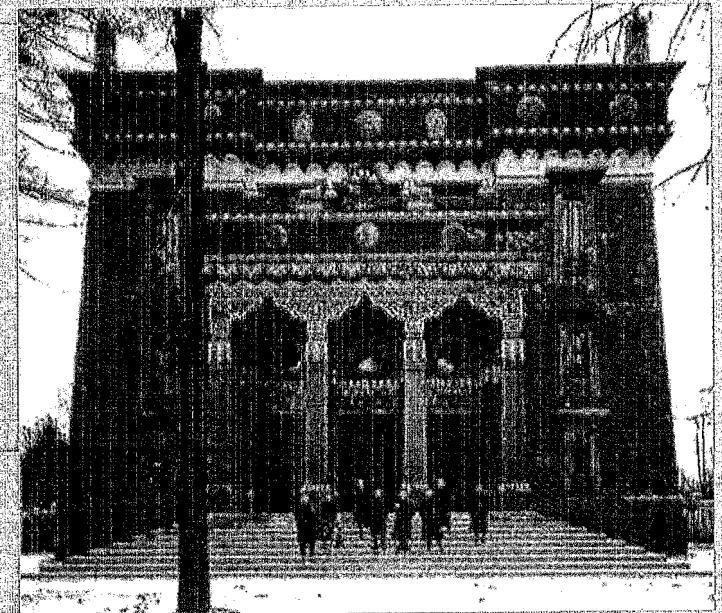


Soviet Russia and Tibet

THE DEBACLE OF SECRET DIPLOMACY,

1918-1930S



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ALEXANDRE ANDREYEV

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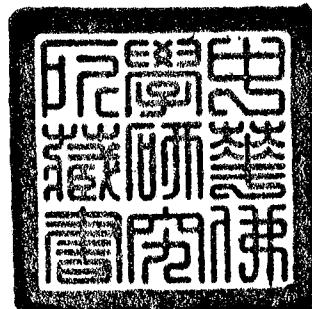
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SOVIET RUSSIA AND TIBET

The Debacle of Secret Diplomacy, 1918-1930s

BY

ALEXANDRE ANDREYEV



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To the dear memory of my late grandmother, Eudoxia

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G.V. Chicherin
- Better an enemy in your own village than a distant friend.
A Tibetan proverb

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Finally, I would like to thank the organizations which partly sponsored my research in 1994–2001, such as the British Council in Moscow, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, History & Antiquity (Kungliga Vitterhets, Historie, och Antikvitets Akademien) in Stockholm, and the Soros Foundation (Open Society Institute) in St Petersburg.

ROMANIZATION OF NAMES

The problem of rendering Asian and Russian names into English is well known. Most of the Tibetan personal names used in the narrative are those of historical personages (Lonchen Shatra, Tsarong, Norbu Dhondup, etc.), therefore I simply reproduced their familiar English spellings from contemporary publications on the history of Tibet. Other names, such as those of Tibetan students in Leningrad, were romanized from the apparently corrupted Russian forms. (I did not attempt to reconstruct their original Tibetan names).

The few Chinese names are also well-known in Western literature (Chiang Kai-shek, Chang Tso-lin, Feng Yu-hsiang, Mao Tse-tung). The same also applies to Mongolian names (Choibalsan, Danzan, Bodo), although in the case of some lesser known political figures, their names were transliterated from the forms commonly used in Russian documents of the 1920s. Still they will be easily recognizable to students of Mongolian history (for example, the name of the Mongolian premier Tserendorj is spelled Tseren-Dorji).

The Russian names are normally given in their contemporary spellings. However, I sometimes retained the old transliteration (I spell Przhevalsky and Ukhtomsky instead of Przhevalskii and Ukhtomskii, as the former spellings appear more often in English sources). Much more difficulty was presented by the transliteration of Buryat and Kalmyk names as they are used in numerous variant spellings. For example, the name of Agvaan Dorzhiev is spelled in English as Dorjiev, Dorjieff, Dorzheev, etc. Therefore I had to standardize these varying transliterations by using modern transcription forms. Thus I spell the name of the Dalai Lama's famous emissary in Russia as Dorzhiev (the alternative spelling "Dorjiev" was only used in reference to a Kalmyk native Ochir Dorjiev, so as not to confuse these two persons).

I have retained all original name spellings in quotations, and used contemporary spellings in context. For the spelling of Asian (Tibetan, Mongolian, Buryat, Kalmyk, Chinese, Sanskrit) and Russian terms see the Glossary.

FOREWORD

LOOKING FOR RUSSIAN SOURCES

Relations between Russia and Tibet have long been the subject of much speculation in the West. These relations were a particularly hot issue on the international political agenda at the beginning of the 20th century when Tibet became a bone of contention for the world's greatest empires, the British and the Russian, which competed for supremacy in Asia. The diplomatic missions led to St Petersburg by the 13th Dalai Lama's emissary Agvan Dorzhiev (a Buryat by birth and a Russian subject) in 1898–1901 paved the way to a Russo-Tibetan rapprochement, yet at the same time they alarmed the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, to the extent that he sent a military expedition to Lhasa under Francis Younghusband in late 1903, to thwart "Russian intrigue" in Tibet. However, four years later, the two competing powers amicably resolved their differences at the negotiating table in St Petersburg by concluding an agreement which put an end to their age-long rivalry, known today as the Great Game. By the beginning of the World War Tsarist Russia had withdrawn completely from Tibetan affairs by recognizing Tibet as a sphere of British interests.

This part of the story is already well-known to Western scholarship. Important contributions to it were the recently published English translations of works by Russian historians N.S. Kuleshov and T.L. Shaumian.¹ However, the relations between the two countries had a most intriguing continuation in the later period under the Bolshevik government of Russia. And again, as two decades before, the chief mediator was none other than Agvan Dorzhiev, although the initiative for a new Russo-Tibetan rapprochement this time came entirely from Moscow, now the epicenter and headquarters of World Revolution, and not Lhasa. This later history of Russo-Tibetan relations has completely escaped the attention of either Russian or Western

¹ Kuleshov 1996; Shaumian 2000.

scholars for a quite simple reason: all documentary evidence relating to the clandestine Moscow-Lhasa dialogue in the 1920s was suppressed in all Soviet sources. Even today, a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tibetan materials in the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) remain classified and therefore inaccessible to researchers. These documents presumably include the correspondence between the Dalai Lama (the same 13th incarnation) and the Soviet Government (via the foreign minister G.V. Chicherin) as well as his official representative in the USSR, Agvan Dorzhiev; the Politburo-approved “programs” of Soviet secret missions to Lhasa, in 1921–1927; reports of their leaders on their negotiations with the Dalai Lama and other leading Tibetans; hundreds of photographs taken in Tibet by these agents as well as the footage of a documentary film shot by one of them; analytical assessments of the political situation in Tibet; correspondence on the Tibetan question between the Soviet Foreign Ministry (Narkomindel) and such entities as the Far Eastern Secretariat of Comintern, OGPU (later NKVD, precursor of the KGB), and the Revolutionary Military Council (RVS SSSR); and miscellaneous other documents which probably make up hundreds of Top Secret “Tibet files”.

On the other hand, two of the secret Soviet missions, the ones that visited Lhasa in 1924 and 1927, came under the spotlight of British intelligence (the Political Officers in Sikkim), which thus provided some important evidence coming from the British side. These materials (reports of the POs and their local informants) are preserved in the Oriental and India Office Collection as well in the Public Record Office in London and are easily available to anyone who might take interest in them.

The Soviet scholarly publications devoted to Tibet's modern history which began to appear in the wake of China's annexation of the country in the 1950s–1960s² were overly ideologized and they referred to that period exclusively in the context of all-out foreign (British) imperialist expansion in Tibet. Even the later works³ made no mention whatsoever of early Soviet overtures to Lhasa. The official (diplomatic) sources, including the many volumed “Dokumenty vnes-

nei politiki SSSR” (Documents of the Foreign Relations of the USSR), published by the Soviet Foreign Ministry under A.A. Gromyko,⁴ were also reticent about these early contacts between the Soviet and Tibetan governments.

So when I started my research project in the late 1980s, in the heyday of Gorbachov's “perestroika” and “glasnost”, I was practically groping in the dark. My first findings were made while I was researching into the history of the Buddhist temple in St Petersburg, built by Agvan Dorzhiev under the patronage of the Dalai Lama in 1909–1915. It was then that I came across some vague references in the AVPRF declassified collections to the Tibetan (or Tibeto-Mongolian) Legation which functioned on the temple's premises in the 1920s–1930s and was run by the same Dorzhiev, who, incidentally, styled himself “Tibet's plenipotentiary in the USSR”. This clearly indicated that there had existed some sort of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Tibet at that time.

Some of these documents were very important, such as Dorzhiev's Narkomindel-issued mandates bearing evidence of his diplomatic immunity, and his political testament written on September 1, 1936. The latter document spoke unambiguously of Dorzhiev's diplomatic activities both in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union in the course of the past four decades for the sake of promoting friendship between two “great” nations, Tibet and Russia. My attempts in the subsequent years to gain access to other AVPRF materials dealing specifically with Soviet-Tibetan relations, however, failed altogether. The administrators of the archive, would turn down time after time, under various pretexts, my requests for permission to “acquaint myself” with their Tibet files. Their standard reply was that they had “no materials whatsoever relevant to the topic of my research”. It was only in the latter half of the 1990s that the archive director, probably annoyed with my persistence, had to acknowledge that these files were closed and not released to researchers. At the same time this person vaguely hinted that some of these files could probably be declassified “in the not too distant future”. However, as I heard from a friend of mine in Moscow, a Mongolist with some good connections in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as late as 2000, the AVPRF

² Pubaev 1955; Leontiev 1956, 1958; Gurevich 1958.

³ Bogoslovskii; Moskaliov 1984.

⁴ Russia: MID 1957–2000.

was in fact unwilling to open its Tibet files. Which means they will remain closed as before, along with the top secret files on Soviet activities in other highly sensitive areas in Central Asia, such as Sinkiang and Mongolia.

Luckily, the AVPRF was not the only place to look for sources on Soviet-Tibetan relations. There were other archival repositories in Russia, possessing quite a number of relevant documents from that period, which became accessible to researchers in the 1990s. Among these were the former Party Archive (now called the Russian State Archive for Social & Political History) as well as the archives of Soviet military history in Moscow, of the Academy of Sciences, of the Institute for Oriental Studies, of the Russian Geographical Society (all in St Petersburg), and, finally, of the former KGB. (Paradoxically, the declassified Tibetan materials in these archives were in many cases copies of those still strictly classified documents in the AVPRF). Especially valuable were the holdings of the Party Archive (RGASPI). Here, the Lenin Collection contained a project for a military expedition to northern India and the Himalayan minor states via Tibet elaborated by two Kalmyk Bolsheviks in July 1919. The Comintern Collection provided important materials related to the first Soviet "reconnaissance expedition" to Lhasa in 1921–1922, mounted jointly by Narkomindel and Comintern's Far Eastern Secretariat; the Politburo Collection included brief resolutions on the second and third Tibetan missions passed by the Soviet leaders in 1923 and 1925; the Collection of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), and Nikiforov Collection shed some light on the results of these missions. The Collection of the head of the Anti-Religious Committee at VTsIK, Yaroslavsky, revealed the Soviet scheme for a special Buddhist mission to the Dalai Lama in 1928 (which, however, was not realized) and a detailed analytical report drawn out in this connection by the Eastern department of the OGPU. These RGASPI collections provided conclusive evidence of Soviet expansion into the Central Asian region, towards British India, as well as of their wranglings with British "imperialists", the renewed Great Game, and they gave me an insight into the nature of the Soviet special interest in Tibet throughout the 1920s.

The archive of Soviet military history (RGVA) provided mainly the records of Red Army intelligence—the intelligence units of the Mongolian People's Army and of the Middle Asian Military District,

SAVO, which closely monitored Tibetan events as well as the concurrent British activities with regard to Tibet, especially in 1926–1927. One of the files in the archive included correspondence between Chicherin and the Revolutionary Military Council, RVS USSR, in 1923, discussing the possibility of supplying arms and ammunition to Lhasa. However, when I tried to order it, I was told that the file had been recently closed again.

The archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg also had something to offer me. For example, I found there a blueprint for a scientific expedition to Tibet drawn by the eminent Buddhist scholar F.I. Stcherbatsky in late 1918. The Narkomindel attached some political importance to the venture, since Stcherbatsky was personally well known to the Dalai Lama. In later years Stcherbatsky was occasionally employed by the Soviet foreign department as a translator of their secret correspondence with Lhasa. One of the most important findings in the academic archive was Stcherbatsky's translation of a Tibetan manuscript secretly received by Narkomindel from Lhasa, this being a detailed description of the Tibetan civic and military administration, including designations of all major governmental offices and names (or titles) of the Tibetans in charge of these. (The original copy of this document must be in the possession of the AVPRF).

Finally, the hair-raising Gulag records in St Petersburg, Ulan-Ude (Buryat Republic) and Elista (Republic of Kalmykia). These consisted mainly of the files on Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhist clerics and political figures, wiped out by Stalin's regime in the 1930s. Some of these people were intimately involved in the Soviet Tibetan schemes, such as Agvan Dorzhiev, Sharab Tepkin and Arashi Chapchaev. Their OGPU/NKVD interrogation transcripts yielded a wealth of information, providing, apart from purely biographical data, many a missing link in the narrative. (Although I had to be cautious as to the veracity of some of their statements, considering the particular conditions in which they were made).

Also, when visiting Elista in spring 1993, I had an occasion to meet and interview the only living member of those mysterious Soviet Lhasa missions, the 92-year old Matsak Bimbaev. Despite his obviously failing sight and memory, he was able to tell me a most thrilling story of his visit to Lhasa in 1927. The Kalmyk, as I found out, was hired for the job of scout by Soviet military intelligence (Razvedupr

of the Red Army Headquarters). Later on, I traced a very curious document in the Kalmyk National Archive—an anonymous analytical report, presumably from that period, assessing Tibet's armed forces. Judging by its contents, it was not difficult to conclude that the factual basis for it was provided by Bimbaev's intelligence.

While in Elista, I had a chance to meet and make friends with Prof. Yu.O. Oglaeve of Elista University. To my surprise, it turned out that the Kalmyk historian had interviewed some two decades before (in the early 1970s) a member of the major Soviet diplomatic mission to Lhasa which took place in 1924, one Bakhanov, the person who incidentally took all those pictures of Tibet which now belong to the AVPRF. Oglaeve was kind enough to allow me to go through that interview (which was actually reworked by him into a coherent story entitled: "Breaking the imperialist blockade") and make notes of the facts mentioned in it.

On top of that, one of my Kalmyk friends, Khongor Khomutnikov, presented me with a copy of the recently published biography of his father, a Kalmyk military commander, who was also the leader of the first Soviet Lhasa mission, Vasily Kikeyev-Khomutnikov.⁵ That little book, to my great surprise, included a slightly abridged text of Khomutnikov's report on his secret visit to Lhasa, submitted to Narkomindel in 1922. (This report is now available to researchers at the National Archive of the Kalmyk Republic). In a friendly conversation Khongor confided to me the great pains it took him to get hold of that unique document, although he refused to identify the archives from which he had obtained it.

Thus, by mid-1993, I had accumulated a whole pile of miscellaneous materials relevant to my research. Still, they lacked something very important without which the secret history of Soviet-Tibetan relations could not be narrated: diplomatic records. A final breakthrough in my frenzied hunt for documents came a year later when I got access to one of the most secret of the Russian archives, practically inaccessible to ordinary scholars, that of the President of the Russian Federation. This became possible only thanks to the fact that my inquiry to that archive, made via the presidential administration under S.A. Filatov, was backed by the late Academician

Dmitry Sergeevich Likhachov, whose name and world-wide reputation often worked miracles with the Kremlin leaders. My research in the archive, however, was limited to only three short visits there during which I was permitted to look into the Tibet file of the President (which was perhaps one of his several Tibet files) and copy from it by hand whatever information which I might find important for my research, which I did as best as I could. The file included 41 microfilmed documents (which means they were copies and not originals), covering 157 pages altogether. 24 documents of these (comprising 91 pages) came from the years 1922–1929, while the remaining ones related to a much later period, 1959–1961. (This latter portion dealt mainly with the discussion of the Tibetan question at the 14th and 15th sessions of the General Assembly of the UN).

The most important materials in the Tibet file were "programs" of the second and third Narkomindel's "Tibetan expeditions", drafted by Chicherin and one of his aids, Aralov, in August 1923 and December 1925, and accompanied by minutely detailed estimates of costs, appropriate Politburo resolutions approving of these programs, a number of Chicherin's memoranda assessing the political situation in Tibet and advocating active, yet very cautious, Soviet policy with regard to the country, the project for the Soviet Buddhist mission to Tibet in 1928, and a memorandum "On the Tibetan question" by the former Soviet ambassador to the Mongolian People's Republic, P.M. Nikiforov (1929). There were also several fascinating documents in the file dealing with Tibetan expedition projects by the outstanding explorer of Central Asia, P.K. Kozlov (dated 1923 and 1924), and by an obscure naturalist and occultist A.V. Barchenko (1925).

These most valuable materials from the archive of the Russian President helped me finally to piece together all the scraps of evidence that I had been able to glean from different sources and produce the story of Moscow-Lhasa's clandestine dealings in the 1920s. In June 1995 I presented a paper entitled "Bolshevik Intrigue in Tibet" at the 7th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS) at Shloss Segau (Graz, Austria), which was followed the next year by a more substantial publication in the *Tibet Journal*.⁶ In 1997, I expanded the narration to the length of a whole chapter

⁵ Bembeyev 1991.

⁶ Andreyev 1996.

which was incorporated into my book “Ot Baikala do Sviastchennoi Lhasy” (From Lake Baikal to Sacred Lhasa)⁷ and a year later my long term research finally culminated in a dissertation (“Soviet-Tibetan relations, 1918–1929”), defended at St Petersburg University in 1998.

This book, written in 2000–2002, is designed to give a broad overview of relation between Russia and Tibet, starting from the late 17th century and bringing the story to the end of the 20th century, with an emphasis on the least researched period, 1920s–early 1930s, making the core of my narrative (Chapters 2–6). As stated above, it is based largely on newly available sources in Russian and British archives, since relevant Tibetan and Mongolian materials (those preserved in the historical archive at Norbulingka in Lhasa and in the archive of the MPR’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ulan Bator) are inaccessible to scholars. The only Tibetan documents I used are Dorzhiev’s correspondence with the Dalai Lama and his ministers from early 1900s and 1910, discovered in the Stcherbatsky Collection at the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian State Historical Archive in St Petersburg. The long introductory Chapter 1 offers a brief survey of Tsarist Russia’s activities in Central Asia in the Great Game era, and it concentrates specifically on the country’s ambiguous relations with Tibet in 1898–1915. The final chapter (Epilogue) speaks of the dramatic fate of those officials and agents who were involved in the Soviet Tibetan schemes, most of whom ended up in the Gulag, and it also discusses briefly the obscure Stalin-Mao contacts over Tibet in 1950–1952 as well as the subsequent official Soviet and post Soviet postures toward the Tibetan question in 1960s–1990s.

As a final remark, I would like to admit that there are still some aspects in the history of Soviet-Tibetan relations which this study could not investigate thoroughly for reasons already explained. We still know very little of the details of the Soviet negotiations with the Dalai Lama in 1924 and 1927, of the visit to Lhasa, in 1928–1930, of one of the Soviet secret agents, Bulat Mukharain, as well as of the links Moscow tried to forge between the pro-Soviet faction in Lhasa

and the Kuomintang party in China, in 1924–1927. Hopefully, we will be able to learn more in the future about these Soviet-Tibetan contacts and the extent of their influence on the Tibetan politics for “there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed” some day.

Alexander Andreyev
St Petersburg
April 2002

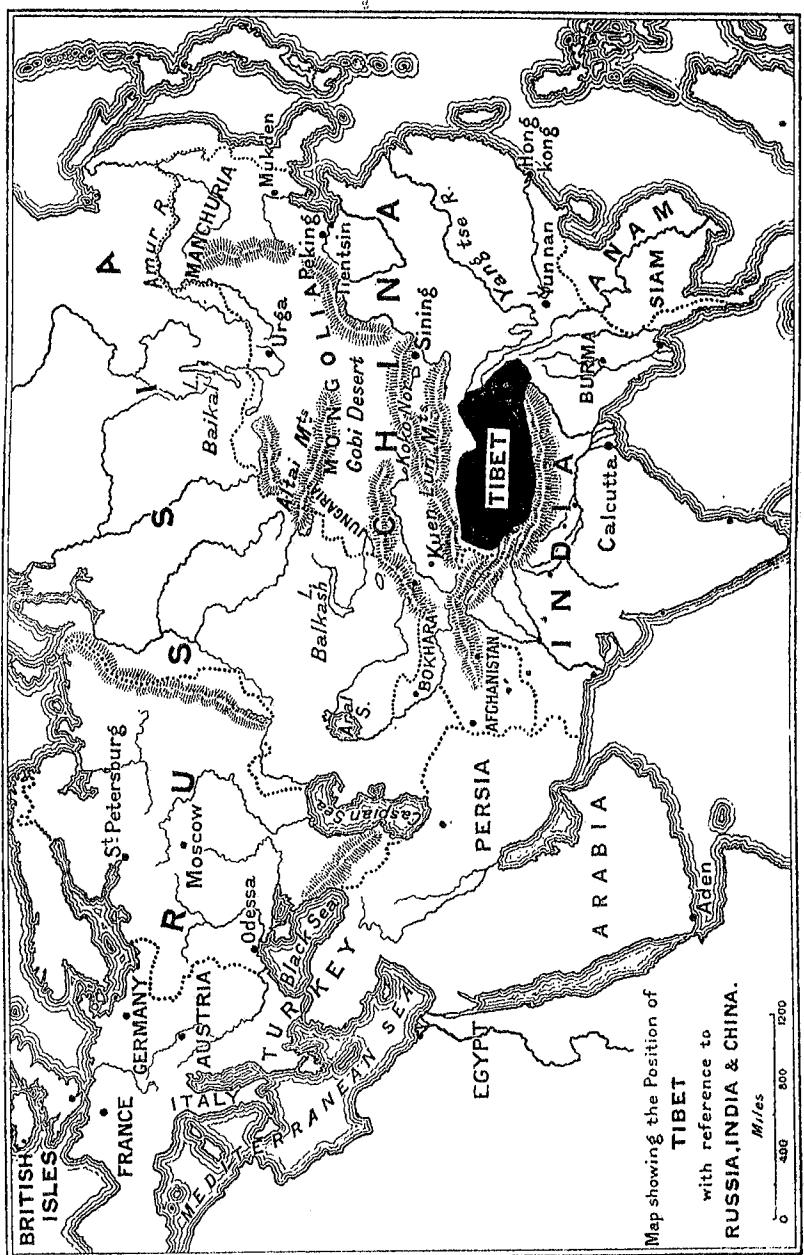
⁷ Andreyev 1997.

CHAPTER ONE

TSARIST RUSSIA AND TIBET: AN UNWELCOME RAPPROCHEMENT

Among the many peoples of non-Russian origin incorporated into the steadily expanding state of Muscovy by the end of the 17th century were the Kalmyks and Buryats, both of whom were of the Mongolian race. The Kalmyks, the Torgut tribe of the Mongol Oirats, migrated to European Russia via Siberia in the wake of political and social upheavals in Western Mongolia (Dzungaria), and they settled down on the Lower Volga about 1632. Subsequently, more Oirat (Kalmyk) nomads moved to the Volga and Don steppes, within the territory conquered by the Tsar Ivan the Terrible less than a century before. As for the Buryats, their homeland since time immemorial was the area adjacent to Lake Baikal, in the southern part of East Siberia. This was the northern outskirts of the once powerful state of the Mongolian Khans, Ar Mongolia. The Russian advance into the wide expanses of Siberia behind the Ural Mountains, which began in the early 17th century, reached this virgin land around 1640, and it was eventually subjugated to the power of Muscovy in just two decades. The Nerchinsk treaty of 1689 made the annexation legitimate, but it was only in 1727 that the border between the Russian and the Manchu Chinese Empires was finally fixed by the Kiakhta treaty. This event led to the isolation of the Buryats from their kin in Outer or Khalkha Mongolia who, in their turn, fell under the sway of the Manchu emperors.

The religion of both the Kalmyks and the Buryats was Buddhism, of the type which originated in medieval Tibet, and which since then has been commonly known in the West under the name of Lamaism.¹ More specifically, these two peoples, together with other



General Map of Europe and Asia, early 20th century (from L.A. Waddell's "Lhasa and Its Mysteries", London, 1906)

¹ The Provisional Government of Russia, by a decree of 7 July 1917, prohibited the appellation of Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhists as "Lamaists" in official papers. After the October revolution the term "Buddho-Lamaism" was used for some time by the Bolsheviks with reference to Tibetan Buddhism, before they finally reverted, in the early 1920s, to a more familiar term "Lamaism", which remains in official and scholarly usage in Russia to this day.

Mongolian tribes, embraced the teachings of the Gelugpa sect ("the Virtuous One"), also referred to as the "Yellow Hats", then the prevailing power in Tibet. A large number of Kalmyks had already been converted to Lamaism, or rather Tibetan Buddhism, before they migrated to Russia, whereas the Buryats (who, like the Kalmyks, were originally shamanists), adopted that religion rather belatedly in the course of the 18th century, due to the proselytism of itinerant Mongolian and Tibetan lamas.

It was mainly owing to the liaison of the Kalmyks and Buryats with Lhasa, the seat of the head of the Buddhist church, the Dalai Lama, that the Tsarist Russian authorities got their first notion of the remote Buddhist theocracy. Their general attitude to the "lamaist creed" itself was fairly tolerant, if not indifferent, at first. The real concern of St Petersburg at that time was defence of the 2000 verst-long Russian-Chinese border, for which purpose special Buryat Cossack regiments were formed in 1764. This was a vital issue since Russia's main trade route to Peking crossed the border in the vicinity of Kiakhta, the major trading post in southern Transbaikalia. Although tolerant of the Buddhist religion per se, Russian administrators, nonetheless, sought to isolate the Buryats from the potentially harmful religio-political influence of Urga (Orgoo, Da Khuree) in Outer Mongolia and Lhasa, the two foremost centers of Northern Buddhism, though with little success. Thus in 1728, one year after the demarcation of the Russian-Chinese border, the Russian ambassador to Peking, Count S.I. Vladislavich-Raguzinsky, issued a special instruction to Russian frontier guards, ordering them "not to admit foreign lamas, alien residents, to the *uluses* (encampments) of the *yasak* (tribute) paying natives".² The measure was designed to put an end to illegal border-crossings by roving Mongolian and Tibetan monks, who came to preach the Buddhist tenets among the Buryat nomads in Transbaikalia. However, despite the border restrictions, the Buryat monks continued to liaise with their brethren in Mongolia and Tibet, and they occasionally travelled to these Buddhist countries for either educational purposes or simply as pilgrims to worship at the great Buddhist shrines there and to bring offerings to the most revered Mongolian and Tibetan incarnate lamas (known as *gogens*, *khubilgans* and *tulkus*).

² Vashkevich 1885, p. 35. The order was issued on 30 June 1728. Also see Forsyth 1992.

Their biggest attractions were the celebrated monasteries of Gandan and Erdene-Zuu in Outer Mongolia; Labrang and Kumbum in Eastern Tibet (Amdo); Drepung, Sera, and Ganden at the holy city of Lhasa and Tashilhunpo near Shigatse in Central Tibet. The immediate religious Patron of the Buryat Buddhists was the Grand Lama of all Mongols, Jebzundamba Khutuktu, called Bogdo Gegen, who had his residence in Urga. The greatest Buddhist hierarchs and "living gods", the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, who were believed to be the incarnations of Avalokiteshvara (the Buddha of Compassion) and Amitabha (the Buddha of Boundless Light) respectively. Residing in Lhasa and Tashilhunpo, they were less easily accessible, primarily due to the great distance separating Russia from Tibet. Therefore, from the days when their homeland was part of the Mongolian confederacy, the Buryat monks usually preferred to be ordained in Mongolia rather than in Tibet. Their religious ties with the neighbouring Khalkas were further stimulated by the fact that Tibetan Buddhism was thriving there in the 17th and 18th centuries. New monasteries were then being founded all across Mongolia, with the support of early Manchu rulers of China such as the Emperor Kanxi. At the same time the learned Mongolian lamas were actively engaged in translating the Buddhist scriptures from Tibetan and Sanskrit, along with non-canonical writings by medieval Buddhist scholars.

In 1741, all available lamas in Transbaikalia took an oath of allegiance to Russia by order of the Vice-Governor of Irkutsk Province, Lorenze Lang, after which they were allowed to preach their teachings freely among the local populace. Their number (150) was then formally approved as "a complete staff of clergy". The lamas were also exempt from paying the *yasak* tribute and other duties. Concurrently the Irkutsk administration placed at their head a Tibetan monk, Agwan Phuntsok, from the Tsongol *dugan* (prayer-house) of the Selenga Buryats, with the title of *shiretu-lama* (Chief Lama). The authority of Phuntsok, however, was contested by a group of lamas from the Hulun-nor or "Gusinoye Ozero" (Goose Lake) *dugan*, who held fast in their practices to the Mongolian tradition. Subsequently, in 1764, the Irkutsk administration appointed Lama Damba Dorje Zayagiin (Zayaev), who had also been educated and fully ordained in Tibet, as Phuntsok's successor as head of all of the Transbaikal Buddhists, and he was given the title of Bandida Khambo-lama. Still, the strife between the monks of the two largest monasteries in the area continued until 1809, when the title was finally bestowed upon

the *shiretu-lama* of the Gusinoye Ozero monastery (*datsang*) by the assembly of the Transbaikal Buryat chieftains (*taishis*). Henceforth this “*datsang*” would remain the chief monastery of the Buryat Buddhists.

As for the Kalmyks, they constituted a separate Buddhist community under their own spiritual leader, the Shajin Lama. This was traditionally Tibet-oriented, as the religious teachers of the Kalmyks (*bakshis*) were either ethnic Tibetans or Kalmyk monks educated and ordained in Tibet. From Tibet the Kalmyks also received their religious books, the Buddhist sacred images (*burhans*) and medicines. Besides, the Kalmyk khans developed a particularly close relationship with the Dalai Lamas, from whom they obtained verbal confirmation as well as sacred attributes of their temporal power.

The main religious centre of the Kalmyks was the residence of the Shajin Lama at a *khurul* (monastery) in Kalmyk Bazar, in the vicinity of Astrakhan. There were a number of other much venerated *khuruls* in the Kalmyk steppes, some of which originated in Lhasa in the form of simple travelling “yurts” (*kibitkas*), such as the Dalai-lamin Khurul on the Manych river, which had been personally consecrated by the Dalai Lama.

In time the politically-implicated Kalmyk-Tibetan connections could not fail to become an object of some concern for the Russian authorities. Thus, in 1728, St Petersburg denied permission to the Kalmyk ruler, Tseren Donduk, to go to Lhasa, ostensibly to offer prayers for his deceased father, Ayuki Khan. They suggested that he send his representatives instead. Consequently, the Khan dispatched a large embassy to Tibet, headed by Gelung Namki, which travelled from Saratov to Selenginsk in Transbaikalia fully at the expense of the Russian crown. Interestingly, there were two Russians on the mission—a political supervisor (*priстав*), named Feodor Poshekhonov, and one interpreter. Poshekhonov was also given the task of gathering information about Tibet, particularly about the country’s trade market. However, the Kalmyks in the party allowed these Russians to accompany them only as far as Urga. Upon his return to Russia, Gelung Namki reported to the Tsarist officials on the results of his journey. He told them, for example, that the mission was received quite favourably by the Dalai Lama: at their departure from Lhasa the Buddhist Pontiff granted the Kalmyk visitors many presents, such as *burhans* and other religious objects, he dispatched with them to Kalmykia a group of 17 Tibetan lamas under one *khambo* (head-

lama), and also verbally blessed Tseren Donduk as a legitimate Khalmyk Khan.

In 1738 another Kalmyk ruler, Donduk-Ombo, sent his embassy to Tibet “for religious worship”, with the approval of Empress Anna Ioanovna. The delegation, headed by one Jamba-Jamtso, again included several Russians, which was one of the reasons why the Peking authorities did not permit the party to travel across Mongolia. Thus the mission failed to reach Lhasa. A Russian interpreter attached to it would later report that Jamba-Jamtso had been secretly instructed by Donduk-Ombo to present to the Dalai Lama a list of the names of Ayuki Khan’s sons, cousins and nephews, requesting him to choose whomever he wished out of it as his, Donduk Ombo’s, successor.³

It should be noted here that Tibet at that time was a virtually independent state, though in the latter half of the 17th century the country had entered into a very special type of relationship with the Manchu Imperial Court in Peking. This was a uniquely Buddhist arrangement known as the *Chö-Yön* [Patron-Priest] relationship. According to this understanding, the Manchu Qing Dynasty [the Patron] was to offer necessary protection to Tibet [the Priest] in times of trouble without, however, politically subordinating them. This form of relationship could perhaps be translated into Western legal terms as a loose protectorate or alliance, but certainly not as a vassal dependence of one party on the other, as the Manchu authorities sought to present the case to the rest of the world.⁴ In 1727, after the Manchu Imperial troops had helped the 7th Dalai Lama to suppress the civil war in the country, two Manchu officials (called *Ambans*) with a military escort were permanently stationed in Lhasa as the Emperor’s representatives. Subsequently Peking would try to use the Ambans as an instrument to extend its influence over Tibet’s internal and external affairs, thus seeking to place its neighbour under its sovereign rule.

The attitude of the Russian government towards the “lamaist creed” and clergy was ambivalent from the very start. Being generally unconcerned about the traditional pattern of living and religious practices of the Buryat and Kalmyk *inorodtsy* (subjects of non-Russian origin), St Petersburg strove at the same time to keep in harness

³ Re these two Kalmyk missions to Tibet see Bichurin 1991, pp. 98–100, 103–104.

⁴ Re the *Chö-Yön* relationship see, Praag 1987, pp. 10–13 & 127.

their political and religious leadership, which was crucial to Russia's imperial borderland policies. The authorities did not hesitate to placate the Buryat and Kalmyk nobles (*taishis*) and clerics by lavishly granting them various benefits (land, pecuniary resources and awards for services rendered to the Russian state), hoping to make them into loyal servants of the crown. The 1822 Statute on the *inorodtsy* of Siberia, drawn up by the liberal reformer, Count M.M. Speransky, guaranteed the Buryats the right to practice their religion in accordance with their customs and tradition. The Buryats were also allowed to found monasteries, the *datsangs*, though with the due authorization of the local governor. Apart from that, the statute provided for Buryat self-administration organs, the Steppe Dumas.

In the latter half of the 19th century, however, the Tsarist administration, alarmed by the rapid growth of lamaist clergy in its two Buddhist regions, switched to much stricter religious policies. Special measures were taken to keep in check the "multiplication of lamas" and the construction of lamaseries, yet these were largely ineffective. Thus, the 1862 decree which prohibited the Kalmyks to send their sons below the age of 16 to *khurul* schools was never really observed. Likewise the Buryats continued to ordain monks in disregard of the officially set quotas, but these were largely unregistered lamas, residing outside monasteries. Overall, however, it can be concluded that, up to the time of the Bolshevik revolution, despite restrictive legislation, the Buryat and Kalmyk monks did fairly well under the Russian Tsars.

The lively liaison of Russia's Buddhists with the Land of Joo (i.e. Buddha), as the Buryats and Kalmyks honorifically referred to Tibet, was, however, cut short towards the very end of the 18th century. The Tibetan rulers closed their country's doors to all western visitors shortly after the Gurkha invasion of Tibet in 1791–92,⁵ and they made no exception in this policy for their coreligionists in Russia. By doing so, the Tibetans sought to protect their country from Western impact—no matter how insignificant it was then—which in their eyes presented a potential threat to the very subsistence of the lamaist state and Buddha's precious religion, upon which their state

was founded. But, even before that time, St Petersburg had prohibited the Kalmyk khans from sending their religious missions to Lhasa in reprisal for the treacherous act of Ubashi Khan. He had led a large number of Kalmyks, unhappy with their life in Russia, back to Dzungaria in 1771. Consequently the Russian government abolished the relatively autonomous Kalmyk khanate and placed the external relations of the Kalmyks under stricter control. Henceforth the Kalmyk monks (*khovaraks*) would receive education at home and would be ordained by their own high lamas, elected by the people and approved by local khans and ulus owners, not by the Dalai Lamas.

* * *

In the 18th century, the mysterious "Land of Lamas", Tibet, was hardly known to the West, including Tsarist Russia. In the "World's Complete Geographical Lexicon" of 1791–92, compiled on the basis of the "latest and most reliable data" by a professor of Moscow University, K.G. Langer, it was merely identified as Tibetan Tartary, a country lying to the west of China.⁶ And that was practically all the author of the book could say about Tibet.

The first Russian ruler who apparently showed some interest in the reclusive Buddhist theocracy was Empress Catherine the Great. In 1768 she had a chance to chat with the Bandida Khambo-lama, Damba-Dorji Zayagiin, who came to St Petersburg to take part in the writing of a new religious code, along with representatives of other creeds. Zayagiin had been educated in Lhasa between 1731–1741 and took his monastic vows of *get sul* and *gelong* under the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama respectively. The Buryat told the Tsarina about his journey to Tibet, and she was so fascinated by his story that she urged the venerable Lama to write it down for her, which he gladly did. According to Zayagiin, he was privileged to "sit on a hundred and one pillows" preaching the lofty Buddhist tenets to Russian aristocrats.⁷ This curious episode seems to have generated a popular legend among the Buryats about the Empress personally favouring the Buddhist religion and consequently served an occasion for proclaiming her an incarnation of the merciful Tsagan Dara-Ehe

⁵ Some scholars believe that Tibet's seclusion policy predates the Gurkha invasion. See, for example, Norbu 1992, p. 27.

⁶ Langer 1791–1792, p. II, p. 102.

⁷ Sazykin 1989, pp. 120 ff.

(White Tara), one of the most revered Buddhist deities. Since that time all Russian monarchs, both male and female, invariably came to be associated with that particular deity and were spoken of as "White Tsars" (Tsagan Bator Khans), the High Patrons of Russia's Buddhists.

A decade later, educated Russians could at last satisfy their curiosity and acquire some concrete knowledge about Tibet. Their source was a few scholarly articles by Petersburg's German-born academics (naturally written in German) and a book by Philipp Efremov, describing his nine-year long travels in Central Asia. This included a small chapter on Tewat (Tibet).⁸ However, this chapter dealt only with Western or Little Tibet (Ladakh), which Efremov had visited around 1781 with a group of merchants from Yarkand. Furthermore, the description of the country given by him, as it turned out, was based not on his personal experience, but was borrowed from another source.⁹

How the Tibetans perceived Russia in those days is difficult to ascertain. There is little doubt, however, that the rulers of the country, the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas, knew of the existence of the northern potentate of the Russian Tsars through the Kalmyk and Buryat pilgrims and traders who visited Lhasa and Tashilhumpo. Thus, in 1774, when talking to George Bogle, head of the first British mission to Tibet, the Panchen Lama asked him "about Russia, and if the king of England had much to say with the Empress" (Catherine II). Bogle answered that the former "had more influence at the court of Russia than any other prince in Europe", despite the great distance that separated the two countries. To this the Lama responded with the following words:

I am glad of it, for in the event of a war between Russia and China, I must perhaps be able, through means of the Company [East India Company—A.A.], to do something towards bringing about a peace, and that is the business of us lamas.¹⁰

At the beginning of the 19th century, while Russia was seeking to promote trade relations with Asiatic countries, particularly China and

⁸ See, Anon 1779; Pallas 1781; [J.F. Hackman] 1783; Efremov 1786 (repr. in Vigasin 1995a, pp. 228–237). See also Kemp 1959.

⁹ See Vigasin 1995b, pp. 141–142.

¹⁰ Markham 1879, p. 166.

India, she turned her gaze again to their Himalayan neighbour, Tibet. Thus, in July 1805, the minister of commerce, Count N.P. Rumiantsev, issued the instructions to the head of the projected Russian embassy to Peking, Count Yu.A. Golovkin. One of the main points in these instructions dealt specifically with the Kalmyk Buddhist missions to Tibet: the ambassador was to arrange with the Chinese authorities that they would not prevent Russian officials (*priставы*) from travelling with the Kalmyk pilgrims to Lhasa since this procedure was prescribed by the laws of the Russian empire governing her nomadic subjects. At the same time Rumiantsev made it clear that the sending of the officials served ultimately the purpose of extending Russian trade into the Dalai-Lama's realm: the agents were to find out about "the peoples inhabiting his land, the goods manufactured there, and the kind of things with which we could supply them (the Tibetans)".^{10a} (The main tasks of Golovkin's embassy included the opening of Russian trade marts in Canton and Nanking and the opening of trade between Russia and India via China and Afghanistan). On the other hand, the deputy foreign minister, Count A.A. Chartoryssky, in a dispatch to Golovkin, emphasized the benefit of the northern route to India: since the days of Peter the Great Russia had sought to open trade with India via Persia but had failed to do so because of the continuous unrest in the latter country. In this respect the tranquil state of the Chinese empire and her trade regulations seem to provide much better opportunities for reaching India by way of Tibet.^{10b}

While making preparations for the Golovkin embassy the Minister of commerce also wrote a letter to a Greek high cleric (the former Metropolitan of New Patres near Athens), Chrisanph by name, who in 1784–95 had made a long journey through Central Asia, visiting Khiva, Bukhara, Turkestan, Afghanistan, India and Tibet. In this letter the Russian statesman addressed the Greek traveller (now a resident of Ekaterinoslav in Russia) with a number of queries about Tibet. What he particularly wanted to know was the country's accessibility from Indian territory (since Chrisanph claimed that he had entered Tibet from Bengal), the form of civil administration, population, especially that of Lhasa, foreign trade and the Dalai Lama's

^{10a} Golovkin 1904, pp. 19–20. Re Golovkin's embassy see: LeDonne 1997, pp. 173–174.

^{10b} Golovkin 1904, p. 23.

attitude towards foreign merchants, and, finally, the extent of Chinese influence over the commercial activity of non-Tibetans living in Lhasa and elsewhere in Tibet. This is what Chrisanph reported to Rumiantsev:

The civil administration of Tibet is in good order, its towns and villages are populous and abundant in riches. Lhasa is the richest and most beautiful city in the whole of India. It is inhabited by at least a million and half people. They are engaged in considerable trade with China, India and the Mungals (Kalmuks). The Dalai Lama protects tradesmen, provided they are not Christian, and they enjoy complete freedom and are allowed to trade in various merchandise after paying taxes. The Chinese exercise no other influence on the city of Lhasa or the entire domain of Tibet than the one that normally exists between two neighbouring self-sustained countries in a time of peace. However, I heard (though I cannot say whether it is true) that the Chinese collect some tribute from the Dalai Lama.¹¹

This picture of a thriving Tibet, where people of many races and creeds mingled together, as was drawn by Ven. Chrisanph, may not be too far from reality, except for the excessive population figure given for Lhasa. Prior to the 19th century, when it became the "Forbidden City" for Western visitors, Lhasa, according to Dawa Norbu, "was, for Asian standards, a fairly cosmopolitan city where Mongols from Mongolia and Russia, Chinese, Nepalese, Kashmiri Muslims, Catholic missionaries from Europe rubbed shoulders".¹²

There is, however, an odd passage in Chrisanph's simple narrative that throws serious doubt upon the credibility of his whole story—the description of his audience with the 11-year old Dalai Lama and his alleged uncle, Minister Baridar. According to historical records, the Dalai Lama who ruled Tibet at that time was Jampal Gyatso and he was 34 in 1792. In this case, then, Chrisanph must have met someone else he took for the Dalai Lama, and probably not in Great Tibet, but in some other country bordering on India, possibly Nepal, Kashmir or Ladakh. Another alternative was that he may have met with the Panchen Lama, whose 4th incarnation, Lozang Tanpa Nyima, was precisely 11 in 1792.¹³

¹¹ Grigoriev 1861, repr. in Vigasin 1995, pp. 290–293. See also ARAN, f. 13, op. 2, d. 1073 (1805), ll. 11–14.

