

 **Article REVIEW**

Qiang Zhai. “Tibet and Chinese-British-American Relations in the Early 1950s”. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8:3 (Summer 2006): 34-53. Doi: 10.1162/jcws.2006.8.3.34.
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A summary statement of Qiang Zhai’s detailed presentation will help put its major thrust into sharper focus. Washington was keen to help Tibet but keener still that the “primary responsibility” of supporting Tibet’s cause be taken up by India - and the U.K. It made a number of suggestions starting with the proposal that New Delhi serve as the venue for a U.S.-Tibet dialogue. Later it was prepared for “procurement and financing” of military aid - *provided* New Delhi would ensure delivery across its territory. More, it was ready to cooperate with India “in every possible way” to forestall a Chinese conquest of Tibet and proposed *inter alia* joint New Delhi-Western operations. Although it would not lodge any formal protest it was less than happy when India and the U.K. managed to get a discussion of the Chinese aggression in Tibet off the U.N. agenda.

Reactions in New Delhi and Whitehall were, for most part, in consonance. Nehru responded by underlining that talks in New Delhi between the U.S. and Tibet would be counter-productive. They would attract wide publicity and only “speed up” Beijing’s plans for a take-over. Off its own bat, the U.S. had dissuaded Lhasa from dispatching a mission to its shores.

For his part the Indian prime minister was strongly persuaded that good relations with the People’s Republic of China “outweighed” any obligations New Delhi had inherited from the British concerning Tibet. U.S.-U.K. suggestions for Indian arms to help Tibet were ruled out. The U.S. was less than clear if Tibetan leaders had “any military plans” to offer resistance while the British were certain that such arms could not halt a Chinese invasion and would best serve only as a morale-booster. Any joint New Delhi-Western operations were ruled out as “politically undesirable.” Failure to obtain Indian cooperation had “dimmed” U.S. enthusiasm while it was reasoned that Western non-involvement might work for “indefinite postponement” of Beijing’s armed assault. Whitehall was persuaded that any attempt to intervene would be both “impracticable and unwise”; it was “not sufficiently interested” in Tibet either to embroil itself with China or get “out of step” with India.

China’s PLA units attacked Tibetan positions at Chamdo (05 Oct) and took strong exception to the Indian protest note, insisting Tibet was part of Chinese territory. Mao indicated that while Tibet might/might not negotiate, he would not tolerate any “foreign”

influence in Tibet's affairs. Clearly the Indian stance had irritated the Chairman and reinforced his distrust of Nehru. Meantime Tibet apart, Washington was uneasy about Chinese dealings in Korea and Vietnam. New Delhi responded by suggesting that it would be "most helpful" to do nothing for any U.S. backing of Tibet would lend credence to Beijing's charge that the Great Powers had been intriguing in its affairs.

On 07 November Tibet appealed to the U.N. to "restrain Chinese aggression"; ten days later the youthful 14th Dalai Lama took over as his country's ruler. His assumption of power has been viewed as an indication that Lhasa deemed it was "a little too early" to compromise with Beijing. At the U.N., the British delegate indicated that since India entertained "strong doubts" about the absolute independence of Tibet and there was a "preponderance" of Indian interest in the matter, Whitehall would not take any initiative. As in the case of according recognition to the PRC, there was a great deal of "sensitivity" to New Delhi's opinion.

El Salvador sponsored the Tibetan appeal. During the General Committee's session both the British and Indian delegates sought to avoid debate, indicating that the chances for a peaceful settlement still existed. Insofar as New Delhi was most directly involved, everybody, including the U.S., fell in line. If India had acted otherwise, the U.S. later averred, it would have put the item on the agenda.

Meanwhile Tibet slowly but surely succumbed to Chinese pressures that brought about "negotiations" in Beijing and the conclusion of the Seventeen-Point, May 1951, Agreement which laid down *inter alia* that the Tibetan people "shall return to the family" of the People's Republic of China and that the Central People's Government "shall conduct the centralized handling" of all external affairs of Tibet.

In sum, Qiang Zhai concludes, Tibet was primarily an issue of Indian concern while Britain was preoccupied with safeguarding its interests in China -- and Hong Kong. Nehru, eager to play the peacemaker in Korea, was less than willing to confront Beijing openly on the issue of Tibet. Washington's principal preoccupation was to contain communism, even though it was eager to salvage the Tibetan cause. Its major hurdles: Tibet's geography -- too remote and isolated -- and the unwillingness of its non-communist neighbour, India, to alienate China by owning Lhasa's cause. For the U.S., Korea and Taiwan remained primary issues of contention, Tibet relatively less so. Mao suspected the British of manipulating India behind the scenes and feared a pro-British-American faction behind Lhasa's decision to explore the possibility of the Dalai Lama seeking refuge in India or outside.

