comprising the following members is reported to be proceeding to Peking for direct negotiations with the Chinese:-

1. Ngapho Shape.
2. Kusangtse Dzasa (Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan Army).
3. Trungyik Chhempo Labho Tara.

It is understood that Ngapho will travel from Chamdo by the overland route to Peking. His wife has already left for Chamdo and will join him before he departs for Peking. Kusangtse Dzasa and Labho Tara will travel via India and will be accompanied by interpretors.

Presentation articles in gold and silver are now being made in Lhasa for Chairman Mao Tse Tung. These will be carried by Kusangtse Dzasa and Labho Tara.

It is reported that consumer goods of Indian origin are fetching fancy prices at Chamdo, where there is an acute shortage of cotton piece goods, soaps, and cigarettes.

It is understood that the Tibetan Government have recalled all their officials from India except for the members of the Trade Mission who are to remain at Kalimpong.

The report of the Political Officer, So La Sub-Agency, that Lhalu Shape had entered Indian territory in disguise is untrue. He is in daily wireless contact with Lhasa.

In the A.I.R. broadcast on March 13 the Prime Minister was reported to have said that the Government of India regarded Tibet as an integral but autonomous part of China, and that if the Chinese could ensure the safety of the trade route, India would withdraw her escorts from Gyantse and Yatung.

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NW#:56266 DocId:183463

Wilson Center Digital Archive Original Scan

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Enclosure 2 to Despatch 492 from Amconsul, Calcutta, April 23, 1951

RELATIONS WITH NEPAL

The relations between these two countries continue to be strained. The Tibetan Government are not satisfied with the view expressed by the Nepalese representative in Lhasa that the treaty of 1856 does not envisage a situation where if one contracting party is invaded by China the other should come to its aid because the treaty conceives of China as the suzerain country. Tibetans feel that the Nepalese are being too meticulous in their interpretation of the Treaty, and that since the latter enjoy unilateral privileges under the treaty, they should keep the spirit of the engagement and come to the assistance of Tibet during her present difficulties.

Meanwhile, I understand that the Nepalese representative has advised his Government to have the treaty revised at an early date.

I also understand that the Nepalese representative, who is facing increasing difficulties in Lhasa, fears that the Tibetan Government might ask him to withdraw his Mission from Tibet. Personally, I doubt that the Tibetans intend taking any such drastic steps at present though it is likely that they may take this opportunity of curtailing the privileges enjoyed by the Nepalese under the treaty. I was told by the Nepalese representative that his Government had advised him to seek my assistance in solving his problems. But I do not see how I can interfere in his relations with the Tibetan Government.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:

During the period under review the National Assembly had only one meeting on 19th February. The meeting was called to discuss a request from the Chinese Officer in Lhasa for the release of his wireless set which was earlier confiscated by the Tibetan Government. The set has been released, but it was found to be out of order.

ECONOMIC:

The rate of exchange which was 3 Sangs and 8 Sokangs in mid-February rose to 4 Sangs and 1 Shokang in mid-March. This slight

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appreciation in the value of the rupee is partly due to fall in wool prices in India, and also because Tibetan traders are now buying more goods for the Lhasa market.

MISCELLANEOUS.

On the 21st February cash presents were distributed on behalf of the Government of India to the monks of Sera, Drepung and Ganden by the Labrang Shhandsos. Mr. Pemba Tsering represented the Mission on the occasion.

Lai Hsi Kuei, a Chinese national, applied for a visa for six months stay in India for trading purposes.

23 White Russian refugees came to the Mission to fill in the International Refugee Organization forms for relief and rehabilitation.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL.

During the month members of the Mission were entertained to lunch and tea by Phunkhang Kung, Doring Thaiji and Lhalu Lhacham. We also witnessed the butter festival, the Torgyap ceremony, and the Dzong-gyap Shame - a display of archery and horsemanship.

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NW#:56266 DocId:183463