¹² Norbu 1992, p. 22.

¹³ For the dates of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas see, for example, Shakabpa 1988.

The Golovkin embassy, however, was not admitted into China proper as the Russian ambassador refused to perform the humiliating "kowtow" ceremony before the image of the Bogdokhan in Kalgan on the Great Wall and had to turn back. Still, some three years later Rumiantsev send another mission to western China and northern India to explore the local markets, placing at its head a Jewish shawl trader from Kabul, Agha Mehti Rafailov. This, incidentally, brought more information about Tibet to St Petersburg, but as in the case of Efremov, the country referred to as Tibet in the Russian documents was again Minor Tibet, i.e. Ladakh. According to Rafailov, Tibet's major export item was fine sheep wool (*pashm*), the bulk of which was purchased by the Kashmiris for making shawls. (Kashmir shawls had become very fashionable in Europe as well as in Russia at that time).

Rafailov made two more trips to Ladakh in the 1810s, both on the instruction of the Russian government, and each time he conveniently combined his purely commercial pursuits with more delicate diplomatic errands. Thus, in 1813, Lieutenant-General G.I. Glazzenap, commander of the Russian troops at the Siberian frontier line, commissioned Rafailov to deliver a letter to the "Tibetan ruler", Raja Mahmud Khan, encouraging the Raja to enter into commercial intercourse with the Russians. The route generally favoured by Rafailov and other merchants, heading for Ladakh and on to Kashmir from Russian territory, started at the Semipalatinsk Fortress on the Irtysh River (in south-west Siberia, the main military outpost on the Siberian frontier line) and led across the Kirghiz steppes to Kulja, a little town in Chinese Turkestan and the closest one to the Russian border. From there caravans travelled southward to Yarkand, via Aksu and Kashgar, and from Yarkand into Ladakh, after crossing several high mountain ranges. The stretch of journey between Yarkand and Ladakh normally took the merchants about three weeks.

In 1820 Rafailov set out from Semipalatinsk for his last journey to northern India and Ladakh. On this trip to "Tibet", he was to purchase and bring back to Russia several *pashm*-yielding sheep for breeding purposes. Agha Mehti, however, strongly doubted the feasibility of the project. In his memorandum to the Russian Minister of Finance, D.A. Guriev, he pointed out that the animals would not endure the hardships of the long journey. Besides, the export of either sheep or their wool was prohibited by the "Tibetan authorities" upon penalty of death. Therefore he proposed to purchase

instead the sheeps' softest fleece (used to make only the finest shawls), gathered after the animals shed their coats, an idea he promised to negotiate with "Tibet's ruler". From this fleece the Russians could manufacture the high-quality Kashmir shawls at a special factory to be built in St Petersburg. Rafailov's other commissions on this journey included the delivery of some confidential letters from the Russian Foreign Minister, Count K.V. Nesselrode, to the rulers of Punjab, Kashmir and "Tibet" (Ladakh). However, shortly before his caravan reached Ladakh, the Kabul merchant fell ill and died very suddenly.¹⁴

The vast economic and political intelligence gathered by Mehti Rafailov about the countries and peoples he visited on his Central Asiatic missions was of great importance to the Russian government. Two years before the merchant's premature death, Glazanap compiled a detailed report for his superiors in St Petersburg, which was largely based on this unique source. The document was entitled: "Information regarding the Asiatic peoples along the Russian and, further, Tibetan borders, with a description of the road leading from Semipalatinsk Fortress to towns in Tibet and Kashmir. Extracted from notes and oral explanations, including those provided by the commandant of Semipalatinsk, Sub-Colonel Kampen II". (This curious document, incidentally, would be appended to the Survey of Siberia in 1812–20, submitted to the government by Count Speranski). The report incorporated some basic data on Minor Tibet—its geography, climate, the cost of mercantile goods, as well as the main avenues by which the country could be approached. "The (most) convenient time for travelling from Russia to Tibet," wrote the Russian general, "is only in May and October since the rivers flood in the summer from melting snow, and these floods along with the deep snow drifts lying in the mountain gorges, make communication with the country extremely difficult".¹⁵

The Tsarist government, however, failed to establish direct trade relations with Ladakh in the subsequent years, despite the promising overtures it made to its ruler through Rafailov. This might be

¹⁴ On Mehti Rafailov see Valovnikov 1990, pp. 10–80. Also, Warikoo, pp. 204–205.

¹⁵ Izvestiia o pogranichnykh k Rossii i dalee k Tibetu aziatskikh narodakh s opisaniem puti iz kreposti Semipalatinskoi v goroda Tibeta i Kashmira, sobrannye iz zapisok i ustnykh ob"iasnenii i iz dostavленного komendantom Semipalatinskim podpolkovnikom Kempenym 2, svedeniia 1818 g. RGIA, f. 1264, op. 1, d. 319 (on Tibet: ll. 133, 141–143, 144ob–147).

explained in large part by the competitive activities of the East India Company, which was at this time, also by means of commerce and secret diplomacy, trying to extend British influence over Ladakh and other Himalayan principalities.

As regards Tibet proper, it was occasionally visited from the 1840s onwards by Russians—ethnic Russians in this case, not Buryats and Kalmyks. These were Russian "Old Believers" from the Altai region who, because of the persecution of their faith, fled to Central Asia in search of the promised Land of White Waters (Belovodie), which seems to be the Russian equivalent of the mystical Buddhist realm of Shambhala. Some of these people travelled as far as Lop-nor and Tsaidam and even further southward, penetrating the high Tibetan plateau. The travel notes some of them left mention familiar geographical names. Although these were given a particularly Russian flavour, for example, Bogogorshe (God's mountains) and Kokushi, they can be easily identified as the Burhan-Buddha and Kokushili ranges, while Ergor (Highlands), is apparently a reference to Chantang (Tib. "byang thang"—the Northern plains of Tibet).¹⁶

* * *

The 1860s–1880s period saw Tsarist Russia's most vigorous advance into Central Asia. The switch to a forward policy by a country which had not yet fully recovered from the debacle of the Crimean war came in 1863 when the war minister, D.A. Miliutin, resolved to begin military operations in the region. His ostensible purpose was to connect the Irtysh and Orenburg fortified lines in order to finally establish Russia's southern frontiers, but he also believed that by demonstrating its military strength in Asia, Russia would be able to prevent England from giving assistance to Poland (then a part of the Russian Empire), where an anti-Russian uprising had erupted earlier that year. The Russian expansion, however, went far beyond those lines and led ultimately to a number of territorial acquisitions. Three Muslim khanates—Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand—had fallen into the Russian hands one by one by 1876. Then the Tsar's generals subdued the Turkoman of the Transcaspian steppes, having annexed the Akhal-Tekke oasis in 1881 and Merv in 1884. Finally, in 1895

¹⁶ See Roerich 1979, pp. 176–177. On the search for Belovodie see V.G. Korolenko's preface to the article by Khokhlov 1903 and Chistov 1967.

the Russians established themselves on the “Roof of the World”, the Pamirs, which brought them fairly close to the Indian border.

This out-and-out southward advance of the great Northern power was in fact a counterpoise to the no less formidable expansionist drive of her main rival on the Asian continent, the British Empire. Driven by the same “irresistible forces” which, in the words of Sir Percy Sykes, “ever drive an organized state to expand at the expense of unorganized neighbours”,¹⁷ the Britons were expanding step by step from their Indian possessions into neighbouring lands in the course of the 19th century. In this way they absorbed many of the Princely states of India, extended their rule over the huge desert province of Baluchistan, and over Assam and Burma, as well as a number of minor “lamaist states” along the Himalayan foothills such as Lahul and Spiti, Ladakh, Darjeeling, Bhutan and Sikkim. Furthermore, the British sought to gain a footing in Afghanistan and Persia, but here their onward movement was checked by the Russians, advancing from the opposite direction. The collision of the two expanding super powers seemed inevitable at some point, and they indeed found themselves on the brink of war in early 1885. Russian troops, having crossed into the Afghan territory, occupied the disputed Panjdeh area, which immediately opened up to them the road to Herat, the “gateway to India”. The British panicked and were about to take to arms, luckily however, the conflict was soon resolved by diplomatic means.

The policy makers in St Petersburg, like their counterparts in London and Calcutta, understood only too well, especially after the Panjdeh incident, the necessity of having a neutral zone to separate the Russian and British imperial possessions in Asia. (Such an idea was first articulated by the famous Chancellor A.M. Gorchakov, soon after the Russian takeover of Khiva in 1873). The only natural buffer at that time to serve such a purpose was Afghanistan, which both Russia and Britain agreed to regard as an independent state. Still, the Muslim kingdom remained in the orbit of Anglo-Russian rivalry, the so-called Great Game, in the subsequent years. As late as 1909 one of the proponents of Russian forward strategy in Central Asia, Colonel of the General Staff A.E. Snésarev, would emphasize the role of Afghanistan as a vehicle of power politics in the following words:

¹⁷ Sykes 1921, vol. 2, p. 366.

The military and political importance of our border with Afghanistan should be regarded as paramount in the sense that it brings us closer to India, the main source of wealth for England and the Achilles heel of its power. We can threaten India across this border and thereby exert influence on Britain.¹⁸

The awareness of a potential Russian menace to India via Afghanistan largely moulded the policy of Calcutta vis-à-vis her Muslim neighbour. The British succeeded in winning over the Afghan Amir, Abdur Rahman (whom they helped to ascend the throne in 1880), and placing Afghan foreign relations under their control, though they failed to gain permission to install their Resident in Kabul. Still, despite the fact that the Amir received a large subsidy from Calcutta, he distrusted British policy and was in no way a good friend of the British. According to L.W. Adamec, the Amir skillfully pursued “a middle course” policy: “an alliance with Britain, but not one that would lead to integration; hostility to Russia, but not to an extent as would result in provoking aggression”. His actions permitted Afghanistan to remain independent, if not neutral.^{18a}

In Persia, which became coterminous with Russia in 1881 after the latter’s annexation of the Turkoman steppes, the interests of the two competing powers clashed primarily in the commercial sphere. The country was actually divided into two separate zones of influence—of Tsarist Russia in the north, and of Great Britain in the south. The Anglo-Russian competition became especially acute in the last decades of the 19th–early 20th century in the period of the “Awakening of Persia”. Nasir-ud-Din Shah, unlike the Afghan Amir, openly favoured the Russians, which gave them a certain advantage over their rivals. The volume of Russia’s trade with Persia was steadily growing, the main items of Russian import being kerosene, cotton fabric and sugar. Also, in 1879 Tsar Alexandre III helped the Shah to modernize his army by organizing an elite Cossack regiment (which would later expand into a brigade), and presenting the Persians with 1,000 Berdan rifles and some guns. The British position in Persia, however, remained quite strong. This was particularly due to their control of the Persian Customs on the Gulf ports and the well-developed communications networks, such as the railroads and the London-

¹⁸ Snésarev 1909, p. 26.

^{18a} Adamec 1967, p. 24.

Teheran-Calcutta telegraph lines, which were of great help to British commercial interests.

There was yet another playground for the Russian and British Great Gamers in Asia—the outlying regions of the Chinese Middle Empire, Sinkiang (Eastern Turkestan) and Tibet. Having drawn close to the Karakorum and Himalayan ranges, the British quite naturally began, from the mid-1860s, secret reconnaissance missions behind the ranges on to Yarkand and Lhasa. These were undertaken by a group of disguised Indian scouts or “pundits” (“learned men”), specially employed and trained for the purpose.¹⁹ The Russians, as is well known, followed their example. A few years later they dispatched to the vast unexplored areas beyond the Great Wall in Western China, and also to Tibet, no less qualified men from among their military geographers, who did practically the same job for the Russian government. Needless to say, this double-barrelled “scientific exploration” of China and Tibet was largely stimulated by the ongoing Anglo-Russian rivalry.

Russian and British interests especially clashed in Kashgaria, where a strong Muslim state of Yettishar, or “Seven Cities”, had emerged in 1865 as an outcome of the Dungan rebellion against the local Manchu Chinese administration. In 1871, Russian troops occupied the Ili region in Dzungaria, lying to the north of Kashgaria. Their aim was to restore order in the adjacent territory, but also, no less importantly, to frustrate the British plans to win over the ruler of Yettishar, Yakub Beg, who was openly siding with the British.

The 1870s also witnessed the beginning of the great era of Russian exploration of Tibet undertaken by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, with some assistance given by the War Ministry. The biggest name among the explorers was no doubt Nikolai Mikhailovich Przhevalsky (1839–1888). He ascended the Tibetan plateau for the first time in December 1872, this being only a short foray, and he led two further pioneering expeditions to the “terra incognita” in 1878–1880 and 1883–1885. The first of these, with Lhasa as its destination, was, however, halted by the Tibetans some 250 km north of the Holy city. That was the closest the Russians could approach the Dalai Lama’s “celestial abode”. Interestingly, this was at precisely the time when St Petersburg made its first attempt to use Tibet as an instru-

¹⁹ Re Indian pundits see Waller 1990.

ment of political pressure on the British. The occasion was provided by a sudden appearance of the British fleet in the Sea of Marmara in early 1878 (when Russia was fighting a war with Turkey). As a result the war minister, Miliutin, proposed to the director of the Asiatic department at the foreign ministry, N.K. Giers, that he dispatch a mission to Tibet to establish relations with the Tibetans and render them “either political or moral support” against the British. The foreign ministry, however, turned down the proposal, saying that it would prefer an ordinary “scientific expedition” to Tibet instead, under Przevalsky’s leadership.²⁰ The purpose of the latter journey was spelled out by General A.N. Kuropatkin, the head of the war ministry’s Asiatic department, in his memorandum to the Emperor (Alexandre III) later in the year:

The object of exploration will be Tibet. Along with the scientific aims, it is suggested that, as much as may be possible, the expedition will also gather intelligence about the political regime in Tibet, her relations with her neighbours, and the possibility of establishing and strengthening our relations with the Dalai Lama. Such a policy, if successful, may open the way to our influence over all of Inner Asia, right through to the Himalayas.²¹

Concurrently with this initiative, the war ministry was seriously considering a scheme for a cavalry attack on India from Russian Turkestan via Kabul. This had been put forward by General Skobelev a year earlier, in response to a hostile stand adopted by British diplomacy towards Russia at the Berlin Congress.²²

More expansionist plans were made by Przhevalsky himself upon his return from the Tibetan journey, in October 1880. In his memorandum “On the possibility of war with China”, submitted to the war ministry in connection with Peking’s persistent reclaiming of the Ili Region, the explorer [who was, incidentally, a Colonel of the General Staff], strongly advocated a Russian military confrontation with her “insolent” Chinese neighbour. More specifically, Przevalsky called for the final annexation of the disputed Ili Region and the acquisition of a part of the Sungari basin in the Far East as well as

²⁰ See Popov 1934, p. 15.

²¹ Kuropatkin’s Memo to the Tsar, November 1878, RGVIA, f. 400, op. 1, d. 553, l. 10.

²² Lebedev 1898, p. 10.

northern Mongolia, up to the latitude of Urga. Speaking of the latter territory, he remarked *inter alia*:

In future, should the English want to penetrate into Tibet from India, it is very likely that the Dalai Lama would move his residence to Urga, towards his most ardent believers there, the Mongols. Then, by possessing Urga and patronizing the Dalai Lama, we would be able to influence the entire Buddhist world.²³

Przevalski's considerations, however, were pigeon-holed by his superiors in the war ministry, who obviously had less bellicose sentiments. The Russian generals were not lured by the prospect of an armed intervention in China, even if the Manchu dynasty at that time was feeble and declining. Still, the exploration of Tibet, along with Mongolia and Western China, begun by Przhevalsky, was continued after his death in 1888 by a host of his most enthusiastic heirs—G.N. Potanin, M.V. Pevtsov, V.I. Roborovsky, P.K. Kozlov, A.N. Kaznakov, B.L. Grombchevsky, G.E. Grum-Grjimailo—many of whom were senior army officers. This new generation of Russian explorers trekked across the arduous expanse of northern Tibet in various directions, penetrating the plateau as far as the waterheads of the great Chinese rivers, Huang He and Yangtze. Yet none of them succeeded in reaching Lhasa. The Buddhist Mecca remained inaccessible to both Russian and other Western visitors, which thereby made it impossible for any European power to open a political dialogue with the hermit-theocracy.

This early Russian political interest in Tibet, as is easy to see from the above-mentioned instances, was to a large extent generated by what St Petersburg regarded as "sinister designs" on the country by its British adversary. To thwart these seemed, from the Russian standpoint, to be only natural. The news of the Indo-Tibetan border clashes in 1888 further annoyed the Russians as they clearly attested to British encroachments upon the neighbouring country. But St Petersburg was even more alarmed when it learned about the conclusion of an Anglo-Chinese convention in Calcutta in 1890 which made Sikkim, formerly a tributary of Tibet, a British protectorate. (This was negotiated between the Governor-General of India, Lord Lansdowne, and a Lhasan Amban, Sheng ta'i). Three years later the convention was augmented by a second agreement with the Manchus—

²³ Przevalsky 1883, p. 305.

again without Tibet's participation—the 1893 Trade Regulations, which further strengthened the British grip on Sikkim. In 1896, the youthful ruler of Tibet, the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso, apprehending that his country would probably suffer the same fate in the not too distant future, wrote a letter to this effect to his fellow incarnation in Outer Mongolia, the Jebzundamba Khutuktu (Bogdo-Gegen). The Russian consul in Urga, Ia.P. Shishmariov, reported on the event to St Petersburg:

Having recently returned from Tibet, a brother of the Urga Khutuktu brought a letter from the Dalai Lama to the Khutuktu, in which he pointed to the troubled state of Tibet, caused by the activities of the British (*pilins*), who had already subdued all frontier tribes, dependent on Tibet until then, and had drawn close to the Tibetan border.²⁴

The Dalai Lama put the blame for the sorry situation on the Manchu Amban in Lhasa, allegedly bribed by the British, and asked the Khutuktu to "find some way of bringing this fact to the notice of Peking". The letter, according to Shishmariov, was translated into Mongolian and handed over to the Urga "ruler" (Amban), Gui-bing, who was to relay it further to the Emperor. The Russian official, however, strongly doubted that the problem was the venality of the Lhasa Amban, and thought that the latter was more likely acting on Peking's instructions.

At this early stage of the contest for Tibet Russia was the first to make a move towards establishing contact with the Lhasan court via her Buddhist subjects. In 1893, Piotr Aleksandrovich Badmaev, a prosperous practitioner of Tibetan medicine ("Tibetan doctor") and entrepreneur, a Buryat by birth,²⁵ put forward a project for the annexation of the entire "Mongolo-Tibeto-Chinese East" to the Russian Empire. This grandiose, if fanciful scheme, despite its clearly adventurist character, was approved by Alexander III, and the Russian government consequently provided a two million rouble loan to Badmaev for its realization. The project, as detailed in Badmaev's memorandum to the Tsar of 13 February 1893, was to begin with an active anti-Manchu and pro-Russian agitation that was to be conducted throughout Mongolia, Western China and Tibet by a host

²⁴ Shishmariov's report to Count D.A. Kapnist, 10 August 1896. AVPRF, f. 491, d. 562, ll. 409–410ob.

²⁵ On P.A. Badmaev see Semennikov 1925; Gusev 1995; Grekova 1998.

of Buryat agents operating from the territory of Transbaikalia as well as by Buryat Buddhist pilgrims. Their work was to prepare the ground for a popular anti-Manchu uprising which was to be started in Kansu Province of China with the primary aim of capturing the city of Lanchowfu, an important political, strategic and commercial centre in the area. This act, Badmaev believed, would immediately produce a chain reaction—a series of uprisings in Mongolia, Tibet and Western China to expel the corrupt and much hated Manchu officials. Finally, the Mongolian, Tibetan and Chinese nobility, jointly with the “distinguished Buddhist priests”, were to dispatch a delegation of their representatives to St Petersburg “to plead the White Tsar to take them under his rule”.²⁶

By elaborating his project Badmaev sought to take advantage of two important events—the rapid decline of the Manchu Dynasty and the beginning of the construction (in 1891) of the Great Trans-Siberian Railway which was to connect European Russia with the Pacific Ocean. (A part of which would pass through Northern Manchuria). Thus, through the annexation of China, Russia was to pre-empt the seizure of the Middle Empire by European “imperialists”. To facilitate the Russian penetration into the neighbouring country as well as to Tibet, the Buryat proposed to connect Lanchowfu by rail with the main Trans-Siberian track.

In early 1895, Badmaev send out a few dozen of his agents to various places in Mongolia, Western China and Tibet. Some of them, disguised as Mongolian Buddhist pilgrims, made it secretly to Lhasa, where they got in touch with their fellow-countryman, holding a high position at the Potala, Agvan Dorzhiev. The main task assigned to these agents was presumably to investigate the local trade market as well as the general political situation in Tibet, especially with reference to British activities vis-à-vis the country, and Dorzhiev, as they certainly knew well in advance, was the right man to approach for this information.

* * *

Agvan Lobsan Dorzhiev (1853/4–1938) was born in a Buryat village (*ulus*) Muhor-Shibir, some 50 km. north-east of Verkhneudinsk,

²⁶ Re Badmaev's project for annexation of Mongolia, China and Tibet see Semennikov 1925, pp. 68–75.

today's Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Buryat Republic. He was of humble parentage, his ancestors having migrated to Buryatia (Transbaikalia) from the Cis-Baikal region (Irkutsk Province) in the 18th century.²⁷ As a boy, he was educated at a monastic school in the Atsagat Datsang, which was a few miles away from his home. His first religious mentor was one of the senior monks from the datsang, gelong-lama Choinzon-Dorji Iroltuev, who would later become head of the East Siberian Buddhists.

Until the age of 19, Agvan led the life of an ordinary Buryat family man. He had a wife and was employed for some time as a clerk (copyist) by the Khori Steppe Duma. However, after meeting with a remarkable man, the much venerated Mongolian lama, Penden Chomphel, the young man made up his mind to renounce the household life and become a Buddhist scholar-monk. So Agvan took the vows of a celibate layman (*ubashi*) from the lama and left his home. His ambitions urged him to aspire to no less than the highest monastic degree of Geshe-lharampa, as he had already seen the profound respect and veneration showed by the Buryats to those monks from Mongolia and Tibet who held that degree. And the only place where that could be earned was one of the great monastic universities of Lhasa. But it was not easy in those days to enter this foremost centre of Buddhist learning since Lhasa remained closed to Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhists alike. Still, Agvan bravely set out on a journey to Lhasa around 1872 as an attendant of Penden Chomphel, concealing his Buryat identity and calling himself a Khalka-Mongol, a subject of the Chinese Emperor.²⁸ It was a dangerous trick which could easily end in the trespasser's severe punishment, but Dorzhiev was apparently unaware at that time of the risk he was taking. Having arrived safely in Lhasa, he enrolled in the prestigious Gomang Datsang at the Drepung Monastery. He would later claim proudly that he was the first Buryat to travel to the Forbidden City in over one

²⁷ Re Agvan Dorzhiev see Zaiatuev 1991; Andreyev 1992; Snelling 1993; Nimaev et al. 1993.

²⁸ In my article (Andreyev 2001b) I speculate on the possibility of Agvan Dorzhiev and Penden Chomphel being charged by the Russian authorities on this trip with the task of intelligence gathering in Tibet. The speculation is based on some documents from the Archive of the RGO which speak of the Russian plans, in 1869 and then in 1873, for sending one or two Buryat Buddhists to Lhasa to this end with a Mongolian mission which was to bring to Urga a new incarnation of the recently deceased Khutuktu.

hundred years.²⁹ According to Gombojab Tsybikov, another Buryat of distinction, who had entered Lhasa in a similar manner in 1900, Buryat and Kalmyk pilgrims had been secretly visiting the Holy city since the 1870s, invariably posing as residents of Outer or Khalkha Mongolia.³⁰

Dorzhiev, however, did not stay long in Lhasa. He lacked the funds to support himself, but, more importantly, fearing persecution in case the Tibetans unmasked him as an outsider, he abandoned the city and travelled with the same Mongolian caravan back to Urga. (That caravan, as it happens, was bringing to Mongolia from Tibet the newly discovered Eighth Incarnation of the Bogdo-Gegen). While in Urga, Dorzhiev continued his Buddhist studies for some time, and it was there that he, at the age of 21, took full monastic vows from the same Penden Chomphel, "the Great Abbot Vajra-Holder". He then briefly visited his homeland, Buryatia, and thence went to the famous Wu-tai Shan Monastery near Peking. Dorzhiev studied there for several years more, under the tutorship of a great spiritual master named Janshub-Gegen, otherwise known as Namnang Bakshi. However, Lhasa still held a strong attraction for the ambitious youth. So, having secured the necessary funds, he journeyed to Tibet again. Dorzhiev entered Lhasa for the second time in 1879, when he was in his 26th year. His next ten years he devoted entirely to the study of Buddhist philosophy (*tsan-nyid*) in the Gomang Datsang at Drepung.

On completing the full course at that monastic school, Dorzhiev took an examination which consisted of participating in a traditional *tsan-nyid* philosophical debate in the presence of the most learned scholars from the three chief monasteries (Drepung, Sera and Ganden), at the Great Chanting Session, during the Monlam Chenmo (New Year's celebration). As a result of his impeccable performance, the much-coveted degree of Geshe-lharampa was conferred upon Dorzhiev. This certainly made him feel very proud; upon his return to Russia he would invariably add this title (equivalent to that of Doctor of Divinity in the West) to his full name.

In the same year (1889), Dorzhiev, by virtue of his great scholarly merits, was appointed one of the seven *tsanshaws* (Tib. *mtshan-*

²⁹ AVPRF, Kitaiskii stol, d. 1448. Agyan Dorzhiev, *Zapiska o moei zhizni v Tibete* (An Account of my life in Tibet), l. 162.

³⁰ Tsybikov, "O Tsentral'nom Tibete" in Tsybikov 1981, vol. 2, p. 10.

zhabs) or philosophical consultants of the youthful Dalai Lama, in order to give him practice in the *tsan-nyid* debates.³¹ This position brought Dorzhiev into close contact with the future ruler of Tibet, which turned with time into a lasting friendship. The profound erudition of the Buryat, coupled with the charm of his personal qualities, helped him to win the Dalai Lama's favours and gradually rise to prominence at the Lhasan court. This was not easy, as when some of the Tibetan high officials learnt that Dorzhiev was a Russian, they began to solicit the Dalai Lama and ministers (Kalons) to have him removed from his post and sent back to Russia. However, luckily for the Buryat, there were other important Tibetans who stood up for him, such as the Lama's tutor and Regent, Tsul-trim Jampa Rimpoche. By mid-1890s Dorzhiev's position at the Potala had become very strong. A Kalmuk pilgrim, Baza-Bakshi Menkedjuev, who had visited Lhasa in 1894, recorded in his travel diary that, while on the road to Tibet, he heard about the Dalai Lama's *sobon* (attendant), a Mongol named "Buryat Akban". It was rumoured that acquaintance with this man would greatly benefit any Mongol. He lived in the Lama's palace (the Potala), and in the words of the Mongols, "there has never been anybody so elevated in Tibet as he".³²

In his Russian autobiography, Dorzhiev confessed that, having revealed to the Dalai Lama his Buryat identity, he also told him about his Buryat countrymen, who enjoyed full religious freedom under the Great Russian White Tsar. The Dalai Lama was obviously impressed by these tales. Thus encouraged, Dorzhiev began little by little to spread among Tibetans "a good image of his fatherland", Russia, and eventually succeeded in setting up a pro-Russian faction at the Potala (to which, incidentally, Tibet's future premier, Lonchen Shatra, belonged). The Buryat was also responsible for urging the ruling Tibetans to break from their "suzerain power," China, which was incapable of protecting Tibet against the British, and seek an alliance with a more powerful potentate, Russia:

Since the time when the Chinese officials, being bribed by the English, deprived Tibet of [a tract] of land [a reference to Sikkim—A.A.], clandestine meetings began to be held in the highest spheres of the Tibetan

³¹ See, Norbu 1991, p. 57, n. 66.

³² Pozdneev 1897, pp. 211–212.

administration to discuss the necessity of seeking the protection of some foreign power. When invited to one of these meetings, I expressed my opinion, saying that in such a case preference should be given to Russia, under whose patronage were the Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhists, and that at the initial stage of negotiations they would be indispensable. Hence Tibet began to keep an eye on Russia.³³

The fact that Russia, unlike China and India, was separated from Tibet by a great distance did not seem to worry Dorzhiev at all. On the contrary, this only supported his main argument, since a remote country such as Russia would not be able to encroach upon Tibet. However, Dorzhiev met with a strong opposition from the Sinophile faction at the Potala. Interestingly, his Russian memoir sheds light on the ambiguous nature of Sino-Tibetan relations in the 17th–19th centuries, i.e. under the Manchu Qing dynasty:

They [the Sinophiles—A.A.] did not dare to break connections with China because, on the one hand, for a period of 200 years some 15,000 *lans* were allocated annually from the state treasury as a kind of allowance or offering to the Dalai Lama, as well as some 30,000 *lans* to cover the cost of tea for the three monasteries, and, on the other hand, the Tibetans still remembered China's financial and military assistance [given to them] during their war with the tribes of Balba, Gorkha and Senba.³⁴

However, Dorzhiev and his followers finally prevailed over those who were clinging to China. Given the xenophobic feelings of the Tibetans, this was something extraordinary.

Dorzhiev further related in his autobiography that the Tibetans were particularly impressed by stories about the Heir-Apparent to the Russian throne (the future Tsar Nicholas II), who, when returning from his Oriental journey via Eastern Siberia in 1891, was very cordially received by the Buryats and consequently “heaped favours upon them”. This fact “considerably raised Russia's prestige among them, from the Dalai Lama and the highest officials, down to ordinary people, which naturally gave rise to an idea that such a Bodhisattva-Tsar could also bestow his favours upon Tibet”. There is little doubt

³³ Agyan Dorzhiev, *Zapiska o moei jhizni . . .*, l. 163.

³⁴ Balba (Tib. *bal-po*) is a general appellation of the Nepalese. Senba (Tib. *sen-po*, *bsen-po*) means “pale people”, but to which particular ethnic group the term refers is unclear. The historical allusion made here by Dorzhiev is to Tibet's first war with the Gurkhas in 1788–1791. The Chinese Emperor Chien lung when reported about the Gurkhas' invasion of Tibet by the Lhasa Amban immediately dispatched an army there which drove the invaders out of the country.

that the stories were spread by Dorzhiev himself. Moreover, according to a Japanese monk, Ekai Kawaguchi, Dorzhiev wrote a pamphlet which identified Russia with the mythical kingdom of Northern Shambhala and asserted that the Russian Tsar was in fact an incarnation of the founder of lamaism, Tsongkapa!³⁵

The news of Dorzhiev's unusual elevation at the Lhasan court must have reached St Petersburg via Baza-Bakshi Menkedjuev and other Buryat and Kalmyk pilgrims, and it was then that Dr. Badmaev sent his agents off to Lhasa. There is a brief reference in the above mentioned memoir by Dorzhiev of a secret meeting of one of them with the Dalai Lama's influential *soibon* at the Potala, which presumably took place in the summer of 1895:

At that time a Buryat messenger from Doctor Badmaev, Ochir Jigmitov, arrived in Tibet. Since, if the purpose of Ochir's visit became known the Buryats would be put on equal footing with the Europeans, and then the doors of Tibet would be closed to them, I deemed that the best thing would be to present (Ochir) as an ordinary pilgrim, and so he, after performing worship together with (other) Mongols, went back home.³⁶

The services the Buryat agents rendered to the Russian government were not unappreciated in St Petersburg. By the Emperor's order of 14 June 1896, two of them—probably those who visited Lhasa—Ochir Jigmitov (Jigjitov) and Dugar Vanchinov, were decorated with gold medals, whereas “Lama Agvan”, as Dorzhiev was referred to in the document, was to be presented with “a gold watch bearing the Imperial monogram”.³⁷

The information the Buryats brought from Tibet was only to strengthen the suspicions of the Russians with regard to their British rivals in Asia. In his memorandum to Nicholas II of 3 May 1896, S.Yu. Witte, the then Minister of Finance, emphasized the paramount importance of Tibet for Russia:

This importance has become even more pronounced of late because of the persistent endeavours of the English to penetrate into the country and subjugate it to their political and economic influence. Russia, in my opinion, must do everything possible to counteract the extension of British influence over Tibet.³⁸

³⁵ Kawaguchi 1909, p. 499.

³⁶ Agyan Dorzhiev, *Zapiska o moei jhizni . . .*, ibid.

³⁷ RGIA, f. 560, op. 28, d. 64, l. 1.

³⁸ Semennikov 1925, p. XXIII.

What so alarmed the Tsar's minister was further evidence of the British military activities in the region suggesting that "England is desirous to seize Tibet".³⁹ At the same time the newspaper that Badmaev published in Chita reported that Nepal was also encroaching on Tibet's territory: Maharaja Bir-Shomshir [or was it rather Bhim Shasir, the Commander-in-Chief of Nepal?—A.A.] sent an ultimatum to the Dalai Lama in the first half of 1896 in which he stated that unless his requirements were fulfilled he would move the Gurkha force already assembled in Kathmandu, across the Tibetan border. The article ended with the rather strong warning that: "We, too, have liaison with Tibet, and therefore we will not watch idly the incursion of the Gurkhas into Tibet, since Gurkhas, in general opinion, are nothing but the vanguard of England".⁴⁰

In late 1896, Badmaev again approached the Emperor—this time Nicholas II—and the finance minister Witte, requesting a second loan, also amounting to two million roubles, to promote his annexation project. Again his petition gave a special emphasis to the importance of Tibet:

Tibet, being the highest plateau in Asia, prevailing over the entire continent, should by all means be in the hands of Russia. By possessing it, Russia would surely be able to incline England to be more tractable.⁴¹

However, despite the young Tsar's clearly expansionist leanings, Badmaev failed to secure more funds for his project and eventually had to give up on it. But Badmaev's ideas served as an incentive for Dorzhiev, who would soon continue his work along much the same lines.

* * *

In the latter half of 1897, the Dalai Lama, who had assumed temporal power by then, sent his favourite *tsanshav*, Agvan Dorzhiev, on a secret mission to Europe. His task was to probe political ground in St Petersburg as well as in Paris to see if Russia and/or France

³⁹ Witte's memorandum to the tsar, concerning Badmaev's letter to him of 22 April 1896. Semennikov 1925, p. XXIII.

⁴⁰ See Badmaev's article "Angliyskaia politika v Azii" (British policy in Asia) in *Jhizn' v Vostochnoi Okraine*, Chita, # 93, 2 June 1896.

⁴¹ Badmaev's memorandum to Nicholas II, undated (presumably submitted in 1897) in Semennikov 1925, p. 110.

could come to the aid of Tibet. This was a clandestine journey as Dorzhiev outwardly posed as an ordinary Buddhist monk coming to Russia to collect donations for the Gomang Datsang from the Buryats and Kalmyks. The idea of turning to France for support, along with Russia, occurred to Lhasa after Tibet was visited in 1889–1890 by two French travellers, Gabriel Bonvalot and Prince Henry d'Orléans. According to Dorzhiev, the French made it clear to the Tibetans that France and Russia, having formed an alliance, were together very strong and could keep Tibet from falling into the British hands.⁴²

On 28 February 1898, shortly after his arrival in St Petersburg, Dorzhiev was granted an audience by the Tsar.⁴³ This was arranged by Ukhtomski, director of the Russo-Chinese bank and editor of "Sankt Peterburgskie Vedomosti", who had enjoyed the Emperor's ear since the days when he participated in the Oriental voyage of the Tsarevich. It is worthy of note here that Nicholas II, unlike his predecessors on the Russian throne, had a fair knowledge of Central Asia and of Tibet in particular. Thanks for this go to his mentors—Przevalsky, who in 1881 lectured him on the geography of the region, and Otto von Stubendorf, head of the cartographic section of the Main Staff, who tutored young Nicholas on military topography in 1885. Dorzhiev's first interview with the Tsar, as far as we know, was fairly successful. Having listened to the Dalai Lama's emissary's lamentable account of British encroachments into Tibet, Nicholas II expressed his sympathy for the Buddhist country and suggested that its ruler petition him in writing for assistance. This was certainly a reassuring gesture. Ukhtomsky, on the other hand, contrary to the Tsar's cautious opinion, urged that Russia should lose no time and immediately send its representative to Lhasa. Dorzhiev, however, argued that this would be precocious, given the specific conditions of Tibet, and that some preliminary contacts and discussions between the two countries were absolutely necessary.

Russia's military chiefs also showed some interest in Tibet. Thus the newly appointed war minister General A.N. Kuropatkin (formerly one of Skobelev's aids, who in 1886 came up with his own scheme for an Indian campaign), voiced his readiness to help the Tibetans modernize their primitive army by lending them military

⁴² Norbu 1991, pp. 16–17. Also Dorzhiev, *Zapiska o moei jhizni*, I. 162ob.

⁴³ The date of the audience was ascertained and brought to my notice by E.A. Khamaganova.

instructors and possibly arms and ammunition.⁴⁴ In addition, Kuropatkin allowed Dorzhiev to approach Kalmyk officers of the Don Cossack Host privately on this subject, and Dorzhiev is known to have travelled to the Kalmyk steppes for that purpose later that year.

Dorzhiev's other useful contact in Petersburg was Prof. S.F. Oldenburg. One of the most eminent Russian Indologists, he provided the Buryat with several letters of recommendation to some of his colleagues in Paris. With these letters, Dorzhiev then proceeded to France together with his attendant, Budda Rabdanov, in the summer of 1898. In Paris he had an interview with one of the leading French politicians, Georges Clemenceau, and he likely also called at the Quai d'Orsay. However, Dorzhiev's "sondage politique" apparently had no effect. Much more was achieved by the Buryat in religious matters, as Buddhism was rapidly coming into vogue in European capitals such as Paris, London and Vienna. On 27 June 1898, Dorzhiev, assisted by Rabdanov, conducted a solemn Buddhist prayer service at the library of the Guimet Museum. This was attended by a host of enthusiastic "Buddhists" from the Parisian "beau mond", as well as such celebrities as Georges Clemenceau and Alexandra David-Neel, who would later be widely known for her travels in Tibet.

Upon his return from Western Europe, the Tibetan diplomat sent a letter to Lhasa via a Kalmyk *zaisang* (nobleman), Ovshe Norzunov, to inform the Dalai Lama of the results of his mission. In this he especially praised the Tsar and the Russians: "I described in detail the greatness of His Majesty the Emperor and the Russian people in general, saying in addition that rapprochement with Russia promised a great future to Tibet".⁴⁵ Waiting for a reply from the Potala, Dorzhiev remained in Russia, commuting between Buryatia, Kalmykia and St Petersburg.

At this time, the Russian Geographical Society (RGO) was making preparations for a new expedition to Tibet to be led by lieutenant Piotr K. Kozlov, one of Przhevalsky's ablest followers. The Russian government attached some importance to this undertaking, and the Tsar was particularly keen that the party should somehow reach Lhasa. Quite naturally, the Russian geographers turned to

⁴⁴ This information comes from the memorandum of subaltern of the 1st Kalmyk regiment Naran Ulanov to the head of the Military Academic Section at the Main Staff, dated 14 July 1901. RGVIA, f. 401, op. 5/929, d. 158, l. 124.

⁴⁵ Dorzhiev, *Zapiska...*, l. 164ob.

Dorzhiev for assistance, since Kozlov was expected to meet the Dalai Lama and greet him on behalf of the Geographical Society. The Buryat, of course, was happy to oblige, and he told the vice-president of the RGO, P.P. Semionov-Tian-Shanski, that the Russian expedition, in order to achieve its goals, should not press too strongly to be admitted to Lhasa when negotiating with the Tibetan frontier guards. Persistence and arrogance, he underlined, might produce a bad impression on the Potala, damaging expedition plans. Dorzhiev also assisted the Geographical Society in selecting gifts for the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan high officials.⁴⁶

Despite all the arrangements made and Dorzhiev's helpful counsels, the Kozlov expedition failed to reach Lhasa. The Russian party was unexpectedly attacked by the Tibetans on its way to Chamdo (in Eastern Tibet) and thought it prudent to turn back. However, a few months later (in early 1901) a Tibetan "delegation", specially dispatched by the Dalai Lama, arrived in the travellers' camp at the Yangtse River. It was headed by two officials: Je-nchonir Jamni-Sherap Usura and Je-nirtsan Dondup Chunden (as their names are given by Kozlov), who, on behalf of Tibet's sovereign, offered apologies for not admitting the Russian expedition to Lhasa. This, they explained, happened because of an old custom which obliged each and every Tibetan to piously protect the city of Budda-lha from foreigners, no matter where they came from. "Until now", one of the Dalai Lama's emissaries added, "we had relied on the help of the Bogdokhan [China's Emperor—A.A.], but after the Europeans, acting in concert, crushed the Chinese capital [an allusion to the suppression of the 1900 Boxer rebellion—A.A.], destroyed many cities, and killed a great multitude of people, the Chinese find it very difficult to maintain order in their own homeland, to say nothing of giving help to the Tibetans. Our closest neighbours, the English, have repeatedly approached us with their military forces; they are our enemies and may take advantage of our weakness. Although there are a few members of our administration (*devashun*) who think differently, we, the majority, headed by the Dalai Lama, hold firm to our opinion, and we rely only on the lofty protection of your Great Emperor". "Be that as it may", the Tibetan concluded, "sooner or later we will

⁴⁶ Archive of the RGO, f. 18, op. 3, d. 622, ll. 3–4. Semionov-Tian-Shansky to Kozlov, 1 June 1899.

have to open the doors of our capital, and we think somehow that we will open them peacefully only to you, the Russians".⁴⁷

In November 1899, just a few months after Kozlov's departure, the Russian Geographical Society sent another explorer to Tibet, a Buryat, Gombodjab Tsybikov. A recent graduate of St Petersburg university, he volunteered to undertake the trip in the guise of a Mongolian Buddhist pilgrim so as to make sure he would be admitted to Lhasa. This idea was suggested to the young scholar by his tutor, a well-known Mongolist, A.M. Pozdneev. The RGO supplied Tsybikov with a French-made manual photographic camera and a set of glass plates for making pictures, and it appears that the Society heads had little doubt that the Buryat would reach Lhasa, in the same manner that Badmaev agents had done earlier. And indeed, having set out from Urga with a group of Alasha Mongols, Tsybikov arrived safely in Lhasa in August 1900. He stayed in the "Forbidden city" for over a year, which gave him sufficient time to gather miscellaneous information about Tibet—its system of administration, social organization, economy, history, the religious rites and everyday life of Tibetans, etc.