For a proper perspective on some of the major themes Qiang Zhai has touched upon, a few relevant aspects of the Tibetan situation need careful scrutiny. To start with, Whitehall had fought shy of any overt intervention to bolster the Dalai Lama's regime in the opening decades of the 20th century and left the latter more or less to his own devices. It may be recalled that before the runaway 13th Dalai Lama set foot in Yatung (February 1910), Indian policy towards him had remained "unformulated" and the Viceroy was "unsure" of how to

proceed. At his interview with the Tibetan ruler in Calcutta (April 1910), Minto “firmly though politely” rejected his major demand for a British protectorate even as he had done so in the case of the 9th Panchen Lama earlier in 1906. When the Lama’s request for the British “to intervene directly” to halt Chinese aggression in his country failed, he began to beg for “any kind of help.”¹

In Beijing the Dalai Lama was viewed “as a barrier” to successful Anglo-Chinese relations. To safeguard its interests against a resurgent China, India decided to developing closer ties with Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim. In 1910, the Kashag had told “Britain and Ministers of Europe” that “big worms are eating little worms.”² The Laden La mission (1912) was designed to accompany the refugee Dalai Lama on his return journey home as well as help in the evacuation of the rebellious Chinese soldiery holed up in Tibet, especially in Lhasa. More, it was to ensure that the fragile cease fire between the rump of the Chinese army and an aroused Tibetan populace baying for its blood held and became permanent. Sadly, Whitehall, hypersensitive on its policy of non-intervention in China’s affairs, put its foot down on this venture. As a compromise, Laden La was to stay put in Gyantse from where he was to act as “a long-distance advisor” to the Lama.³

About this time (ca. 1914) the Dalai Lama had given Bell to understand that he wanted Tibet to be “entirely independent” but would consult the British government “whenever necessity arises.”⁴

In June 1919 Jordan reported Chinese “willingness” to debate the boundary issue (Tibet was to be kept out) that had remained unresolved at the tripartite Simla Conference (1913-4). The August talks in the Chinese capital appeared “reasonable” to start with when these were suddenly terminated.⁵ Broadly, British policy in Tibet was “sterilisation” and isolating the country “as far as possible”. Bell’s Lhasa mission (1920-21) was demonstrative of “a more liberal approach” and a broad decision *against* posting a permanent British representative in Lhasa where he may not have been easy to protect.⁶ All the same,

¹ Wendy Palace, *The British Empire and Tibet 1900-1922*, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005): 65-6, 69.

² Wendy Palace: 70.

³ Nicholas and Deki Rhodes, *A Man of the Frontier: S W Laden La (1876-1936), His Life and Time in Darjeeling and Tibet* (Kolkata, 2006), chapter 7 “The Dalai Lama Returns to Tibet”, 23-27, gives a vivid description of the British “volte face”. Understandably Laden La was “very disappointed”.

⁴ Wendy Palace: 126.

⁵ Parshotam Mehra, *The McMahon Line and After* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1974): 330-343.

⁶ Parshotam Mehra, *The McMahon Line*: 356-369.

Curzon, now foreign secretary in the British government, wanted “a firm line” yet “an open attitude” regarding China on Tibet.⁷

Professor Qiang Zhai’s meticulous data on Washington’s efforts to persuade the British and the Indian governments to stand up for Tibet at the U.N. and render it all help *including* men and munitions makes for impressive reading. For the record though American interest in Tibet’s affairs goes far back to the opening decade of the 20th century when Rockhill, the American Minister in Beijing, acted as an unofficial advisor to the 13th Dalai Lama and helped him negotiate with the Qing court (1908). The Minister noted that the Tibetan ruler, while ill-treated by the Dowager Empress and the youthful Emperor would not cooperate in the difficult task they now propose to undertake of governing Tibet like a Chinese province.⁸

Long after the 13th Dalai Lama had retired to the heavenly fields (1933) and there was an imminent danger of an armed Chinese escort for the 9th Panchen Lama, by then a confirmed Chiang protégé, crossing over into Tibet (1936-7) with the unambiguous objective of restoring the Lama -- and suborning the rickety, regent-led Lhasa regime to Chinese ends in the bargain -- the British government in India held back and refused to lend any material help *barring* diplomatic support. More, it refused to counsel the Tibetan government offering any armed resistance to the Chinese onslaught. The British mission’s report is clearly demonstrative of the Tibetan regime’s thinking and of the Raj’s own predilections. The Regent’s attitude, the report heavily underlined, did not indicate that the Tibetans would put up much, if any resistance nor is it at all certain that we should want them to do so especially as it is possible that the Chinese might make it a pretext for a more serious invasion.