In the month of August of the same year 1899, having received a reply from the Dalai Lama via his courier, Ovshe Norzunov, Dorzhiev hastily departed for Lhasa again. He reached Tibet's capital by the end of December and was heartily welcomed there by his high Patron, who, in acknowledgment of Dorzhiev's great service, promoted him to the third rank (senior abbot rank of Mkhanché) and appointed him the "chief Khambo", with a voice in all matters of politics and religion.⁴⁸

The political life in Lhasa at that moment was unusually hectic, as the influential sector of Tibetan politics finally split between three major factions—pro-Chinese, pro-British and pro-Russian. The latter, owing to Dorzhiev's fervent agitation, very quickly took the upper hand, urging the Dalai Lama to re-orientate Tibet from China to Russia. This was an unprecedented move, since Tibet, for the first time in its history, was going to seek the protection, albeit under the terms of the legitimately Buddhist *Chö-Yön* relationship, of a Western (or rather Euroasiatic) power, which territorially was not contiguous

⁴⁷ Archive of the RGO, f. 18, op. 1. d. 40, l. 3. Kozlov's memorandum to the Main Staff, undated.

⁴⁸ Dorzhiev, *Zapiska . . .*, l. 165.

to it. At the same time the Tibetan government, according to Dorzhiev, reconfirmed its adherence to the seclusion policy, and prescribed that "this commitment be renewed periodically", which seems to have been a concession made to the anti-Western monastic sector, which was still very powerful in Tibet. As a result of these developments, the Dalai Lama considered it necessary to send Dorzhiev to St Petersburg again in March 1900, this time as his duly accredited "official representative", who was apparently to request the Tsar's consent to becoming the Patron of Tibet.

So Dorzhiev made a second trip to Russia in 1900, travelling by the same circuitous route as he had two years earlier, via India and China. On 30 September, Dorzhiev was received in audience by Nicholas II in the Livadia Palace outside Yalta, his favourite Crimean summer residence. Of the content of their conversation we know very little. According to a Soviet diplomat, L.E. Berlin (who got the story personally from Dorzhiev), the Tsar emphasized the "necessity of establishing liaison with Tibet and mutual exchange of information", and promised "support and protection to Tibet, though in rather vague terms".⁴⁹ Apart from his interview with the Tsar, Dorzhiev also had an opportunity to talk in private with the key Russian ministers—of foreign affairs, finance and war: Count V.M. Lamsdorf, S.Yu. Witte, and Kuropatkin. His own impression of the meeting he summed up as follows:

The ministers . . . were of the opinion that protection could be promised to Tibet only on the condition that a Russian consulate be established in the country, but when I explained to them that having let the Russians into her confines, Tibet would be unable to prevent the influx of other Europeans, and then they might acquire some influence which would be to the detriment of the Russians, they concurred with my opinion in principle.⁵⁰

The military question was also high on Dorzhiev's agenda during his Yalta visit. One result of the Buryat's secret parleys with the war minister was that Kuropatkin showed "readiness" (as he had two years before) to grant the Tibetans "cannons of the latest make", captured by Russian troops in Peking (at the time when they suppressed the anti-Western Boxer mutiny, together with other European

⁴⁹ Berlin 1923, p. 143.

⁵⁰ Dorzhiev, *Zapiska . . .*, l. 165ob.

powers, in July–August 1900). The cannons were most likely the Krupp guns, which had been purchased by China earlier from Germany. This was apparently a goodwill gesture on the part of the Tsar's generals, but it must also have been a good bargain for the Russians, who could thus rid themselves of a war trophy with which they were—due to their friendship with Peking—uncomfortable. Still, the transportation of this weaponry to Tibet was a serious problem, which at first led Dorzhiev to decline Kuropatkin's generous offer, although on second thoughts he agreed to accept it. "Now, after some consideration", he wrote to Kuropatkin from Yalta on 11 October 1900, "I think that if it proves to be difficult to deliver the cannons to Central Tibet, they nonetheless will be of great help for the defence and prestige of the country".⁵¹ Dorzhiev probably thought of bringing the cannons to Eastern Tibet (Kham) where they could be used for the defense of the Tibet's frontier, but it seems doubtful that he was able to realize these plans.

Dorzhiev must have been quite content with the results of his negotiations in Yalta, as he practically rushed back to Lhasa as soon as they were over in November 1900. In his Tibetan autobiography, the lama stated that he made the journey from Urga to Lhasa in just 72 days, which was certainly a record time by the standard of those days. On his way to Tibet, Dorzhiev was accompanied by Ovshe Norzunov who, like Tsybikov, this time carried with him a camera provided by the RGO. (The pictures he would take with it, along with those that Tsybikov had shot some time earlier, were in fact the first published photographs of the Forbidden City).⁵²

In Lhasa he was received "with unusual joy" by the Dalai Lama and Kalons (ministers) who, having abandoned their former doubts, "became secure in the opinion that Tibet at last found her patron,

⁵¹ RGVIA, f. 165, op. 1, d. 5304a, l. 7.

⁵² Norzunov's photographs of Lhasa were first published in the West by Joseph Deniker (see his articles: "New Light on Lhasa, the Forbidden City, With photographs by Ushe Narzunoff", in *The Century Magazine*, 66, # 4 (August 1903), pp. 544–554, and "Trois voyages à Lhasa, 1898–1901, Par Ovshe Narzounof, pèlerin Kalmouk", in *Le Tour du Monde*, Nouvelle série, 10, # 19–20, 7–14 May 1904, p. 218; also Views of Lhasa, *National Geographic Magazine*, 16, # 1 (1905), pp. 27–28). In Russia these photographs appeared for the first time as an appendix to Tsybikov's essay "O Tsentral'nom Tibete" under the title: "Lhasa i glavnye monastyr'i Tibeta v fotografiakh"/Lhasa and its chief monasteries in photographs/ in *Izvestia IRGO*, 1905, v. XXXIX, pt. III, pp. 219–227.

one more powerful and reliable than China".⁵³ To conclude a formal treaty to that effect "on more solid foundations" with Russia, the Dalai Lama then sent Dorzhiev to St Petersburg for the third time in 1901. Because of the official character of his visit, Tibet's ruler supplied him with a "letter of rank" and attached two Tibetan senior officials to his "embassy": Lobsang Khenchok and Gyaltsen Phuntsok.

Dorzhiev's 1901 Tibetan mission to Russia was the culmination of his attempts at Russo-Tibetan rapprochement. From the moment it set foot on Russian soil in the port of Odessa (on June 12), to the day when it finally left Petersburg (on July 17), the delegation had been the focus of public attention. All of its movements received detailed and positive coverage in the Russian press. Thus from columns in "Odesskie Novosti" (The Odessa News) we learn that Dorzhiev and his companions were hailed enthusiastically upon their arrival. The mayor of Odessa, Zelenov, arranged a tour of the city for his Tibetan guests, which included visits to such captivating places as a soap factory, a laundry, a bakery and a waterworks. The city's modern facilities, according to the newspaper, fascinated Dorzhiev, and he might have even thought of introducing some of the western technical innovations to Tibet. The purpose of the mission, styled as "extraordinary", was described by the paper as "a possible rapprochement and cementing of good relations with Russia". Therefore, the envoys were going "to raise the question of establishing in St Petersburg a permanent Tibetan Embassy for correct intercourse with Russia".⁵⁴

However, as soon as the Tibetan mission arrived in St Petersburg, the semi-official organ of Russian press, "Novoe Vremia", carried Badmaev's letter to the editors in which the Buryat, contrary to his earlier views, stated that "Russia was straining every effort to safeguard the integrity of the Empire of the Bogdokhan". Therefore, he hoped, Russia's Tibetan guests would be received heartily as the Bogdokhan's subjects, "who came to beg the Russian government to protect Tibet against any encroachments upon its integrity". Badmaev's piece was no doubt designed to reassure Peking about the goals of

⁵³ Dorzhiev, *Zapiska...*, l. 165ob.

⁵⁴ Odesskie novosti, 12 June 1901, # 5320.

the Tibetan mission, by telling it that Russia had no intentions of changing Tibet's current status vis-à-vis its suzerain power.⁵⁵

A few days later—on 23 June—Dorzhiev and the members of his mission were granted an audience by the Tsar at the Grand Palace in Peterhof. The Tibetan envoys presented a letter and gifts from the Dalai Lama to the Russian emperor. In return, Nicholas II handed Dorzhiev his autographed letter and gifts for the Dalai Lama. In his missive the Tsar expressed his “strong hope that, given the friendly and fully well-disposed attitude of Russia, no danger will threaten Tibet in her fortunes hereafter”.⁵⁶ The presentation of this letter marked the high point of the Tibetan Mission, and although the document, strictly speaking, did not contain any binding obligation on the Russian part, Dorzhiev took it in that particular sense:

His Majesty the Emperor received the embassy very kindly and graciously and deigned to present it with a *gramota* [charter—A.A.], stating the consent of His Majesty to secure the protection and defence of Tibet.⁵⁷

The Tsar's *gramota*, written “in solid gold letters”, produced a very strong impression on the Tibetans. But Dorzhiev was not the only one who misunderstood or rather misconstrued the Emperor's words. S.F. Oldenburg would later also claim that “in 1901, the Dalai Lama was given a written assurance by His Majesty the Emperor that Russia would stand by Tibet”.⁵⁸

The rest of the time that Dorzhiev remained in St Petersburg was divided between sightseeing and more discussions with Russia's top officials. The Tibetan mission visited the Peter and Paul Fortress, with its burial vault of the Romanov Imperial Dynasty, the Mint, where the mission members watched the process for splitting gold and silver, the famous Hermitage, and the Russian Museum. Dorzhiev and his companions also turned up at the Aeronautic Depot at the Volkovo Airfield, where they were entertained in a very special way, being carried up into the air in a hot-air balloon in the company of obliging Depot officers. This was certainly a breath-taking expe-

⁵⁵ Badmaev's Letter to the Editors (“Tibetskie gosti”), *Novoe Vremia*, 19 June 1901, # 9083.

⁵⁶ AVPRF, Kitaiiskii stol, d. 1449, l. 100.

⁵⁷ Andreyev 2001a, p. 37. See also Norbu 1991, p. 26.

⁵⁸ ARAN, f. 6, op. 1 (1905), d. 27, l. 64ob. Oldenburg to Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, 29 September 1905.

rience for the Tibetans, who had never seen either balloons or airplanes. Further, Kuropatkin permitted Dorzhiev to view the military fortifications in Kronstadt, the chief Russian naval base in the Baltic Sea, in which the Tibetan envoy apparently took a keen interest.⁵⁹

The discussions with the diplomats—Count V.M. Lamsdorf and N.G. Gartvig (director of the Asiatic Department of the foreign ministry, MID), dealt mainly with the cumbersome issue of a Russian consulate in Tibet. Dorzhiev insisted that the consulate be established outside Tibet proper, and he proposed a suitable place for it—the city of Kandin (known also as Tachienlu or Darchendo) in Szechuan Province. Kandin, situated in the valley of a navigable tributary of the Ming River, was one of the major stations on the pilgrim trail to Lhasa. It was also a brisk trade post on the caravan route from China to Tibet, with a customs-house for Chinese merchants. But, more importantly, Kandin had mail and telegraph links with Lhasa, which in Russian eyes made it a particularly advantageous spot for a Russian political agent, who could then “easily collect news on Tibetan affairs and relay these to the Russian Government”.⁶⁰ The question was finally resolved at the State Council, on 5 November 1901, following the Emperor's directive to satisfy the petition of the Tibetans.⁶¹ The purpose of the consulate, or political agency, was primarily to “establish direct and regular intercourse between the Imperial Government and the supreme Buddhist authorities of Tibet”⁶² but it was also no doubt to serve as a listening post to monitor British activities in the regions. Communications between the consulate and St Petersburg were to be effected through the Russian diplomatic missions in Urga and Peking, headed respectively by Y.P. Shishmariov and P.M. Lessar. On Dorzhiev's recommendation, the MID approved his confidant, Budda Rabdanov, as Russian consul to Tibet. However, due to some bureaucratic procrastination, Rabdanov arrived in Kandin, together with his two assistants, a secretary and an interpreter, both also Buryats, only in September 1903. He had stayed in office for almost a year, until October 1904, when the consulate was abolished by the MID.

⁵⁹ RGVIA, f. 165, op. 1, d. 5304a, l. 10. In his telegram to Kuropatkin of 7 July 1901 Dorzhiev thanked the war minister for the warm reception and permission to visit Kronstadt.

⁶⁰ RGVIA, ibid., l. 19. Dorzhiev's note on Kandin.

⁶¹ RGIA, f. 560, op. 28, d. 64, l. 5. Lamsdorf's letter to Witte, 18 July 1901.

⁶² AVPRF, Kitaiiskii stol, d. 1449, l. 1.

Dorzhiev, however, failed to conclude any formal agreement with the Russian government that would ultimately place Tibet under Russian protectorate. According to the well-known Russian diplomat, I.Ya. Korostovets, the draft of a Russo-Tibetan treaty was discussed in a special conference but was eventually rejected, "as it might have resulted in a conflict with England without offering any real advantages". This draft, he wrote further, "did not have any substantial basis and was confined, under the slogan "support for Buddhism", to intrigues against the English competition".⁶³

The conversations of the Dalai Lama's emissary with the war minister and other top brass revolved mainly around the question of Russian military aid to Tibet, which was still pending. Kuropatkin, so it seems, did not object in principle to lending Russian Buryat and Kalmyk junior officers as instructors to Lhasa, as well as providing the Tibetans with some amount of arms. It was decided that the final arrangement to that effect would be made in the following spring, when the Dalai Lama would send another mission to St Petersburg.⁶⁴ Still, there is a possibility that cannot be entirely ruled out that Dorzhiev somehow managed to obtain a quantity of outdated Burdan rifles from Russian arsenals in East Siberia and sent these secretly off to Lhasa via Urga in late 1901.⁶⁵

In his diplomatic memoirs Korostovets also mentions Dorzhiev's "fantastic plans" which implied "the Russian advance across the Himalayas in order to liberate the oppressed people".⁶⁶ However the Tsar's generals were apparently not lured by the prospect of invading India from the north at a time when the Russian troops had just occupied Manchuria, an act which looked rather ominous in the eyes of their British rivals.

Korostovets portrayed the Buryat as certainly a remarkable personality, one who knew how to gain other people's sympathy and confidence. "He spoke with marked authority and expertise, and mightily pleased the Tsar; . . . judging by his behaviour and flattering ways, one could have mistaken Dorzhiev for a Catholic priest had not his narrow Mongolian eyes and broad cheekbones betrayed his origin".⁶⁷

⁶³ Korostovets 1926, p. 208.

⁶⁴ RGVI A, f. 401, op. 5/929, d. 158, l. 124. Ulanov's memorandum to the Main Staff, 14 July 1901.

⁶⁵ See Andreyev 2003.

⁶⁶ Korostovets 1926, p. 208.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

At the same time Dorzhiev had a very superficial knowledge of European politics and its workings, and he relied too much upon secret diplomacy and undercover intrigues as instruments of political influence, something which Korostovets contemptuously referred to as "Asiatic machinations".

Upon the completion of his 1901 mission, Dorzhiev dispatched his assistants, Lobsang Khenchok and Gyaltsen Phuntsok, "with gifts and documents" to Lhasa, while he himself remained in Russia. Until early 1903 the Tibetan diplomat would be mostly engaged in religious and educational work—he gave vows and initiations to the monks and laymen, founded two monastic schools (*choiras*) and a medical one (*manba datsang*) in Kalmykia, and several Buddhist monasteries in Irkutsk Province (from whence came his ancestors and where shamanism still prevailed), and he also elaborated a new Buryat alphabet. Apart from that, in the fall of 1902, Dorzhiev made another trip to France, though the details of this journey are entirely unknown.

* * *

The Russo-Tibetan rapprochement brought about by Dorzhiev's three subsequent visits to Russia was largely a product of the Great Game. Precarious and awkward, it collapsed as soon as the Anglo-Russian contest in Asia came to an end. From the very beginning the reaction of St Petersburg to the overtures of Lhasa was restrained and wary. The Russian policymakers had no real desire to be actively involved in Tibetan affairs, even less to establish a Russian protectorate over Tibet, as this would inevitably impair their country's friendly relations with China and, moreover, lead to a major confrontation with the British. All they could offer Lhasa was moderate diplomatic support and moral encouragement, along with anti-British propaganda couched in some bizarre Buddhist prophecies (which we will discuss later). According to a Soviet historian, A. Popov, the Tibetan question that emerged on Tsarist Russia's political agenda in the early 20th century was primarily an "exotic" one, as it did not directly affect either the interests of the Russian capital or those of the Russian General Staff.⁶⁸ True as this may be, the statement overlooks one important feature: by virtue of its geographical location, Tibet, like Afghanistan and Eastern Persia, was

⁶⁸ Popov 1927, p. 102.

a natural strategic buffer, providing access to the Indian northern frontier and the British-controlled Himalayan princedoms, which inevitably made the country, in much the same way as the Afghan and Persian buffers, a convenient instrument of political pressure in the hands of Russian diplomacy. Formally, the Russian government had a fairly good pretext for activating relations with Lhasa, namely its numerous Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhists, the factor which all too soon became Russia's trump card in her bargaining with the British over Tibet. Thus while Calcutta claimed it had commercial interests in Tibet which as a neighbouring country it needed to sustain, St Petersburg would emphasize the need for its Buddhist subjects to liaise freely with their spiritual head, the Dalai Lama. Naturally enough, Count Lamsdorf tried to disclaim the political character of Dorzhiev's 1901 "extraordinary embassy" by underlining, in his interview with the British ambassador Charles Scott, the mission's "purely religious" purposes.⁶⁹ On the other hand, the opening up of Tibet to Western trade (of which there was much talk at that time), was not believed to be in Russian interests, as the only country to benefit from it would be British India (although experts such as Przhevalsky and Badmaev took the contrary view).

By turning to St Petersburg for help, the Dalai Lama, or rather his far-seeing advisor, Agvan Dorzhiev, involuntarily created a situation which immediately triggered off a new round of competition in Central Asia. All of a sudden Russia began to show some keen interest in Tibet, despite the fact that her priorities in Asia at the time lay in the Far East (in Korea and Manchuria), where confrontation with Japan was already looming. As for the British, the new Viceroy of India, Lord George Curzon, was gravely alarmed by reports of Dorzhiev's warm reception at the Russian Emperor's court in 1901. (The Buryat's earlier visit had been dismissed by him as a "fraud", as he could not believe the xenophobic Tibetan lamas would dare to send a mission to Europe). This event, placed in the context of Russia's further advance into Asia, suddenly alerted Curzon to the likelihood of a Russian protectorate over Tibet in the not-too-distant future, unless the British took measures to arrest the progress of their adversary. As he wrote to Lord George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, on 11 June 1901, "We cannot pre-

⁶⁹ Lamb 1960, pp. 255–256.

vent Russia from taking Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan, though we may delay the latter a little. But I think we can, and ought, to stop a Russian protectorate over Tibet, by being in advance ourselves..."⁷⁰ Being an ardent exponent of British forward policy and an arch-Russophobe since the days of Russia's conquest of Central Asia, the Viceroy was not the kind of man who would wait idly for the moment when the Russians would establish themselves in Lhasa, ahead of the British. In 1900 and 1901 he wrote to the Dalai Lama in an attempt to open direct communications with the Tibetan government. However, both his missives calling for discussion of the ailing Indo-Tibetan trade and frontier issues were ignored by Tibet's ruler, and the second of these was even returned to him unopened in October 1901. By this time Curzon already knew (though not as much as we do today) about the "mischievous" Buryat's renewed activities in St Petersburg, so that Lhasa's rebuff of his initiatives only aggravated his apprehension of Russian intrigue in Tibet. As a result, the Viceroy chose to adopt an active Tibetan policy, and since the Russians were also getting more and more involved in the Tibetan situation owing to Dorzhiev's persistent overtures, this ultimately drew Tibet into the Great Game.

On 18 July 1902—precisely one year after the completion of Dorzhiev's second mission to Russia—a Chinese daily, "China Times", published what purported to be the text of a secret agreement between Russia and China concerning Tibet. According to the opening clause of it, the Chinese government, "being conscious that China's power was weakening", agreed to "relinquish her entire interest in Tibet, with all privileges and benefits, to Russia, in exchange for Russian support and assistance in maintaining the integrity of the Chinese empire".⁷¹ Consequently, the Foreign Office warned the Chinese authorities "against the conclusion of any arrangement of this kind", as the British government in that event "would be certainly forced to take steps for protecting the interests of Great Britain".⁷² The agreement in question, however, proved to be non-existent, or rather its existence was vehemently denied by the Russian Foreign Ministry. The source of the report remains unknown to date, although

⁷⁰ Lamb 1959, p. 52.

⁷¹ Great Britain: FO 1904, pp. 140–141 (document # 49).

⁷² Ibid., p. 141 (document # 52).

it could have been a draft of the Russo-Tibetan treaty referred to by Korostovets.

Another source of alarm for Calcutta were the rumours of Russian military aid to Lhasa. In reality, however, no instructors were sent to Tibet by St Petersburg around that time, though Dorzhiev could have easily arranged, with Kuropatkin's consent, a delivery of some small amount of arms to the Tibetans via Mongolia, namely those antiquated Berdan rifles, *berdanky* (which were actually then being replaced in the Russian army by the more sophisticated Mosin 7.62 mm magazine rifles, the so-called *triohlineiki*). Such an arrangement does not seem to be impossible, considering the war minister's earlier grant of the "Chinese cannons" to Dorzhiev. By this "little intrigue"—if it did take place, of course—Kuropatkin might have hoped to help the Dalai Lama strengthen his primitive armed forces, and his initiative seems to have been especially timely as the bulk of the British Indian troops, including the Gurkhas were then fighting with the Boers in South Africa and thus could not be employed readily against the Tibetans. At the same time the Dalai Lama's overt advances to St Petersburg was certainly a temptation for the Russian general, one which was hard to resist.⁷³

The Anglo-Boer war indeed had some stimulating effect on Russian foreign policy. Some of the leading politicians in the country, including the war minister, believed that Russia should take advantage of the British difficulties in order to strengthen her position in the Ottoman Empire as well as in Persia and Afghanistan. As a result St Petersburg succeeded, for example, in extracting from the Shah in December 1899 a prolongation of his obligation not to grant railway concessions to foreign powers for another decade. Shortly after that (in January 1900) Russia gave the Persian monarch a loan of 22.5 million roubles, which was followed a year later by a commercial agreement which largely served Russian interests. The Russian foreign ministry also notified Whitehall in early 1900 of its decision to establish direct relations with the Afghan government and took some concrete steps towards that end.⁷⁴

The outcome of Curzon's fears and suspicions, some of which were well-founded and some imaginary, was the dispatch of a diplomatic mission to Tibet towards the end of 1903. This eventually grew into a full-fledged military expedition, under Colonel Francis Younghusband. This venture was presented to the outside world by the British as "a pacific mission" intended to conclude a treaty of friendship and trade with the Tibetan government. But in reality it was conceived as "a preventive action" to frustrate Russian intrigue in Tibet "while there is yet time".⁷⁵ Some of the Russian diplomats posted in Asia, such as the consul general in Bombay, V.O. Klemm, and the ambassador to Peking, P.M. Lessar, believed, however, that the British invasion of Tibet was in fact a counterthrust, provoked by the Russian occupation of Manchuria.⁷⁶

The story of Younghusband's expedition to Tibet in 1903–1904 is well-known⁷⁷ and need not be recounted here. Much less information is available about Russian activities with regard to Tibet in the period immediately preceding the mission's departure and during it.

On 8 April 1903 the Russian ambassador to London, Count A.K. Benckendorff, while talking to the head of the Foreign Office, the Marquess of Lansdowne, assured him that the Imperial government had not concluded any convention about Tibet, either with Tibet itself or China, and he also stated that Russia not only had no agents in Tibet, but that it had no intention of sending agents or missions there. Russia's policy, in his words, "ne viserait le Thibet en aucun cas" (had no designs whatever upon Tibet). Yet, despite this fact, Benckendorff made it a point that his government "could not remain indifferent to any serious disturbance of the status quo in that country" since it regarded Tibet an integral part of China.⁷⁸ In saying this, the Russian diplomat was probably unaware of Kuropatkin's "Tibetan intrigue", as well as of the fact that the Russian military, had, since the latter half of 1901, been giving extensive training to a Kalmyk subaltern of the 1st Don Regiment, Naran Ulanov (the

⁷³ Lamb 1989, p. 60. Letter from Curzon to Hamilton, 13 November 1902.

⁷⁴ Popov, op. cit., p. 108.

⁷⁵ Re Younghusband expedition to Tibet see Younghusband 1910; Fleming 1961; Mehra 1968; Addy 1984; Hopkirk 1990; Verrier 1991; French 1994.

⁷⁶ Great Britain: FO 1904, pp. 187–188 (documents ## 83, 84).

⁷⁷ See Andreyev 2003.

⁷⁸ See Vitukhnovsky 1958; Davidson, Filatova 2000, pp. 45–46.

one who had served as an interpreter on Dorzhiev's 1901 mission), and were planning to dispatch him as an instructor to Lhasa.

In just two years, Ulanov had completed the Officer's Cavalry school in St Petersburg and a junior course at the Academy of the General Staff. On May 30—precisely at the time when Prince Ukh-tomsky's "Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti" reported that the British were planning to send an "amicable mission" to Tibet, Ulanov came up with his own project for a Tibet expedition.⁷⁹ Compiled largely along the lines of Tsybikov's "scientific pilgrimage", this was submitted for approval to the War Minister. One of the special tasks of the journey was to charter a new and shorter route from Russia to Tibet, leading across her Middle Asian possessions via Baku, Krasnovodsk and Tashkent onto Djungaria and thence directly to Lhasa. This route was commonly used in the past by Kalmyk (Oirat) Buddhists, who were now (since the 1890s) seeking to revive their lost connection with Tibet.

Shortly after the beginning of Younghusband's military expedition to Tibet, St Petersburg was once again alarmed by the Tibetan situation. The Russian response to this British challenge also came from military quarters: Kuropatkin, who could not remain indifferent to this serious breach of the "status quo" by the British, interrupted Ulanov's preparations for his scientific journey and, with the Tsar's due approval, dispatched him instead to Lhasa in January 1904 at the head of a secret reconnaissance mission. The party consisted of seven men—the Kalmyk Cossack junior officers and clerics, which outwardly allowed them to pose as pious pilgrims. Ulanov was instructed primarily to gather intelligence on the British in Tibet and, as a sideline, to explore and charter the new route to Lhasa.⁸⁰

There was yet another, much more sinister, project that was considered by Kuropatkin at that time. Around mid-November 1903, Petr Kozlov proposed sending "an expeditionary force" to Tibet "to counter the steps of the British-Indian government".⁸¹ The Russian mission, consisting of Buryat Cossacks, was to incline the Tibetan government, following the British example, to open their country to Russian pilgrims and goods, by resorting to either diplomatic nego-

⁷⁹ Re Ulanov's Tibet expedition project see Andreyev 1997, pp. 51–60.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 9–10.

⁸¹ Archive of the RGO, f. 18, op. 1, d. 40, ll. 1–4. Draft of Kozlov's memorandum to the head of the Military-Academic Committee at the Main Staff, undated.

tiations, or, if need be, to "appropriate" military action. The reaction of Kozlov's superiors to his proposal was neatly expressed by the 2nd Quartermeister General of the Main Staff, Ya.G. Zhilinsky:

The guiding idea for the expedition: it must try to secure the same privileges for the Russians which the British are seeking by their expedition, however it should avoid, by all means possible, any clash with the British.⁸²

Kuropatkin, however, decided not to hurry events and dispatched the Kalmyk reconnaissance party to Tibet first. (Shortly before their departure, the Tsar told his minister that he, while briefing Ulanov, should encourage him to "inflame the Tibetans against the British"). But then, in February 1904, the Russo-Japanese war broke out suddenly, and the Russian generals had to give up on their Tibetan designs for the time being. In the meantime, the Ulanov mission, despite the fact that its leader died of altitude sickness en route, still made it to Lhasa. The Kalmyks, now headed by Ulanov's aide, a monk (Bakshi) Dambo Ulianov, reached the Tibetan capital in May 1905. However, they did not find there either the Dalai Lama or the British. The Tibetan ruler, along with Dorzhiev and a small retinue, had fled to Urga in Mongolia on 30 July 1904—towards the confines of the great empire of the White Tsars. As for the British, having forced the Tibetans to sign, on 7 September 1904, a humiliating bilateral treaty which effectively placed Tibet under British protection, they left for India. Still, the Russian Kalmyk mission was not in vain. While in Lhasa, Ulianov contacted high Tibetan officials, including the Regent, Ganden Tri Rimpoche (Lozang Gyaltzen Lamoshar), to whom he submitted a special report. In this he sought, by referring to an ancient Buddhist prophesy, to prove on purely theological grounds that the Buddha's teachings would flourish in the future primarily in Russia and China. Thus Tibet should seek protection of only these two powers and not of England, the country which was profoundly hostile to Buddhism.⁸³

The disastrous Russo-Japanese war distracted St Petersburg's attention from Tibet for a while. Yet the Dalai Lama, by his sudden

⁸² RGVA, f. 447, op. 1, d. 53, l. 93ob. The quotation comes from what seem to be the guidelines specially drafted by Zhilinsky for the memo to be submitted to the head of the Main Staff, V.V. Sakharov.

⁸³ Andreyev 1997a, pp. 46–47.

reappearance in Urga, just 300 versts away from the Russian border, at the end of 1904, was to remind the Russians of his country's tragic situation. He was again—and much more persistently than before—seeking the White Tsar's protection. In early 1905 he started optimistically to make plans for a visit to St Petersburg and even expressed his wish to settle "within the confines" of Russia. At the same time the Dalai Lama desired that the Russian government declare openly, "before all other nations", that they "take Tibet under their protection from England and China". The Russian foreign ministry (MID) was certainly embarrassed by these plans and after some hesitation decided that it would be best, under the circumstances, to convince the Dalai Lama to return to Lhasa. The diplomatic department even promised to provide him with a Russian Cossack escort (under Kozlov) to Lhasa. The Russian generals, on the contrary, were of the opinion that the Dalai Lama should be given temporary asylum in one of the Buryat datsangs in Transbaikalia. The commander of the Russian army in the Far East, Adjutant-General N.P. Linevich, bewailed the MID's decision, arguing that Russia thereby "will lose forever the unique opportunity to extend her political influence over the entire religious world of Mongolia", whereas "by helping to restore the religious centre in Lhasa, which is under the direct influence of the British, we'll put this weapon into their hands".⁸⁴

This opportunity, however, was irrevocably lost by timid and vacillating Russian diplomacy in this period. The Russians who had a chance to meet with the Dalai Lama in Urga in 1905 (among whom were the Buddhist scholars T.I. Stcherbatsky and B.B. Baradiin as well as P.K. Kozlov), testified unanimously to his strongly pro-Russian feelings and desire to effect a Russo-Tibetan alliance. Once he told his Buryat interpreter, Namdak Delykov, that he could bring all of the Central Asian tribes as far as the Tibetan frontiers, under Russia's rule. On another occasion, he offered St Petersburg his services as a mediator in the Russo-Japanese conflict, since the war with Japan, he believed, was exhausting Russia's resources and distracting her from Tibet. He would also talk of establishing a telegraphic link between Lhasa and Russia via Kobdo in Western Mongolia, which he thought was the shortest route. Furthermore, the Dalai Lama

⁸⁴ Linevich's telegram to the military Governor-General of the Far East, Admiral E.A. Alekseev, of 22 April 1905, commenting on the MID decision, quoted in Pavlov, Petrov 1993, p. 218.

even considered opening Lhasa to Russian scholars and commercial agents, and personally invited Kozlov, Stcherbatsky, Delykov and other Russians to accompany him to Lhasa.⁸⁵ However, the foreign ministry took little interest in such alluring proposals. As Stcherbatsky aptly put it, the Russian officials "simply wanted to wash their hands of the Dalai Lama's affair".⁸⁶ This was especially the case after they learnt that the British had allegedly cancelled their Lhasa treaty and were negotiating a new one with the Chinese in Calcutta. Utterly disappointed, the Dalai Lama had to leave Urga in September 1905, and move to the Vankuren monastery in Northern Mongolia. At the same time, he dispatched his trusted "confidential minister", Dorzhiev, to St Petersburg for further discussions with the Russian government. There the Buryat would, as it happened, settle down permanently and pose henceforth as his master's "special envoy" (*osobyi poslanets*).

Despite the fiasco of his negotiations with St Petersburg, the time the Dalai Lama spent in Urga was nonetheless not in vain, as he had an opportunity to get to know the Russians firsthand and learn many things from them. Thanks for this should go mainly to his first Western tutor, Theodor (Feodor) Stcherbatsky. While reporting on his Urga visit, the distinguished professor claimed that his conversations with the Lama concerned mainly "questions of modern politics, the alignment and significance of the Great Powers, and the nature of their interest in Tibet".

Until then, the Dalai Lama had had only semi-mythical knowledge of geography and astronomy, borrowed from Sanskrit literature. I had to explain to him briefly in the Tibetan literary language the European concepts of physical and political geography, and also to translate all the names on the maps from the Petri school atlas. Besides, on his request, I translated for him all the reports in the Anglo-Chinese press dealing with the Tibetan issue.⁸⁷

While staying in Vankuren, the Dalai Lama was approached by yet another Russian scholar, a Buryat, Badzar Baradiin. Having audited a three year course at the Oriental department of St Petersburg University (where his main tutors were Oldenburg and Stcherbatsky),

⁸⁵ ARAN, f. 725, op. 1, d. 129. Stcherbatsky's Urga Diary, May–July 1905; Archive of the RGO, f. 18, op. 1, d. 153. Kozlov's Urga Diary, 1905.

⁸⁶ Stcherbatsky diary entry, 16 June 1905.

⁸⁷ Stcherbatsky, Kratkiy otchet o poezke v Urgu (A Brief Account of my Trip to Urga) in Abaev et al. 1989, p. 252.

Baradiin then volunteered to undertake, following Tsybikov's example, a pilgrimage to Khalka Mongolia and Eastern Tibet (Amdo), in 1905–1907. Staying in Vankuren for several months allowed him to closely observe the everyday life of the Dalai Lama's court and to collect various information about Tibet's ruler, his flight from Lhasa and the British military expedition there. From Vankuren, Baradiin moved to the Labrang monastery, where he spent eight full months in the guise of a pilgrim. Interestingly, according to Baradiin, the Dalai Lama's pro-Russian feelings originated in fact under the influence of his former tutor, Chamba Rinpoche, and were later only reinforced by Dorzhiev. This strong gravitation towards Russia by the Dalai Lama and his entourage was seen by Baradiin as something absolutely "exceptional" rather than "a deeply motivated historical phenomenon":

Even [the Tibetans] from the upper class cannot say who the Russians, the English and other nations are. In his pro-Russian orientation the Dalai Lama could only refer to the prophesy of Buddha Shakyamuni that his religion in future times would spread to the north.⁸⁸

The Russo-Japanese war over, both Russia and Britain began to look actively for a final settlement of their century-long differences in Central Asia. The negotiations to that effect were conducted between the new Russian foreign minister, A.P. Izvolsky, and the new British ambassador to St Petersburg, Arthur Nicholson, from May 1906. They mainly concerned the three areas where Russian and British interests clashed most, i.e. Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet. An able politician, known for his liberal leanings and an inclination to compromise, Alexandre Izvolsky, having taken over as foreign minister in 1906, re-shaped Russia's foreign policy, making it more Western-oriented, where he believed the nation's genuine interests lay. With regard to Asia, he abandoned the extremism of his predecessors in favour of a more realistic and balanced course. The Entente Cordiale recently established between Britain and France urged St Petersburg, traditionally allied with Paris, to seek a reconciliation with its num-

⁸⁸ Archive of the Oriental Institute, St Petersburg, f. 87, op. 1, d. 1,2, l. 180. B. Baradiin, *Dnevnik puteshestvia buddiiskogo palomnika-buriata po Khalka-Mongolii, Alashani i Severo-Vostochnoi okraine Tibeta-Amdo, 1905–1907 gody*. Baradiin's journey was sponsored by the Russian committee for the exploration of Central and Eastern Asia. It was briefly described by the traveller in such publications as Baradiin 1908a, 1908b, 1909. Baradiin also published a translation of a writing by a Tibetan scholar monk Jalkhambo Dagba-Jaltsan, see Baradiin 1924.

ber one adversary. However, the defeat in the war with Japan, having seriously damaged Russian prestige in Asia, could not but weaken Izvolsky's hand at the negotiating table, compelling him to make concessions to the British, particularly in the Afghan and Tibetan questions. The foreign ministry's stance towards the latter, formulated at a special conference on 6 June 1906, was based on the assumption that Russia had no immediate interests in Tibet whatsoever. (By that time the British had also largely curtailed their Tibetan ambitions, as London had to sacrifice some of the advantages it had secured by the Younghusband mission in the terms of the Anglo-Chinese Convention which had been concluded on 27 April 1906).

The result of the negotiations was the Anglo-Russian Convention relating to Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet, signed in St Petersburg on 31 August 1907. The accord was of paramount importance, since it was intended to eliminate the antagonism of the two competing powers, and it eventually paved the way to their rapprochement and the creation of the Triple Anglo-Franco-Russian Alliance. Henceforth, for over a decade, this would serve as a deterrent (albeit not a very strong one) for Russian and British imperialists alike. According to the Convention, Persia was divided into three separate zones: the northern zone was allotted to Russia and the south-eastern to Great Britain, while the middle zone was to remain neutral. Each state pledged not to seek concessions of a political or commercial kind in the zone of the other. At the same time both Russia and Britain made a solemn declaration that they would respect the "strict independence and integrity of Persia". In regard to Afghanistan, Russia declared the country to be "beyond her sphere of influence" and bound itself to having political intercourse with Kabul only via the British government. The British, for their part, engaged not to seek any alteration of the current political status of Afghanistan.

In the agreement dealing with Tibet the signatories recognized China's claim for suzerainty over that country and engaged to respect the territorial integrity of Tibet and abstain from all interference in her internal administration. This arrangement, however, did not exclude direct relations between British commercial agents and the Tibetan authorities, as was provided for by the terms of the 1904 Lhasa convention and the subsequent 1906 Anglo-Chinese agreement. On the other hand, Buddhist subjects of both Russia and Great Britain (India) were allowed to maintain relations with the

Dalai Lama and other Buddhist hierarchs in Tibet "on strictly religious matters". The British and Russian governments also pledged not to send their representatives to Lhasa and "neither to seek nor to obtain, whether for themselves or their subjects, any concessions for railways, roads, telegraphs, and mines, or other rights in Tibet".⁸⁹ Finally, in a separate statement not included in the body of the convention, St Petersburg and London agreed not to send their scientific missions to Tibet for a period of three years.

The Anglo-Russian accord was generally hailed in both capitals as a "fair compromise" and a "further guarantee of European peace". The mouthpiece of the Russian government, "*Novoe Vremia*", while admitting that Russia lost her freedom of action in Tibet, was not distressed at all by this, since the convention provided the most essential thing—"a counterbalance to British expansion, all that the boldest Russian policy in Tibet could desire". "Hence, since the English, the immediate neighbours of the Dalai Lama, have renounced their active policy in his possessions", the paper wrote, "less so we, separated from Tibet by thousands of versts, should complain of the agreement".⁹⁰

However, Dorzhiev, who apparently saw the convention as offering better conditions in Tibet to England, was among those who complained. At the end of 1907 he submitted a memorandum to the MID and the Geographical Society, entitled "On Closer Rapprochement Between Russia, Mongolia, and Tibet". This was a project for Russia's peaceful "cultural and economic conquest" of Mongolia and Tibet to meet the "new alignment of forces and demands of life" in Asia.⁹¹ More specifically, Dorzhiev proposed to establish, much along Badmaev's lines, a private trading house either in Urga or Kiakhta, with a ramified network of affiliates throughout Mongolia, China, Tibet and Russia. In Tibet, for example, agencies of this kind were to be established in such major Buddhist centres as Kumbum, Labrang, Lhasa, Tashilhumpo, and Nagchu, since these were regularly visited by pilgrims and had large communities of monk-scholars (except Nagchu, a major frontier post north of Lhasa). Since the Anglo-

Russian convention did not bar Russian Buddhists from visiting Tibet, these towns, in Dorzhiev's thinking, were potentially accessible to Russian trade agents disguised as pilgrims.

The economic integration of Mongolia and Tibet with Russia was to be supplemented by cultural and educational initiatives, such as schools for Mongolian, Tibetan, Buryat and Russian children. Their curriculum was to include Oriental and European languages, history, literature as well as Buddhist religion. Special vocational schools were also envisioned. The important moral aspect of this integration was pinpointed by Dorzhiev in a rather emotional declaration that "Russia should become a faithful friend, teacher and protector for the Mongols and Tibetans in all matters as well as their defender from exploitation and oppression of China, Japan and England".⁹² The MID officials, however, showed little interest in Dorzhiev's proposals for creating a Russo-Mongolo-Tibetan alliance not only because of the Anglo-Russian accord, but also because Russian diplomacy tended to separate, and not to combine, the Mongolian and Tibetan questions.

In subsequent years, Dorzhiev would exert more efforts to revitalize the Russo-Tibetan rapprochement. Thus, in the spring of 1908, having returned from a secret rendezvous with the Dalai Lama at the Wu-tai monastery in China, he petitioned the MID, on behalf of his high patron, for permission to construct a modest Buddhist "prayer-house" in St Petersburg to satisfy the religious needs of the Buryat and Kalmyk residents. There was, however, a clearly political motive behind the project, as Dorzhiev sought to promote thereby, closer ties between St Petersburg and Lhasa as well as to establish the Dalai Lama's unofficial representation at the Russian Tsar's capital.

Izvolsky's reaction to the petition was quite positive because, as he put it in a letter to the minister of internal affairs, P.A. Stolypin, "our favourable attitude to this wish of the Dalai Lama will produce a deep impression on Him as well as on the numerous Lamaists within the limits of Russia".⁹³ Having secured official permission, Dorzhiev purchased a plot of land on the outskirts of the city, in Staraya Derevnia (Old Village), and launched, in late April 1909, the construction of a Buddhist datsang. The necessary funds for it

⁸⁹ For the full text of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention regarding Tibet see Goldstein 1989, pp. 829–831.

⁹⁰ *Novoe Vremia*, 13 (26) September 1907.

⁹¹ Archive of the RGO, raz. 97, op. 1, d. 11, l. 1. The memorandum is dated 20 November 1907.

⁹² Ibid., l. 2.

⁹³ Izvolsky's letter to Stolypin, 12 June 1908. See Andreyev 1992, p. 88.

were provided by the Dalai Lama as well as by Dorzhiev himself. The Buryat also set up a special construction committee, which included some outstanding Oriental scholars and artists, such as V.V. Radlov, S.F. Oldenburg, F.I. Stcherbatsky, V.L. Kotvich, and N.K. Roerich. (These people were in fact active supporters of the Tibetan cause, representing a kind of a Tibetan lobby in the near-governmental circles of St Petersburg).⁹⁴

There was certainly some ambivalence in Russia's Tibetan policy as it was pursued by the MID under Izvolsky in 1906–1910: while officially disclaiming any Russian interests in Tibet, the Russian foreign department, nonetheless, continued to liaise secretly with the Dalai Lama. On the whole, one may even speak of two distinct Russian policies vis-à-vis Tibet at that time: one was the Tsarist government's non-interference in Tibet's internal affairs, abiding by the terms of the 1907 Anglo-Russian accord, and the other one was maintenance of amicable relations with the Dalai Lama, as both the "Buddhist Pontiff" and the political leader of his country, on a strictly confidential basis. (These contacts naturally were to be effected through the medium of Dorzhiev). The ultimate goal of the latter policy was to secure Tibet's pro-Russian orientation "for the future".