It does not seem at all certain that this (active resistance to Chinese escort) would be the wisest course for the Tibetan government to adopt, if ... in any case it seems desirable to avoid any risk that the Tibetan government on the departure of the (Gould) mission from Lhasa, might be left under the impression that HMG would encourage such a course.⁹

The state of Tibet’s defences and the leadership of its “army” were summed up neatly in Brigadier Neame’s report (1936) that was not exactly complimentary.¹⁰ In Lhasa, it revealed, there were only 600 troops of the Bodyguard regiment, 400-armed police and 300

⁷Wendy Palace: 141-142.

⁸ Parshotam Mehra, *From Conflict to Conciliation: Tibetan Polity Re-visited*, Harrassowitz, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004): 33, 35.

⁹ Parshotam Mehra, *Tibetan Polity*: 76.

¹⁰ Alastair Lamb, *Tibet, China and India, 1914-1950* (Hertingfordbury: Rockford, 1989): 274. See also Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet 1914-1951* (Indian Edition, New Delhi, 1933): 287.

soldiers from regiments stationed in Kham. There were six mountain guns in the Tibetan capital (of which two were “dangerous to fire”), 2 Lewis guns and 6,000 modern rifles. Neame indicated that in his considered judgment.

Tibetans as a nation are absolutely non-military Tibetan government and officials concerned with army have absolutely no idea of sound military organization, administration or training troops employed on active service in East Tibet are incapable of firing with effect and waste ammunition when in action.

In the event, the Brigadier concluded that

It is justifiable to say that except for the fact that they possess a certain number of modern weapons, which few of them know how to use; the army has advanced little from its condition in 1904 when the British Mission advanced to Lhasa ..

And one may be sure that no significant change, qualitative much less quantitative, for the better would have taken place in the decade or so that elapsed between 1936 and 1950. It should follow that short of an armed intervention by New Delhi/Britain or the U.S., singly or in unison, there was no stalling or halting the progress of the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army in October 1950.

It is pertinent to add that British efforts to help in the modernisation of Tibet were minimal at best. With the Lama himself beating a hasty retreat in the wake of the monks' rebellion (1921), they held their hand. Charles Bell and some “do gooders” in Lhasa notwithstanding, the mantra was sterilisation of Tibet, its complete isolation. Moreover, in Whitehall, relations with China, especially on the commercial plane, were rated far more important. No wonder that in Beijing's British Legation, Tibet was viewed as a drag, a particular nuisance.¹¹

Later whatever the compulsions of China in its inability to exercise any meaningful authority in Lhasa for the years the 13th Dalai Lama was alive (d. 1933) and for almost a decade and a half thereafter, it refused to yield any ground on its theoretical claims to Tibet as an integral part of the mainland, and mounted tireless efforts to give these shape and form. The idea of war supplies, via Tibet, to a beleaguered Chinese regime or massing of troops in the provinces bordering on Tibet or planning airfields there to pressurize Lhasa were part of the same plan. Some of the 1943-44 exchanges, briefly reproduced below, in which both Whitehall as well as the State Department were involved demonstrate that even a hard-driven Guomindang regime was uncompromising in its resolve to incorporate Tibet into the larger whole of the motherland

¹¹ Wendy Palace: 55.

HMG do not feel themselves committed to regard China as the suzerain unless she in turn agrees to Tibetan autonomy.

If the Chinese government contemplate withdrawal of Tibetan autonomy HMG and the Government of India must ask themselves whether in the changed circumstances of today it would be right for them to continue to recognize even a theoretical status of subservience for a people who desire to be free and have in fact maintained that freedom for more than thirty years. (*British Foreign Office*, 22 July 1943)

There have been increasing indications in recent months that the Chinese Central Government desires, and as soon as it is in a position to extend its control over Tibet by force of arms. It is almost a foregone conclusion that Tibet will resist such encroachment by all means at its command including, presumably, appeals to Great Britain and the US. (*Charge in China, Chungking, to the Secretary of State*, 20 September 1943)

Chinese regard Tibet as an integral part of China; regard relations with Tibet as an internal problem... in their study of geography the Chinese have long been taught that Tibet is a part of China ... Politically and in law Chinese claims regarding Tibet stand on far firmer ground than do British claims. (*Acting Secretary of State to Ambassador in China*, 29 September 1943)

Recent additional troop concentrations on the Tibet-Chinghai border and that the Chinese possibly for the purpose of “pressure” to be applied later on is constructing some airfields there. it was curious how much trouble was taken over outlying regions such as Tibet and Outer Mongolia, which are of absolutely no economic value to China. (*Ambassador in China to Secretary of State*, 4 October 1943)

Major Tolstoy believes that it would take from six to eight months from the Indian border to China for a shipment to go through even under adverse conditions; that it would be necessary to have our representatives accompany the shipments; and that the entire transportation could be handled by certain responsible Tibetan traders who are either in India themselves or who have their representatives on the Indian border. (*William J Donovan*, Washington, April 14, 1944)¹²

¹² For the fuller text see Parshotam Mehra, *The North-Eastern Frontier: A Documentary Study*, 2 vols, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979, 1980): II, 144-54.

In the light of the above it should follow that neither for Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in the mid-1940s nor yet for Chairman Mao at the end of the decade was there any question of a negotiated settlement. According to Michael Sheng, Mao believed that China “must assert control” over Tibet “as soon as possible”; more, that the use of military force was inevitable and the only question was “how much force to use and when.” He was also convinced that Britain, India, and the U.S. were “forging an anti-Beijing front”. Mao succeeded largely because of the superiority of the Chinese army, the insularity of Tibet’s polity and, lip sympathy apart, the indifference of the rest of the world.¹³

Earlier as Hopkinson, the British Political Officer in Sikkim, was to put it (1948) the plain objective Chiang kept in view was “nothing short of complete Tibetan surrender” to the wishes of the Chinese government. Nor was that all. For in the course of his review of developments for the years August 1945-August 1948, the British officer revealed *inter alia* that T L Shen, the Guomindang Chinese representative in Lhasa, had told him (1945) that the real obstacle to a settlement in Tibet was the “likelihood” of British aggression and the Chinese fear thereof. Hopkinson’s own considered view was that a Chinese-Tibetan settlement was impossible because of “Chinese intransigence for ignoring such facts as Tibet’s refusal to surrender its hard-won independence” over the past thirty odd years and demand for Lhasa’s complete capitulation. Indian independence, Hopkinson stressed, “made no difference” to Chinese “claims to Indian territory in Assam.”¹⁴ (*Polity*, 90) Was it any wonder then that New Delhi’s later efforts, as revealed in the October-November (1950) diplomatic exchanges with Beijing, drew a blunt, if spirited, rebuff?¹⁵ A few of the more relevant excerpts reproduced below spell out their respective positions and make for sober reading.

New Delhi-Beijing, Memorandum, 21 October 1950:

The Government of India feels that the time factor is extremely important. In Tibet there is not likely to be any serious military opposition and any delay in

¹³ Michael M. Sheng, “Mao, China, Tibet and the Korean War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8:3 (Summer 2006): 15-32, cited in James Matray’s H-Diplo review, at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/Matray-Sheng.pdf>.

¹⁴ Parshotam Mehra, *Polity*, 90, n. 205. *Review, August 1945 to August 1948* by A J Hopkinson, Political Officer in Sikkim, India Office Records. Mss Eur D 998/23, para 18. It may be of interest to note that both Hopkinson’s official “review” as well as Richardson’s annual report for 1947 had reached Whitehall through a devious channel and *not* through Government of India in New Delhi. Hopkinson, it would appear, had kept copies of these reports which he was “good enough to loan” to the Commonwealth Relations Office in London when he visited there “to see us”. A note in the CRO, Pol. Est. 6120/49 dated 19 January 1939, addressed to one H S Shattock in the UK High Commission’s Office in New Delhi while forwarding copies of these reports revealed that the Government of India “seemed to have kept (these reports) to themselves”. For details PRO, FO 371/76315.

¹⁵ For the full text, Parshotam Mehra, *North-Eastern Frontier*, II, “New Delhi-Beijing exchanges, October-November 1950”: 155-64.

settling the matter will not therefore affect Chinese interests, or a suitable final solution. (Government of India's) interest in this matter ... is to see that the admission of the People's Government to the UN is not postponed a peaceful solution is sought while military action may cause unrest and disturbances on her own borders.