A good example of St Petersburg's covert dealings with the Dalai Lama in the period immediately following the Anglo-Russian convention was the story of a secret loan granted to him by the Russian government in 1908. The Dalai Lama, via his agent in Peking, asked the Russians for a sum of 110,000 silver *lans*, money he needed to cover the expenses of his forthcoming trip to China's capital for a meeting with the Emperor. The MID again reacted to the request quite sympathetically. In his letter to the Council of ministers of 26 July 1908, Izvolsky reiterated his arguments, given earlier to Stolypin, adding that

the MID continued to have cordial relations with the Dalai Lama even after his flight from Tibet. The Dalai Lama more than once turned to us for advice on highly important political issues, informed us of his plans and sent gifts to His Majesty through his special representative. . . . In this way we have acquired the confidence of His Holiness and can rely, in the event of His return to Tibet, on His friendly attitude towards us.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ For more detail about the construction of the Buddhist temple in St Petersburg and its political implication see Andreyev 1992, 1994.

⁹⁵ RGIA, f. 560, op. 28, d. 406, l. 10. See also Andreyev 1993a.

Izvolsky also pointed out that a refusal to accept the Dalai Lama's petition might cause him to turn to Japan, and this would eventually damage Russia's interests in the neighbouring Mongolia. Accordingly, the amount requested was loaned to the Dalai Lama at 6.5% interest for a period of half a year. The ministry of finance, however, doubtful that he would be able to return the loan, insisted on a letter of guarantee, which was then jointly signed by Stolypin and Nicholas II on August 10, 1908. As a result the money for Tibet's ruler was secretly deposited in the Russo-Chinese Bank in Peking in a special account of the Imperial Russian Legation, named "Building account T".⁹⁶

A few months later, in November 1908, the Dalai Lama, now in Peking, asked for yet another loan of 250,000 *lans*. All negotiations with the bank and the Russian consulate on his behalf were personally conducted this time by Dorzhiev, who even stipulated the conditions and guarantees for this second loan. Izvolsky, of course, strongly backed the petition. His arguments, set out in a confidential letter to Stolypin, were as follows: since the Dalai Lama had initially objected to the humiliating protocol of his audience with the Chinese Emperor (i.e. performance of the kowtow), Russia's ambassador, Arseniev, had to persuade him to abide by the required etiquette in order not to antagonize the Chinese. Besides, the Dalai Lama's willingness to return to Lhasa, following Arseniev's advice, was further evidence of his friendly feelings for Russia.⁹⁷

* * *

The years 1910–1913 brought the tottering Russo-Tibetan relations to another serious juncture. The Dalai Lama, who had just returned to Lhasa in December 1909 after years of roaming in Mongolia, China and Kham (Eastern Tibet), had to flee again, as a result of the Chinese invasion of Tibet. On the pretext of policing the British trade marts at Yatung, Gyantse and Gartok (established under the provisions of the 1893 Trade Regulations and the 1904 Lhasa Convention), but seeking actually to consolidate its sovereign rule over Tibet, Peking had sent a large military force to Tibet under the command of a Manchu general, Chung-yin, earlier that year. When the Chinese troops entered Lhasa in February 1910, the Dalai Lama,

⁹⁶ Ibid., l. 28.

⁹⁷ Ibid., ll. 49–50.

with three Shapes (ministers of the government council) and 60 retainers, left the city, taking a southerly route. He initially wanted to head for Mongolia again, but the northern road was already in Chinese hands. So the Lama had no other choice but to turn for help to Tibet's former foes: with the permission of the British Indian authorities he took refuge at Darjeeling on the Sikkimese border which, by a strange quirk of fate, would be his home for the next two years. From there the Dalai Lama made desperate appeals to both the Viceroy of India, Lord Minto, and the Russian Tsar, protesting against Peking's "violation of international law" and calling on both monarchs to come to Tibet's rescue. Apparently, he was trying to derive some benefit from the Anglo-Russian entente. However his pleas met with little response from either the British or the Russians, who, because of their treaty obligations, had no particular desire to meddle in the Sino-Tibetan conflict. Still, as the Chinese intervention continued, Calcutta was getting more and more concerned, since Peking's military presence in Tibet presented a potential menace to India's north-eastern border. This fact did not escape the notice of the then Russian war minister, V.A. Sukhomlinov, who in his letter to the new head of the MID, S.D. Sazonov in late 1910, observed, perhaps not without some satisfaction, that "the waning spectre of Russian threat from the north-west has been replaced (in the minds of the British) by the appearance of the new spectre of Chinese threat in the north-east".⁹⁸

During his two-year sojourn in Darjeeling the Dalai Lama was contacted twice by the Russians, first in the late 1910 by Prof. T.I. Stcherbatsky, then on a sabbatical in India, and in March 1911 by a Russian diplomatic agent, L.Kh. Revelotti. On both occasions, the meetings took place in the presence of a British official, the Political Officer in Sikkim, Charles Bell. Stcherbatsky brought some messages from St Petersburg which he transmitted to the exiled Lama secretly, through one of his attendants. Once in the open, the professor chatted nonchalantly with his host about a variety of subjects, from the ongoing construction of the Buddhist temple and his search for Sanskrit manuscripts in the Buddhist monasteries (which was actually the reason why he wanted so much to travel to Tibet), to the well-being of the Imperial family, etc. "Whether his (the Dalai Lama's)

⁹⁸ Sukhomlinov's letter to Sazonov, 20 November 1910. Quoted in Shaumian 2000, p. 159.

appeals reach Russia I don't know", Stcherbatsky wrote to V.V. Radlov after his first audience, "since his house is protected by a double guard, so access to him is possible only with the permission of the English, and his postal and telegraphic communications are strictly censored. One gains the impression that he is being guarded like Napoleon on the Isle of St Helena".⁹⁹

Despite Calcutta's best efforts to isolate him, the Dalai Lama found ways to break through his cordons, and he succeeded in establishing a parallel link with St Petersburg as soon as he realized that the British alone could not be of much help to Tibet. Thus in one of his epistles to the Tsar he wrote:

Mr Charles Bell informed me categorically that it was fruitless to refer the issue of Tibet to the British Government, and the Viceroy, too, could not help in this matter. In spite of our repeated insistence for help, we were told in no uncertain terms that no meaningful help was possible because of the Anglo-Russian treaty. Since it appears unlikely that our cause will be taken up by the British... we are left with no choice but to place the hope of Tibet at the doorsteps of your palace, where I intend to lead a small entourage as soon as possible.

Nonetheless, the Dalai Lama expressed a vague hope that Britain and Russia or, alternatively, Russia and some other members of international community might join their efforts to find a solution to the Tibetan issue.¹⁰⁰

This new idea of a joint Russo-British (or international) arbitration of the Tibetan case was most likely prompted by his Russian advisor again. As Dorzhiev would recall later: "While [the Dalai Lama] was staying in Darjeeling, [I] communicated with [him] by intimate words and secret signs, and when he wanted by open letters, and [he] replied by signs to my proposals. When I found out that he wanted to return home I set out for Tibet".¹⁰¹

In early 1911, when the Russian government received the Dalai Lama's first messages, both Dorzhiev and Kozlov began to press the MID and the War Ministry for what seemed to be a joint Russo-British rescue operation to reinstall the exiled Lama back in Lhasa.

⁹⁹ ARAN, f. 148, op. 1, d. 60, ll. 79–81. Stcherbatsky to Radlov, Darjeeling, 26 October 1910.

¹⁰⁰ RGIA, f. 1102, op. 2, d. 110. The letter was dated 22 day of the double 10th month (1910).

¹⁰¹ Mongolian Version of Autobiography by Agvan Dorzhiev, translated into English by Caroline Humphrey, unpublished manuscript.

The idea behind the project was very simple: the British were to bring the Dalai Lama from Darjeeling to Lhasa, and the Russians in the meantime were also to send there a Buryat Cossack force, under Kozlov, to provide an escort for the Dalai Lama. In his memorandum of 10 December 1910, Dorzhiev, for his part, tried to persuade the MID "to establish a joint patronage of Russia and Britain over Tibet, based on some contractual act".

The presence of the Russian and British representatives in Lhasa would instill in the Tibetans the conviction that they need not be afraid of any measures of compulsion and that being under the protection of the two great powers, the Tibetans may, finally, settle their internal affairs peacefully....¹⁰²

The MID, however, turned down Kozlov's scheme, and it certainly did not favour the idea of placing Tibet under a joint Anglo-Russian protectorate. The stance of Russian diplomacy on the Tibetan question by the beginning of 1912 was neatly formulated by T. Shaumian as "lack of any wish to intervene in Tibetan affairs and placing responsibility for these on Great Britain".¹⁰³ Thus Nicholas II in his response to the Dalai Lama delivered by Revelotti in February 1912, advised him "to pursue a policy of good consent with the British government concerning the Tibetan affairs", as only this could lead to a "favourable resolution" of his travails.¹⁰⁴

* * *

The Xinhai revolution which began in southern China in October 1911 and the fall of the Qing dynasty significantly affected developments in both Mongolia and Tibet. On 1 December the Khalkha princes and lamas proclaimed the independence of Outer Mongolia, and on 29 December the Grand Lama of Urga, Jebtzundamba Khutuktu, was ceremonially enthroned as Mongolia's Sovereign ruler, or Bogdo Khan. The Chinese Ambans, together with their escorts, were expelled from the four main Khalkha-Mongolian *aimags* (provinces). The Russian government, though sensitive to the "national aspirations" of the Mongols, did not advocate the full independence of Mongolia, on which her new leaders strongly insisted. The MID's Mongolian agenda, as was formulated in 1911, envisaged Russia's

¹⁰² Shaumian 2000, p. 176.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁰⁴ AVPRF, Kitaiskii stol, d. 1408, l. 290.

diplomatic support of Khalkha Mongolia, "within the framework of broad autonomy, however, without breaking up with China", mediation between Mongolia and China, counteraction to the latter's military presence and colonization pursuits, and active Russian policy in the economic, financial, military and social spheres.¹⁰⁵ To implement all these tasks, Russia dispatched her representative to Urga, the then ambassador in Peking, I.Ya. Korostovets, who negotiated a treaty with the Mongolian leaders on 3 November 1912. By the terms of the agreement Russia recognized Outer Mongolia as an autonomous state and engaged to help the country to maintain its self-sustained existence, under Russian protection. At the same time, Outer Mongolia granted Russia the status of most favoured nation in trade, business, exploitation of mining and timber resources, as well as other exclusive rights and privileges.

The new Chinese Republican government, under President Yuan Shikai, which continued to regard both Outer and Inner Mongolias as integral parts of China, could not, of course, agree with such defiant infringement upon their rights. However, Peking failed in her attempts to reclaim Outer Mongolia. The Sino-Russian Declaration of 5 November 1913 confirmed in the main the Russo-Mongolian treaty, and the subsequent 1915 Kiakhta Tripartite Sino-Russo-Mongolian Agreement finally legitimized the Russian's great diplomatic victory.

In Tibet, the news of the Chinese revolution triggered a series of anti-Manchu uprisings which eventually turned into a full-scale liberation war. In early 1912 the Dalai Lama sent his 23-year old favourite, Chensal Namgang, "the Hero of Chaksam", to Lhasa to coordinate an anti-Chinese armed rebellion in conjunction with the newly-formed War Department. (Chensal Namgang, like his Master, was a Russian sympathizer and a great friend of Kozlov).¹⁰⁶ As a result of the revolt the Chinese troops were defeated and expelled (together with the Ambans) first from Central Tibet, and then the outlying regions of the country. The Dalai Lama was now free to return to Lhasa.

¹⁰⁵ Luzianin 2000, p. 47. For the Mongolian perception of these developments see Baabar 1999, pp. 130 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Kozlov met Namgang (later to be known as Tsaron Shape or Tsarong II) twice, in Urga in 1905 and in Kumbum in 1909. The latter meeting he described in detail in his travelogue, see Kozlov 1923, p. 276.

One important result of his second exile was that he and other leading Tibetans altered their attitude to the British and began to regard their powerful southern neighbour in a more positive light. The amicable relations between the Tibetan ruler and Charles Bell, his principal liaison with the government of India, eventually developed into a lasting friendship. The Dalai Lama's intimate conversations with Bell, a fluent Tibetan speaker, and a man of great erudition and tact, were educative and illuminating—in many ways like those discussions he had had earlier with Stcherbatsky and Kozlov in Urga and Kumbum. They talked, as Bell would later recount in his memoirs, on a wide range of subjects, and the Dalai Lama used every opportunity to increase his rather limited knowledge of the West and "enlarge his horizons". He wanted to learn not only about China and Tibet, but also about the chief European countries and America.

I used to give him maps of the different continents in the world, with the places of chief importance written in Tibetan. . . . He was especially interested in the Great Powers, and learned all he could about the kings and different nations of the world. . . . In India he did indeed observe British methods of administration and compare them with Chinese methods in both Tibet and China. The Chief Ministers were naturally interested in the revenues of Nepal, Sikkim, Kuch Behar and other States that they knew or had heard about. They were very emphatic that the Indian states, being made safe by the British power from external aggression, and granted freedom by the same power in their internal administration, were in an ideal position. They sighed and said, "That is how we should like Tibet to be".¹⁰⁷

Bell, for his part, learned from the Dalai Lama "the inmost details" of Tibetan politics, "hitherto a subject closed to outsiders", as well as about "the mysteries of their complicated religion". These friendly contacts significantly contributed to the improvement of mutual understanding and closer ties between the two countries, whereas Russia in the same years, having concentrated on Mongolian affairs, was clearly drifting away from Tibet.

In the summer of 1912, the Dalai Lama met with his faithful *tsan-shaw* once again, this time in Phari-dzong, on his return journey to Lhasa. Dorzhiev, travelling by a northern route via Urga, where he had attended the Bogdo-gegen's enthronement ceremony, had to

¹⁰⁷ Bell 1987, pp. 136–137.

detour Lhasa to avoid the severe fighting still going on there. Their rendezvous in Phari was a brief one. The Dalai Lama and Dorzhiev then travelled together as far as the Samding Monastery, where the Buryat left to proceed to Lhasa. After spending some time in the Tibetan capital Dorzhiev journeyed back to Russia to continue his diplomatic mediation. Before his departure, he, however, paid a short visit to the Samding monastery for more confidential talks with the Dalai Lama.¹⁰⁸ This was in fact their last meeting: they would never see each other in person again.

These facts come from Dorzhiev's Tibetan memoirs, whereas his report submitted to the Russian authorities in early 1913 gives a somewhat different version of the events. According to that document, Dorzhiev met with the Dalai Lama at Kalimpong (Galan-pu), and thence they proceeded together to Lhasa. There, upon the conclusion of the truce between the Tibetans and the Chinese, the Dalai Lama was restored in his spiritual and temporal powers, and he then proclaimed Tibet's independence. This, if we are to believe Dorzhiev, must have taken place some time in the early fall 1912(!), since his Russian report was dated 5 January 1913.

The Dalai Lama's first and foremost concern at this juncture was strengthening his country's armed forces, and therefore he arranged with the Buryat that he would leave behind his three man Buryat Cossack escort, to be hired in the capacity of military instructors. These were Tsyren-Dylyk Ganjurov, Budajap Budaev, and Budajap Munkuev. Since the arrangement ran contrary to the 1907 Convention and might lead to British protests, Dorzhiev assured the Russian authorities in Transbaikalia that the Cossack presence in Lhasa "would be kept in greatest secrecy" by the Tibetan government. Besides, the Buryats, he reasoned, were practically indistinguishable from the natives, since they spoke fluent Tibetan and Mongolian and were dressed in indigenous clothing.¹⁰⁹ So this was how the Russian instructors came to stay in Lhasa.

Returning to Russia, Dorzhiev carried with him the Dalai Lama's two letters addressed to the Tsar and the Russian Government, together with gifts for Russian and Mongolian officials, as well as 50,000 silver *lans* for the Petersburg Buddhist temple and many sacred

¹⁰⁸ Norbu 1991, pp. 38–39.

¹⁰⁹ RGVA, f. 2000, op. 1, d. 7668, l. 58, 58ob. Dorzhiev's memorandum, Troitskosavsk, 5 January 1913.

burhans, the divine images to be installed therein. Having reached Urga, the Buryat, acting as the “Tibetan plenipotentiary” (apparently on the instructions of his master), concluded a Mongol-Tibetan agreement with the autonomous Mongolian government on 29 December 1912 (signed 11 January 1913). When handing it over to the Russian officials (Korostovets), he pointed out that the treaty was initiated by the Dalai Lama, who had long aspired to unify the two related Buddhist peoples. The MID, nonetheless, was nonplussed, viewing the Dalai Lama’s (or rather Dorzhiev’s) initiative as a “crafty trick” designed to lure Russia into the Tibetan question. The arrangement, which seemed quite innocent at first glance, perfectly fitted in with Dorzhiev’s overall scheme for Russo-Mongol-Tibetan economic and cultural integration. Articles 1 and 2 of the nine-point agreement acknowledged the independence of the two states, along with the sovereign positions of their rulers, the Dalai Lama of Tibet and the Grand Lama of Mongolia. Further provisions went on to state that both nations, by mutual consent, would promote the propagation of the precious faith of the Buddha, provide mutual assistance at all times in the event of any internal or external threats, and protect their subjects who might be travelling across Mongolian and Tibetan territories for religious, political and educational reasons.¹¹⁰

The British ambassador in St Petersburg, George Buchanan, as soon as he learnt about the Mongol-Tibetan agreement, lodged a protest to the MID, so that the new Russian foreign minister, S.D. Sazonov, had to reassure him by stating that the Russian government disregarded the treaty and would continue to adhere firmly to the 1907 Convention. He further stated that Dorzhiev’s new visit to St Petersburg could not in any way alter Russia’s stance on Tibet, the more so that the Buryat was not even officially recognized as the Dalai Lama’s representative. This was apparently true, as Sazonov personally denied an audience to Dorzhiev, with the result that the Tibetan envoy had to present the Dalai Lama’s missives and gifts to the head of the Council of ministers, V.N. Kokovtsev.

Sazonov was portrayed by Buchanan in his diplomatic memoirs as a “staunch friend of Great Britain”, who remained “a loyal and zealous collaborator for the maintenance of the Anglo-Russian under-

¹¹⁰ For the Russian text of the Mongolo-Tibetan agreement see RGIA, f. 821, op. 150, d. 430, l. 20. The English translation can be found in Bell 2000.

standing to the last days of his tenure as Foreign Minister” in 1916.¹¹¹ That understanding was seen as “the Alpha and Omega of his policy”, which was certainly the case, as it was under Sazonov that the Russian and British governments had made a secret deal regarding their special interests in Outer Mongolia and Tibet. In this, London acknowledged the former as a sphere of Russian interest and St Petersburg the latter as a British sphere. Hence Sazonov strove to escape from the cumbersome Tibetan problems which he believed should now be entirely Britain’s, and not Russia’s headache. The conclusion of the 1912 Russo-Mongolian agreement was a clear enough message to Whitehall that the Sino-Tibetan differences could be settled following the Russian suit. As Sazonov wrote to the Russian ambassador in London on 16 December 1912,

we would regard as advantageous the conclusion of a direct agreement between the British Government and the Dalai Lama, provided it does not infringe on our Tibetan convention, since such a treaty would establish parallelism vis-à-vis the Chinese Government between our stand on the Mongolian question and that of Britain on the question of Tibet.¹¹²

The first of the Dalai Lama’s letters addressed to the Tsar and the Russian government dealt with questions relating to the Russo-Tibetan religious and cultural ties. The Tibetan sovereign requested the Russian authorities to appoint the clergy—15 fully ordained lamas—to serve in the St Petersburg Buddhist temple, which was then still under construction. He also petitioned them to enroll a few Tibetan boys, whom he had sent with Dorzhiev, into Russian educational establishments.

In his other letter, the Dalai Lama sought the solution to strictly political issues, such as recognition of Tibet’s independence by Russia and Britain and the taking of the country under their joint protection, a dispatch of Russian and British diplomatic agents to Lhasa to guarantee Tibet’s safety, a sale of Russian arms and the lending of Russian instructors to Lhasa, granting a loan to Tibet of up to one million roubles through the Peking branch of the Russo-Asiatic bank, and, finally, legalization of Dorzhiev’s position as the Tibetan

¹¹¹ Buchanan 1923, p. 92.

¹¹² RGIA, f. 560, op. 28, d. 64, l. 104. Sazonov’s secret telegram to the Russian Ambassador in London, 16 December 1912.

representative in Russia.¹¹³ The Dalai Lama, however, realized well enough that his requests were apparently at odds with the 1907 Convention. Therefore he proposed that the Russian Government either enlist the assistance of other Great Powers or, alternatively, as the agreement no longer fitted the current situation, to revise it in order to secure the territorial integrity of Tibet.

These renewed attempts by the Dalai Lama to urge both Russia and Britain to stand jointly as guarantors for Tibet's independence, as well as his desire to make them revise the Anglo-Russian accord, met with little sympathy in the Russian diplomatic department. In his letter to Kokovtsev of 25 April 1913, Sazonov expressed—in no uncertain terms—his attitude to the Tibetan question:

Russia has no interests in Tibet other than those of her Buddhist subjects, the Buryats and Kalmyks, who see in the Dalai Lama their spiritual leader. But even this purely religious concern should not be encouraged as this might provoke separatist tendencies among the Russian Buddhists.

In contrast to Russia, Britain through her Indian possessions is contiguous to Tibet, has long been trading with that country and had concluded a series of international acts with both Tibet and the Chinese Government.

In 1907 the Imperial Government concluded a special agreement on Tibet with the British, by the terms of which Tibet was recognized as a part of China, and both Russia and England engaged themselves not to attempt to include Tibet into their spheres of influence. Thus, without sacrificing seriously any of her own interests, Russia put a limit to British (attempts) to gain a foothold in Tibet. Any revision of this agreement in the direction desired by Dorzhiev is clearly impossible. The British could agree to the revision only with a view to expanding their influence in Tibet and further restricting our possibilities of gaining influence there. . . . If, however, the British Government, while revising the 1907 agreement, would offer us a compensation in other regions, then I would not certainly raise any objections to such a revision.¹¹⁴

These considerations were communicated by Sazonov to the Emperor, who largely concurred with the arguments of his foreign minister. Buchanan, for his part, also raised the question of revising the 1907 Convention during one of his audiences with Nicholas II. Nevertheless, the convention was not amended and remained in force until the Bolshevik revolution, five years later.

¹¹³ Ibid., I. 107. See also AVPRI, Kitaiiskii stol, d. 1476, ll. 95, 97.

¹¹⁴ RGIA, ibid., I. 118.

Sazonov was not the only one who perceived the Tibetan situation in early 1913 as devoid of any prospects for Russia. The Russian consul general in Calcutta, K.D. Nabokov, also argued that the Dalai Lama, by his sojourn in India and subsequent conduct "gave the English such a weapon that this game will be surely won by them. . . . It seems doubtless to me that England wants to continue having "la haut main" in Tibetan affairs, and that the circumstances are quite favourable to her". Taking a sober view of the situation in Central and Near Asia, the Russian diplomat believed that time was opportune for a better bargain with the British.

If a question were to arise about revising our agreement with England, our recognition of her right to penetrate into Tibet would now have the character not of a forced admission of the fact, but of a voluntary concession, at the cost of which we could demand appropriate compensations where they are needed most, i.e. on the Afghan frontier. . . . In Afghanistan, the 1907 Convention cannot make us happy, and it is unlikely that we will tolerate the present status quo there for long. It seems to me that if we miss now this favourable opportunity for the simultaneous revision of the Afghan and Tibetan clauses of the agreement, we will lose in Tibet, and gain nothing from England in Afghanistan.¹¹⁵

The conclusion drawn unanimously by both Russian and British diplomats in early 1913, after the Dalai Lama's reinstatement in Lhasa, was that the future of Tibet depended solely on the agreement between London and Peking. This simple solution, as it was, precluded any Russian participation in the final settlement of the Sino-Tibetan dispute. At the same time St Petersburg spared no pains to consolidate the Russian position in Autonomous Outer Mongolia by gradually turning the country into an efficient and strong buffer between Russia and China. The Russians would sell large quantities of arms to Urga and send their instructors there. They would loan huge amounts of money to the Urga government for the upkeep of the newly established Mongolian armed forces (the Mongolian Brigade), as well as to local princes and officials. They would also support a number of commercial projects designed to modernize the neighbouring state, such as the construction of the Urga-Kiakhta

¹¹⁵ RGIA, ibid., I. 110, 110ob. Nabokov's dispatch to the MID, 27 December 1912.

railroad and the Kalgan-Urga motor road as well as the introduction of Western-style postal, telephone and telegraph communication systems.

There were also incidental benefits to Russia from this relationship; after the beginning of the Great War the Ministry of Agriculture would send an expedition to Outer Mongolia under P.K. Kozlov for the purchase of beef cattle for the acting Russian army.

This latest delimitation of the spheres of influence in Central Asia ultimately left Tsarist Russia a spectator at the tripartite Sino-Indo-Tibetan conference convened at Simla in the latter half of 1913. The purpose of the Simla negotiations was to adjust the relationship of Tibet and China, with Great Britain as mediator, as well as to formalize the Indo-Tibetan boundary in the Assam Himalayas. It was not easy to reconcile Tibet, after it had proclaimed its independence, with the republican China of Yuan Shih-kai, which continued to regard the country as a "Chinese province" and denied any political role for its Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama. The British government was also reluctant to acknowledge Tibet's full independence because of the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention, and the best they could do was to insist on the internal autonomy of Tibet within the old paradigm of China as a suzerain power, as long as treaty obligations were duly performed between Tibet and India.

Russia's diplomats were naturally curious to know about what was going on behind the closed doors at Simla, but they were deprived of any firsthand information, despite a British promise to keep them fully posted. The Dalai Lama and Tibetan government, of course, invited Dorzhiev to participate in the discussions, but his attendance was not authorized by the MID on the grounds that it might compromise Russia.

In May 1914, the British ambassador transmitted the draft of the Simla convention to Sazonov for approval, as previously agreed. According to the document, the historical territory inhabited by Tibetan tribes was divided into Outer and Inner Tibet. The former, being the dominion of the Dalai Lama, was recognized as fully autonomous, although under nominal Chinese suzerainty. The latter, including the Eastern part of the country adjacent to China, and the Kokonor area, was to remain under effective Chinese control. Peking promised to respect the territorial integrity of Outer Tibet and to abstain from interference in her administration. However, a Chinese representative (Amban), with a suitable escort, was to be re-

installed in Lhasa in accordance with age-old practice. The British government, on the other hand, engaged "not to station military or civil officers in Tibet nor troops (except the Agents' escorts), nor to establish colonies in that country". Their trade agent at Gyantse was, however, allowed to visit Lhasa with his escort, whenever necessary.

The Russian foreign minister, when presented with the draft of the agreement, objected to several clauses in it since they contradicted the 1907 accord, necessitating a few minor alterations, such as deletion of Article X which entitled the British to resolve differences between China and Tibet by an "equitable adjustment". After St Petersburg's approval, the Simla Convention was signed by the representatives of Tibet and Britain, the Dalai Lama's Chief Minister, Lonchen Shatra, and the Indian Foreign Secretary, Sir Henry McMahon, while the Chinese representative, Ivan Chen, only initialled it. The agreement, however, was subsequently repudiated by Peking. Therefore the British and Tibetan delegates signed an Anglo-Tibetan Declaration on July 3 in which they acknowledged the Convention as binding to their governments, as well as new Trade Regulations to replace the earlier arrangements of 1893 and 1908.¹¹⁶

Another important outcome of the Simla conference was a new Indo-Tibetan border, the McMahon Line, being indicated on a map attached to the Notes of 24 and 25 March 1914, exchanged between Sir Henry McMahon and the Lonchen Shatra. However, the validity of this special arrangement, kept secret from the Chinese (and, naturally, the Russians as well), was open to serious doubt, be it only for the reason of the 1907 Convention, which precluded any direct Anglo-Tibetan contacts without the Chinese government as intermediary.

The Simla Agreements were received rather sourly in Lhasa, as the Tibetans did not get what they were expecting so eagerly; independent status for their country. The powerful clerical circles were especially unhappy with the fact that some Tibetan territories in the Assam Himalayas, particularly the Tawang monastery and the surrounding area, had been ceded to the British by the Tibetan representative. As a result Lonchen Shatra was disgraced and lost his key post at the Lhasan government.

¹¹⁶ For the text of the Simla Agreements see Goldstein 1989, pp. 832–841.

Still, Tibet had remained, since 1913, a *de facto*, if not *de jure*, independent state under the Dalai Lama's sovereign rule. Faced with the new and strongly challenging political realities, the Dalai Lama would concentrate his efforts in the next few years in three directions: administrative (improvement of the system of state management), military (reorganization of the Tibetan army), and diplomatic (seeking a definitive settlement with Peking, either along the lines of the Simla agreement, or through conclusion of a new agreement). The most urgent issue of the moment, as long as fighting continued in Eastern Tibet (on the Kham-Szechuan frontier) and there remained a threat of a new Chinese invasion, was that of a military reform. Until 1913, Tibet had no regular army of her own. Her armed forces numbered about three thousand untrained and poorly equipped soldiers. Suffice to say that the Tibetans were then armed mainly with primitive matchlock guns and lances.

In 1913, upon his return to Lhasa, the Dalai Lama appointed his favourite, Chensal Namgang, as Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army. (In the same year the young man, having married the daughters of the late Tsarong Kalon, inherited thereby the latter's aristocratic titles, family rights and numerous estates). Shortly after that, Tsarong (or, more correctly, Tsarong II) would become one of the four heads (Kalons or Shapes) of the Kashag, the highest government office in Tibet, which would make him into a very powerful figure in Lhasan politics.¹¹⁷

The first thing that Tsarong did as Commander-in-Chief was to increase the Tibetan troops by one thousand men. His next priority was their arming and training. The former task was partly solved in 1914 when the British granted the Tibetans 5000 rifles of the old "Lee Metford" and the new "Lee Enfield" models, with half million rounds of ammunition. But this was certainly not enough. So in 1915 Tsarong requested the Indian government for a new supply of British arms to Tibet, but they refused, though agreeing at the same time to grant Lhasa an additional quantity of ammunition. This caused Tsarong to look for other sources of modern Western weaponry, and he turned, naturally enough, to Russia. In the same year, 1915, he addressed his request to the Russian consul-general in Urga, A.E. Miller, via a special messenger asking for 1000 Russian rifles "to

¹¹⁷ Re Tsarong Dzasa see Spence 1991, pp. 34–57.

safeguard Tibet from possible encroachments of China". However, the consul denied the request, advising the Tibetan emissary "to apply to the British government via the Indian authorities" instead.¹¹⁸ The rebuff must have disappointed the Dalai Lama and probably signalled to him that Russia would not be of much help to Tibet under the circumstances.

As for the military training of Tibetan troops, we know that Tsarong formed four Tibetan regiments which were drilled according to the British, mixed Chinese and Mongol, Japanese, and Russian military systems. The British instructors were those few commanding officers from Gyantse where British troops (or rather escorts) were stationed to protect trade marts. Their Russian counterparts were the above mentioned three Buryat Cossacks and one Mongol officer, Tenpai Gyaltzen, who had been trained in the Russian army. The drilling practice, as far as is known, took place in the vicinity of the Radeng monastery, north of Lhasa. Interestingly, Tsarong wrote a letter to Kozlov about that time from Radeng, asking to send him some Russian military manuals and regulations.¹¹⁹ Two years later (in 1915), according to W.D. Shakabpa, these four regiments were brought to Lhasa where they "were made to parade, manouver, and engage in competitive exercises before the Dalai Lama, officials of the government, and the public". The British regiment showed more proficiency than the other three, hence it was decided that the Tibetan army would be modeled after the British pattern.¹²⁰

Apart from the army reform, the Dalai Lama tried to introduce some other Western innovations into the country, such as the printing of paper money and postage stamps, and mintage of silver and golden coins. In addition, in 1913, he sent four Tibetan boys to England under one of his advisors, Kusho Lungshar, to receive Western technical education. This act was apparently to balance his earlier initiative of sending young Tibetans (probably of the same number) to Russia.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ See Berlin 1922, p. 363.

¹¹⁹ Archive of the RGO, f. 18, op. 3, d. 465, l. 2. Russian translation of Tsarong's letter to Kozlov from Radeng, dated 18 day of the 10th month (1913?). This is one of Tsarong's two letters to Kozlov, preserved in the archive. The first one, dated 29 May 1909, also in the Russian translation, was apparently written when the Dalai Lama's party was in Tsaidam, on the way to Lhasa.

¹²⁰ Shakabpa 1988, p. 259.

¹²¹ One will find almost no information about these Tibetans in Russian sources.

British aid to Lhasa in this early period of Tibet's independence was rather scanty. The reason why Britain could not afford more assistance to her Himalayan neighbour was primarily her commitment to the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention. Thus the Foreign Office turned down in 1915 (as it would in subsequent years), Charles Bell's petition to be allowed to accept the invitation of the Dalai Lama to visit Lhasa, as this act could be qualified as interference in Tibetan affairs by St Petersburg.¹²²

Analyzing British policy with regard to Tibet in the period "after Simla" (1914–1917), the British historian, Alastair Lamb, remarks that it was divided into "two streams". On the one hand, the British officers in India directly responsible for the conduct of relations with Lhasa argued that "China having opted out of diplomatic settlement, the Tibetans could now be treated to all intents and purposes as de facto independent; and any matters relating to the administration of the border between British India and Tibet could be carried out bilaterally without reference to China at all". On the other hand, the British diplomatic officials, primarily those from the British Legation in Peking, believed that some new agreement with the Chinese would sooner or later have to be negotiated "in order to define the nature of Chinese interests in Tibet and the limits of that territory adjacent to Tibet which was under direct Chinese administration". However both of these lines met with the same obstacle of the Anglo-Russian Convention, which somehow had to be surmounted.¹²³

As for the Simla Convention, it was not put into operation and soon became, as was aptly put by Lamb, "a document of mainly academic interest" in the eyes of the British Indian authorities.

In the meantime, the Tsarist Russian administration had what was apparently its last official contact with Lhasa. In the early fall of 1915 the Urga consul-general, A.Ya. Khionin, received a letter from the Dalai Lama (dated the 18th Day of the 5th Moon of the Wood Tiger year), together with a present of five lans of gold. This was delivered by one Chambal Choingyur, probably the same Tibetan courier who had requested a supply of Russian arms to Lhasa. The

Kozlov in the diaries of his last expedition to Mongolia says that they suffered badly from nostalgia and prematurely died—"went on a distant journey of no return". P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, Journals of the 1923–1926 Mongolian expedition, entry for 9 November 1924.

¹²² Lamb 1989, pp. 19–20.

letter was merely a friendly message telling the Russians that the Dalai Lama's efforts to consolidate his spiritual and secular rule were "fully successful". Khionin, in his curt reply written on 7 November, on Sazonov's instructions, expressed his joy in connection with these good tidings, by adding that he ascribed the progress to the "policy of harmony with the Government of Great Britain, an ally of the Russian Imperial Government, that was wisely pursued by His Holiness".¹²³

The only concern of the Russian official relating to Tibet at that time was the administrative status of the Tibetan residents in Outer Mongolia. The Peking Government claimed they were under Chinese jurisdiction, whereas the Mongolian Government insisted that the Tibetans should continue to be looked after by the Department of Spiritual Affairs and Property, the *Shantszodba*, as had been the case before the Mongolian revolution. Both Khionin and Sazonov subscribed, naturally, to the latter view.

As for the Russian Buddhists, they continued to liaise with the "Land of Joo" and its spiritual leaders. Their pilgrimages, as with those of the Khalkha Mongols, were largely stimulated by the Dalai Lama's return to Lhasa. Politically, such visits presented no problem, now that the Great Game was over. The 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention allowed the Buryats and Kalmyks "to enter into direct relations on strictly religious matters with the Dalai Lama and other representatives of Buddhism in Tibet". In practice, however, the Buryats and Kalmyks often had difficulties when visiting the Buddhist Mecca, though these were created not by the British, as one might suspect, but the Tibetans themselves. In his dispatch to St Petersburg of 18 February 1914, the Russian consul general wrote:

The semi-literate pilgrims to Lhasa—the Siberian Buryats—are detained at the border (by the local Tibetan administration), and every time I have to interfere personally so that they be allowed to cross the border and proceed to Lhasa.¹²⁴

Thus, despite Russia's complete withdrawal from Tibetan affairs, the Russian diplomatic officers in Urga and Calcutta (the "men on the spot"), had occasionally to enter into contacts with the Tibetan senior

¹²³ AVPRI, Kitaiskii stol, d. 670, l. 2, 3. Khionin's letter to the Dalai Lama of 7 November 1915.

¹²⁴ Troianovsky 1918a, p. 27.

officials, including the Dalai Lama. And there was also Dorzhiev, who tried to keep alive the Russo-Tibetan connections, at least along religious lines.

On 10 August 1915, upon the completion of construction of the Buddhist temple in Petrograd (as the city was renamed in 1914), Dorzhiev personally inaugurated the Datsang by giving it a Tibetan name: *Kun la brtse mdzad thub dbang mchos 'byung ba'i gnas*—The Source of the Loft Dharma of the Lord-Hermit Compassionate to All Beings. From 1910 to 1916 the Buryat also built two residential houses close to the temple quarters. One of these, a four-storied building originally designed as a Buddhist hostel, was soon converted into a hospital for Buryats serving in the people's volunteer corps in Archangel. As a true Russian patriot, Dorzhiev, together with the Bandida Khambo Lama of the East Siberian Buddhists, Dashi Itigelov, established an all-Buryat committee immediately after the outbreak of the Great War to collect donations for the Russian army in field. Also, special *jud-khurals* were regularly conducted in the temple in these years to bring victory to Russian arms.

The burdens of war time, primarily the severe food shortage, made it unbearably hard for the Buryat and Kalmyk monks to remain in Petrograd. In 1917, one by one, they all abandoned the city and returned to their homelands. This was the year when Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in the wake of the February revolution and when the Bolsheviks staged the October coup which brought them to power in Russia.

CHAPTER TWO

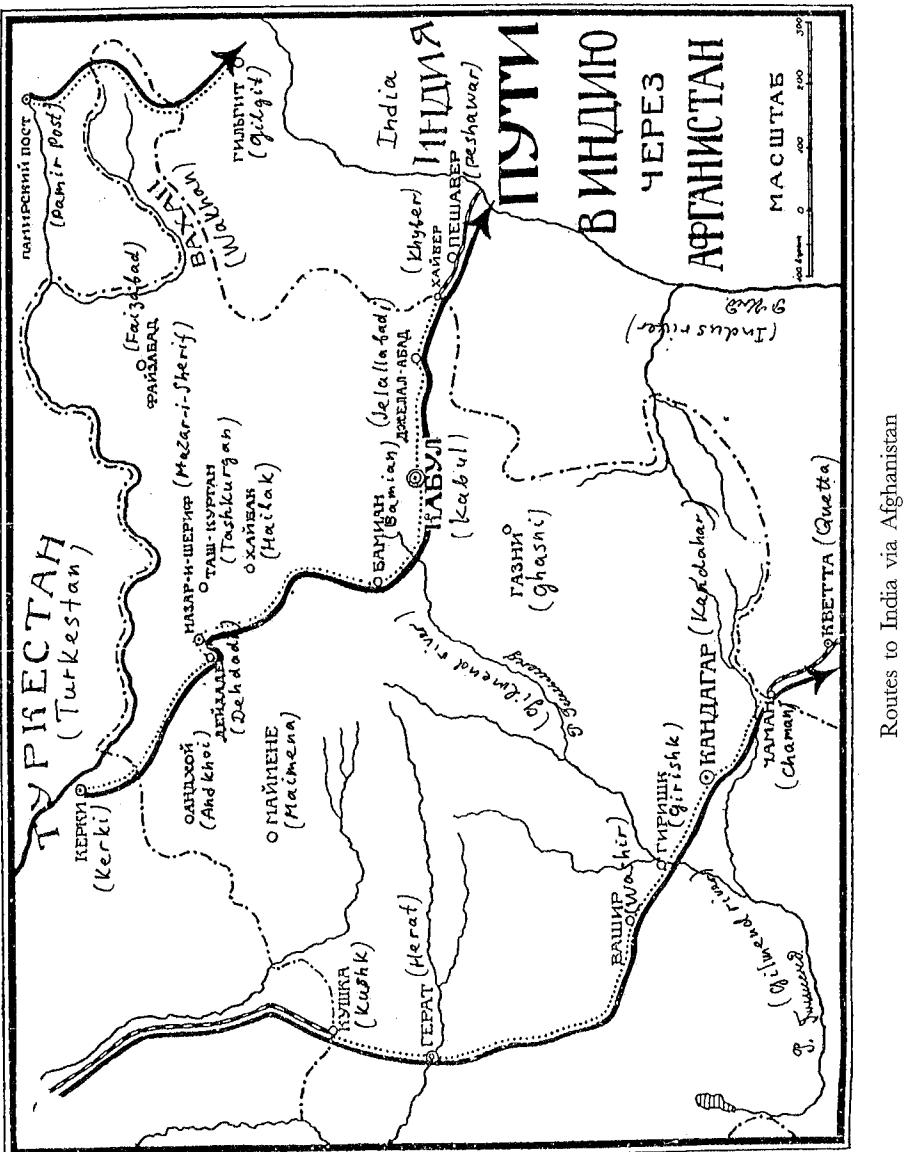
THE BOLSHEVIKS ENTER THE SCENE

In 1915–1916, while doing extensive readings on the political economy of capitalism, V.I. Lenin occasionally came across a few references in the Western literature to treaties concluded by Russia, China and England with regard to Tibet in the early 20th century. The reliability of these sources was never questioned by him, hence the exiled leader of the Bolshevik party came to believe in a non-existent “secret” Russo-Chinese agreement on Tibet from 1902, by which Tsarist Russia allegedly established its protectorate over the latter. He was also convinced that his country had ceded Tibet to England under the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention. These “facts” led him to a conclusion that “Tsarism and all the reactionary elements in Russia . . . are striving towards one goal—to beat England in Asia (to take away from her the entire Persia, the entire Mongolia, the whole of Tibet etc.”).¹ A few years later, in 1919, Georgyi Chicherin, the head of the Soviet People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (commonly abbreviated as Narkomindel or NKID), would assert much in the same vein that the 1907 convention “was produced by the hands of Anglo-Russian metallurgical imperialism . . . which placed Tibet under the English sway”.² However, as we have seen before, the treaty in fact tied the hands of the “English imperialists” rather than giving them “carte blanche” in Tibet.

As soon as the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia, they immediately annulled as “predatory” all the treaties which had been previously concluded by Tsarist Russia with Great Britain and other major powers in the period of the “imperialist partition” of the world. This move was part of the Soviet government's propagandist campaign to do away once and for all with what they called “secret diplomacy” and its vicious “conspiratorial methods”. Curiously enough,

¹ Lenin 1958–1965, vol. 28 (1962) (“Notebooks on Imperialism”), p. 492; vol. 30 (1962) (“On the separate peace”), p. 188. One of the sources of Lenin's information on Tibet was B.L. MacKay, *China, die Republik der Mitte: Ihre Probleme und Aussichten*, Stuttgart-Berlin-Cotta, 1914.

² Chicherin 1961, p. 96.