New Delhi-Beijing, Note, 28 October 1950:

In the present context of world events, the invasion by Chinese troops of Tibet cannot but be regarded as deplorable and, in the considered judgment of the Government of India, not in the interest of China or of peace.

.... deep regret that in spite of the friendly and disinterested advice repeatedly tendered by them... the Chinese Government seek a solution of the problem by force instead of the slower and more enduring method of peaceful approach.

Beijing-New Delhi, Note, 30 October 1950:

The People's Republic of China would "like to make it clear: Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory and the problem of Tibet is entirely a domestic problem of China. The Chinese PLA must enter Tibet, liberate the Tibetan people and defend the frontiers of China. This is the resolved policy of the Central People's Government.

New Delhi-Beijing, Note, 1 November 1950:

Beijing's charge that India's representation "affected by foreign influences hostile to China" and categorically repudiate it.

The Government of India's policy has been entirely independent and directed solely towards a peaceful settlement of international disputes and avoidance of anything calculated to increase the present deplorable tensions in the world

A settlement of the Tibetan problem ... by peaceful negotiations adjusting legitimate Tibetan claims to autonomy within the framework of Chinese suzerainty. Tibetan autonomy is a fact which the Chinese Government was themselves willing to recognize and foster.

Beijing-New Delhi, Note, 16 November 1950:

But regardless of whether the local authorities of Tibet wish to proceed with peace negotiations and regardless of whatever results may be achieved by negotiations, no foreign intervention will be permitted. The entry into Tibet of the Chinese PLA and the liberation of the Tibetan people are also decided.

Deeply regret that the Indian Government in disregard of the facts has regarded a domestic problem of the Chinese Government- the exercise of its sovereign rights in Tibet- as an international dispute calculated to increase the present tensions in the world.

Soviet Russia's role in Tibet's "liberation" makes for interesting reading. It is clear that Stalin saw the land of the lama as a Western stooge, and lent Mao and his men not only considerable moral support in the task of "liberation" but also, in the initial stages, tangible armed assistance and training of personnel. Tibet, it appears, emerged as a major subject during Mao's official visit to Moscow (December 1949- January 1950). When the Chairman asked Stalin to continue Russian air support rendered in the case of Sinkiang for Beijing's impending attack on Tibet, Stalin's response: "It is good you're getting ready for the attack. Tibetans should be taken in hand." Liu Shao-chi in a memorandum to Stalin (late 1949) expressed the view that "the question of Tibet should be solved by political means and not by military force." Three years later (1952) Peking asked Moscow for help "in establishing control over Tibet."¹⁶

Stalin told Mao that Tibet is "a part of China" and therefore Chinese troops "should be stationed" in Tibet. Chou En-lai affirmed that keeping Chinese troops in Tibet was "indisputable." The Soviets held Mao's absorption of Tibet to be justified and underlined the urgency of its "peaceful liberation" from western imperialism. The historian Leontiev (1958) expressed the view that Tibet had been turned into a "semi-colony of British imperialism, an agrarian and raw material appendage for the imperial powers."¹⁷

The Russian author is categorical in his assertion that Stalin's counseling strongly affected decision-making by Beijing on the Tibetan issue in the years 1949-52. More, that Stalin gave Mao the "go ahead" for Tibet's military occupation by the PLA in October 1950. Apart from considerable diplomatic support, Stalin also rendered some tangible help in building transport communications between China and Tibet and training of PLA units in the early 1950s. Moscow was certainly not interested in an independent Tibet; the latter it feared would "most likely" ally itself with the "imperialist West" rather than the "communist East"¹⁸.

It is in this context that US interest in persuading Whitehall or Nehru's India to render both moral and material support needs to be viewed. In an era of mounting cold war tensions, U.S. support of the Tibetan cause via El Salvador came to be viewed for all that it

¹⁶ Alexandre Andreyev, *Soviet Russia and Tibet: the debacle of Soviet Diplomacy 1918-1930s* (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 385

¹⁷ Andreyev, 387.

¹⁸ Parshotam Mehra, *Polity*: 95.

was worth: a clever tactic by Uncle Sam to score an important victory against its ideological adversaries. New Delhi's efforts to bring about a cease-fire in Korea- where in October 1950 Chinese "volunteers" joined the North Korean army to invest the south- synchronized with events leading to and following Tibet's "liberation" by the Peoples' Liberation Army made things a lot more complicated. Odd as it may sound, a decade or so later the Cuban missile crisis ran pat into Beijing's massive armed assault on India's land frontiers (October 1962) making a difficult situation far worse. History unfolds itself in strange, inscrutable ways!