Routes to India via Afghanistan

in late 1917–early 1918, Narkomindel had published a few dozen of these “secret treaties” and included among them the 1907 Convention concerning Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet.³ This suggests that the Bolsheviks were probably unaware of the fact that right after its ratification the full text of the treaty had appeared in several Russian newspapers, including the semi-official “Novoye Vremia” (New Times).⁴

That this incipient Soviet interest in the far-off region of Central Asia was generated largely by the turbulent developments on the Indian subcontinent is evidenced by an article in the Moscow daily “Izvestia” (The News) on September 27, 1918, headlined “In India and Tibet”. This spoke quite emphatically of the struggle begun by the Tibetans against their “foreign oppressors”, following the Indian example:

In the heart of Asia, in the sacred Tibet, north of India, goes the same struggle. Taking advantage of the feebleness of the Chinese administration, this forsaken land raised the banner of uprising for self-determination.

In the opinion of the writer of the article, the Tibetans “suddenly remembered” that in 1914 they had signed a treaty with the British, that “guaranteed them independence”, which was a clear allusion to the abortive Simla convention. By this agreement the British had allegedly tried to placate the Tibetans, “fearful of the inner ferment in the vicinity of India”, although they “did not ratify it”(?!). That treaty “existed at least on paper”, as long as the Chinese republic retained its independence. “But” the Bolshevik observer sarcastically concluded

now that China has completely fallen into the hands of the Allied capitalists, the Indian government recalled that Tibet had always gravitated economically towards India. Therefore, taking into account the fact that the revolutionary movement can easily spread along the Yangtze river to Tibet, given the growth of revolution in the south of China, and that the authority of the Peking government in Lhasa is reduced to naught, [it decided] that the restoration of “order” there [in Tibet] must belong henceforth to the English alone.⁵

³ Narkomindel 1917, pp. 163–165. Also Troyanovsky 1918. For the English translation see OIOC L/P&S/II/136 P 2888/1918 Russia: the Bolshevik Blue Book on India, 1918–1919.

⁴ Novoye Vremia, 13 (26) September 1907.

⁵ A. Alek., “V Indii i Tibete” (In India and Tibet), Izvestia, 27 September 1918. The author of the article was probably Aleksandr Alekseevich Voznesensky, who would later teach political economy at the IJViA and the university in Leningrad.

This piece of hot news from Tibet, actually the first Soviet word about the Lamaist country, is a typical example of early Bolshevik revolution-inspired propaganda. In reality there was nothing like an “anti-British uprising” in Tibet at that time, although the Tibetans and the Chinese were engaged in a new round of hostilities on the Kham-Szechuan frontier in 1917–1918. However, the Bolsheviks could hardly have known of the conflict, the more so as “*Izvestia*” discussed the struggle of the Tibetans with the British, not the Chinese. (Their adversary, the White Russian government of Admiral Kolchak at Omsk, for example, only learnt about the fighting in Szechuan via their military agent in Peking a year later).⁶ In general, the Bolsheviks’ knowledge of the political situation in the countries of “awakening Asia” (to use Lenin’s term), had been very scarce and fragmentary for quite a long period of time due to the information blockade of Soviet Russia caused by the civil war. Still the Soviet leaders firmly believed that the Russian proletarian revolution had triggered off a strong national liberation movement everywhere in the East, hence in Tibet too!

Despite its clearly propagandist character, the column on Tibet in a September issue of “*Izvestia*”, was prompted, so it seems, by a concrete Tibet-related fact, something “*Izvestia*” readers could not know—the recent release from the notorious Butyrki prison in Moscow of the Dalai Lama’s former emissary to the Tsar, Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev. The Buryat was arrested, together with his two Kalmyk companions, at the railway station Urbach, not far from Saratov, some time during the summer of 1918, on suspicion of attempting to smuggle monies and valuables out of the country. These were actually offerings (“mandala”), collected by Dorzhiev in Kalmykia for carrying out some additional construction work at the Buddhist temple in Petrograd. In his Tibetan Autobiography written around 1924, Dorzhiev spoke quite bitterly of his Butyrki ordeal:

The prison guards were very much like the Deathlords who guard hell. The doors and windows, etc., were made of iron. Just the sight of them made for depression in the highest degree. Though there was food and drink every day, what they gave us was practically just water. On top of the suffering, as if ready to die from hunger, the eating of

⁶ RGVA, f. 39499, op. 1, d. 113, pp. 3–7. A memorandum “On the Tibetan Question” compiled by Colonel of the General Headquarters of the Admiral Kolchak’s Army Tatarinov, 1 October 1919.

natural lice was difficult to endure. These things gave rise to depressing thoughts. . . . Fellow prisoners were taken out and killed. I thought, “When will they take me out to be killed?” When a door opened, it made me look really hard. But even then there was no way to be sure whether you might not be released rather than killed. The Deathlords will certainly not release you, but kill you as is the nature of things.⁷

Dorzhiev owed his salvation to several friends from the Orientalist circles in Petrograd, especially Th. Stcherbatsky, S. Oldenburg, and B. Vladimirtsov. Having bribed one of the prison “deathlords”, Dorzhiev sent word to them from Butyrky, and they instantly came to his rescue by forwarding a petition to F.E. Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Soviet secret police, the Cheka (the precursor of KGB). In this petition Stcherbatsky and his colleagues asked for the release of Dorzhiev and the return of the confiscated funds either to him or to the Buddhist temple construction committee which they represented.⁸ Also, Oldenburg, who held the prominent post of the permanent secretary of the Russian Academy of Sciences, sent a cable to Lenin’s personal assistant, N.P. Gorbunov, expressing his great concern about Dorzhiev’s plight.⁹ That the Narkomindel must have also interceded with Cheka on Dorzhiev’s behalf is suggested by a curious little statement in his Tibetan memoir: “I knew a minister of the foreign affairs. I met with him and relied on his help”.¹⁰ If so, Dorzhiev must have contacted Chicherin some time prior to his arrest. Whatever the truth may be, the aged Tibetan diplomat was soon released by Cheka, presumably on the condition that he would collaborate with the new regime. Such a deal apparently did not much trouble the Buryat’s conscience as both sides easily found common policy ground. The Narkomindel’s first and foremost goal with regard to Tibet at that stage was to make contact with the theocratic leaders of the country. Conveniently, Dorzhiev was also seeking to resume the disrupted liaison with his August Patron, the Dalai Lama. The idea of helping the Bolsheviks against the British in Asia was certainly not unwelcome to the Tibetan diplomat either, as he, like Chicherin, was a staunch Anglophobe.

⁷ Norbu 1991, p. 44.

⁸ AVPRF, f. 100, op. 1, papka 1, d. 1, l. 1. Report on the meeting of the Buddhist temple construction committee, 10 September 1918.

⁹ GARF, f. 130, op. 2, d. 657, l. 49. Oldenburg’s telegram to N.P. Gorbunov, 23 August 1918.

¹⁰ Norbu, op. cit., p. 45.

Three weeks later, on 19 October, a group of leading Orientalists from the "Russian Committee for the Exploration of Central and Eastern Asia", formally under the aegis of the Narkomindel, met in session in Petrograd to discuss two expedition projects: one to Chinese Turkestan and the other to Tibet. The purpose of the latter expedition, to be led by Th.I. Stcherbatsky and B.Ya. Vladimirtsov, was described as the "exploration of Tibet, mainly the central Lhasa and Tashilhumpo region, in linguistic, literary and ethnographic respects".¹¹ As regards the ethnographic aspect, the travellers were to collect information "on the inter-relations, mutual penetration and influence of the Mongol and Tibetan tribes along the northern frontier of Tibet". Ten more men were also assigned to the party: two topographers and eight "junior personnel". The expedition was to follow the shortest caravan route—starting from Urga or Uliasutai in Outer Mongolia, it was to proceed west-southward to the Yum-beise monastery on the Mongolian-Chinese border, and thence across the Gobi desert, via An-hsi, to Western Tsaidam, known as the land of salt-marches. There, after changing camels for horses, the party was to ascend the high altitude Chantang Plateau and finally trek right through these vast barren highlands towards Nagchu and Lhasa. The entire journey between Urga and Lhasa was scheduled for some 25–30 days, but this considerably underestimated the burdens of what seemed to be a well-trodden route.

This expedition, though formally a "scientific" one, certainly had a political aspect attached to it. Stcherbatsky, who had met twice with the Dalai Lama—in 1905 in Urga and in 1910 in Darjeeling—now hoped for a new meeting, this time in the Potala, as the ruler of Tibet had personally invited him to come to his country. But this provided the Soviet leaders with an excellent opportunity for opening a political dialogue with Lhasa—with Dorzhiev's mediation, of course. However, Chicherin had to pigeon-hole the Tibetan project, much to Stcherbatsky's disappointment (and probably his own too), because of the uprising of the Czech Legion (the Czech prisoners-of-war who seized control of the Trans-Siberian Railway).

As for the expedition to Chinese Turkestan, it was to be led by one of the Narkomindel's officials, referred to in the Committee's

¹¹ ARAN, f. 148, op. 1, d. 97, l. 84. Project for an expedition to Tibet of the Russian Committee for the Exploration of Central and Eastern Asia, 19 October 1918.

papers as an "Orientalist", N.Z. Bravin, who had just returned from an important diplomatic mission to Teheran (of which more below). This expedition, according to Oldenburg's original plan, was to conduct some "archeological and ethnographic" work in the area of Kashgar and Yarkand, to which places, somewhat unexpectedly, Kashmir was also added a few months later (in January 1919).¹² Curiously, the Committee records do not account for this change, neither do they specify the kind of work Bravin was planning to do in Chinese Turkestan and Kashmir. At the same time they tell us that he was to use an alias for his journey, calling himself Kenjoga. The latter fact, however, should not be a surprise as Bravin's name was well-known to the British Indian authorities since the days when he had served as secretary at the Russian Consulate General in Calcutta. (That was when Stcherbatsky travelled to India to meet with the Dalai Lama in late 1910). All this cannot but make one feel suspicious about Bravin's real intentions, considering that the Ferghana-Kashgar-Yarkand-Leh route provided a channel through which Russian roubles were smuggled into Kashmir before the Bolshevik revolution, and that that same ancient route was also conveniently used afterwards for the entry of the Bolshevik emissaries and the import of propaganda literature into India.¹³

Bravin might have been already packing up for his new perilous journey into Central Asia when Moscow was thunderstruck with the news of a coup d'état in Afghanistan in February 1919. As a result, Chicherin reassigned Bravin to another job, placing him at the head of a Soviet diplomatic mission to Kabul in late May of 1919, by which time Afghanistan had come to the forefront of the Soviet Eastern politics.

* * *

Narkomindel, the Soviet counterpart of the Tsarist foreign ministry (MID), was established shortly after the Bolshevik coup. However for quite some time it existed virtually in name only, since former ministry officials refused to collaborate with the Bolsheviks, and new

¹² ARAN, f. 148, op. 1, d. 106. The Committee issued Bravin (Kendjoga) a mandate, on 28 January 1919, saying that he, together with several companions, proceed to Kashgar, Yarkand and Kashmir, "to collect ethnographic and archeological collections" (l. 8).

¹³ Warikoo 1989, p. 190.

cadres had to be hastily recruited to replace them. These early "Red diplomats" were mainly professional revolutionaries who had spent long years in exile in Western Europe. Some of them were well educated and spoke European and Asian languages, and after all who could ask for more in those days? One of these was Georgyi Vasilievich Chicherin (1872–1936), the famous "Lenin's Narkom", as he is styled in the official Soviet historiography.

Born into an old aristocratic family, Georgyi, thanks to his father, V.N. Chicherin, who was also a professional diplomat, had taken, since his early age, a keen interest in history and historical documents. His other passions were Wagner and Nietzsche. Having graduated from St Petersburg University where he studied philology and history, Chicherin had worked for some time (between 1897 and 1903) in the archival section of the MID. After his uncle's death in 1904, he inherited the Chicherins' patrimonial estate in Tambov Province and a large fortune, which instantly made him a very rich man. But Chicherin, who had a strong aversion to wealth and private property, would soon throw in his lot with the Revolution and spend all his money on promoting its cause. In the same year, 1904, Chicherin fled Russia to escape imminent arrest for his connections with an underground anti-government group. His next 13 years were spent in Europe engaged in active revolutionary work in Berlin, Paris, London and other cities. Politically, he had sided for a long time with the Menshevik faction of the Russian Socialist Democratic Party, and he went over to the Bolsheviks only after their October coup.

Chicherin arrived in Petrograd in early 1918 from London, where he had been interned for anti-war propaganda and spent a few months in Brixton prison. His release was secured by Leon Trotsky, who, as the first head of the Narkomindel, had arranged his and another Russian internee's exchange in return for all British subjects then trapped in Russia (including the British ambassador Sir George Buchanan). He was appointed Trotsky's deputy shortly after helping to negotiate the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which took Russia out of the World War. Then, on May 30, 1918, Chicherin was promoted to head of Narkomindel, an office he would hold continuously until 1930. It was Chicherin who reorganized the Soviet foreign ministry from scratch and shaped the country's foreign policy for the next decade. His closest aid was Lev Mikhailovich Karakhan (1889–1937), another member of the Soviet delegation at Brest-Litovsk, also to play a prominent part in the Bolsheviks' Tibetan schemes.

Chicherin is generally portrayed by his biographers as an intellectual, a skilled polemist, and a stalwart proponent of the policy of peaceful co-existence with the West.¹⁴ His insistent advocacy of the latter became known as a "peace offensive". But Chicherin was also the architect of the Soviet active Eastern policy, which had as its chief instrument Lenin's principle of national self-determination. However, the Bolsheviks did not at first have any consistent and clear-cut policy with regard to the Eastern nations. Chicherin's perception of the political realities there was largely coloured by revolutionary enthusiasm, and therefore his decisions were often spontaneous and inadequate. In the opinion of one of Narkomindel's ablest officials, the first head of its Eastern department, A.N. Voznesensky, the Soviet diplomatic office in its early years "was not pursuing any definite political line either in the Near, the Middle, or the Far East. . . . The questions arising were tackled spontaneously, and, as it seemed to me, emotionally".¹⁵ Much of Chicherin's severe Anglophobia, which obviously lay at the bottom of all Narkomindel's activities in the East, probably came from his Brixton experience (although it was not even half as gruesome as that which Dorzhiev went through in Butyrki). But the vast majority of the Soviet ruling elite also shared strong anti-British sentiments at that time, mainly due to Britain's active participation in the allied military intervention in Russia and the support given to the anti-Bolshevik "White" movement.

A workaholic, Chicherin hardly left his office, and not infrequently he received visitors after midnight, but this was because he suffered from insomnia. Mrs. Philip Snowden, a member of the British Labour party and Trade unions' delegation which came to Russia in 1920, recalled the Narkom sympathetically in her book of memoirs:

Tchicherine, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, gentle by nature, artistic by temperament, uncomfortable in the whirlpool of politics as it seemed to me, and shrinking, sad-eyed, into nothing with the burden of the office unto which he was not born, turned tyrant through suffering, the instrument of less admirable men than himself.¹⁶

Among Chicherin's other idiosyncrasies was his rather bizarre care of documents, which may have developed when he served in the

¹⁴ Re Chicherin see Zarnitskii; Sergeev 1975; O'Connor 1988; Sokolov 1993.

¹⁵ Quoted in Genis 2000, p. 391.

¹⁶ Snowden 1920, p. 126.

MID archives. It is known that he ordered files by the colour of their folders and could even recall their exact location on the shelves. In his office Chicherin set up a small working archive of his own consisting of files on high priority issues which could be accessible to him during his night vigils. Chicherin made sure that none of the Tsarist diplomatic records were destroyed as, for example, had happened to the police archives in Petrograd during the February revolution. These documents were carefully transferred to Moscow when the Soviet government returned to Russia's ancient capital in spring 1918.

Soviet diplomacy since its earliest days, as is well known, was intimately wedded to revolution, which produced a rather peculiar symbiosis. Thus, while making their overtures to the Eastern rulers, the Bolshevik leaders were actually seeking to liberate the multimillion peoples of Asia from foreign domination, primarily that of the "British imperialists". Diplomacy provided them with a legal and very convenient channel through which they could disseminate their revolutionary ideology worldwide. The Kremlin strategists—the "dangerous dreamers" as head of the British Foreign Office, Arthur Balfour, had once called them—linked their hopes for a speedy triumph of the World Social Revolution mainly with Western Europe at first. However the quick collapse of the experimental soviet republics in Bavaria, Slovakia and Hungary in 1919 made them shift their attention eastwards, to the vast Asian continent, seen as the "rear" of Western capitalism. In their eyes the fate of World Revolution now hinged on developments in Asia, and it was there that they were contemplating striking a mortal blow at their arch-enemy, Great Britain. Such a reckoning soon enough revived the plans for an "Indian campaign" once nurtured by the Tsarist military, for in Leon Trotsky's words "only through India could England be struck down". The idea was articulated even more emphatically by one of the Bolshevik's leading experts on Central Asia, Sultan Efendiev, in 1919:

If the feeble Tsarism, looking for a rich booty, had planned, with some measure of reality, a military expedition to India, across a number of hostile countries (Bashkiria, Kirghizia, Turkestan, Kokand, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, Persia, etc.), why should the Russia of workers and peasants which excites so many hopes in the hearts of Eastern peoples not accomplish something in the same direction?¹⁷

¹⁷ Efendiev, "Problemy Vostoka" in *Zhizn' Natsionalnosti*, # 41 (49), 26 October 1919.

It was this desire to penetrate into India to link the anti-British elements there with the victorious Russian revolution that gave an additional impetus to Soviet endeavours to befriend the buffer states making the arena of earlier Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia, their two southern neighbours, Persia and Afghanistan, and certainly the more remote Tibet.

We will now briefly review the Narkomindel's overtures to Persia and Afghanistan made in 1918–1919, with a special emphasis on the 1919 Bravin mission, as it provides a good study case of the methods of Bolshevik secret diplomacy in the early post-revolutionary period.

As early as December 1917, Narkomindel sent its emissary N.Z. Bravin, the former Russian consul in Khoi, to Teheran.¹⁸ However, the Soviet diplomat could not accomplish much at his post, and he returned to Moscow shortly after the Shah had, in mid-August of 1918, placed at the head of his government an Anglophile, Vossugh-ed-Dowleh. A mission from the Baku Commissars' under I.O. Kolomiitsev, sent to Teheran with Lenin's due approval in the summer of the same year, also suffered a set-back. In early November, Kolomiitsev's diplomatic premises were attacked by a group of Russian officers from the Shah's Cossack brigade, and the first Soviet ambassador to Persia, the Red *safir*, had to jump out of the window and hastily flee both town and the country itself, leaving behind his family and the mission's staff. Kolomiitsev was subsequently murdered by the same officers in 1919, on his second diplomatic mission to Persia, thus sharing the tragic fate of the famous Russian poet and diplomat, Alexandre Griboedov, who was massacred by a street mob in Teheran as far back as 1829.

Thus the early attempts to establish relations with the Persian government were obviously a fiasco for Bolshevik diplomacy. In the meantime, the British had succeeded in considerably enlarging their imperialist "dominion" in Persia. Following the evacuation in early 1918 of Russian troops from what used to be Russia's sphere of influence, they had actually placed its entire territory under their control. By this deliberate act the Soviet government lost its "legal"

¹⁸ Nikolai Zakharovich Bravin (1881–1921), after graduating from the Oriental faculty of St Petersburg University, served as a translator and secretary of the Russian Consulate General in Calcutta in 1909–1911, and later as secretary of the Russian consulates in Turkey, Abyssinia, and finally as a vice-consul in Persia (1915–1917). He was assassinated in Kabul in 1921.

footing in northern Persia, secured by the 1907 Convention, and yet this loss won them the sympathies of a broad segment of Persian nationalists. Moreover, the Soviet initiative had strong repercussions throughout the Muslim world, already agitated by Lenin's incendiary appeal to "All toiling Muslims of Russia and the East" in December 1917. As a result a pro-Soviet public opinion, sensitive to the Bolshevik nationalist slogans, began to gradually form in Persia, which was, under these new conditions, perceived by Moscow as a typical British "colony".

It was at this heady time that one of the Bolshevik strategists, K.M. Troianovsky, came up in the latter half of 1918 with a kind of a master plan for the great Eastern revolution. The key role in this was assigned to the countries of the Muslim East (Russian Turkestan, Persia, Turkey and Egypt), which were spoken of as the "gates" or "outer ramparts", closing access to India, the "citadel of the revolutionary East". Troianovsky especially emphasized the significance of Persia, which he considered could become the "geopolitical centre" of the entire Muslim world, because it provided an important link, connecting, on the one hand, the Muslim populace in Russia with their 66 and half million spiritual brethren in India, and on the other, the Young Egyptian Muslim movement with that of the Indian nationalists.¹⁹ "Our immediate task", he wrote in his book of guidelines for Eastern revolution-makers,

is to raise an uprising in Persia and clear up the soil further in the East, in India and in China, the strongholds of the imperialists of England, America and Japan. The revolution in Persia must give a signal to a series of revolutions on the vast expanse of Asia and partly in Africa...²⁰

Neighbouring Afghanistan was even more important to Bolshevik designs due to its geostrategically advantageous position, providing the closest overland approaches to India. The most prominent of these routes were the two avenues via Kabul and Kandahar.²¹ (There

¹⁹ Troianovsky 1918b, pp. 41–44.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 47.

²¹ Snesarev 1921, pp. 31–37. One of the ablest generals in the Tsarist top military administration (the Main Staff and the General Staff), Snesarev (1865–1937) sided with the Bolsheviks after the revolution. From 1919 he headed the Academy of the Red Army General Staff in Moscow, where he also lectured on military geography. His focus was mainly India and the countries of the buffer zone area—Afghanistan, the Pamirs, Kashgaria, Tibet, and East Persia.

was a third one, via the Pamirs, which lead right into the valley of Kashmir, but this route was very difficult in practice. Nonetheless, it was precisely by way of the narrow mountainous tracks of the Pamirs that the intrepid Comintern agents would sneak into India in the 1920s). The political situation in Afghanistan was similarly rather unfavorable for Moscow at first. King Habibullah (who had succeeded Abdur Rahman in 1901) was believed to be a good friend of the British—he received an annual subsidy of 20 lakhs of rupees from them and his country's foreign relations were entirely in the British hands. But there was some hope placed in the numerous anti-British elements in the country, especially the unruly Pathan tribesmen of various ethnic groups along the north-western border of India, who were in a permanent state of unrest and could easily be stirred up against the British.

The very first step towards establishing relations with the Afghan government was made by the Bolsheviks on 10 August 1918, when the authorities of the Turkestan Soviet Republic dispatched D.I. Slivitsky, one of the Red commanders of the garrison at the Kushk fortress (the major military outpost on the Russian-Afghan border), on a special mission to Kabul. Slivitsky, who was, incidentally, not a Bolshevik himself, was instructed to contact the Afghan rulers and explain to them the lofty principles of the new Soviet Eastern policy. The amateur-diplomat was also to collect information on the political situation in the country, which, as one will recall, was placed within the British sphere of influence by the 1907 Convention. Slivitsky's mission, however, was unsuccessful, since he could not meet with King Habibulla, who was shot dead in February 1919 as a result of a family plot. His only achievement, it seems, was mounting a radio-telegraph station in Kabul for communication with Kushk and Tashkent, a job he did at the request of the new Amir, Amanullah Khan.

The ascension of King Habibulla's youngest son, Amanullah, to the Afghan throne did not at first forebode any major changes in the country's political orientation, as the new Afghan ruler at once communicated to Delhi his wish to adhere to the traditional policy of friendship with the government of India. Yet shortly after that, the Amir sent letters on behalf of the "free and independent Afghanistan", to the governments of France, the North-American States, Persia, Turkey, and Japan, in which he explicitly rejected the 40-year long British control of Afghan foreign relations. Furthermore, on 7th

of April, Amanullah Khan and his foreign minister Mahmud Tarzi forwarded two messages to Lenin and Chicherin, offering to establish friendly relations between Afghanistan and Soviet Russia. To this M.I. Kalinin (the Chairman of VTsIK) and Lenin responded positively and they immediately proposed an exchange of diplomatic representatives. By the time the Soviet leaders received the missives from Kabul in the late May 1919 some more astounding news had reached Moscow—of a war launched by King Amanullah against the British in India! Whatever were the true reasons behind the Amir's rash decision to attack his eastern neighbour at the undemarcated portion of the border west of the Khyber, much of the stimulus certainly came from the reports of his agents, who testified to considerable unrest in India. This new Anglo-Afghan war (the third one), turned out, however, to be a very short one. The Afghans, despite their high spirits and the eagerness to fight their nation's oppressors to the bitter end, were heavily defeated in just a few weeks and had to ask for an armistice (concluded on 28 May). It is generally believed that the speed of the British victory owed much to their use of aircraft, whose bombs and machine-guns had an utterly demoralizing effect on the Afghan army.

The immediate Soviet reaction to the Anglo-Afghan war was the dispatch of a new secret expedition to Kabul via Tashkent headed by Bravin, and, somewhat unexpectedly, plans for striking the British from the north via Tibet and the Himalayas, which we will discuss later. Of the former initiative one will find to this date only a brief mention in the available Russian and Western literature.²² The story of the Bravin Mission, as follows, is based on the account of B.N. Ivanov, a member of the Revvoensovet (Revolutionary War Council) of the Turkestan Soviet Republic, who was attached to that mission and subsequently reported on it to his superiors, as well as to the Turkestan Central Executive Committee.²³ According to Ivanov, the mission or "embassy" (*posol'stvo*) included, apart from Bravin, four more men—Zibarov, Kulikov, Auliyan, and himself, who were to "control and direct" Bravin's work. (This was because the Turkestan authorities did not trust him fully, probably because he was a for-

²² See, for instance, Adamec 1967, p. 144.

²³ Archive of the Institute of Oriental Studies, St Petersburg, f. 115 (A.E. Snegarev Collection), op. 1, d. 154. B.N. Ivanov, "Doklad o prebyvanii v Avganistane", Tashkent, November 1919.

mer Tsarist official and was not a member of the Bolshevik party.) This team was accompanied by a group of 10 Bolsheviks—ethnic Sarts and Bokharians. While disguised as an escort, their real task was to conduct pro-Soviet agitation in Afghanistan.

The main object of the mission was to incite the Afghan Amir to continue his war with the British in India. Having set out from Tashkent in early July 1919, the party arrived in Kabul on 28 August after nearly two month's travel. By this time the Anglo-Afghan war was over, the British Indian and Afghan governments having finally signed a peace treaty in Rawalpindi on 8th August. According to the agreement, the British withdrew all their privileges formerly granted to the Amir, including his lavish subsidy. At the same time the Afghan delegates were given a letter in which Delhi officially recognized the freedom of Afghan foreign relations from British control. This decision, amounting to formal recognition of the independence of Afghanistan, was enthusiastically hailed by Kabul. As a result, many of the leading Afghans discarded their Anglophobia almost overnight and began to show openly much friendlier feelings towards their country's "former oppressors". The Bolshevik emissaries could sense this change immediately. The Amir accorded them a warm welcome, with a guard of honour and music, and they were also offered tea in the Amir's gardens outside Kabul. Yet at the same time, a foreign ministry official, Amut-Ali, who accompanied the mission to their residence in one of the Amir's palaces, told Bravin confidentially about the Anglo-Afghan peace treaty and stated that the Afghans were quite happy with it. Therefore he asked the Russian guests "to say nothing bad about the British". While in Kabul, the Soviet mission actually found itself in the position of "honorary hostages", being totally isolated from the local Kabul dwellers. Moreover, the Afghan authorities demanded that the mission members refrained from any political agitation and made them sign a special paper to that effect. Ivanov attributed this kind of treatment to the "new course" of the Afghan government and the "prevailing British influence".

The Soviet delegation was officially received by Amanullah Khan three times. Apart from that, the Amir granted two private audiences to Bravin and one to the Muslim members of the Soviet "embassy". At the first reception, which took place on 26 August, Bravin handed over to the Amir his credentials, along with a letter from Lenin, which might have been the above-mentioned joint Kalinin and Lenin

reply of May 27 to Amanullah's earlier message. He also handed a letter from Trotsky to the foreign minister Mahmud Tarzi. All these letters were translated at once and read out to the Afghan ruler. After that the Amir made a short speech, in which he emphasized two points: first, that he did not want to interfere with the fratricidal war in Russia, which was described by him as "a struggle of two brothers, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks"; and, second, that he would do his utmost to deliver Russian Muslims from British influence and "return" them subsequently to Russia. Also, Amanullah said that he wanted to establish relations with Japan, because "one friend is good, yet two friends are better".

In his reply to these revelations, Bravin stated explicitly that the Central Soviet government in Moscow was prepared to render any assistance and support to Afghanistan, that liberation of the Muslim East was "written down in our program", and he also stressed the historical importance of the fact of the arrival of the first Soviet Russian mission in Kabul. The Afghan leaders, of course, were very pleased to hear that, yet, according to Ivanov, one could sense some "sour notes" in their words that the Amir did not expect in fact "any real help" from Russia, due to the country's "ailing communications". To reassure the Afghans, Bravin told them that, notwithstanding the transport problems, military aid could still be given to Afghanistan very soon.

Two days later Mahmud Tarzi paid a return visit to the Soviet mission. This time the discussion revolved mainly around such vital subjects as the nature of Bolshevism and the Bolshevik attitude to religion. Since Bravin was not a Bolshevik, his "comrades" Zibarov, Auliyan, and Kulikov, despite their poor knowledge of foreign languages, had to explain to Tarzi as best as they could the basics of the Communist doctrine. Tarzi said that he liked the Bolshevik teachings, as they reminded him of pure Islam, however, in his opinion, the Afghan population would not be able to comprehend them, therefore he asked his mentors not to disseminate their views among the Afghans. According to Ivanov, "Djenabi Foreign Minister is no doubt a true enemy of England, but he was forced to play, with so little success, his "diplomatic game" with our embassy". The Afghan ruler himself, Amanullah Khan, was portrayed by him as "a nice young man of 21, being a helpless puppet in the hands of his camarilla, which seated him on the throne". The current political system in Afghanistan Ivanov described succinctly as "a country of typical

patriarchal and despotic rule, caught between the pinions of modern history".

During his first eye-to-eye conversation with Bravin, Amanullah Khan immediately revealed his secret ambitions: Soviet Russia should cede some of its southern territories to Afghanistan, namely Kushk, with the Panjdeh area, Kerki, and Termez, "as a proof of her friendship". Also, the Trans-Caspian region should be placed under the Afghan protectorate, to enhance his (the Amir's) prestige. The Soviet promise of military aid did not tempt him much: "You can't give me one thousand cannons", he told Bravin arrogantly, "and I don't want to take anything less than that". In general he spoke of Soviet Russia in a rather haughty manner: "Your country, the Great Soviet Republic, is a feeble sick man, therefore the strong Afghanistan must stretch its helping hand to Russia".

The negotiations with the Afghan government eventually turned into open bargaining—at the audience which took place on 10 September, for example, Amanullah Khan and his ministers asked Bravin point-blank what kind of assistance Soviet Russia could give to Afghanistan if the latter decided to break with British India. Bravin, although he was instructed by the Turkestan authorities not to promise anything to the Afghans before Turkestan and the Soviet Russian Republic were reunited, replied, on his own initiative, that the Turkestan Soviet could, in a month's time, supply Kabul with a certain amount of weapons (quick-firing guns, machine-guns, and the Berdan rifles, with ammunition) for arming the frontier tribes (Afridi), and lend the Amir 1500 first-rate soldiers(!). In addition, the Turkestan government could take upon itself the war expenditure if the Anglo-Afghan hostilities were to be resumed. These proposals, however, did not impress the Amir, who remarked "sourly" that England had offered him much more in all respects but he did not agree to take anything "because of his friendship with the Russians". As for Amanullah's insistent territorial claims, Bravin told him evasively that this question lay within the competence of the Soviet Central government and could not be taken up by his mission. (At the earlier meeting he put it even more bluntly: "We don't trade our subjects; without a plebiscite these areas cannot be ceded to the Amir").

The conditions finally laid down by the Amir and his ministers for the establishment of "friendly relations" between Afghanistan and Soviet Russia were rather impudent from the Soviet standpoint. These included, *inter alia*, the stationing of Afghan garrisons in

Termez, Kerki, and Kushk, transferring the Kushk radio-telegraph station to Kabul, and recognition by Moscow of Bukhara's independence. Amanullah also did not permit Bravin to hoist the red flag above the Soviet residence, saying that this could be done only when other foreign embassies arrived in Kabul.

The negotiations apart, the Bravin mission members were also engaged in various subversive activities, notwithstanding the pledges they had given to the Afghan authorities. According to Ivanov, one of the mission's special tasks was to get in touch with the Afghan "Bolsheviks", as well as the representatives of tribes hostile to the Afghan government, such as the Hazaras, Afridies, and those from Yagistan. ("These tribes could supply first-class soldiers for the Red Army. Therefore it is necessary to organize and recruit these people, by attracting them at first with a high salary for their service"). Such contacts were naturally made secretly by the Soviet emissaries, outside of their official dealings with the Afghan rulers, which Ivanov referred to cynically as *igra* (a game).

Another important task of the mission was procuring information on the military and political situation in Afghanistan. "We had to content ourselves mainly with the conversations that we had with the escort soldiers, servants, and the Afghans who occasionally contacted us, as well as the information we received from the Amir and his ministers". And, of course, there was a typically Eastern source of news—bazaar gossip. "We could communicate freely", reported Ivanov, "only in Herat with the three Austrians, the remaining members of the German-Turkish mission, in Kabul with the Indian revolutionaries, and, on the way back to Herat, with another party of Germans, who had formerly participated in the same mission. (They had travelled the length and breadth of Afghanistan during their four year stay in the country)". These must have been participants in the Hentig-Niedermayer mission sent by Kaizer Wilhelm to Teheran and Kabul in 1915, with the aim of bringing Persia and Afghanistan into the Holy War against the British in India and the Russians in Central Asia.²⁴

The Soviet mission to Kabul, having come into the spotlight of the vigilant Indian Political Service, evoked some strongly anti-Bolshevik comments in the British press. For example, the "Times" in London

²⁴ On the secret German mission to Persia and Afghanistan in 1915 see Hopkirk 1995; Babakhodzhaev 1960, pp. 18–26; Khoteev 1977, pp. 180–194.

devoted a long and wrathful column to it, headlined "Bolshevist menace to India: Afghan stepping stone", which called Bravin "a Bolshevik agent in Kabul endeavouring to extend his propaganda to India". "Presumably as a result of M. Bravin's activities", asserted the author of the article ("a high Russian authority on Asian affairs"), Afghanistan began to entertain the idea of a rapprochement with the Soviet Republic.

In due course the official organ of the Soviet Republic announced the arrival in Moscow of an Afghan mission, which was received with considerable pomp by the Bolshevik Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. During the course of this visit there was much talk of Afghanistan as the "only ally" of the Soviet Republic and of England as the "common enemy".²⁵ The Afghan mission mentioned in the "Times" was that of General Muhammad Vali-Khan Badahshani, who came to Moscow on 12th October 1919 in the capacity of ambassador extraordinary of the Afghan government. The British, however, were mistaken in their assessment of Soviet-Afghan relations—the Bolsheviks did not, if truth be known, regard the Afghan government as their ally, and they were extremely irritated with the Amir's "imperialistic" claims. Yet Moscow needed Afghanistan at this stage most of all as a *platsdarm* (place d'armes) for attacking India. One such plan was made, for example, in early August 1919 by the head of the Revvoensovet RSFSR, Leon Trotsky. He proposed that a cavalry corps, consisting of some 30 to 40 thousand riders was to be immediately formed somewhere in the Urals or in Turkestan, "with the idea of launching it against India"—across the territory of Afghanistan.²⁶ "The international situation is currently shaping in such a way", Trotsky wrote to his comrades in Politburo, "that the road to Paris and London lies via the towns of Afghanistan, the Punjab and Bengal".

The high priority given to the idea of World Revolution (which, since March 1919, had its headquarters in the body of Comintern), made it imperative for Chicherin to continue the lame Soviet-Afghan dialogue. In the same year of 1919 he therefore dispatched yet

²⁵ *The Times*, 12 December 1919. For the reception of the Afghan mission in Moscow see *Izvestia*, 12, 14 and 17 October 1919.

²⁶ Trotsky's report to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of 5 August 1919 in Meijer 1971, vol. I, p. 625 (doc. # 347).

another mission to Kabul, under Ya.Z. Surits, who was to finally negotiate a treaty of friendship with Afghanistan.

* * *

Tibet re-emerged on the Bolsheviks' political agenda quite unexpectedly in the middle of 1919. On 26 May, "Zhizn' Natsionalnosti" (Life of Nations), a mouthpiece of the People's Commissariat of Nationalities (Narkomnats), published an article by A.M. Amur-Sanan, head of the Kalmyk section of this Soviet department, under the catchy title "The Keys to the East". The author of this tried to emphasize the importance of the Buddhist Kalmykia and Mongolia to the World Revolution:

It is usually believed that the key to the rich East and India is found in the Muslim countries, Persia and Afghanistan, but this is not quite so. It is true that the nearest, and perhaps the easiest, way from Europe to Asia lies through these countries, but this is not the only way. There is also a Mongolian-Buddhist route, which starts in the Kalmyk steppes, and leads through Altai, Mongolia, and Tibet, on to India.²⁷

Amur-Sanan further proposed to employ the Kalmyk Buddhists for the dissemination of the "idea of the soviet government" among the millions of Mongol-Buddhist tribes of the East, as the latter "would respond to the call of their Kalmyk brethren more readily than to that of alien nations and religions". He also thought it would be much easier for Buddhists to enter the Forbidden Land, Tibet, which still remained inaccessible to Europeans. Hence, Tibet, "which is connected with Mongolia geographically and also by religious ties, could likewise fall into the sphere of Soviet influence". However the Mongolian-Buddhist route did not stop in Tibet but continued further southwards, across the Himalayas, and "this, then", concluded Amur-Sanan, "is the way by which India could establish contact with the centre of world revolution—Russia".

The person behind this cunning plan was most likely Agvan Dorzhiev, whom the article praised as "a well-known Eastern specialist, the founder of the Buddhist temple in Petersburg which greatly displeased England, and a supporter of a rapprochement between Mongolia and Russia". The ideas of Amur-Sanan were soon reiter-

²⁷ A. Amur-Sanan, "Kliuchi Vostoka" (The Keys of the East), *Zhizn' Natsionalnosti*, # 19 (27), May 1919, p. 2. For an English translation see: Eudin, North 1957, p. 199 (document # 51).

ated by another highly-placed Kalmyk Bolshevik, Arashi Chapchaev, Chairman of the Kalmyk Central Executive Committee (KalmTsIK). He asserted in the same "Zhizn' Natsionalnosti" that "the Soviet government must not confine itself to orientation on Mohammedanism, but it must equally lean on the Buddhist world".²⁸ Chapchaev also eulogized Dorzhiev and in passing told the readers of his latest activities: in the autumn of 1918 the Buryat planned to go to Mongolia, for which purpose he was issued a mandate by the Narkomindel, however these plans were dashed by mutinous Czech troops who cut all Trans-Siberian railway communications. As a result, the commissariat reassigned Dorzhiev to the Kalmyk steppes instead, where he was staying at the time. Of the nature of Dorzhiev's Kalmyk mission Chapchaev said nothing, but we learn from the Buryat's other mandate, issued by the authorities of Astrakhan Province, that it consisted mainly in pro-Soviet agitation.²⁹

In his Tibetan memoirs Dorzhiev alluded to the work he did among the Kalmyks in the following words:

... Since the Eastern route to Buryatia was cut off by fighting, I again made my way to the Kalmyk lands. Because they had several times involved themselves in the battles between the white and red armies, the monastic groups were broken up. The monks let their hair grow long, wandered into houses, and dressed in lay clothing. Several times I saw this and each time it made me sad.

Once more I went to Astrakhan. The people there were not extremely happy when I told them what had happened. To each of the monasteries I delivered a strongly worded document that no one was to loot and destroy. "Do not worry. Things will be able to go on as in the past," I told them. I went and spread the word together with the official and author Kelsang to each of the 70 monastic groups telling them about the system of the new government.³⁰

The situation in Kalmykia had been unstable since the time the Kalmyks had changed their social status by joining the Cossack estate

²⁸ Oiratsky, "Mongolia, kak vorota buddiiskogo Vostoka" (Mongolia as a Gateway to the Buddhist East), *Zhizn' Natsionalnosti*, # 26 (34), 13 July 1919. Oiratsky is Chapchaev's literary pseudonym.

²⁹ The mandate reads as follows: "This is to certify that the holder of this [document] is a Tibetan citizen Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev, who has arrived from the Centre to the Kalmyk steppes for agitation purposes. Therefore the Kalmyk Executive Committee requests all organizations and individuals to render Dorzhiev, everywhere in the steppes, all kinds of assistance to enable him to fulfill his tasks. January 11, 1919". See: State Archive of the Kalmyk Republic (Elista), r. 3, op. 2, d. 80, l. 3.

³⁰ Norbu, op. cit., p. 45.

in 1917. This event antagonized the neighbouring Russian population, who often quarreled with the Cossacks, and consequently provoked considerable looting and violence in the Kalmyk *uluses* (settlements). For some time the Kalmyk steppes were terrorized by numerous gangs of Russian brigands who stole Kalmyk cattle, kidnapped well-to-do people, and raped Kalmyk women. The coming of the Bolshevik Red Army to the Volga-Don steppe region brought even more suffering to the Kalmyks, as their cattle were now commandeered by the commissars and their *khuruls* vandalized and destroyed by the Red Army soldiers. Many years later Chapchaev, when recalling these troublesome times, would confess that "the Kalmyks perceived Bolshevism then as vandalism, which tends to destroy and smash everything, without creating anything in its place".³¹ Dorzhiev, through his agitation, apparently tried to pacify the Kalmyks by presenting them with a somewhat brighter picture of life under Bolshevik rule to follow upon the completion of the civil war. No doubt his and Chapchaev's communications to Moscow urged Lenin to issue the "Appeal to the Kalmyk people" of 22 July 1919. In this the first head of the Soviet government (Sovnarkom), recognized that the Kalmyks "were subjected to acts of violence by individual agents of the Soviet power" and assured them that the Sovnarkom would "struggle against whatever abuses by these persons" and would "punish the violators".³²

Dorzhiev's stay in Kalmykia allowed him to befriend some of the leading Kalmyk Bolsheviks, including the head of the KalmTsIK Arashi Chapchaev, the man who would later lead one of the Narkomindel's secret missions to Lhasa. Interestingly, Chapchaev's article in the newspaper "Zhizn' Natsionalnosti" tended to highlight the role of Mongolia from a rather pragmatic standpoint caused by the needs of the ongoing civil war. The country, he argued, provided an "inexhaustible source" of material subsistence and manpower for the white armies of Admiral Kolchak, that were already retreating deep into Siberia, hence it was to be "snatched from Kolchak's

³¹ Quoted in Chapchaev 1990, p. 11. This extract from Chapchaev's speech to the 1st All-Kalmyk Congress of the Soviets was erased by censors from the published materials of the congress (*Pervyi obshchekalmytskiy s'ezd sovetov, 2-9 iulia 1920 goda*, Protokoly, ed. by D.A. Chugaev, Elista, 1971).

³² Quoted in *Izvestia*, # 161 (713), 24 July 1919 ("Vozzvanie t. Lenina k kalmytskomu trudovomu narodu").

hands". What was actually needed at this crucial point was "propaganda of the ideas of soviet government" among the Mongols, and Chapchaev assured his readers that Agvan Dorzhiev, "this great expert on Eastern affairs", would gladly take up his former work towards the rapprochement of Mongolia and the new Soviet Russia.

Some more concrete proposals designed to put the Kalmyk-Mongol-Buddhist scheme into operation were soon made by Amur-Sanan and Chapchaev. On July 16 their joint memorandum drawn up two days earlier was laid on the desk of Lenin in his Kremlin's office.³³ In this the Kalmyks sought to emphasize that scheme once more in the light of the recent Afghan developments.

Up to the present moment the north-western frontier of India, with its militant tribes which are in a constant state of ferment, has caused England the greatest amount of trouble. Here the British are menaced by the Muslim world, and accordingly the Soviet government of Russia chose this direction in order to exert influence on the British through agitators from amidst the Muslims.

However, they argued, there was yet another route by which India could be approached from the Russian territory, that leading through the Buddhist East, across Mongolia and Tibet, toward the lengthy belt of Buddhist buffer-states—Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, Burma, and Siam. This was the shortest overland road to Bengal, the most revolutionary province of India, but one could penetrate much further by following that route into Burma and Siam within the Indo-Chinese peninsular, that being "the rear of the British colonial possessions" in south-east Asia.

After this brief introduction into the revolutionary geopolitics of the region, Chapchaev and Amur-Sanan came up with a bold proposal—to send a small military expeditionary force to the north-eastern section of the Indian border, via Mongolia and Tibet. The Kalmyks believed that the sudden appearance of the party in the then quite and peaceful "Buddhist borderland" would throw the British Indian authorities into a panic. The same men were also to carry a certain amount of weapons (rifles, machine-guns, revolvers) and

³³ RGASPI, f. 2 (Lenin Collection), op. 2, d. 183, ll. 1–4. The text of the Kalmyk proposals was originally published by Anatoly Latyshev in his article "Fakel revolutsii v Indii—cherez Tibet" (The torch of revolution into India, across Tibet) in *Kuranty*, Moscow, # 161 (676), 26 August 1993.

munitions for distribution among the indigenous population of this border area. Subsequently a regular supply of arms to these people was to be organized, since the British "had deprived them of any possibility to procure modern weapons for their needs". To produce more effect, the Kalmyks proposed to dispatch to Tibet, concurrently with the military force, a "peaceful and purely scientific expedition". "Plans for such an expedition were made by the Narkomindel last year", they explained, and some outstanding Oriental scholars volunteered to participate in it, however these designs were not realized due to the Czech uprising. "But now that the Red Army had advanced deep into Siberia, this question must be put on the agenda again".

Lenin apparently liked the Kalmyk proposals, despite their adventurist character, for he at once forwarded the memorandum to the Organization Bureau (Orgbiuro) of the Central Committee with a laconic note on it: "I think this should go to Chicherin for working out preparatory measures". And to Chicherin it went without delay as the Bolsheviks knew only too well the wisdom of the old saying: strike while the iron is hot.

The atmosphere in and outside Russia at that stage was particularly turbulent. While the fighting of the Red and White armies in West Siberia had finally reached its climax, the clouds of the revolutionary thunder-storm were gathering over both Europe and Asia, its epicenters being Germany and the Indo-Afghan border. Hamburg came into the hands of the left-wing social democrats, the so-called "Spartaks", and there were disturbances in Berlin and many other German cities as well. The situation in Afghanistan was similarly seen in Moscow through the prism of the approaching World Revolution. The Bolsheviks believed that the Anglo-Afghan hostilities were suspended only for a one-month period of the Muslim holiday of Ramadan (from 31 May to 31 June) and were sure to be resumed as soon as the holiday was over. The regular Afghan troops were massed on the Indian border and some of them had already begun, according to rumour, to advance to the frontier. These troops were well-armed and, so it seemed, presented a formidable military force. In the meantime the Afghan Amir dispatched a large number of his emissaries to India, where they began a frantic agitation to stir up an anti-British uprising. According to A.N. Voznesensky, some of the frontier tribes entered into alliance with the Afghan ruler and

so did many of the Indian Rajas, who were hostile to the British. Afghanistan seemed to be finally "on the eve of the Holy War".³⁴

The conclusion of the Anglo-Afghan peace treaty at Rawalpindi on the 8th of August, however, blighted Moscow's hopes that the new Afghan ruler would launch an anti-British jihad. As for the Kalmyks' proposals, they proved to be totally unrealizable in view of the conditions created by the continuing civil war in Russia. This was particularly the case with the dispatch of a Red Army squadron to the "quiet" Buddhist borderland on the north-eastern fringes of India. But there is some evidence that preparations for a "scientific expedition" to Tibet were under way on the premises of the Narkomindel in the summer of 1919, with Stcherbatsky's active participation. According to S. Oldenburg, the latter was summoned to the Soviet diplomatic office in Moscow that year "to discuss the question of an expedition to Tibet, which was most important in the political respect".³⁵ And here is what the famous Sanskritist himself wrote to Oldenburg at that time:

During the summer I was busy translating two letters for the Narkomindel, which made four pages of large format in my handwriting, and [I've done] five documents more of late.

- 1) A list of all government institutions, both old and new ones, which emerged under the 13th incarnation of the Dalai Lama, a list of all schools, all prefectures, all factories, arsenals, as well as a list of all noble families (castle owners), giving their staffs—the number of the clerical and secular officials in each and every institution; it's 35 large format pages altogether;
- 2) a list of all clerics, from the Dalai Lama and Banchen [Lama] down to abbots of all monasteries, some 10 pages in my handwriting;
- 3) a list of all Tsonkapa [i.e. Gelugpa—A.A.] monasteries, with their personnel;
- 4–5) plus two minor documents.

Everything was written in the minute *shara* script, on rough Chinese paper, so I had to read [the documents] with the help of a magnifying

³⁴ A. Voznesensky, "Na podstupakh k Indii", *Izvestiya*, # 143 (695), 3 July 1919.

³⁵ Oldenburg revealed this special feature of the Tibetan expedition many years later, when he interceded on behalf of his colleague, Academician Stcherbatsky, who was then in trouble with the authorities. See his letter to the administration of the Vasileostrovsky region of Leningrad, dated 20 February 1929, TsGA SPb, f. 7179, op. 3, d. 139, l. 2.

glass. We spent almost one whole month trying to make out the handwriting. The information is extremely interesting; everything that Waddell, Rockhill, and the old travellers tell us looks so ridiculously insignificant, if compared with the fullness of this data.

I asked for permission to publish these in our forthcoming journal. This would give us a trump card, however, the MID objects, being afraid that we could thus reveal their informer.

So far I have refused any recompense for the work, but Zalkind insists on it, while nobody can determine the sum to be paid. Therefore we decided to ask you to settle that matter.³⁶

In yet another letter to Oldenburg (presumably from the same period) Stcherbatsky related his recent conversation with L.Ya. Sternberg, also a member of the Russian Committee for the Exploration of Central and Eastern Asia: "I've just seen Sternberg. He speaks seriously about the possibility of sending an expedition to Tibet right now". Stcherbatsky was "absolutely delighted" to hear this and he informed Oldenburg of his readiness to put aside all his current work and to begin preparations for the journey.³⁷

One more piece of evidence comes from a well-known Indian nationalist, "Indian Prince" Raja Mahendra Pratap. In February 1920 he sent a postcard to Stcherbatsky from Kabul, which read as follows:

My dear Prof. Stcherbatsky,

So I am in Kabul. Your Government representatives also well-established in the country. If you should like to come on a scientific visit you will be quite welcome, I hope. Kindly let me know, at least, how are you getting on. What about Tibet mission? Please don't forget me if you go that side. Kindly remember me to Prof. Oldenburg.

Yours sincerely,
Mahendra Pratap³⁸

This remarkable personage, who, judging from the above quotation seems to have been on friendly terms with both Stcherbatsky and Oldenburg, merits closer attention by us at this point of the narrative. A participant in the abortive Hentig-Niedermayer mission and

³⁶ ARAN, f. 208 (Oldenburg Collection), op. 3, d. 685, l. 164, 164ob. Undated letter. The journal mentioned by Stcherbatsky is *Novyi Vostok* (New Orient) which was launched by the All-Russian Scientific Association of Oriental Studies, under Narkomindel's auspices, in 1921.

³⁷ Ibid., l. 170. Stcherbatsky's letter to Oldenburg, undated (presumably written in the summer of 1919).

³⁸ Ibid., f. 725 (Stcherbatsky Collection), op. 3, d. 166.

head ("President") of the self-appointed three-men Indian revolutionary government-in-exile ("Provisional Government of India"), set up in Kabul at the end of the same year, 1915, Mahendra Pratap had worked indefatigably since that time for the overthrow of the British Raj in India. In 1916–1917, Pratap made several attempts to establish contacts first with the Tsarist and then the democratic governments of Russia, but to no avail. His idea was to rally the Tsar to the anti-British Turco-German alliance, despite the fact that Russia was then fighting bitterly with Germany in the Great War. It is known that he dispatched a letter to Nicholas II on 13 February 1916, engraved on a golden plate, with an expression of regret in connection with the Russo-German military confrontation.³⁹ This remained unanswered however. In the spring of 1917 the Provisional government of A.F. Kerensky, knowing that Pratap was wanted by the British as a dangerous "seditious", denied him an entry visa. The Indian Raja could come to Russia only after the Bolshevik coup—in February 1918 he spent some time in Tashkent, at the invitation of the Turkestan authorities, and thence proceeded to Red Petrograd. Now that there was no Tsar in Russia and the Bolsheviks had just brought the country out of the war with the Kaiser's Germany, Pratap made a similar proposal to the new government—to unite with the Germans and strike at the British in India, but apparently they were not inspired by such an idea. "Izvestia" spoke cautiously of Pratap's plan, since the German penetration into Persia and India by a "northern route", via the Ukraine, the Caucasus, Turkestan and Afghanistan, was potentially dangerous for the Bolshevik regime itself at that stage. "If Germany succeeds in the full realization of this plan", wrote "Izvestia", "she will obtain a very rich market; if not, still she will no doubt be able to trigger off an explosion of nationalist sentiments in India, and, by striking at the most vulnerable spot of England, will make it sign quickly a peace treaty".⁴⁰

In early July of 1919, having reappeared in Moscow en route from Berlin to Kabul, Raja Mahendra Pratap at once contacted the Narkomindel, which arranged for him to meet Lenin—"this great man"—as part of a group of Indian revolutionaries. A Soviet historian, M.A. Persitz, believes that the purpose of Pratap's visit was

³⁹ For this letter see Vigasin 1999, pp. 444–445 (document # 324).

⁴⁰ "Na putiakh k Indii", *Izvestia*, # 99 (363), 19 May 1918.

probably to induce the Bolshevik leaders to launch an India liberation campaign jointly with the Afghans,⁴¹ which seems quite plausible. But if so, the idea of a surprise attack on India's north-eastern frontier via Tibet and the Himalayan minor buffer-states, as expounded in the Kalmyk project, could have been prompted by him as well! Tibet, curiously enough, was Pratap's other great obsession and over the course of many years, he tried unsuccessfully to penetrate into the sacred Buddhist kingdom, where he apparently hoped to conduct anti-British propaganda. His first attempt was made from Kabul as early as 1916. Pratap resumed his efforts four years later, after his return from Moscow. His message to Stcherbatsky in the early 1920s clearly indicates two things: that the Indian Raja was privy to the Narkomindel's Tibetan designs and, more importantly, that he planned to participate in Stcherbatsky's "Tibet expedition", with, of course, Chicherin's approval. When these plans did not work out, Pratap set out for Tibet on his own but this new attempt of his also ended in failure.

* * *

The civil war still raging in the larger part of Asiatic Russia was a serious impediment to Moscow's plans regarding Mongolia and Tibet. In their vision of the future revolutionary transformation of the political and social order in Asia, the Bolsheviks tended to regard these two countries—backward feudal theocracies from the Marxist point of view—as united in a common fate. Therefore Mongolia and Tibet were not to be dealt with separately, for they were part of the one Mongol-Tibetan question. This view was asserted by Vladimir Vilensky (Sibiriakov), a Soviet expert on Far Eastern affairs, in an article featuring special discussion of the question.⁴² In the days of the Great Game, Mongolia was an object of imperialist encroachment by Russia, as Tibet was for the British. Russian imperialists conveniently placed the neighbouring Outer Mongolia under their protection, and they also annexed the adjacent Urianhai region (Tannu-Tuva), whereas their British rivals obtained a major influence in Tibet. The two countries actually found themselves in the same position of "double

dependence", balancing the formal suzerainty of China and virtual protectorate of Russia (Mongolia) and Britain (Tibet). But now that the mighty storm of World Revolution had finally reached the borders of Mongolia and Tibet, a movement for national liberation was rapidly gaining momentum there. Their shared aspiration for independence only strengthened the traditional ties between the two nations. There was an overt tendency, Vilensky further argued, towards the unification of all the Mongol tribes, between China and Russia, on the one hand, and of all the Tibetan tribes, between India and China, on the other. "The Tibetans, too, have evicted the Chinese officials from their capital. They have not undertaken anything against the British so far because the British were much more clever than the Russians, and they avoided the blunders that were committed by the Russian *Kulturtreggers*", concluded the Bolshevik analyst.

The Narkomindel began to make friendly overtures to both Mongolia and its formal suzerain, China, in the latter half of 1919, by issuing a series of appeals to their respective peoples and governments. These proclamations were composed in accordance with a very simple propagandist pattern that was adopted by early Soviet diplomacy, a "diplomacy of self-sacrifice" as it was aptly called by the British. For example, in his appeal "to the Peoples and Governments of Southern and Northern China" of 25 July 1919, Lev Karakhan emphasized Moscow's refusal of Russia's share of the Boxer indemnity and her renunciation of all special privileges enjoyed by the Tsarist government on Chinese territory, including the ownership of the Chinese Eastern Railway. This was a gesture obviously intended to win the sympathies of both the Peking Central and Canton Nationalist governments. Similarly, in the appeal to the Mongolian people of June 26, Chicherin accentuated the fact that the Soviet government repudiated all the Tsarist agreements with Urga, and he also recognized the right of the Mongolian people to national sovereignty. In his subsequent declaration of August 1919, made to the "Mongolian People and to the Government of Autonomous Mongolia" the Narkom took a further step by stating that Mongolia, as an independent country (because the 1912 Russo-Mongolian Convention was no more), was entitled to have direct intercourse with other nations, without any tutelage from either Peking or Petrograd. Therefore he called upon the Mongolian people to enter into diplomatic relations with the Russian people without delay by sending their representatives to

⁴¹ Persitz 1973, p. 31.

⁴² V. Vilensky (Sibiriakov), "V glubinakh Azii: Mongolo-Tibetskii vopros", *Izvestiia*, # 155 (707), 17 July 1919. See also Vilenski 1925.

meet the Soviet Red Army.⁴³ Interestingly, both documents prudently avoided any mention of China's "suzerain rights" over one of its "outer territories", that being a rather sensitive issue for the Mongols. However the rulers of Mongolia were so frightened by the violent Bolshevik revolution that they avoided any contacts with the Soviet Russian authorities and they barred Russia's official agents from Urga. Moscow's chances of winning Mongolia over became even more slim after Peking had cancelled Outer Mongolia's autonomy and, seeking to bring the "vassal country" back to the Chinese fold, sent troops there under General Hsü Shu-tseng, which reached Urga in late October 1919.

While the prospects for extending Soviet influence to Buddhist Mongolia and Tibet remained vague at this juncture, some brighter prospects for the Bolsheviks appeared in another corner of Central Asia, in the Turkestan Republic. The territory of the latter became contiguous with that of the Soviet Russian Republik (RSFSR) once again in September 1919, after the commander of the Turkestan front, M.V. Frunze, had crushed Kolchak's Southern Army. Lenin hailed this victory as having "a world-wide historical significance" because Soviet Russia, by establishing "correct relations" with the peoples of Turkestan and by eradicating all vestiges of the Tsarist great-power imperialism in this Muslim country, could demonstrate to the whole world, and especially to all the oppressed nations of Asia and Africa, the non-aggressive character of its Eastern policy. In reality, however, Red Turkestan began all too soon to play the role of the Bolsheviks' main revolutionary base in Central Asia, instrumental in promoting Moscow's easternward expansionist schemes.

By this time Soviet-British antagonism had already reached a critical juncture as the new head of the Foreign Office, Lord Curzon, called for the creation of a "cordon sanitaire" from the Baltic to the Black Sea and to Turkestan in order to safeguard the Empire against Bolshevism. More specifically, he spoke of the necessity "to create and buttress tiny independent states in the Caucasus, Transcaspia, Central Asia, Persia and Afghanistan, near the borders of India, hostile to the Bolshevik Russia and under the tutelage of Britain".⁴⁴

⁴³ For the text of the declaration see Iudin 1959, pp. 106–107.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the War Cabinet, Cab. 23/9, 1919, and Curzon's draft memorandum to the War Cabinet of 21 August 1919 in Great Britain 1947–1972, vol. III, pp. 519–526.

To these plans Lenin promptly responded with a counter-challenge towards the end of the same year, when he set the Eastern communists the task of rallying "all awakening Eastern nations" to the Soviet Republic, to carry on together with them the struggle against world (i.e. British) imperialism.⁴⁵ This call heralded the beginning of a new era of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia, along the southern rim land of Soviet Russia—from Transcaucasia to Kashgaria, where British and Bolshevik troops had clashed in the course of the Civil War.

We have already seen how the Bolshevik leaders sought to use the Anglo-Afghan hostilities to their own revolutionary ends by planning to strike a double blow at the British in India from two different directions, via Afghanistan and Tibet. As soon as Turkestan was finally reunited with Soviet Russia, Trotsky would return to his earlier plan for a cavalry attack on India, adding a new element to it, that of revolutionary diplomacy: "We can forthwith thwart England's efforts to rally the Asian states against us by setting up a major military base in Turkestan, for which there are already adequate elements", he wrote to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party in September 1919.

A feasible line of direction for a thrust needs to be immediately selected and one out of the chain of states which England is ranging against us confronted with immediate attack, presented with an ultimatum to conclude a peace treaty, and made to comply with our binding or subjected to attack.⁴⁶

Trotsky's revolutionary extremism, however, was not shared by all of his party comrades, least of all by Chicherin, who certainly preferred negotiations to cavalry swords as an instrument with which to dismantle the British-projected buffer system in Central Asia. But it was essentially the conventional diplomacy of the old type with its underhand dealings, clandestine intrigues, and conspiratorial methods (no matter if these were publicly jettisoned by the Bolsheviks) to which he had to resort under the prevailing wartime conditions. As Lenin put it in one of his public speeches at that time: "As long as

⁴⁵ Lenin speech to the 2nd Congress of the Communist organizations of the Eastern nations on 22 November 1919 in Lenin 1958–1965, vol. 30 (1962), p. 140.

⁴⁶ Meijer 1971, vol. 1, document # 453 (Trotsky's memo to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of 20 September 1919), p. 673.

there is war, secret diplomacy must remain as one of its instruments. . . . The evaluation of this diplomacy will depend on the general evaluation of war".⁴⁷ However the kind of war the Bolsheviks declared on world capitalism and imperialism in 1917 would never stop. It continued virtually uninterrupted up to the last days of the Soviet state in the form of severe ideological confrontation. In Moscow's eyes this fully justified the use of secret diplomacy, and it should be no surprise that Chicherin, when briefing one of the Soviet ambassadors in the middle of the 1920s, would begin by reminding him that the Soviet Union was "in the state of secret war with Britain".⁴⁸

* * *

We will now outline the main stages of the Anglo-Soviet diplomatic contest for the two foremost strategic buffers in Central Asia: Persia and Afghanistan. London took the lead in that dramatic competition: on August 9, 1919—while Bravin was still on the way to Kabul—the British Minister in Teheran, Sir Percy Cox, concluded a convention with the Shah's government. According to that treaty, Britain was to lend military and civil advisors to the Persian administration and provide a two million pound loan to the Shah's exhausted treasury. These measures would allow her to take a firmer grip of Persian affairs after Russia had surrendered its sphere of influence in the country. Chicherin, of course, tried hard to prevent the conclusion of the treaty: on June 26 he sent the Persian government, via Kolomiitsev, a 19 point proposal for an alternative Soviet-Persian agreement drafted by Karakhan. However this was not delivered to them as the agent was captured on his way to Teheran and then shot by the Shah's Cossack officers, as related above. Then, on 30 August, after the Anglo-Persian convention had been already signed, the Narkom issued a proclamation to the Persian workers and peasants, which declared its non-recognition of the arrangement because it implied the enslavement of the Persian people. The treaty, however, which Curzon himself praised as a "diplomatic masterpiece" and his "great triumph", lapsed soon after the resignation of Vossug-

⁴⁷ Lenin, "Doklad o vnutrennem i vneshnem polozhenii respubliki na sovestchaniu aktivista Moskovskoi organizatsii RKPb", 9 October 1920, in Lenin 1958–1965, vol. 41 (1963), p. 341.

⁴⁸ Besedovsky 1997, p. 164.

ed-Dowleh in the middle of 1920. By that time the British position in Persia and other parts of Central Asia had been seriously shattered by the Bolshevik inspired "Eastern revolution", which was rapidly making headway across the Asian continent.

In January 1920, the Red Army occupied Khiva, then in April Soviet power was restored in Azerbaijan (bordering on Persia), and finally in June a Gilan Soviet Republic was established in northern Persia, following a dashing naval raid led by F.F. Raskolnikov on the Caspian port of Enzeli, then under the British control. Plans were immediately made at Baku for a military expedition to Teheran to overthrow the oppressive, pro-British Shah's government, however these were soon frustrated as the leader of the "Persian revolution", Mirza Kuchek Khan, proved to be a man of too moderate ambitions. He was not keen on either expropriating the property of the local bourgeoisie (the Gilan merchants and artisans), or launching any sweeping agricultural reforms. As a result, his government was replaced, through an "October coup", by an ultra-communist one, headed by another Persian nationalist, Ehsanulla Khan. Yet this was even less efficient than its predecessor as the kind of socialism Ehsanulla tried to introduce in Persia, following the Bolshevik patterns, was a complete disaster, utterly antagonizing all classes of the Gilan population. Hence the Soviet leaders faced a dilemma—either to continue their ruinous experiments in Gilan (which were actually conducted under the direction of the hot-headed Azerbaijani communists lest Moscow should be accused of interference in Persian affairs) or "liquidate" the ill-fated Red Persian government, as its existence seriously impeded negotiations then going on in Moscow with the Shah's envoy towards conclusion of a treaty of friendship. They ultimately chose the latter, politically more advantageous, option early in 1921. Thus the Gilan puppet republic, which had brought the Bolsheviks no political dividends and only maimed their prestige in the Muslim East, had to be sacrificed to the more vital interests of the Soviet state, and it finally collapsed in September 1921.⁴⁹

The Soviet-Persian treaty which was signed on 26 February 1921, was the first in a series of agreements concluded by the Soviet government with its "Eastern neighbours" in the course of that year. (It would be followed by similar treaties with Afghanistan, on 28

⁴⁹ Re the Gilan Soviet Republic see Genis 2000; Chaquery 1995.

February, Kemalist Turkey, on 16 March, and the People's government of Mongolia, on 5 November). This arrangement was largely propagandist in its spirit—the Bolsheviks renounced “the old Tsarist policy of force” with regard to Persia, repudiated all the agreements concluded formerly between St. Petersburg and Teheran, cancelled Russian concessions in the country and, moreover, provided for a transfer to the Persian people, without compensation, of all Russian possessions in Persia, including railroads, telegraph and telephone lines, the port of Enzeli, and many more. This naturally produced a strong impression on Persian society at large. A correspondent of the British magazine “Nation” had to acknowledge the tremendous growth of Russia’s influence in Persia due to its “policy of self-sacrifice”.⁵⁰ As for the Anglo-Persian treaty, it was finally annulled by the cabinet of Sayyid Zia ad-Din, a political writer, who came to power through a coup d’etat in Teheran staged by an ex-trooper of the Shah’s Cossack brigade, Reza Khan (the future Shah Reza Pechlevi), precisely at the time of the conclusion of the Moscow agreement. One of Lord Curzon’s biographers, H. Nicolson, would later explain this fiasco of British diplomacy by Curzon’s serious misconception of the attitude of the average Persian towards Russia and Great Britain:

He did not realize that in 1919 it was Great Britain who was regarded as the oppressor and Russia as the potential friend. Nor did he rightly estimate the congenital instinct of the Persian to regard each of these two powers with equal suspicion and to support themselves, their country and their relations by alternating overtures, now to Moscow, now to Downing Street.⁵¹

In Afghanistan, at the very threshold of India, Anglo-Soviet rivalry assumed an even more dramatic character. Moscow obviously sought to benefit as much as it could from strained Anglo-Afghan relations in the post-war period, and it skillfully played on Afghan national sentiments by overly emphasizing the fact of Afghanistan’s “full independence” as a sovereign state. Still, the Amir’s insistent territorial claims and his support of the anti-Bolshevik Basmachi movement in Bukhara and the Ferghana valley made him an unlikely Soviet ally in Moscow’s eyes. It took Ya.Z. Surits, head of the Soviet extra-

⁵⁰ *Nation* (magazine), London, 3 June 1921.

⁵¹ Nicolson 1934, p. 147.

ordinary mission which arrived in Kabul in December 1919, eight full months to resolve all the differences between the two parties and negotiate a preliminary agreement with the Afghan government signed on 13 September 1920.

By that time some crucial changes had taken place in the nature of Anglo-Russian relations. In late 1919 the British cabinet, headed by Lloyd George, decided to withdraw from its intervention in Russia and agreed to open negotiations towards the conclusion of a trade agreement with what Curzon called “this deplorable government at Moscow”. The Soviet leaders attached paramount importance to that arrangement as it amounted to de facto recognition of Bolshevik Russia by the leading Western power. Therefore they were compelled to adopt, at least outwardly, a more conciliatory attitude to their British adversary and substantially moderate their ambitions with regard to Persia and Afghanistan. In his letter to Chicherin of 4 June 1920, Trotsky would propose the exact reverse of the Eastern policy “of resolute and dynamic action” that he had advocated less than a year before, by insisting that

a Soviet revolution in the East is now advantageous to us chiefly as a major item of diplomatic barter with England.... We must continue in every way to emphasize through all available channels our readiness to come to an understanding with England with regard to the East.⁵²

According to a modern Russian historian, S.B. Panin, declassified documents in the Soviet archives reveal that the Soviet leaders in their political calculations in the period of 1919–early 1920s regarded Afghanistan as only “a bargaining chip in their game with England”, and they believed that an alliance with that country could be detrimental to their political designs.⁵³ At the same time Moscow had no intention of discontinuing her anti-British subversive activities in Afghanistan. Thus Narkomindel instructed Surits to attempt “to prevent the conclusion of peace” between the Afghans and the British, as well as to “seek to bring about a new Anglo-Afghan confrontation by all means possible”.⁵⁴

⁵² Meijer 1971, vol. 2, p. 209 (document # 556).

⁵³ Quoted in a secret dispatch of L.M. Karakhan to Sh.Z. Eliava, the RSFSR plenipotentiary in Turkestan of 9 January 1920 (RGASPI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 2116, l. 6), see Panin 1995, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

What seems to be particularly interesting about this Soviet mission is the unusually broad plenary powers vested in Surits by the Sovnarkom. According to his letter of authority issued on 23 June 1919, he was appointed "the extraordinary and plenipotentiary representative of RSFSR for Central Asia, with a permanent residence in Kabul" and instructed "to maintain diplomatic relations with the peoples of the independent Afghanistan, the independent tribes of Baluchistan, Khiva, Bukhara, and the peoples of India, Kashmir and Tibet, struggling for their independence". Hence Moscow authorized Surits to "come into direct contacts with the governments of these countries, already existent and those that may come into existence, as well as revolutionary organizations pursuing the object of liberation of the peoples in Central Asia from foreign dominion"; moreover, the Soviet diplomat was entitled to post his own representatives and agents, and to negotiate and conclude treaties, either directly, or through his middlemen, on behalf of the Central Government in Moscow.⁵⁵

The Soviet-Afghan negotiations were in full swing when, in April 1920, the British Indian authorities rather belatedly started their own talks with the Afghans at Mussoorie, hoping to develop the preliminary Rawalpindi arrangement into a full peace treaty. These talks were held between Sir Henry Dobbs and Mahmud Tarzi, who was simultaneously the chief negotiator with the Soviets at Kabul. But it was at about the same time, on May 31, that the British authorities in London opened their parley with the Bolshevik delegation, headed by L.B. Krasin. The disputed Persian and Afghan issues soon emerged. Lloyd George, in his reply to Krasin's proposal to resume Anglo-Russian trade relations, put forward as one of the conditions for this resumption, that the Soviet government refrain from any anti-British acts in Asia Minor, Persia, Afghanistan and the frontier of North-Western India. The policymakers in Simla and Delhi also seemed to be willing to come to terms with the Bolsheviks about Afghanistan, as is evidenced by the correspondence of the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, with London in May and June 1920. However, no agreement was reached, which left Moscow with no other alternative but to press for the conclusion of her own treaty of friendship with Kabul.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Volodarsky 1985, pp. 164–165.

The final stage of this unprecedented Soviet-British race for Afghanistan was a mixture of intrigue and drama: on 28 February 1921, the agreed text of the Soviet-Afghan treaty was concluded in Moscow. Much to Moscow's annoyance, however, the Afghan authorities delayed its ratification for nearly half a year. The stumbling-block was one of the special benefits the Soviet party wanted to derive from this treaty—the establishment of consulates in the Ghazni and Kandahar areas, close to the Indian border. This seriously alarmed the British and made them exert pressure on Kabul via the Dobbs mission. As a result Moscow had to abandon her claims, which reassured the authorities in Kabul and Delhi and paved the way to the ratification of the Soviet-Afghan agreement (13 August), and subsequently the conclusion of the Anglo-Afghan treaty of peace (22 November 1921). The new Soviet *polpred* (plenipotentiary) in Kabul, F.F. Raskolnikov, in his letter to Lenin, had predicted this outcome, stating that the Afghans would most likely prefer "without breaking relations with either England or Soviet Russia, to establish a status quo with both states and, by maneuvering between them, gain various benefits from both sides".⁵⁶

The kind of price the Kremlin was prepared to pay for Kabul's friendship is evident from the secret supplement to the treaty. According to that document, the Soviet government was to provide Afghanistan with an annual state subsidy of 1 million gold roubles and a certain amount of arms, including 5000 rifles, 12 airplanes, and 8 anti-aircraft guns. Apart from that, the Soviets were to set up an aviation school and a cordite manufacturing factory in Afghanistan, as well as establishing a Kushk-Kabul telegraph line. On top of that, Russia was to lend various advisors ("experts") to the Afghan government.⁵⁷ All this "aid" was apparently designed to outweigh British assistance to Kabul, in order to prevent the Amir from turning to the British.

* * *

As for the largest Central Asian buffer, Tibet, it once again drew the attention of the Kremlin's world revolution-planners at the end of 1919, in connection with the "clandestine" Tibetan negotiations in Peking. These talks began on 13 August between J. Jordan, head of the British Legation there, and the acting Foreign Minister of

⁵⁶ Panin, *ibid.*, p. 63 (Quoted in Raskolnikov's letter to Lenin of 22 August 1921).

⁵⁷ Tretiakova 1996.

China, Ch'en Lu, with the aim of laying a basis for a Sino-Tibetan settlement. What the British and the Chinese were actually looking for was, in Alastair Lamb's words, "a new instrument to replace the abortive Simla Convention" of 1913–1914, with the help of which they could finally settle the vexing question of Sino-Tibetan border and also of the status of Tibet.⁵⁸

In Ch'en Lu's opinion, a model for the definitive agreement with Lhasa could be Tsarist Russia's corpus of agreements about Mongolia, which formally recognized China's suzerainty there (although this recognition was only a face-saving measure, as Peking had practically no control over Mongolian affairs). For the British the precedent of Mongolia was certainly not unwelcome in regard to their position in Tibet because if they followed the Russian model, they could station their representative in Lhasa, just as the Russians had installed theirs in Urga as far back as 1861. The only possible obstacle to such an arrangement, the 1907 Convention, was no longer in operation once the Bolsheviks had openly renounced it. And envisioning the future Sino-Tibetan settlement, Jordan also wanted the division of Tibet into Outer and Inner zones, as agreed upon in Simla, to be discarded. This was one of the main proposals Jordan made to Ch'en Lu at their first meeting.

Despite the amicable atmosphere in which they began, however, the Anglo-Chinese talks on Tibet were suddenly called off. The Chinese Foreign Ministry, the Wai-chiao-pu, explained to Jordan that the discussion must be postponed until a more stable Central government had been established in China. But the real reason for the disruption of the talks, as it turned out later, was that they somehow came to the notice of Japan, which seriously alarmed the Chinese cabinet.

Moscow reacted rather nervously to the negotiations in Peking. "Radio has just brought us news that the question of Tibet's independence is already put on the agenda", wrote V. Vilensky in "Izvestiia":

Talks between China and England about 'China's granting Tibet autonomy, on the condition that China retain her sovereignty' are under way. No doubt the question was raised by British diplomacy which, seeking to protect the approaches to India, is spinning its diplomatic web, planning to catch in it eventually both China and Tibet.

⁵⁸ Lamb 1989, p. 83.

Vilensky also referred rather vaguely to Sino-Tibetan hostilities in repeating a communication received from Canton. According to this, the governor of Szechuan Province, General Hsung K'ai-yu, had called the Canton Southern government for help, urging its leaders to come out jointly with the Northern government of Peking "against Tibet, which is threatening war, due to China's non-recognition of her autonomy". The general conclusion made by Vilensky from the intercepted radio communications was that the Tibetans had begun to claim their right to self-determination "in the most unambiguous manner".⁵⁹

The news from Peking apparently made Chicherin very anxious, as the Anglo-Chinese talks "behind the back of the Tibetans" could sooner or later result in some sort of secret agreement that would finally turn Tibet into a legitimized British protectorate. However there was very little he could do at that juncture to interfere in the Tibetan situation in order to frustrate this new intrigue by British diplomacy.

A new surge of Soviet interest in Tibet could next be observed in the middle of 1920, when the civil war in Russia was already drawing to a close. On 8 July the 1st Kalmyk Congress of the Soviets, for example, issued an appeal "To the Peoples of the East", which was specifically addressed to the Kalmyks' "Buddhist brethren" in India, Tibet, Mongolia, China and Siam. The authors of this proclamation (presumably Chapchaev and Amur-Sanan, who presided at the Congress) called on the Asian Buddhists to raise arms against their foreign oppressors, following the example of the Kalmyks and other big and small nations in Russia, as "the hour of vengeance has come".⁶⁰ Among the participants in this forum was Agvan Dorzhiev, who posed as "the representative of Tibet". He would subsequently take part in yet another, even larger, anti-British rally of the period, the Congress of the Peoples of the East, which was held in Baku in early September of the same year.⁶¹

It was in this atmosphere of revolutionary euphoria that Chicherin returned some time in the summer of 1920 to his still "frozen" Tibet

⁵⁹ V. Vilensky, "Bor'ba za nezavisimost' (sredi narodov Dal'nego Vostoka)", *Izvestiia*, # 256, 15 November 1919.

⁶⁰ GARF, f. 1318, op. 1, d. 641, ll. 126–127ob.

⁶¹ The latter fact is mentioned in Zaiatuev 1991, p. 36.

expedition plans. The Narkom actually had two projects to choose from by then—the old one by Stcherbatsky and a fresh proposal drafted by a 39-year old naturalist and adventure story writer from Petrograd, Alexandre Vasilievich Barchenko.

There is evidence that Barchenko volunteered to lead a “scientific and propagandist expedition” to Mongolia and Tibet “to explore Central Asia and establish contacts with local tribes”.⁶² Among those who wished to participate in the journey were several Bolshevik sailors of the Baltic Fleet. Two Lhasa-bound routes, both originating in Kiakhta, on the Soviet-Mongolian border, were charted by Barchenko. After crossing Mongolia, via Urga, the travellers could either choose a short Yumbeise-Anhsı-Tsaidam road, or a longer one, leading through the Alashan-Xining-Kokonor area. The party was to consist of eight men—two leaders and six escorts, probably to be recruited from the Red sailors. The cost of the entire venture was estimated at 79,000 roubles.

Alexandre Barchenko, as recent research into his biography has shown, was not only a writer and scientist, known mainly for his experiments in parapsychology, but also an occultist and visionary, a follower of the French mystic, Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre.⁶³ He believed in the existence in the prehistoric times on this planet, of a highly advanced non-technocratic society (“culture”) which he identified both with the legendary Buddhist realm of Shambhala and the subterranean “civilization of Agartha,” as was “evidenced” by Saint-Yves’ writings. The remnants of this culture could still be found in the secret brotherhoods, situated somewhere in the Alpine region of Afghanistan, India, and Tibet, so the real purpose of Barchenko’s trip was to get in touch with the enlightened Shambhala-Agarthi dwellers and partake, if possible, of their “supreme knowledge”. After the Bolshevik revolution Barchenko used to lecture extensively on this occult theory in Petrograd, by especially emphasizing the fact that the vanished prehistoric culture was basically “communist”. As a result a group of the Bolshevik sailors in Petrograd enthusiastically volunteered to join his expedition and help him recover the lost heritage of the ancient communist “Red Shambhala”.

We don’t know whether Barchenko revealed his secret aspirations to Chicherin. Outwardly, his proposal, combining scientific (or rather

⁶² AFPRF, f. 100, op. 1, p. 1, d. 1, l. 8.

⁶³ Andreyev 2001c.

quasi-scientific) and propaganda tasks, seems to fit perfectly in Narkomindel’s overall scheme for Soviet penetration into Tibet. However, the Narkom preferred the Stcherbatsky project, be it only because the estimable professor had personally known the Dalai Lama and enjoyed his confidence.

It was at this stage of expedition planning that a delegation of young Mongolian revolutionaries came to Russia in three separate parties in July–August 1920. This included Sukhe-Bator, Choibalsan, Danzan, Bodo, Chagdarjav and other figures who would soon play the key role in staging the “people’s revolution” in Mongolia. After a short stay in Verkhneudinsk, then the capital of the Soviet-constructed Far Eastern Republic, the Mongolians proceeded to Irkutsk, the third major Bolshevik revolutionary centre in Asiatic Russia, along with Tashkent and Baku. There they contacted the Narkomindel representative and the head of recently established Eastern Peoples’ Section (Sekvostnar) at the Siberian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party (TsK RKPb), F.I. Gapon, asking him for Soviet assistance in the liberation of Mongolia. They said that they primarily needed Russian arms, ammunition, and instructors, as well as a monetary loan. From Irkutsk the Mongolian delegation proceeded further to Moscow, accompanied by several Buryat members of the Sekvostnar, including Elbeg Rinchno and Tseben Jamtsarano, both known as active participants in the Buryat national liberation movement.

Interestingly, the coming of the Mongolian revolutionaries to Irkutsk coincided in time with the creation of a new division within the Sekvostnar, the Mongol-Tibetan unit (Montibotdel), in addition to the already existent Korean, Chinese and Japanese units, in mid-August 1920. According to the program of this new group, it was to conduct communist agitation, organize pro-communist groups, and produce and disseminate revolutionary and educational literature “for the sake of [Russia’s] rapprochement with Mongolia and Tibet on the basis of mutual economic benefits and politico-economical aid”.⁶⁴ The first and foremost task of the unit at this early stage was to acquaint itself with the current political situation and popular sentiments in these countries, for which purpose a number of special agents—“revolutionary workers”—were to be dispatched to Lhasa,

⁶⁴ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 152, d. 157, l. 11, 11ob.

Urga, Kobdo, Shara-sume, Khailar and Peking. Their training was to be started urgently with "special courses" in Irkutsk. Concurrently, in the fall of the same year, a Mongolian and Tibetan printing house was to be set up in Irkutsk to publish the appropriate propagandist literature. The same program also envisaged the training of a cadre of "revolutionary officers" for the future "Red armies" of Mongolia and Tibet. This was of paramount importance since the contemporary revolutionary movements, in order to be able to fight efficiently against the old armies of the imperialist powers, were to be well-equipped and well-trained, in accordance with the latest standards of military equipment and science.

Some steps towards the realization of these tasks had already been made in September 1920 when the head of the Mongol-Tibetan unit, S.S. Borisov, also known as an organizer of the first revolutionary groups in Mongolia in 1919, gave the following commission to one of his subordinates:

[You must] urgently

- 1) provide detailed information to the unit on the results of the visit to Peking of a delegation of [Mongolian] princes, their negotiations with Chinese governmental circles, and the potential perspectives of these;
- 2) collect information on the situation in Tibet, the country's relations with China and England, its political leanings, the armed forces, traces of foreign influence there, etc. and submit a report on all these questions, along with your own considerations, to the Mongol-Tibetan section of the Sekvostnar;
- 3) recruit among the Tibetan residents in Mongolia, particularly in Urga, the individuals who, owing to their political inclinations, could be employed by the section for the work as translators, in both Irkutsk and Urga, and also could be sent as agitators to Tibet.⁶⁵

In the meantime, the Mongolian mission, upon its arrival in Moscow, delivered to the Soviet government an official letter written by the Mongol princes and high lamas and sealed with the Bogdo-Gegen's red square seal. In this the leaders of theocratic Mongolia asked for Soviet military aid to expel the Chinese troops from their country and restore Outer Mongolia's autonomy under the Grand Lama, Jebdzundamba Khutuktu, ruling as a "constitutional monarch". Along

⁶⁵ Ibid., f. 495, op. 152, d. 3, l. 11. The person who was given this commission was not identified in the document.

with this missive, the Mongolian revolutionaries, on Sukhe-Bator's initiative, sent to the Soviet leaders from Irkutsk via Sekvostnar another letter, on behalf of their revolutionary organization (dated 28 August 1920), which outlined more specifically their goals and priorities for the near future.⁶⁶

The Soviet-Mongolian negotiations were held on the premises of Narkomindel at the Kuznetskii Most (Blacksmiths' Bridge) in September–October. Among those who were invited to participate were Rinchino, Dorzhiev and Amur-Sanan. In the course of the discussions it was Karakhan, it appears, who raised the question of the projected Soviet mission to Lhasa. In his confidential letter to Oldenburg, written presumably in late September 1920, Stcherbatsky sheds some light on the Soviet Tibetan plans as far as they stood at the time. He repeated one of his conversations with Chicherin's right hand man:

I've just returned from Karakhan. We have talked with him for about two hours. He shows an extraordinary interest in the East. He regrets that the committee [the Russian Committee for the exploration of Central and Eastern Asia—A.A.] was placed under the Narkompros and wants to bring it back and merge it with the Oriental Society.

He was also concerned about the pillage of the [Buddhist] temple. As for Tibet, they would wish most of all to have a radio station installed in Lhasa, and he asked for my opinion. I raised the question of information, but did not turn down [the idea of] the radio-station outright. I insisted that I would rather go to London first, and Khambo [Agvan Dorzhiev—A.A.] will send to Lhasa a Buryat, Jambalon, the bearer of this letter. In the meantime, the mounting of the expedition would follow its normal course. Khambo thinks that penetration into Tibet from the north, under the present conditions, is very dangerous, but I asked him not to decline Karakhan's plans categorically as things may still change.⁶⁷

Stcherbatsky's allusions to the pillage of the Buddhist temple and to his forthcoming trip to London need some comments here. The Tibetan temple, or rather monastery (*datsang*), in Petrograd was totally abandoned by the monks after the February Revolution. Dorzhiev, therefore, shortly before leaving for the Kalmyk steppes in late 1918,

⁶⁶ Re these two letters see, for example, Iudin 1959, pp. 112–113; and Sobolev 1978, pp. 89–90.