A word on the proposed or projected aid for Tibet may not be out of place. According to Carole McGranahan, the Americans were "mainly interested in preventing the spread of Communism rather than providing serious and committed aid to Tibet." Kenneth Knaus has cited the Tibetan ruler to the effect that the U.S. had "used Tibet as a pawn in the Cold War" and he no doubt resented it. Young though he was, the Lama was not naïve. For while at Yatung, in 1951, the youthful ruler had much hoped that "some help" would be forthcoming from Britain and the U.S. And "it did not come". All that he received was "one letter from the American consul in Calcutta"! New Delhi too, he had "calculated", would *not* be "happy" if he crossed over. Later he could quite see that such U.S. support as was forthcoming in the 1950s was "not out of moral principle or sympathy but because of the world wide anti-Communist policies." More, it was "not genuine support for the restoration of Tibetan independence."¹⁹

Two major criticisms of Qiang Zhai's extremely well researched presentation may be in order. To start with, a slight imbalance in favour of U.S. -- and to an extent British -- source-material is noticeable. And in the bargain there is a relative neglect of Indian and Chinese sources. For the U.S. the temptation to use the excellent, extremely valuable if informative volumes in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series is understandable. So also the rich and well-preserved British Public Record Office archives (The National Archives of the United Kingdom) in London. As to Chinese sources this reviewer has no competence to comment but a word or two on the Indian sources may be of interest. Here there is a problem no doubt about New Delhi's short-sighted if also ill-advised policy of sitting tight on its archival records and even though a 30-year limit is said to be operative, in actual fact it is observed more in the breach than compliance. The above notwithstanding, there is no dearth of first-rate primary sources in the plethora of letters/private papers/correspondence relating to the 1950s in the printed volumes of Jawaharlal Nehru's works and a host of secondary sources dealing with the then-prime minister's foreign policy especially in the realm of his relations with China.

¹⁹ Carole McGranahan, "Tibet's Cold War: the CIA and the Chushi Gangdrug Resistance 1956-1974," *Journal of Cold War Studies*:8.3 (summer 2006): 102-30. See also Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War, America and the Tibetan Struggle*, (New York: Public Affairs, 1999) both cited in Tom Grunfeld's Article Review, JCWS, 8.3 (summer 2006). For the Dalai Lama's stay at Yatung see Thomas Laird, *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006): 300, 310.

Another significant omission in this reviewer's opinion is the relative neglect of the Indian viewpoint, all the more so in that New Delhi's role -- on the author's own showing -- was pivotal. That Nehru reacted the way he did is important but even more relevant is to pry deeper to find out why he behaved the way he did. And here the British legacy he inherited comes in for proper scrutiny. The Raj's policy towards Tibet was ambivalent at best. And it succeeded largely because it faced -- thanks to a moribund, weak and invertebrate Guomindang regime in China -- no major crises.

As political legatees of the Raj, Nehru's India understood, if not perhaps always appreciated, the various compulsions in which its policy was formulated and executed. This would go far to explain why more often than not there was a close liaison, and a singular identity of views on major issues, between New Delhi and Whitehall -- much more so than between either of them and the White House in Washington. Not unlike ND, Whitehall too was allergic to supplying Lhasa with arms -- and armed men! In the unlikely event that they did, results would have been chaotic, both in, and outside of, Tibet. Nor would men and munitions have been of any help in the circumstances in which Lhasa was placed. The clearest demonstration of a New Delhi-Whitehall nexus was their decision -- sad and unfortunate as it proved in retrospect -- to put off the debate on Tibet at the U.N. in the hope that a negotiated settlement with Beijing would emerge.

In the light of the important role New Delhi played in the evolving situation in those fateful years it stands to reason that the author may perhaps consider re-casting his title. His text has, as it stands, apart from the "Conclusions", two sub-sections: "The Role of Britain" and "The Role of the United States." How about carving out a third: "The Role of India", on which he has expatiated at some length and in some detail.

A small error in mixing up K.P.S. Menon with V.K. Krishna Menon has no doubt inadvertently crept in. The former, a distinguished diplomat, was independent India's first foreign secretary; the latter, long in public life, was defence minister in the Indian government in the early 1960s.

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