⁶⁷ ARAN, f. 208, op. 3, d. 685, ll. 162–162ob. Stcherbatsky to Oldenburg, undated letter (written presumably in October 1920, shortly before Stcherbatsky's departure for Europe).

had asked Stcherbatsky to move into the nearby monastic "hostel" in order to look after the temple, its library and other *datsan* property in his (Dorzhiev's) absence. However, in October of 1919, when General N.N. Yudenich began to advance on Petrograd from the north, Stcherbatsky was turned out of his flat by a Red Army commander who quartered his detachment in the same hostel. Soon after that the temple was thoroughly looted and vandalized. The despoilers, presumably the Red Army men, knocked the head off the plaster of Paris statue of the Big Buddha in the main prayer hall and they also pierced a large hole in the gilded image's chest with the bayonets, searching for some treasures which they believed to be hidden inside. However there was nothing there but sheets of fine paper with sacred Buddhist prayers and invocations, which would later be sold at the city's second-hand markets for use as cigarette paper. Practically all of the temple furnishings, indeed every item of value and utility, was taken away—from the precious ritual objects, such as gilded, bronze and copper statuettes or burkhans of Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese make, down to door knobs, locks and even nails. But the most irreplaceable loss of all suffered by the temple was its library and Dorzhiev's diplomatic archives, which were completely destroyed.

Dorzhiev learned about the incident rather belatedly when he was in Kalmykia, via a cable from his Latvian disciple, Carl Tennisson, in September of 1920. He immediately rushed back to Petrograd only to face the ghastly sight of a typical pogrom in the Buddhist temple there. Dorzhiev immediately lodged a protest with Narkomindel, forwarding a letter to the head of its Eastern department, Ya.D. Yanson, on 1 October. In this he stressed the political implications of the event:

The plunder and desecration of the Buddhist Temple in Petrograd, being undoubtedly an all-Buddhist shrine, specially patronized by the Dalai Lama . . . will definitely have a negative impact on and hinder the normalization of relations between Soviet Russia and the Buddhist East.⁶⁸

The Narkomindel seemed to be quite concerned and it promptly re-addressed the "note" of the Tibetan representative to G.E. Zinoviev, the head of the Petrograd city administration, Petrosoviet, and simultaneously the chairman of Comintern's Executive Committee. "The

⁶⁸ Andreyev 1992, p. 107.

Narkomindel wants to draw your attention to the scandalous plunder and vandalizing of the Buddhist temple", Karakhan and Yanson wrote in the covering letter. "The fact of its destruction is criminal not only because of the historical value (of the monument), but it will also undermine any trust of the Buddhists towards Soviet Russia, if news of the temple's ruin reaches their ears".⁶⁹

The subsequent Cheka inquiry into the incident resulted in the detention of the seven Red Army soldiers and dismissal of their commander, yet the stolen temple property could not be recovered. On the other hand, Narkomindel's intercession had more positive results, as it helped to evict the military unit from the temple's quarters, and the diplomatic agency is also known to have given some help to Dorzhiev in the restoration of the Buddhist temple.

Stcherbatsky's visit to Narkomindel in the autumn of 1920, however, was not only occasioned by his involvement in Chicherin's Tibetan designs. The Russian Academy of Sciences concurrently planned to send the scholar on a special mission to Western Europe, where he was to re-establish the contacts disrupted by the revolution and the civil war between the Russian institution and the leading European academic communities. His other tasks included the printing of manuals of Oriental languages, purchase of books and other educational supplies, and, moreover, he was also presumably to give assistance to Krasin's trade mission in London.⁷⁰ In December 1920 Stcherbatsky left Petrograd for Scandinavia and Europe, and he finally got to London in July of the following year,⁷¹ a few months after the conclusion of the Soviet-British trade agreement. Whether he was able to render any real assistance to Krasin in the aftermath we do not know; although there is some evidence that Stcherbatsky met with Curzon at some point during his two-year stay in Europe. According to Oldenburg, his colleague, on Krasin's instructions, negotiated with Curzon the question of return to the USSR of the Russian scientific collections "confiscated by the British in India", which could well be true.⁷²

⁶⁹ Andreyev 1990, p. 396. Narkomindel to Zinoviev, 4 October 1920.

⁷⁰ Ya.V. Vasil'kov, "Vstrecha Vostoka i Zapada v nauchnoi deiatel'nosti F.I. Stcherbatskogo" in ABAEV et al. 1989, p. 195.

⁷¹ On Stcherbatsky's trip to Europe in 1920–1923 see ARAN f. 725, op. 2, d. 40 and 47.

⁷² See TsGA Spb, f. 7179, op. 3, d. 139, l. 2. Letter from Oldenburg to the Vasileostrovsky District Executive Committee, 20 February 1929.

The person who was to replace Stcherbatsky at the head of the Tibetan expedition, as is suggested by the above quotation, was Sandan Jambalon. A Buryat ex-lama and a protégé of Dorzhiev, he was on the payroll of the Sekvostnar in 1920 and early 1921 and was apparently attached by the Bolsheviks, together with Rinchno and Jamtsarano, to the Mongolian Mission as Sekvostnar's representatives. Hence he must have participated in the discussion of the Tibetan question at Narkomindel in the early autumn of 1920.

The details of this discussion are unknown to us, save for the fact that they resulted in a brief resume, which was quoted later in the minutes of one of the Sekvostnar's sessions:

During the visit in Moscow in September–October 1920 of the delegation of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party the question of Tibet, as related to the Mongolian question, was discussed at the Narkomindel, with the participation of the former Tibetan ambassador to Russia, comrade Dorzhiev. Incidentally, the issue of sending a special expedition to Tibet was raised in Narkomindel some time before, however, it was only after the arrival of the delegation that it was put on the plane of practical realization, and concurrently the approach to the Tibetan question was also worked out. The discussions at the Narkomindel resulted in the following [conclusions]:

- a) The establishment of connections between the RSFSR and Tibet is utterly important and pressing;
- b) the absence of relevant information on the internal and external situation of Tibet in the last 3 or 4 years and the special vitality of the Tibetan question due to the revolutionary upsurge in India and in Asia in general, necessitates that Soviet diplomacy handle the Tibetan question with utmost caution, as it is inseparably linked to other Far-Eastern questions; and
- c) in order to clear up definitively the question and map out practical ways for the solution of the Tibetan problem it is imperative to dispatch a small secret reconnaissance expedition to Tibet, and after finding out the situation there and in case of a positive attitude of Tibet towards Russia, one of its members must steal into Afghanistan and transmit the results of the expedition to Moscow. On receiving the news the Narkomindel must set to mounting another, more substantial expedition, or rather mission to Tibet.⁷³

⁷³ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 87, l. 1 and 1ob. Extract from the Protocol of the session of the Presidium of the Sekvostnar, jointly with the Mongol-Tibetan unit of the Section, 15 January 1921.

The above scheme of the two expeditions—the first one to make preliminary exploration (“reconnoiter”) of the political situation in Lhasa and the second to conduct official negotiations with the Dalai Lama—strikingly resembles Narkomindel's two-act Afghan scenario, which was so successfully put into action by the joint efforts of Bravin and Surits. Some practical steps to implement this simple scheme were immediately made by the Soviet diplomatic department. Thus, Narkomindel allocated a sum of 6200 silver roubles (of the Tsarist coinage) for the mounting of the “first Tibetan expedition” (as the venture would be henceforth referred to in official papers), 200 arshins of brocade for presents to prominent Tibetan officials and lamas, and some weapons for the mission escort (four carbine-rifles and one sub-machine gun). Chicherin and Karakhan also mapped, with Dorzhiev's help, the expedition route. This was to start in Urga, where the Soviet emissaries were supposed to join a large caravan of Mongolian and Tibetan pilgrims and traders, which certainly provided them a good cover and facilitated their entry to the Buddhist Mecca.⁷⁴

Then, on 17 November 1920, the Mongol-Tibetan section passed a resolution on the necessity of starting “as quickly as possible” the publication of literature in Tibetan, with the help of some specialists in the field, such as Gombojab Tsybikov.⁷⁵ (After his return from Tibet, the Buryat scholar had been teaching Mongolian at the Oriental Institute in Vladivostok, between 1902 and 1917, and then at the Buryat teachers' courses in Chita and Aga in 1917–1922. During this period he wrote two manuals of the conversational Tibetan and Mongolian languages, and in 1919 the Bolsheviks published his Tibetan travelogue entitled “The Buddhist pilgrim at the holy places of Tibet”).⁷⁶ The Tibetan literature the unit was going to produce was mainly “popular educational books of encyclopedic character” to help the Tibetans “overcome the medieval scholastic views prevailing in their minds”.⁷⁷ These publication plans, however, were seriously impeded by the lack of printing presses with Tibetan type,

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 9, l. 1, 1ob.

⁷⁶ G.Ts. Tsybikov, *Posobie dlja prakticheskogo izuchenia mongol'skogo iazyka*, Vladivostok, 1907; and *Posobie dlja izuchenia tibetskogo iazyka*. I: Razgovornaia rech, Vladivostok, 1908. See also Tsybikov, G. 1919. Re Tsybikov's biography see R.E. Pubaev's preface to his *Selected works*, Tsybikov, G. 1991, pp. 7–26.

⁷⁷ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 152, d. 157, l. 11ob.

so it remains unclear whether the Mongol-Tibetan unit eventually succeeded in producing any propaganda literature intended for Tibet.

The Tibet expedition project was discussed further at the joint session of Sekvostnar's Presidium and the Montibotdel held in Irkutsk on 15 January 1921. The session found the means provided by Narkomindel for the expedition inadequate, and called for an additional sum of up to 8000 silver roubles. Since the Sekvostnar's own chest was practically empty at that time, it was decided that the extra monies would be borrowed from the fund of the Mongolian revolutionary party and reimbursed later by the Mongol-Tibetan unit. The quantity of weapons for the escort was likewise recognized as insufficient. The session also decided to change the expedition route, which became rather dangerous after the appearance of the retreating "white bands" of Baron Ungern von Sternberg in the vicinity of the Mongolian capital. Therefore a new one was to be chartered, passing somewhere west of Urga. Finally, the Sekvostnar and Montibotdel entrusted Rinchno and Dorzhiev with the task of drawing up security instructions for the expedition staff, to be submitted for their due approval at the next session.⁷⁸

In the meantime more dramatic events took place in Mongolia, as the city of Urga was seized by Ungern's troops on 3 February 1921. The "White Baron" claimed that the purpose of his campaign was to liberate the country from the Chinese and reinstate the deposed Bogdo-Gegen, which was in fact what the Mongolian leaders had initially requested from Moscow. As a result the rejoicing Khutuktu awarded the "restorer of Mongols' independence" with the *Darkhan-chin-van* decree, one equal to the rank of khan, and the lamas proclaimed him an incarnation of Mahakala, the militant protector of the Buddhist creed. The invasion of Mongolia by Ungern instantly jeopardized Moscow's Tibetan plans, but, more importantly, it made inevitable the subsequent Soviet intervention in the neighbouring country, which paved the way for the "people's revolution" there only a few months later.

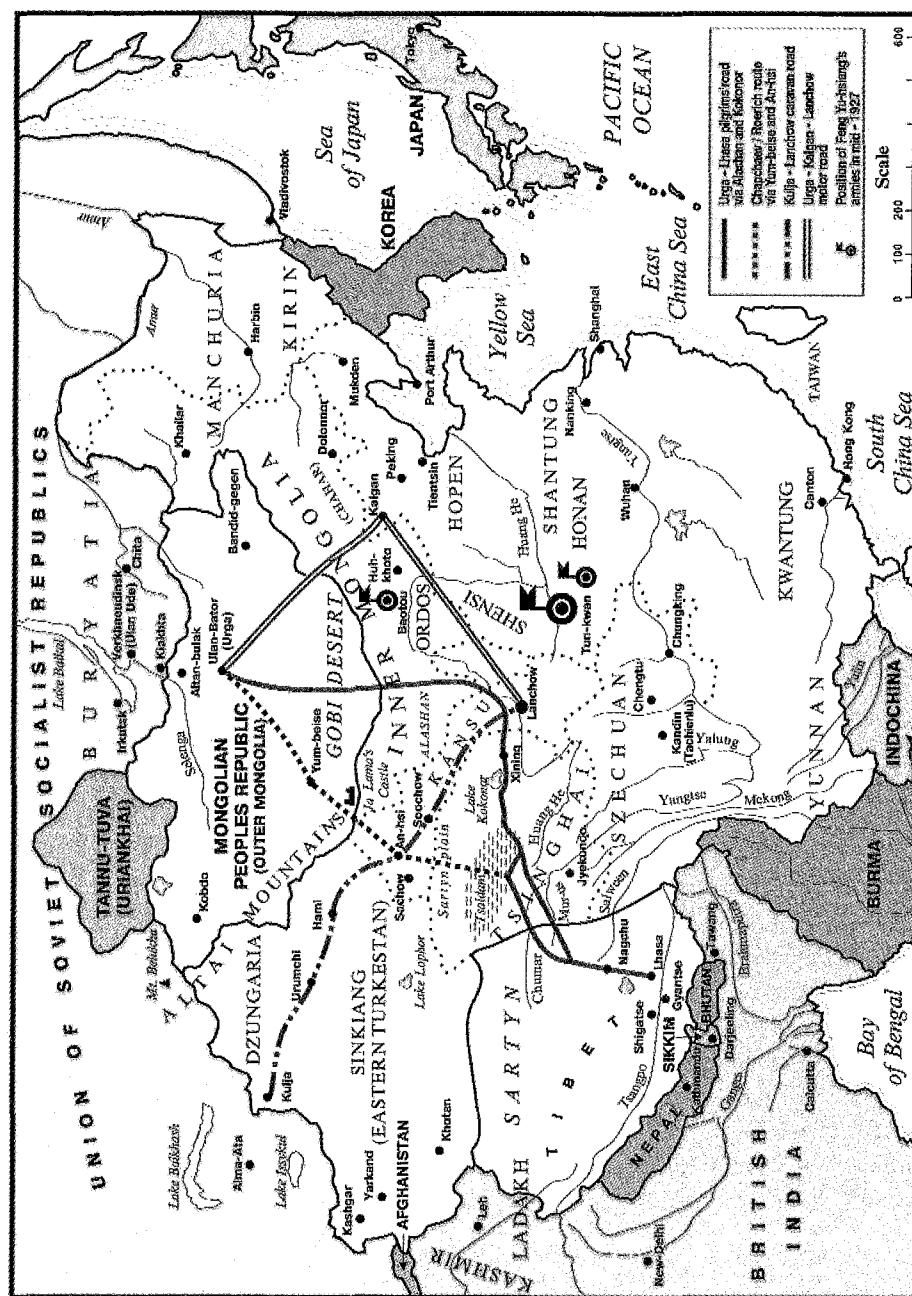
⁷⁸ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 9, l. 1-lob.

MOSCOW'S FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH LHASA

The beginning of 1921 witnessed another important event which would have some impact on the history of Soviet-Tibetan relations—the transformation of the Sekvostnar into the Far Eastern Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Communist International—or Comintern. The man who carried out this reorganization was one of the Bolshevik "Old Guard", Boris Zakharovich Shumiatsky.¹ From the moment he joined the Bolsheviks in 1903, Shumiatsky was highly active in revolutionary work in Siberia and the Far East. In October 1917 he became head of the Tsentrosibir' (the Central Executive Committee of Siberia) based in Irkutsk, an organisation that promoted the Sovietization of that part of Russia after the Bolshevik revolution. With the downfall of Soviet rule in Siberia in August 1918, he had to go underground and work in strict secrecy for its restoration. It was then that Shumiatsky changed his name into Andrei Chervonnyi and assumed a disguise which made him entirely unrecognizable. In 1919 he became a member of the Siberian Bureau TsIK RKPb and led underground work in the Kolchak's rear. After the establishment of the Far Eastern Republic in April 1920, Shumiatsky was appointed chairman of the Council of Ministers in that Soviet buffer state and then, in February 1921, Moscow placed him at the head of the Comintern's headquarters in Irkutsk and simultaneously made him Narkomindel's representative in the Far East. He also held a high military post as a member of the Revvoensovet of the Fifth Red Army, from January 1921.

The Far Eastern Secretariat of Comintern (DVSK), as moulded by Shumiatsky, was designed "to direct all Communist and revolutionary work in China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia and Tibet". It was to rest exclusively upon indigenous organizations in these countries,

¹ Re Shumiatsky see Bagaev 1974. Shumiatsky is also known for his memoirs *Sibir' na putikh k Oktiabriu, Vospominaniia pervogo predsedatelya Tsentrosibiri* (Irkutsk, 1989) and a book about the first Soviet ambassador to Persia, I.O. Kolomiitsev, *Na postu sovetskoi diplomati: Pervyi sovetskiy diplomat v Iran* I.O. Kolomiitsev (Moscow, 1960).



Map of Mongolia, China and Tibet in the 1920s (Tibet's frontiers are as shown on the "Political Map of China, showing the spheres of influence of the imperialist powers", published in Leningrad, 1927)

without creating any of its own. Accordingly the DVSX was subdivided into four main sections, the former Sekvostnar divisions—Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Mongol-Tibetan.² The creation of this new entity relieved Narkomindel of much of its work connected with revolutionary propaganda in these regions, which now became the sole prerogative of Comintern.

The Mongol-Tibetan section, like its Sekvostnar's predecessor, was a tiny group of only three to five active workers. Its staff at the Comintern headquarters in Irkutsk often changed as the people recruited were soon dispatched to the Transbaikal borderland as well as to Outer and Inner Mongolia for some practical work there, and their positions had to be filled by new recruits. Among those who were on the section's payroll in 1921 were the mainly Buryat and Mongolian revolutionaries who would later play a key role in the new administration in Buryatia and Mongolia, such as Maria Sakhianova, Georgii Danchinov, Dorji Rinchino, Bodo, Chagdarjav, D. Sukhe-Bator, Kh. Choibalsan (the latter two were engaged in the Agitprop sub-unit).³ Surprisingly, some of the staff were ex-lamas, such as Sandan Jambalon and Sanja Bakbushev, obviously Agvan Dorzhiev's protégés. The section ceased to exist in March 1922, as a result of DVSX's new reorganization.

From the early spring of 1921 the attention of the Far Eastern Secretariat and specifically of its Mongol-Tibetan section was largely focused on Outer Mongolia. These entities worked hard to set up a united Mongolian national front to fight against Chinese imperialism. They helped the Mongols to assemble and arm their partisan detachments in the Transbaikal area, as well as to create their genuine revolutionary organization after a Soviet model, which until then had existed only on paper, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MNRP). According to the program of this party, adopted at its constituent congress in Kiakhta between 1–3 March, the MNRP's main objective was formulated as staging the "anti-imperialist and anti-feudal people's revolution" by means of expulsion of the foreign aggressors from the country and winning "full national independence". The document incidentally, mentioned Tibet as a country of similar socio-economic formation and stated that the primary task of the labourers in such countries must be "the seizure of state power in

² RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 13, l. 1.

³ Sobolev 1978, p. 94. See also RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 91 and 93 *passim*.

their hands and the establishment of the rule adopted by national assembly . . . in the interests of the majority of the population".⁴

To be able to carry out all this important work Shumiatsky began by requesting the Comintern to allocate his DVSK branch the sum of half a million golden roubles. This money, he explained, would be needed for a period of six months "to finance all Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Mongolo-Tibetan Communist and revolutionary organizations". Shumiatsky insisted that the sum should be placed at his disposal urgently, "since the opening of hostilities might lead to the closure of borders and all the indigenous organizations would cease functioning without the financial support".⁵

As soon as the MNRP's first congress was over, the Far Eastern Secretariat appointed, on Dorzhiev's proposal, a new leader of the Tibet expedition, a Buryat lama Dava Yampilov. On March 8 the deputy head of the DVSK, Gapon, cabled to one of the members of the Mongol-Tibetan unit, S.S. Borisov:

The head of the expedition is Yampilov, a confidant of Dorzhiev. It is he, who will take upon himself the fulfillment of diplomatic tasks. The role of Jambalon will be to escort the expedition, take care of its valuables and deliver [letters] to the addressees. Besides, Jambalon, as a party comrade, will be a kind of "commissar"—a controller, who will make sure that the expedition fulfill its tasks, but he also has some other work to do which is of political and not diplomatic character, as detailed in the special instructions.⁶

Shortly after that (on March 18), the Mongolian partisan detachments, recently assembled by Sukhe-Bator and Choibalsan in the Transbaikal area, seized Maimachen (today's Altan Bulak), a town on the Soviet-Mongol border then in the hands of the Chinese troops (*gamins*). As a result, an alternative Provisional revolutionary government of Mongolia was immediately established in Maimachen, which was henceforth to become the stronghold of the Mongolian "People's revolution". Then, on April 10, Sukhe-Bator appealed to Moscow afresh for military aid, this time against Baron Ungern, and the Soviet government readily responded to his appeal by sending a composite expeditionary corps to Mongolia. At the same time the

⁴ Sobolev 1978, pp. 110–111.

⁵ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 4, ll. 24–25. Shumiatsky's cable to Kobetski, in the Comintern Secretariat in Moscow, undated.

⁶ AVPRF, f. III, op. 2, pap. 102, d. 28, l. 80.

Revolutionary War Council of the Soviet Republic dispatched a group of young Kalmyk military instructors to Maimachen to assist the Mongols in the formation of their Red Army. These were recruited from non-commissioned and junior grade officers of the Kalmyk cavalry regiment, based in the North Caucasus, in the Grozny area. The idea of lending the Kalmyk instructors to the Mongols originated with none other than Amur-Sanan, who put forward the proposal when the Mongolian mission was still in Moscow. Some of the Kalmyk volunteers, who arrived with this and two more groups in Mongolia between May and September 1921,⁷ would subsequently be employed by Comintern and Narkomindel to participate in the Soviet Lhasa missions.

At this crucial moment, while the Red Army command was hastily planning an anti-Ungern military campaign to be launched by a joint Soviet-Mongolian force, Agvan Dorzhiev, then staying in Buryatia, got some fresh news from Lhasa. This was delivered to him in early June by a group of Kalmyk pilgrims returning from Tibet—Sanja Bakbushev, Choizin Kenzeev, Bimbe Mikhailov and Ochir Dorjiev. Bakbushev and Mikhailov had spent some 10 years in Lhasa which they left in the autumn of 1920. They travelled back by a land and sea route via India, China, and Mongolia. Ochir Dorjiev, who had studied in Tibet for only four years, had set out for home much earlier, in 1919, and it took him almost two years to cross Central Asia before he arrived in Transbaikalia. These Kalmyks brought Dorzhiev a letter, or perhaps several letters, from the Dalai Lama and presumably his other friends in Tibet.⁸ The Lama's missive could have been, it seems, a reply to Dorzhiev's message dispatched to Lhasa at the behest of the Narkomindel as early as 1918. Dorzhiev at once informed Shumiatsky in Irkutsk about the arrival of the Kalmyks from Tibet and his intention to contact the Narkomindel as soon as possible:

Upon completion of my work, connected with an extremely important secret task, given to me by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of RSFSR, I have presently received here, in the Far East, the necessary information from Tibet . . . I wish to proceed instantly to

⁷ The full list of these Kalmyk instructors is given in Zlatkin 1970, pp. 130–142.

⁸ NARB, f. 643, d. 4, l. 2, 2ob. Draft of Dorzhiev's letter to Shumiatsky, dated 16 June 1921.

Moscow to deliver it to the Narkomindel, [as well as to] hold talks and receive proper instructions.

Dorzhiev, who styled himself as "Tibet's plenipotentiary" in that letter, added that he would be accompanied on the journey by his "staff"—Galsan Galzotov (his secretary), Shojur Aiushiev (a Tibetan doctor), Shoija Tsireno (his attendant), and the four Kalmyks who had brought him the news from Lhasa.⁹ He therefore requested Shumiatsky to issue the "necessary documents" to all these persons and to reserve seats for his entire party "on the first outgoing train". From Dorzhiev's other letter to Shumiatsky we learn about their plans to send one of the Kalmyks, Sanja Bakbushev, as a courier to Lhasa, ahead of the expedition. To undertake such a trip he demanded a sum of 2,000 gold roubles, and Dorzhiev made it clear that Bakbushev would not agree to go otherwise, as "he will feel extremely uncomfortable, when he meets the people who supported him during his 10 year stay [in Lhasa]". Because of the urgency of the trip Dorzhiev persuaded Bakbushev to shorten his visit to his native Kalmykia from three weeks to five days only. "It is necessary to hurry him, so that he could return and be here in November. I believe", Dorzhiev continued, "that you fully realize the great importance of his journey". Therefore he insisted on finding "someone, who could take the Kalmyk across the Manchu border, with the money", to avoid the risk of its confiscation by the frontier guards.¹⁰

Dorzhiev arrived in Moscow with his escort in early July 1921. Along with him came Shumiatsky to finalize the expedition project with Chicherin, as well as to attend the Third Congress of Comintern. On the 6th or 7th of July Dorzhiev submitted a memorandum to the new head of the Narkomindel's Eastern department, S.I. Dukhovsky, with a carefully detailed scenario of the expedition. This opened with an allusion to the earlier Tsarist period of Russo-Tibetan relations, when Tibet tried hard to secure her independence against the encroachments of her aggressive neighbours—Nepal, China, and British India. "It was at that time", Dorzhiev wrote, "that the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan government and the people had unanimously recognized that only a friendly alliance with Russia could save Tibet from a foreign yoke". The old sympathy for Russia still prevailed among the Tibetan leaders.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., d. 3, l. 3. Draft of Dorzhiev's letter to Shumiatsky, undated.

At the present time, according to the information that I have received, the Dalai Lama and his entourage adhere to their former views, and there should be no doubt about their willingness to restore friendly relations with Russia, the more so when they learn about the [political] platform of the Soviet Power and the lofty principles of protecting oppressed smaller peoples that it is putting into life.¹¹

All this sounded very optimistic, but still Dorzhiev was not certain about the sentiments of the "government lower ranks" and the common Tibetans. Therefore he proposed that a courier should be dispatched first to Tibet, in advance of the expedition. This person, by taking a sea route (i.e. by entering Tibet via India), could deliver some letters to the Dalai Lama and provide him with detailed information on the state of affairs in Soviet Russia. This would pave the way for the subsequent visit of the official Soviet mission to Lhasa, as, in Dorzhiev's thinking, the Dalai Lama and his government needed time to make the necessary arrangements for the reception of the Soviet representatives and, more importantly, for holding consultations and talks that would mould their attitude towards the Soviets. They might even want, Dorzhiev argued, to send someone to Moscow, with important information for the Narkomindel. The Russian courier to Lhasa could be Sanja Bakbushev—"a Don Kalmyk, he had lived in Tibet for ten years and he brought me the news from the Dalai Lama". He could easily make it to Lhasa again as "a holder of a passport, issued to him by an English consulate as a citizen of Tibet".¹²

In the meantime the mounting of the expedition would go on as already planned. The party was to have the minimum number of participants, some 10 people at the most, who would travel discreetly disguised as Buddhist pilgrims, in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves. The role of the nominal leader, according to Dorzhiev, could be played by a Buryat lama, Dava Yampilov (Yampilon). "He is a fully reliable and knowledgeable man, who had journeyed to Tibet, across Central Asia, several times. Educated in Tibet, the man is known to the Dalai Lama through my recommendation as someone who speaks both the Russian and the Tibetan languages". The real leader of the expedition should be Tsivano, who was proposed

¹¹ Nimaev et al. 1993, p. 30.

¹² Ibid.

by Rinchino, instead of Jambalon. A Transbaikal Cossack, Tsivano was described as "an old campaigner", who had served in the Red Army from the very beginning. "He is an experienced person, steadfast and battle hardened". "There is no doubt", Dorzhiev concluded, "that such a man will be indispensable for the long and exhaustive journey as a military leader". Thus it was Tsivano who seems to have been intended as the person to hold all political talks with the Tibetan leaders.¹³

The third key person on the mission, Dashi Sampilon, also a Buryat, was to conduct scientific observations and keep a travel diary during the journey. Sampilon had a reputation as a nationalist and pan-Mongolist; a member of SR (Socialist Revolutionary) party, he was active in the Buryat political organizations of the civil-war period, the Buryat National Committee (Burnatskom) and the People's Duma of the Buryats of East Siberia (Burnarduma). After the collapse of the latter and the re-establishment of the Soviet power in Transbaikalia he, like many Buryat nationalists, emigrated to Outer Mongolia. "As regards the question of scientific work", Dorzhiev noted in his project, "Sampilon should be absolutely independent of Yampilon. A mandate and the funds should be provided to him separately".¹⁴ The remaining seven men were to do all the "rough work" in the expedition and therefore their names were not given.

The objective of the mission Dorzhiev formulated in the following words:

This expedition, as a first and trial step, should have as its immediate tasks clarification of the internal situation in Tibet, determination of her relations with neighbouring powers, especially England, and finding out how strong is the influence of the English and other diplomatic intriguers on Tibet.¹⁵

In his opinion, the expedition should not engage in any propaganda work in Lhasa at this early stage, and he therefore tried to dissuade the Narkomindel from sending a film projector with the party, an idea which was probably suggested by Shumiatsky.¹⁶ "Sending a cin-

ematographic projector I find unnecessary since the public demonstration of films might provide an occasion for spreading gossip about the expedition, and this might eventually strain relations with England".¹⁷ Dorzhiev also objected to bringing a big radio-telegraphic apparatus to Tibet's capital "since we do not know where it could be installed, neither do we know about the public opinion and whether there are any Anglophilic leanings in the masses". Hence he suggested there should first be a discussion with the Tibetan government about a place for the installation of the device. At the same time Dorzhiev emphasized the importance of the telegraphic link between Russia and Tibet. The need for it had been well understood by the Dalai Lama a long time ago, and he had even held talks once with the Dutch telegraphic agency in Peking about the establishment of a telegraphic communication with Russia. "Today this is still a priority for Tibet", Dorzhiev asserted, "therefore, I believe, a man of a Buryat-Mongol or Kalmyk origin should be trained to handle the apparatus". He then proposed that the Narkomindel should send a "small radio-receiver" (instead of a big one) with the expedition, to be followed by some wireless operators trained for the job, disguised as pilgrims.

Dorzhiev's memorandum was concluded with the words: "After this first expedition arrives in Lhasa, and in case we obtain some positive information from it, a second bigger one, I believe, should be mounted. This would carry a radio-station, a cinema projector and possibly some weapons for the Tibetan army".¹⁸

On the same day (July the 7th) Dorzhiev also handed a short note to Dukhovsky intended to expedite the dispatch of the Tibet expedition, as the joint Soviet-Mongolian force, according to his information, "had drawn close to Urga".¹⁹ In reality, however, the Mongolian capital had been seized by the revolutionary troops on that day, the event which marked the culmination of the Mongolia liberation campaign to be known henceforth as the "People's revolution". The only delay in the expedition plans, in Dorzhiev's opinion, was now caused by Sampilon, who for some reason did not come to Moscow, as had been agreed before. Therefore he suggested

¹³ Ibid., I. 31.

¹⁴ Re Dashi Sampilon see Khabtaev 1967.

¹⁵ Nimaev et al. 1993, p. 31.

¹⁶ Shumiatsky is known to have attached great importance to the development of cinematography in the USSR as a powerful means of mass propaganda, see B. Shumiatsky, *Kinematografiya millionov, Opyt analiza*, Moscow, 1935.

¹⁷ Nimaev et al. 1993, pp. 31-32.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

that Sampilon be sent off, along with the telegraphists, as a separate follow-up team.

While in Moscow, Dorzhiev had occasion to meet with some of the Soviet's top leaders, including V.I. Lenin. This important fact was reported by his grand-nephew, S.D. Dylykov, who claimed in his short memoir that he had heard it from Dorzhiev himself. (Dylykov, however, dated the meeting to the year 1922, which is obviously a wrong date, as Lenin was practically unable to receive visitors at that time due to his illness, especially after his first stroke in May 1922. Besides, Dylykov's statement clearly indicates that this meeting took place some time prior to the dispatch of the Tibet expedition, presumably in July 1921.) "In 1922", Dylykov recalled,

Agvan Dorzhiev was received by Lenin, who was keen to know his opinion on the national reconstruction and the religious issues of the Buryats and Kalmyks, as well as on their links with the Buddhists of Mongolia and Tibet. Lenin questioned him in detail about the possibility of sending an expedition of the Buryat and Kalmyk pilgrims to Tibet to get to know the current situation in the country, the feelings of the Dalai Lama and his entourage, the role of the English and the Chinese, and the relations of Tibet and India. Agvan Dorzhiev's own journey to Tibet Lenin regarded at that time as a highly risky venture, considering the hostile attitude of the English to his person.²⁰

According to Dylykov, Dorzhiev also met twice in the same year with the Chairman of VTsIK, M.I. Kalinin, and the Tibetan question no doubt must have emerged at some point of their two conversations. Among other subjects discussed by them were again the issue of Buryat national reconstruction and religion, and Kalinin especially wanted to know Dorzhiev's opinion on whether the Soviet Constitution satisfied the aspirations of the Buryat ethnic minority. Apart from that, Dorzhiev most probably also informed Kalinin about his efforts to assist the Pomgol, the Famine Relief Organization, set up at VTsIK in July 1921 to fight a severe famine which had stricken a large territory of European Russia, including Kalmykia. It is known that Dorzhiev was active in raising funds for the Pomgol in Buryatia and Mongolia and he sent a large amount of Tibetan herbal medicines, weighting some 9 *pood* (about 150 kg), with those Kalmyk companions of his, who were returning to their homeland.

Shumiatsky, for his part, forwarded his own proposals for the Tibet expedition to Chicherin on 7 July, detailing its tasks, organization, and staff. Nothing more than that is known about the document. Interestingly, Shumiatsky and Dorzhiev submitted their separate Tibet projects to the Narkomindel on the very day when the Politburo, the Soviet shadow government, met in one of its regular sessions in the Kremlin. However, the Tibetan question was not taken up by them either at that session, or at those which followed. This may seem rather strange as all Narkomindel's foreign policy initiatives were normally subject to approval by the Politburo, as would happen, for example, to the subsequent Soviet missions to Tibet. But in that case the question must have been considered privately between Chicherin, Shumiatsky, Lenin and Kalinin. Dorzhiev's expedition proposals, so it seems, were generally accepted by the Narkomindel, with the exception of one point—Dashi Sampilon was to lead the second mission, seen as the main Soviet diplomatic effort vis-à-vis Tibet. And it was with that expedition that the Narkomindel-trained wireless operators were finally to travel to Lhasa.

* * *

One of the special tasks of the Soviet expedition was collecting intelligence on the British presence in Tibet. Dorzhiev's caustic reference to "the English diplomatic intriguers" in the country suggests that the Buryat probably knew of the arrival in Lhasa in late 1920 of the British Indian representative, Charles Bell. (His informants might have been Sanja Bakbushev and Bimba Mikhailov, who had left Lhasa around that time). This visit reflected an important change in Whitehall's Tibetan policy which had taken place earlier that year. The coming of a Chinese delegation from the Kansu provincial government to Lhasa at the end of January had made the British suspicious, fearing that the mission could in fact be a secret overture by Peking towards a separate Sino-Tibetan agreement. The Dalai Lama must also have been alarmed, as he at once sent a letter to the Political Officer in Sikkim, Major W.L. Campbell, requesting that the Viceroy depute a British representative to Lhasa, because "the Chinese deputies, if they have been nominated by the Chinese President, may assume a bold attitude and injure the prestige of Great Britain and Tibet".²¹ Both London and Delhi responded to

²⁰ Dylykov 2000, p. 37.

²¹ Lamb 1989, p. 107.

this request positively, although China officially denied it had anything to do with the Kansu Mission: the dispatch of a British official to Lhasa was found most desirable, especially in the light of the Chinese withdrawal from the negotiating table in 1919, as it could ultimately persuade Peking to resume tripartite negotiations on the Simla model. At the same time there were some serious disagreements between the Foreign Office and the Indian Government on whether the British should give the military aid to Lhasa, considering the potential threat to Tibet's independence presented by the militant Chinese warlords. As for the Bolshevik Russian threat, it was entirely disregarded by the British at the time.

The officer who led the diplomatic mission to Lhasa was Charles Bell, who, although retired, was asked by London to return to his post of PO in Sikkim. The formal occasion for his visit was provided by an invitation from the Dalai Lama, who had asked Bell to come for advice in connection with the Kansu Mission. Bell's instructions, as he briefly stated them in his well-known biography of the 13th Dalai Lama, were "to convey to His Holiness friendly greetings from the British Government, and to explain the international state of affairs then prevailing".²² In his official Final Report of the Lhasa Mission, submitted to the Secretary of the Foreign Department of the Government of India, Bell would be more precise, stating that he was instructed to visit Lhasa "with a view to bringing about friendly relations (between the Indian and Tibetan Governments) as far as possible".²³ At the same time he was also to try to find out the results of the Kansu Mission, and his report shows unambiguously that China, rather than Russia, was then uppermost in the minds of the British Indian officials, as far as the defense of the northern Indian frontier was concerned. ("There was danger that the Kansu Mission might lead to an agreement between China and Tibet", Bell wrote. "Had it been effected we should have been faced with unrest along the whole northern frontier of India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and the Assam frontier tribes". He also reported anxiously about the presence of the Mongolian Governor of the Province of Ili in Lhasa at the time when he himself came there, and about the activities of

other Chinese agents, who "were steadily drawing over to their side influential members of the National Assembly of Tibet").

Charles Bell arrived in Lhasa on 17 November 1920 (about the same time when the Mongolian Mission left Moscow), with his staff—Dr Dyer (replaced shortly after by Dr. R.S. Kennedy, of the Indian Medical Service), and two assistants, both of Tibetan descent: Rai Bahadur Achuk Tsering and Kusho Palhese. After Colonel Francis Younghusband, he was the first British diplomat to visit the capital of Tibet, still inaccessible to Europeans. Bell was accorded a most cordial welcome by the Dalai Lama and his ministers, most of whom knew him from the days of the Lama's "Indian exile" in 1910. And indeed Bell's fluent command of the Tibetan language and thorough knowledge of the local customs and etiquette easily enabled him to win the respect and sympathy of the leading Tibetans. One of the presents he gave to the Dalai Lama on behalf of the Indian Government—a golden butter lamp—was placed on the altar in front of the image of Buddha in the Holy of Holies of the main temple in Lhasa (the Jokhang, or the Big Buddha Temple), which no doubt made a good impression on the Lhasan dwellers. In his report Bell stated: "My staff and myself were indefatigable in making and renewing friendship with all classes of Tibetans, official and non-official. Especially were we careful in this priest-ridden country to gain the goodwill of the powerful monasteries, the largest in the world, as of the priestly class generally".

The long hours that Bell spent in amicable conversations with the Dalai Lama, discussing various matters from vital political issues to the cultivation of plants and an expedition to climb Mount Everest, naturally enough made them into close friends again. At the farewell audience (on 16 October), shortly before the departure of the British diplomat, the Lama would urge him to return to Lhasa in future to complete the treaty between Britain, China and Tibet. "We have known each other for a long time", he would say to Bell, "and in you I have complete confidence, for we two are men of like mind".²⁴

At the same time not everyone in Lhasa was of course pleased with Bell's visit. The radical (anti-British) elements there strongly protested against the presence of the British Mission in the Holy city, threatening to kill Bell and Kennedy. Bell had also witnessed

²² Bell 1987, p. 247.

²³ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1113: C. Bell, Final Report of Lhasa Mission, November 1920 to October 1921, Delhi, 29 November 1921.

²⁴ Bell 1987, p. 381.

a rebellion of the monks from the Loseling college of Drepung Monastery against the Tibetan Government, which made the latter summon extra troops to Lhasa (the incident was caused by the arrest of the three managers of the college, known for their openly pro-Chinese and anti-Dalai Lama leanings). Curiously enough, both of the conflicting sides, the government officials and the Drepung clerical authorities, approached the British diplomat with a request to settle their dispute, the fact that showed Bell that he had "stepped up in the favour of the clergy as well as of the laity".²⁵

The main achievement of the Bell Mission, apart from generating pro-British feelings at all levels of the Tibetan society, was the important agreement it concluded with the Dalai Lama providing for the modernization of Tibet with the British aid. This included first the supply of arms (mountain guns, machine guns, rifles and ammunition); second, assistance in the training of the Tibetan military forces; third, construction of a telegraph line from Lhasa to Gyantse so that thenceforth there could be a direct communication with India; and, finally, giving some help in the protection and development of Tibet, such as the manufacture of munitions, prospecting for mineral resources, and opening schools on the European model in Lhasa and Gyantse. The most controversial point in the treaty, that is of arms supply to Lhasa, was resolved only towards the end of Bell's visit. The authorities at Delhi, apparently under the influence of Curzon's Memorandum of 26 August which marked an end of a long-term process of Anglo-Chinese negotiation over Tibet,²⁶ agreed to supply Tibet, on payment, 10 pieces of mountain artillery with ammunition, 20 machine guns, 10,000 Lee-Enfield rifles along with 1,000,000 rounds. (These were to be supplied on the condition, however, that the arms and ammunitions would be used solely for Tibet's self-defence and the maintenance of internal order.) Summing up the results of his mission, Bell stated with satisfaction in his Final Report:

The confidence of the Tibetan Government in us has been thoroughly restored. The friendship they feel towards us is probably greater than ever before. The policy, which I proposed for regulating our future relations with Tibet, has been accepted in its entirety.... In fine, we

²⁵ Ibid., p. 369.

²⁶ Re Curzon's memorandum of 26 August 1920 see Lamb 1989, pp. 119–121.

may perhaps say without exaggeration that the Tibetan question has been settled as far as it be settled at present. The settlement should last for several years and promote very greatly our interests as well as the interests of Tibet, and further, in the truest sense, the ultimate interests of China.

There was yet one more side, whose interests in Tibet Bell utterly ignored when making his political predictions, that of Soviet Russia. In his interview with the Daily Telegraph of 17 January 1922, Bell rejected the idea of Bolshevism having already penetrated into Tibet, as had been reported in certain sections of the press, while arguing that the latter country made "a formidable buffer State between India and Russian Bolshevism". "The principles of Bolshevism were wholly abhorrent to the Tibetan character", he declared with certainty, and therefore Bolshevism "would never enter Tibet".²⁷ In his earlier interview to a Calcutta correspondent of the Times, Bell, however, was not so positive. He admitted that the Tibetans were "alarmed at the approach of Bolshevik emissaries who are drawing near Tibet through Chinese Turkestan" and that "China is powerless to check the advance of these disturbing elements".²⁸ The situation in Russia was no doubt broached more than once during the tête-à-tête conversations of Bell with Tibet's sovereign. It would be interesting at this point to quote some of the latter's utterances on Russia, both Tsarist and Soviet, as given in the already mentioned memoirs of the British diplomat.

"The Dalai Lama thinks continually of Russia", Bell wrote.

In common with his subjects, he feels the Tibetans certainly have affinity with the Siberian Russians, for these latter bear a considerable resemblance to the Mongols and have indeed often inter-married with them. Until the time of the first World War he used to look on Russia as not only the most powerful nation in the world, but also as more favourable to Buddhism than any other non-Buddhist nation. The Tsar had many Buddhist subjects, namely, Buriats in Siberia, Torgots widespread in Mongolia, Sinkiang and European Russia, and other Buddhists as well. The members of these Mongol tribes could be found in the three great monasteries round Lhasa, and they all recognize the Precious Protector as their spiritual ruler. Certainly the Emperor of all

²⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 17 January 1922 ("Britain and Tibet: Sir C. Bell's Mission, Satisfactory results").

²⁸ *The Times* (London), 31 October 1921. ("Tibet tired of seclusion: Ready to open country").

the Russias has written him many friendly letters, more warm and friendly than those he has received from the Ruler of the scattered British Empire.²⁹

When the Dalai Lama fled to China after the British invasion of Tibet in 1904 he hoped for Russian assistance, but the assistance was not given. "He felt that Dorjieff had exaggerated Russia's desire to help him", and the Lama had completely given up on Russia after the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, which as we know was not true. Now, under the rule of Bolsheviks, the nation which was once Tibet's greatest hope, "has turned completely round and became her greatest menace". The Dalai Lama's bitter feelings towards Russia Bell expressed as follows:

These Balshebuks, he feels, are without law and without custom; and, worst of all, many among them abandoned their religion, and are setting their minds on destroying the religion of other nations also. Outer Mongolia, already in their grip, is suffering terribly, so his own agent and the commercial agents of his subjects tell him. They have taken all the gold in Outer Mongolia and sent it to Russia. And worst of all, they are interfering with Mongolia's holy religion.

The Dalai Lama was no doubt fully sincere in saying all this to his old British friend, Charles Bell. But what then about his message to Dorzhiev? There is, however, no absolute certainty that the letter that Dorzhiev claimed he had received from Lhasa in mid-1921 was written personally by the Dalai Lama and not by someone from his entourage. The mysterious correspondent of Dorzhiev could be, for example, one of the Lama's *soibuns* (attendants), a Kalmyk scholar-monk Sharab Tepkin, of whom will be said more, as the story unfolds.

* * *

Preparations for the Tibet expedition began as soon as Shumiatsky returned to Irkutsk from Moscow. Some light on these are shed by his subsequent letters and cables to Narkomindel, Chicherin and Dukhovsky. This is what Shumiatsky wrote to Chicherin in his first message on 25 July:

I am currently in great haste getting the expedition equipped. I have summoned the expedition leader, Yampilov, to Irkutsk, to instruct him

²⁹ C. Bell, *Portrait of a Dalai Lama*, pp. 391–392.

according to your directives. The radio apparatus and the things listed in the note that I had left with you have not yet arrived here, but I'm still waiting. We have mapped out the route in such a way as to avoid all dangerous spots. The entire journey is estimated to take some 45–60 days, including stops and possible delays. I am looking now for the head of the convoy among the Kalmyk communists. In a day or two one of the candidates for this position will show up here. The expedition will set out on July 28th, or August 4th, at the latest. It will not travel on the camels, purchased by the previous organizers, as it is much safer to proceed on the hired animals as pilgrims usually do. I have already summoned Sampilon to Irkutsk. He's got bogged down in his work in Mongolia so I had to pull him away from it. When he gets here I'll work on him a little and then send him to you for more polishing and so that you could personally meet him and finally decide whether he is suitable for the job.³⁰

In his another letter of the early August, this time addressed to Dukhovsky, Shumiatsky reported of the progress in his work:

First of all, the mounting of the expedition and its departure are now impeded only by the absence of the radio apparatus and those items that you were to procure and send here. Things are already well underway. I am trying only to obtain a golden ingot, instead of the silver one. If I do not get it, we'll have to mould it here. It's only a two-day job. The expedition will depart as soon as I receive the items ordered. I have already instructed Yampilov and I am going to send him off today. For reasons of security, he will wait for the caravan not far from the nomad's highroad. I have already chosen the commander of the convoy, who virtually will be our *politkom* [political commissar—A.A.] and summoned him here. This is a Kalmuk communist. I don't know if his appearance and manners will suit, which is also important. This is why I summoned him here.

... Thirdly, the monies—6,600,000 in the Romanov roubles, 19,800,000 in Soviet currency and 10,000 in gold—have been received from the courier Shumin on 26 July. From the latter I have also received fabrics of red and maroon shades. I am waiting for the other things for the expedition—a radio set and presents (watches, a Mauser, etc.).³¹

The Kalmyk commissar of the expedition, in fact its real leader, was Vasily Alekseyevich Khomutnikov,³² who was to conduct negotiations with the Dalai Lama and his government. Born in 1891 to a poor

³⁰ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 97, l. 9ob.

³¹ Ibid., l. 12, 12ob (undated message).

³² For Khomutnikov's biography see Bembeyev 1991.

Kalmyk family from the Denisovskia stanitsa of the Sal' okrug (region) in Don Province, he lost both of his parents at the age of 13. To earn his living the boy had to hire himself out as a day-labourer to well-off Kalmyks—cattle-dealers, merchants and stud farm owners. In 1912 Khomutnikov enrolled in military service and was attached to the 2nd Don Cossack regiment. With this regiment he fought on the German and Austrian fronts during the World War. It was then that the young Kalmyk trooper, responding to Bolshevik anti-war propaganda, turned to active revolutionary work. After the 1917 February revolution, Khomutnikov found himself in Petrograd together with his regiment. He joined the Bolshevik Party in the same year and, according to V. Bembeyev, Khomutnikov was one of 67 Cossacks from the regiment who took part in the historic assault of the Winter Palace by the Bolsheviks on the night of 25th October 1917. The ensuing civil war brought the Kalmyk to his native Don Province, where he was the assistant commander of the Red Army cavalry unit engaged in fighting against Ataman Kaledin. Subsequently Khomutnikov was assigned the task of recruiting Kalmyks for the Red Army. This was not an easy job as the majority of the Kalmyk population at that time was strongly anti-Bolshevik and manifestly sided with the "whites". Still, a Red Kalmyk cavalry regiment was formed by the summer of 1919, mainly due to the energetic efforts of Khomutnikov and another remarkable Kalmyk, Kharti Kanukov. The former was then appointed the commander of the regiment, and the latter its commissar.

In January 1921 Khomutnikov and Kanukov were dispatched to Mongolia—"on an international mission"—at the head of the first Kalmyk group of military instructors. Both of them then took part in the Soviet-Mongolian campaign against Ungern. After the seizure of Urga, Khomutnikov was appointed to command the Mongol cavalry regiment, formed on a Kalmyk model. As for Kanukov, he took charge of the reconnaissance section in the Mongolian People's Army, and towards the end of August he was also made the military commandant of Urga. It was probably Kanukov who recommended his comrade-in-arms to Shumiatsky, but what ultimately made the latter choose Khomutnikov for the role of the expedition leader, after their meeting in Irkutsk, was the fact that the Kalmyk turned out to be a fellow-villager of the Dalai Lama's secretary, Sharab Tepkin.

Luvsan Sharab Tepkin (1880–1952) was one of the three sons of

the well-to-do Kalmyk stud farmer from the Denisovskia stanitsa.³³ He received both a secular and religious education, one of his tutors being the celebrated Kalmyk scholar-monk, gelong Menke Bormanjinov, abbot of the Bokshirgain Khurul at Denisovskia. In 1903 when Bormanjinov was elected Bakshi Lama (Grand Lama) of the Don Kalmyks, his ablest disciple, Sharab Tepkin, became head of the Khurul. Five years later the young Khurul Bakshi visited St Petersburg with the Don Kalmyk Buddhist Mission, to bow to the Russian Emperor as an incarnation of the Tsagan Dara-Ehe (White Tara), and offer him their gifts: two throne-shaped carved ebony arm-chairs and a silver replica of a Buddhist temple. Shortly after that memorable event Tepkin left his homeland for Tibet where he enrolled in the Gomang Datsang at Drepung. He must have completed the full 10-year course of the Buddhist philosophy (*tsennyid*) in less time than it normally takes a monk student, for A.M. Pozdneev claimed that Tepkin had already posed as the Dalai Lama's attendant or *soibun* in 1916.³⁴ This is no doubt a remarkable fact as hitherto we have known of only one Russian subject, Agvan Dorzhiev, who had held this high position at the Lhasan court. On the other hand, there is the rather confusing evidence of N.V. Valero-Grachiov, who knew Tepkin intimately in the mid-1930s, when both lived together in the Karaganda area. According to Valero-Grachiov, Tepkin had travelled to Tibet twice: first at the age of 17, when he entered Drepung and succeeded in completing his course of studies there in just four years, i.e. by 1902. About 1913 the Kalmyk headed for Lhasa again, this time as an interpreter attached to a small diplomatic mission, allegedly dispatched by the Russian Government, and he was awarded a medal for his services upon his return to Petersburg.³⁵ This information, however, does not seem to be fully reliable as research into the biography of Valero-Grachiov, an amateur actor, Oriental student, and enthusiastic hunter for the "abominable snow man" in the Himalayas and Tibet, shows that he was a skillful hoaxter.³⁶

³³ Re Tepkin see Bakaeva 1997, pp. 9–17.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁵ N.K. Fortunatov, "K voprosu o 'snezhnom cheloveke'" in *Porshnev*, Shmakov 1959, pp. 27–28.

³⁶ Andreyev 1998, pp. 157–167.

Whatever the truth may be, Tepkin did belong to the Dalai Lama's close entourage in the late 1910s, and it was probably he who had sent to Moscow via Dorzhiev that valuable intelligence on Tibet that Stcherbatsky was translating for Narkomindel in the summer of 1919. In 1931 when Tepkin was arrested by the Soviet secret police (OGPU), he told his interrogator that while in Lhasa he had first learned about the Russian revolution "from an English paper" some time in 1920. Then, in 1921, he and the Dalai Lama separately received letters from two Kalmyk emigres: a Zaisang (nobleman) Dorji Onkorov and the former Chief Bakshi of the Great-Dorbet Khuruls, Zambo Khaglyshev. In these they wrote that a violent revolution had taken place in Russia, and that the country was then in the grip of tyranny, with much violence being done to the Kalmyk laymen, clergy and khuruls. For these reasons, they, together with a large number of other people persecuted by the Bolsheviks, had had to flee abroad and settle in Constantinople in Turkey. "On behalf of the Kalmyk emigres, they, Onkorov and Khaglyshev, requested in their letter to the Dalai Lama for permission to come to Tibet, as [they said] it was impossible for them to return to the country of tyranny and violence". "In the letter addressed to me", Tepkin continued, "they asked me to exert some influence on the Dalai Lama, to urge him to come to their rescue. The letter to the Dalai Lama was written in the Kalmyk language, which I, on the instructions of the latter (which were relayed to me by his secretary), translated into Tibetan. This translation was then handed over to the Dalai Lama by the same secretary. What reply the Dalai Lama gave to the Kalmyk emigres I do not know for sure. All I know is that around 1923–1924 one of the authors of the letter, Zambo Khaglyshev, arrived in Tibet, via England".³⁷

This is a very curious piece of evidence which suggests several important conclusions. First, that the Kalmyk emigres in Constantinople knew that their countryman, the former Khurul Bakshi Sharab Tepkin, was one of the Dalai Lama's attendants, which made them believe that he could intercede in their behalf. Second, that Tepkin, although being the Lama's *soibun*, was actually not so close to Tibet's ruler as to be able to counsel him the way Dorzhiev did. Certainly, the Kalmyk did not attract Bell's attention, and he was not even

³⁷ AMB RK, file 940-r, l. 9 (Interrogation transcript of Tepkin, 20 June 1931).

mentioned in Bell's book of memoirs. Third, that the Dalai Lama possessed enough negative information about Soviet Russia by 1922 to make him refrain from any friendly overtures to its leaders via a letter to Dorzhiev. On the other hand, it may be speculated that the letter had been written by the Lama some time before he received news from the Kalmyk emigres and prior to Bell's visit to Lhasa. However it may be, the probability is high that the message "with the latest news from Tibet" was sent to Dorzhiev by Sharab Tepkin rather than the Dalai Lama, the more so that it was delivered by another Don Kalmyk, Bakbushev. As for Dorzhiev's allegation that "the Dalai Lama and his entourage still adhered to their former (pro-Russian) views", this perhaps should be ascribed to his own willful interpretation of whatever facts were contained in the letter.

Many years later, when interrogated by an NKVD officer, Khomutnikov would claim that he had never met Sharab Tepkin personally in his youth, although he would admit that he had worked for some time as a labourer at the stud farm of Tepkin's brothers in Denisovskaya. Also, that he was briefed twice before the journey—first by Shumiatsky in Irkutsk and then by V.I. Yudin, a Soviet plenipotentiary in Mongolia. The latter told Khomutnikov he should contact Tepkin, as soon as he arrived in Tibet, because the person could arrange an audience with the Dalai Lama and act as interpreter at it, since he was "a Dalai Lama's secretary".³⁸

Contrary to Shumiatsky's expectation, the preparations for the Tibet expedition had continued for another full month. On 29 August he reported to Chicherin, obviously with relief:

With much difficulty, I am finally setting off the expedition the day after tomorrow. It emerged that Makstene³⁹ has distributed all the silver money of the expedition [between different places] and I can't put it together now. Of 13 thousand [roubles] I picked up here and there some 7 or 7 and half thousand roubles and the remaining sum will have to be borrowed. I've just received the radio transmitter (on 19 August) and brought it here. Please try to arrange things in such a way that the lads who study radio-telegraphy would make themselves familiar with the type of the radio-apparatus that you have sent to me, right there in Moscow, to be able to set it to work once they are in Tibet.⁴⁰

³⁸ Bembeyev 1991, p. 82.

³⁹ O.I. Makstene was Narkomindel's representative in Troitskosavsk at that time.

⁴⁰ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 97, l. 42. Shumiatsky's letter to Chicherin,

But then some more unexpected difficulties cropped up and the Soviet expedition was not finally able to set out from Urga until 13 September, two weeks later. The party consisted of eight men, apart from Yampilov and Khomutnikov (now posing under the names of Badmaev and Kekeyev)—six Kalmyks and two Buryats. They were the escorts, but were probably also instructed to carry on some pro-Soviet agitation in the Russian Buddhist colony at Lhasa. Of these eight people we know only three by name—Shagdur Lundukov, L. Badminov, and Dorji Darminov, all Kalmyks. With their 12 pack camels hired for the journey, these Bolshevik emissaries merged with a major Lhasa-bound caravan, consisting of some 150 animals and 100 men, mainly Tibetans and Mongols (Khalkas, Torgouts and Buryats). The vast majority were pilgrims and traders of various kinds. There were also some Buryats and Tibetans who had formerly served in Ungern's troops. The caravan was led by a Mongolian incarnate lama, the Gegen-Lama. It proceeded in a strict march formation, with an escort of its own, by making regular reconnaissance of the route ahead. Occasionally, the Gegen-Lama would arrange some military drill during the day-time stops for rest. The precautions taken were fully justified as there was a considerable risk of attack either by the retreating "whites" or by brigands.

Some time after the departure of the caravan, Narkomindel received a communication from its agents about a mutiny in the Alashan area, some 600–700 versts south of Urga. It was raised by one Saj-lama (Jamian-Danzan) under the slogan "Say No to Red Russians and Red Mongols". The rebels, who were apparently a group of opponents of the new Mongolian Government, twice approached the Bogdo-gegen, with presents and appeals for support, but he did not dare to respond. The alarmed Dukhovsky urgently cabled a message to Shumiatsky, who was then in Urga, asking him for details, knowing that the expedition route went through the Alashan desert.⁴¹ The mutiny, however, was suppressed fairly quickly by a Soviet-Mongol cavalry detachment and its leader, Saj-lama, was captured and shot.

In the meantime the caravan safely reached the encampment of Dzasaktu Khan at Tsagan-Gol, where the travellers halted for 10

Maimachen, 29 August 1921. It was written shortly after the arrest of Baron Ungern by the Soviets.

⁴¹ Ibid., ll. 60–61 (undated).

days to change camels. Here Khomutnikov purchased some 50 rifles from the local Mongol residents. All of these were Russian made, bearing the trade mark of Izhevsk arms factory, and were intended as presents for Tibetans. The caravan then proceeded across the Gobi desert to the grazing lands of the nomadic Torgouts at Edzin-Gol. The journey there took another month and a half. There was a particularly dangerous stretch of the route in the Majin-Shan locality where caravans were frequently attacked by the well-armed bands of the notorious "warrior-monk" Ja-Lama.⁴² His *khoshun* of 500 yurts was located on the border of Outer Mongolia and the Alashan principality. After consultations it was decided to ask the Torgout Khan, who was known to be on friendly terms with Ja-Lama, for help in return for a bribe. All negotiations with the Khan were conducted by Khomutnikov assisted by Badminov who acted as interpreter. As a result, the Khan agreed to send two guides to take the caravan across Sartyn, a desolate mountainous area in Upper Mongolia, normally avoided by travellers,⁴³ to bypass the outpost patrols of Ja-Lama. After a long and tiring journey across Sartyn, Tsaidam and the Chantang plateau, which lasted for about 50 days, the caravan had finally reached Nagchu, the main frontier post at the gates to the Dalai Lama's "Forbidden Land". Not everyone had endured this hard passage. Lama Yampilov, for example, fell sick and died suddenly on the road, which left Khomutnikov with no other option but to take over the position of the expedition leader. There was yet another incident worth telling the reader. While at Edzin-Gol, Darminov, somewhat unexpectedly, told lama Yampilov of his wish to remain with the Torgouts and join up with Ja-Lama, who especially favoured Kalmyks, being of Kalmyk origin himself. This led to a serious quarrel between the two men. To put an end to it the *politkom* had to interfere—and he shot the "traitor".^{43a}

At Nagchu, located some 150 miles north of Lhasa, all caravans, especially those coming from Mongolia, were usually stopped for customs examination, but, more importantly, to obtain permission from

⁴² Re Ja-Lama see Lomakina 1993.

⁴³ The toponym probably refers to the Sartang plain situated behind the Humbolt range, north of Tsaidam.

^{43a} This episode is related in the copy of Khomutnikov's report which is in the possession of Prof. Yu.O. Ogleev, but it is omitted in the copy preserved in the National Archive of the Republic of Kalmykia (R-150, op. 1, d. 4a, ll. 1–19) and in Khomutnikov's biography by V.Sh. Bembeyev (Bembeyev 1991).

the Lhasan authorities to enter the Holy City. While the Tibetan customs officers were examining the travellers' luggage, Khomutnikov discovered, much to his surprise, that the pilgrims and traders were carrying a large quantity of weapons with them, some 1500 magazine rifles of Russian, Chinese and Japanese manufacture, four "Maxim" machine-guns, up to 10 million (!?) cartridges, and a great number of hand-grenades. According to Khomutnikov, all this material, coming mainly from the defeated Ungern troops, was sold to the Tibetan customs at a comparatively low price. Luckily, the Soviet expedition belongings were not searched as Khomutnikov declared them to be the property of the Dalai Lama, that had been dispatched to Lhasa by his representative in Russia, the head of all Russian Buddhists, Agvan Dorzhiev. He then produced a letter from Dorzhiev, prepared in advance for just such an emergency. This was immediately forwarded to the Potala, and the expedition had to linger for some time at Nagchu, pending the reply. The necessary permission to proceed came in very quickly—"in few days", as Bembeyev has it in his book, but this could hardly be so. (The distance between Nagchu and Lhasa was usually covered in 14 days by yak caravans, and in 4 or 5 days by mounted messengers, in George Roerich's estimation.⁴⁴ So the Russian team must have been held up in Nagchu for a fortnight at best). With the permission came the Dalai Lama's instructions to provide Khomutnikov and his men with post-horses, and not to examine the things they were carrying.

The Soviet Mission arrived in Lhasa on 9 April 1922, i.e. the entire journey took them nearly seven full months. (Which means that Shumiatsky and Dorzhiev had considerably under-estimated the travelling time in their project). Their first audience with the Dalai Lama took place the next morning. It was "a strictly confidential meeting", Khomutnikov recorded in his report, since no members of the Tibetan Government were invited to attend. The person who arranged it was Sharab Tepkin, still in the Lama's attendance, as he was then present at the meeting as interpreter. After the customary greeting ceremony, Khomutnikov offered the Gyalpo Rinpoche, Tibet's "Glorious King", the presents of the Soviet Government—100 *arshin* of the first-class brocade, four gold watches, a silver service,

⁴⁴ Yu.N. Roerich, *Izbrannye Trudy*, Moscow, 1967, p. 88. For the original publication see, Roerich 1931.

and a radio-telegraph apparatus.⁴⁵ With the presents, Khomutnikov handed over an official letter from the Soviet diplomatic office, signed by Karakhan, and another one from Dorzhiev.

The conversation began with the Dalai Lama asking the Bolshevik emissary in a very straightforward manner about his elderly Russian tutor, Agvan Dorzhiev, whether he was in good health and not shot by the "Soviets" (he pronounced the word in Russian as "sovety"), and what he was currently doing. Khomutnikov replied that Dorzhiev was fine and doing well, making a tour of Buddhist monasteries within the Soviet Republic every year. His activities were completely unrestrained by the Soviet government. The Dalai Lama, still suspicious, enquired then about his Buddhist co-religionists, and Khomutnikov again had to reassure him by saying that Buddhists in Russia were not persecuted but enjoyed full religious freedoms. Their *dat-sans* and *khoruls* were not closed, and regular services were conducted in these as before. Moreover, the Buryats and Kalmyks, thanks to the new Bolshevik national policy, were allowed to establish their own national autonomies. To reinforce his arguments, Khomutnikov referred to Dorzhiev's letter as authoritative proof of his statements.

This first interview, if we are to believe Khomutnikov's account, lasted from 10 o'clock in the morning till 4 in the afternoon. It was mainly the Dalai Lama who was asking questions and his Soviet visitor answering them in the best way he could. Surprisingly, one of these was about Nicholas II, implying that the Lama probably knew nothing of the Ekaterinburg massacre of the Romanov family in July 1918. The Dalai Lama was also curious to know about the new political system in Russia, as is evidenced by his seemingly naive question: "How are you going to manage without rich people?" The interview ended with the Kalmyk commissar requesting Tibet's ruler grant a meeting with his ministers. This request he accompanied by a rather odd reservation: "Can I be certain that they (the ministers) will not turn me over to the English?"—which shows the extent of the Bolshevik Anglophobia at that time.

⁴⁵ Bembeyev 1991, p. 78 (NARK, f. 150, op. 1, d. 4a, l. 4). According to the "List of valuables received by the Tibet Expedition from the Narkomindel", the Dalai Lama's presents included three gold watches with a "RSFSR" monogram engraved on the upper lids and "a watch of burnished steel with a luminous clock-face". The document also mentions "a couple of silver salt-cellars of artistic work", whereas Khomutnikov's report speaks of "a silver service". NARK, r-137, op. 1, d. 2, l. 150.

The audience with the Tibetan Kalons took place the next day (11 April), at the Dalai Lama's summer residence of Norbulingka. Only two of them were present at the occasion, along with Tibet's Sovereign, as Khomutnikov's report suggests—the war minister Tsarong (Tsarang-Galdan as his name is spelled in the report) and an elderly Lonchen ("Prince Longchin"), holding the post of interior and foreign minister. This was probably the Prime minister Lonchen Shol Khan, as Dorzhiev's old friend, Lonchen Shatra, was dead by that time.⁴⁶

The ministers—Tsarong and the Lonchen Shol Khan—from the very start expressed their deep concern about Buddhists in Russia by quoting information from the Kalmyk refugees in Constantinople. Again, as on the day before, Khomutnikov had to vehemently refute all the dreadful stories about the violent rule of the Bolsheviks by alluding to the positive news contained in the letters from Karakhan, Dorzhiev and other Buddhist clerics he had brought to Lhasa.

"How strong is Soviet Russia? Can other powers beat it? Will it support Tibet against encroachments by other states?"—these were the questions the Kalons addressed to Khomutnikov. "We defend the interests of all national minorities and seek to establish close relations with them and protect them from aggression, no matter which side it may come from" replied the mission's leader firmly. "Therefore the Tibetan people can fully rely on our assistance and support". Thus encouraged, the Kalons told Khomutnikov that the British delivered arms and ammunition to Tibet "for a payment", however, they refused to lend them experts in making cordite, cartridges and shells. "For this reason, we want to know", the Kalons said, "whether the Soviet Government could provide such experts to Tibet, so that they could work for a salary here, as well as specialists in radiotelegraphy". To this request the Kalmyk, of course, gave a positive reply. His impression of the meeting with the Kalons he summed up as follows: "The Dalai Lama and his both ministers were very pleased with the conversation. They were especially delighted having received the radio-telegraph apparatus. They said that that was a very precious gift and immediately gave orders to take it to a hiding-place so that the English would not know about it".⁴⁷

⁴⁶ According to Shakappa 1984 (p. 262), Shatra died in 1923 but Lamb (1989, n. 33, p. 27) argues that the fact of Shatra's absence in Lhasa in 1921 during Bell's visit indicates that he had already been dead by that time.

⁴⁷ NARK, f. 150, op. 1, d. 4a, ll. 6, 7.

At his last, farewell audience with the Dalai Lama, Khomutnikov tried to encourage the Tibetan leader to send "an official embassy" to Moscow. In reply to this the Lama said:

This is not possible at the moment, for if the English learn about it, this may have grave consequences for us. Nonetheless we wish to establish the same kind of relations with the new Russia that we used to have with the old Russia, although this will not be easy because of the remoteness of your country from Tibet. Therefore, instead of an official embassy, I will dispatch with you Sharab Tepkin, with a verbal reply to Your Government and three letters addressed to Dorzhiev, so that the latter could convey their contents to Your Government. Sharab Tepkin will help Dorzhiev in his work as the person is in advanced years, and in case Dorzhiev dies he should replace him.⁴⁸

Although the Dalai Lama declined the offer to send his "embassy" to Moscow, he apparently welcomed the Soviet plans for a second mission to him for further negotiations and even made an arrangement with Khomutnikov to that effect.

It would be interesting at this point to collate Khomutnikov's narrative with what Sharab Tepkin related to his OGPU interrogator about the first Soviet Lhasa mission years later:

In 1922 an expedition from Russia arrived in Tibet, which consisted of 5 men, headed by lama Dava Yampilov. Among them was a person whom I knew, a Don Kalmyk, Khomutnikov, who held a high rank in the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Army. This expedition brought a letter to the Dalai Lama from the Narkomindel and another one from Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev. During my conversation with the above-mentioned Khomutnikov I enquired about the situation in Russia, and told him of the letter that I had received from the Kalmyk emigres in Turkey. He convinced me that life [in Kalmykia] was calm at present, the believers among the people and the clergy were performing their duties undisturbed, etc. In connection with the departure of the expedition for Russia I was summoned by the Dalai Lama, who said I should go together with them, to meet Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev and inform him of the situation in Tibet. At the same time I was charged with a task of informing him, the Dalai Lama, about the current developments in Russia and the condition of life for the clergy there.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., ll. 9, 10.

⁴⁹ AMB RK, Ibid., l. 9.

Tepkin's story is generally in line with Khomutnikov's report, save for his claim that Lama Yampilov did come to Lhasa at the head of the Soviet mission, but this discrepancy could perhaps be explained by aberration of his memory. In any case, we are inclined to believe Khomutnikov as he obviously had no reason to forge the fact of Yampilon's premature death in his official report.

Apart from meetings with the key political figures of Lhasa, Khomutnikov and his team also visited Tibet's largest monastic university in the environs of the capital, Drepung. There they easily got in touch with a rather scanty Buryat-Kalmyk community, the majority of whom were monk-students from the Gomang Datsang. This occasion provided an excellent opportunity for Tepkin and his comrades to engage in pro-Soviet agitation and at the same time to collect some information on the political situation in Tibet. It was from these people that he probably learnt about the Loseling incident and the strongly anti-British feelings of the Tibetan clericals. Khomutnikov apparently tried to make a good impression on the monks and he donated a large sum of money to one of the monasteries he visited (presumably Drepung). As a result, his name (the adopted one, Kekeyev) was allegedly carved on a special plaque, together with the names of other outstanding donors, somewhere outside the main temple (*tsogchen dugan*) of the monastery.⁵⁰

Khomutnikov left Lhasa on May 1st after spending three weeks there. On his way back he was accompanied by two members of his mission, as well as the Dalai Lama's envoy, Sharab Tepkin. Since caravans did not operate between Lhasa and Urga in summer, the party had to return to Russia by way of India. The Soviet emissaries were still posing as Mongol pilgrims which certainly helped them during their journey. They reached the Indian border on post-horses provided by the Dalai Lama. Their return route went through Gyantse and Domula (Domunath?), and they deviated from it only to visit the Tashilhumpo monastery and receive the blessing of the Panchen Lama, commonly referred to by the Mongols as Banchen Erdeni, or Banchen Bogdo, the highest spiritual authority in Tibet. "I introduced myself to him without saying who I really was", Khomutnikov wrote in his report and he had good reason to con-

⁵⁰ This fact was related to the present author by Khongar Khomutnikov (Vasily Khomutnikov's nephew) in an interview in Elista in April 1993.

ceal his identity as the Panchen Lama, according to rumours, was a firm Anglophile. While crossing the border Khomutnikov detected some British troops stationed on the Tibetan side. Proceeding further southwards, the travellers reached Galimput (Kalimpung) on 25 May where they boarded a train to Calcutta. "In Galimput we encountered an English secret police patrol (Hindus) which followed us as far as Calcutta where we arrived the next day, May 26. To avoid suspicion we carried with us a great number of Tibetan religious books, as is usually done by lama-pilgrims". In this way the Kalmyks safely reached the former capital of British India. There they intended to take a steamship to Shanghai but were delayed "for whole 27 days due to a strike by the dockers there". They finally got to Shanghai, not without difficulties though: having not enough money to pay the fare, the four agents had to bribe the steamship company officials to get aboard. Travelling from Shanghai by railway on to Kalgan, with a stop in Peking, and from Kalgan by motor car to Urga, the team finally arrived in the Mongolian capital on August 4th, having spent some three months on the return journey.

* * *

Back in Moscow, Vasily Khomutnikov submitted a detailed report on his Tibetan Mission to the Eastern Department of the Narkomindel on 28 October 1922. This report offered a general survey of the current political, economical, and military situation in Tibet, which was precisely what the Soviet leaders wanted to know about the Dalai Lama's theocracy. The very titles of its sections reveal the focal points of the Soviet interest in the country—"The Dalai Lama and his sentiments", "Ministers of the Dalai Lama", "Tibet and England", "Tibet and China", "The Japanese in Tibet", "The Tibetan Army", "The Branches of Trade", etc. We will now cite these in the English translation, and then try to evaluate the quality of the intelligence gathered by Khomutnikov.⁵¹

⁵¹ NARK, f. 150, op. 1, d. 4a: "Doklad o poezdke v Tibet", ll. 8-17. See also Bembeyev 1991, pp. 84-92.

The Dalai Lama and his sentiments

The Dalai Lama is at present the only spiritual and political head of Tibet. All state power is in his hands and those of ministers appointed by him—of war, finance, internal and foreign affairs, and the minister of the court.

However earlier, approximately until 1911, the situation was different. At that time Tibet was ruled by the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Bogdo (the incarnation residing in the Tashinling monastery in the south of Tibet), whose highest spiritual rank was reckoned almost identical to his. When the Dalai Lama, as the English military expedition approached Lhasa in 1904, fled to Mongolia, the Panchen Bogdo remained in Tibet and replaced him. The English were able to get very close to him and win his favour, by setting him against the Dalai Lama. With the Chinese advance on Tibet in 1911 the Panchen Bogdo fled to India, together with the Dalai Lama, where the English authorities began to draw him and his companions to their side. At the time when the Dalai Lama lived in Galimput, the 18-year old Panchen Bogdo travelled to London, at the invitation of the British Government, who showed him much attention. However by the time he returned to Tibet, the Dalai Lama had succeeded in establishing the kind of order there which eliminated the diarchy. All power passed on into the hands of the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Bogdo stood up in opposition to him, and is now a supporter of the English.

The Dalai Lama's own attitude to England is friendly at present, due to the fact that the English supply weapons to Tibet to arm it for fighting against China. He regards the latter country with definite hostility. The Dalai Lama enjoys great sympathy with the lamas and the popular masses although he has opponents among them. Thus, in 1921, in connection with the arrival in Lhasa of the British representative Bell, the monks of two monasteries, being supporters of the Chinese orientation, attempted to raise an uprising against the government. However, its leaders were arrested and are still in prison.

Shortly before my arrival, the Dalai Lama, according to the Torgout lamas residing in Lhasa, received a letter from the Bogdo Khutukhtu (Djinsan-Dambu) in Urga, which said that the Soviets, having destroyed their temples and sacred books, had now got their hands on Mongolia, and dethroned him, the Bogdo-Khutuktu, with the help of the Mongolian revolutionary party. Therefore he asked the Dalai Lama

to perform the special *chedji* services for the destruction of enemies and evil spirits.⁵² Before our arrival, these services were indeed performed, but after the Dalai Lama had received information from Dorzhiev and myself, he cancelled them.

. . . When parting with me at our last meeting, on 29 April, the Dalai Lama, having thanked me, said: "I desire to establish neighbourly relations with Russia, for, although we, formally, are in peaceful relations with Britain, she in fact seeks to subjugate us. To this end she stationed her troops on our territory, which is quite annoying and completely undesirable for us". By saying this he gave me to understand that he was discontented with the British policies.

Ministers of the Dalai Lama

The administration of Tibet is concentrated in the hands of three ministers: of internal and foreign affairs—Longchin, of war and finance, Tsarang Galdan, and the minister of the court, a lama, whose name I don't remember.

Longchin (a Prince, an elderly man of 65) is definitely an opponent of England. When the Dalai Lama and other prominent figures in Tibet fled to India at the time of the Chinese invasion in 1910, Lonchin remained in Lhasa. Upon the return of the Dalai Lama he was arrested on charges of collaboration with the Chinese. It eventually emerged that the accusation was unjust, and so he was released. He has great sympathy for Russia. When we parted, he told me: "We were on friendly terms with the Russians before, and I think we shall be able to restore our old relations, if conditions and circumstances permit". In conclusion, he added, with tears welling up in his eyes, that there were many things he would like to say on the subject, however he had to restrain himself as he had already been arrested once.

Tsarang-Galdan, the 28-year old war and finance minister, is a rather influential figure. He was born to a Tibetan of humble origin, and since his early days had been a *khuvarak-lama* (a disciple).

⁵² *Chedji* must be a reference to a special service dedicated to the protectors of the Buddhist teachings, *chokyons* (Tib. *chos skyon*, Sansk. *dharma-pala*), a class of tutelary deities. Alternatively, the term could be a corrupted Mongolian word "shajin"—religion, faith.

He came to the fore in 1911 when he set up a small detachment to protect the Dalai Lama, and he is said to have rescued him once from the Chinese. On the Dalai Lama's return from India, Tsarang was appointed the war minister. He killed his predecessor, the former war minister, who had been charged with treason, with his own hands, and took possession of the other's entire property, including his wife. He played a most active part in the war with China in 1917–1918. Tsarong speaks some English which he learnt in India from English instructors. He used to know some Russians—in 1907 or in 1909 he met the traveller Kozlov, who was then received by the Dalai Lama, upon the latter's return from Peking. He was very nice to me, many a time he invited me to his home and was always glad to discuss any topic. He is keenly interested in Soviet Russia and the Red Army.

Tibet and England

The English do not interfere in the internal affairs of Tibet, and they have no official representative in Lhasa. But the English influence on the life in the country is steadily growing. With their cooperation the Tibetan army began to be organized in 1912, for the needs of which they sent several instructors in 1917. However, their influence is most visible in trade.

On 18 November 1920, a British Mission arrived in Lhasa. It consisted of three men—Colonel Bell, Dr. Deldin, and a translator, a Sikkimese Damba. Bell told the Dalai Lama that the English wanted to assist in the enlightenment of Tibet, and he asked him to admit an official representative of England in Lhasa in order to establish closer ties [between the two countries]. He conducted talks about the construction of a motor road from the Indian border to Lhasa and a telegraph line from Gyantse (up to which place it had been built in 1904) to Lhasa, and he also sought permission for an English military force (about two companies) to remain on the Tibetan territory, in the Dorjin area, where it had been installed in 1917. He succeeded in obtaining consent for the completion of the telegraph line and for the leasing of tracts of land to the NW and SE of Lhasa (where exactly and how large I could not find out). In compensation England pledged to supply arms [to Tibet]. It was rumoured shortly

before I left Lhasa, that the government had dispatched its officials to receive from England, as was agreed with Bell, some 20 thousand rifles, 8 mountain guns, 10 submachine guns and 5 mortars.

Bell spent almost a whole year in Lhasa, staying permanently in a place close to the Dalai Lama's palace.

In the early May of 1922 one English mining engineer with an assistant came to Tibet, to render assistance to the Tibetan Government, [as a result] of Bell's negotiations. The former was offered a salary of 6,500 rupees (1 rupee is 64 kopeks), and the latter—5,000 rupees. In the Domula area, near the border, the English are putting up a sawmill under the protection of their soldiers, which I have seen myself in passing the place. There are many English subjects in Tibet, who are mainly Sikkimese, serving as instructors in the army, and the Hindu traders from Bengal and Nepal.

About 40 young men have left Tibet to receive education in the English schools in India and England, 10 men will go to a military college and the rest to technical and agricultural colleges.

The attitude of the lamas and the popular masses to the English is definitely hostile.

Tibet and China

There has been no representatives of China in Tibet since 1912. The eastern border of Tibet and China has been a war front since 1918, and skirmishing there is not infrequent.

The caravan roads to China are closed, so Chinese goods come to Tibet to a large extent by way of Calcutta.

The Tibetans, on the whole, do not like the Chinese. The supporters of China can be found primarily among the Tibetan princes, who formerly, under the Manchu dynasty, had enjoyed authority. Such persons are usually bribed by the Chinese Government. When detected, they are punished most severely by the authorities, for example, they are sewn up in hides and drowned in the river. In general Chinese policy is viewed [by the Tibetans] as seeking to restore its former dominion over Tibet.

The Japanese in Tibet

There are no official representatives of Japan in Lhasa. In 1912 three Japanese came to Tibet, two of whom returned home in 1914 after collecting various information on Tibet. They served in the capacity of instructors, training soldiers according to the Japanese military pattern. The third remained in Tibet, and still resides there as a lama [alternative reading: disguised as a lama].

The Ungern Missions

After the seizure of Urga in 1920 Ungern made up his mind to get in touch with Tibet, for which purpose he sent to Lhasa a delegation of six men. However, all of his emissaries were robbed and killed by Ja-Lama en route.

His second delegation, dispatched in 1922, consisting of two Russians, three Tatars, two Buryats, and two Mongols, and having some 20 camels, succeeded in getting to Nagchu. But they were detained there and, according to the instructions of the Dalai Lama, who denied them entry to Lhasa, sent to Kham-pa, to the Chinese front, to be at the disposal of the Tibetan Commander-in-Chief there. They left 500 *lang* of silver money in Nagchu for the Dalai Lama.

The Tibetan Army

The Tibetan troops have been organized following the European model, since the war with China in 1910–1912. At first the training was conducted by some Buryats after the Russian pattern, then by the above-mentioned Japanese, and finally by the English.

The general strength of the army amounts, in the words of the war minister, to 60,000 men, of which 30,000 are in Eastern Tibet on the Chinese border, in the locality of Kham-pa (Chamtu). This figure is certainly exaggerated. In reality, there are some 25–30 thousand men, in my opinion. There are two regiments stationed at the court of the Dalai Lama, in the place called Nurulinkhan, one battalion in Lhasa itself, and one company in Tantsi, half-way between

Lhasa and Tantsi. A military school for junior officers, run by the English instructors, is located in the same place.

Training and organization of the army are carried out after the English pattern by English instructors. A regiment consists of six companies, a company of four platoons; there are two regiments in a brigade and three brigades in a division. The military units are almost exclusively made up of infantry, there being almost no cavalry troops at all due to the specifics of terrain. There is one division of mountain artillery made up of two batteries, which is stationed on the Chinese border in Kham-pa.

All the military are dressed in English uniforms and equipped with English weapons, and there are also Russian, Japanese, and Chinese made rifles. The military designations are borrowed from English. Thus soldiers fighting on foot are called "infantry", and a colonel is titled "corneil". The senior instructors are English, the junior—Sikkimese. One senior instructor is attached to the court of the Dalai Lama, and with him eight Sikkimese instructors.

In Gyantse there are six English and three Sikkimese residents on the premises of the military college, and there is one English platoon protecting the telegraph station. The Tibetan units are well-disciplined, and in general Tibetans are good soldiers, though the drill seems to be poor. The soldiers are supplied with food products according to the following ration: three pounds of rice, tea three times a day, half a pound of flour, and occasionally some meat.

The barracks are built of stone in the Tibetan style, enclosed by a stone wall. They are clean and in good order, being taken care of by men on duty. There are sentries posted in pairs at every doorway, including those in the palaces of the Dalai Lama. The city is intensively patrolled at night-time.

The Tibetans themselves make weapons and shells by primitive methods, but the quality of these of course is far from perfect. The range of the rifles is small, and the shells explode rather poorly.

The Branches of Trade

Trade in Tibet is in the hands of the Chinese and Nepalese. The Chinese trade primarily in silk, footwear, tea and tobacco. The Nepalese and Bengalese Hindus trade in English commodities such

as tinware and hardware, kitchen utensils, textiles, English boots, ready-made English clothing, hats, puttees, etc.

There are up to 60 shops (good ones) in Lhasa, of which 35 are foreign, and the rest belong to Tibetan traders.

The English supply the red copper, used for coinage by Tibetans. In former times this copper came from Russia, as did brocade, which was highly valued and sold in large quantities to monasteries. Nowadays brocade comes from India, but it is of poor quality.

The cottage industry is insufficiently developed. Its products, a home-spun coarse broad-cloth, thin felt and jewelry are exported to Mongolia. Skins, leather and tallow are exported to India and China.

There are gold mines in Tibet, developed by the government.

Lhasa

The bulk of the population in Lhasa is made up of lamas, who number up to 15,000, and pilgrims who flock here from all corners of Central and Eastern Asia. There are many temples and monasteries, as well as several palaces in the city. The number of private houses is about 400, most of these being three-storied.

Many lamas are Mongols, and there are some 40 Buryats and 10–12 Kalmyks.”

How accurate was all this miscellaneous information either gathered by Khomutnikov personally or obtained from his various informants in Lhasa, such as “the Torgout lamas”? The most valuable part of Khomutnikov’s account is no doubt his first-hand evidence of the political situation in Tibet, following Charles Bell’s visit. The Soviet agent seems to confirm the fact known to us mainly from the British and Tibetan sources that the Dalai Lama’s modernisation plans, especially his initiatives towards building up a strong and efficient Tibetan army on the British model, met with opposition from the powerful monastic circles, which was only growing with time, causing a considerable tension within Tibetan society. But there were some strong opponents to an Anglo-Tibetan alliance among the civilian administration as well, such as, for example, Kusho Lungshar, one of the heads of the National Assembly (Tsongdu). Even the Tibetan Premier, Lonchen Sholkhang, whom the British regarded as “very friendly” at that time, also seemed to have some ill feelings for them deep inside,

as is suggested by Khomutnikov. What is important, however, is that the anti-British elements in Tibet were mainly people of pro-Chinese (rather than pro-Russian) orientation, who were doing fairly well formerly, under the Manchu rule, and who sided openly with the Chinese during their invasion in Tibet in 1910–1912. Khomutnikov makes no mention in his report of any pro-Russian faction in Lhasa, but a certain number of Tibetan Russophiles were certainly there, to say nothing of the Buryat-Kalmyk colony at Drepung, which was still the main center of Russian influence in Tibet. Moreover, Khomutnikov’s testimony also seems to give some support to Dorzhiev’s statement about pro-Russian sentiments of the Tibetan leaders—according to the Kalmyk, such key political figures of the period as the Dalai Lama, Lonchen Sholkhang, and Tsarong Shape, generally believed to be pro-British, began to show some explicit interest in, if not sympathy for, Soviet Russia after their contacts with the Soviet Mission, which is certainly a remarkable fact.

Another curious piece of evidence is the discussion of the rift in the relations between the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, dating back to the time of the former’s exile in Mongolia in 1904–05. What seems to be particularly interesting is that the Panchen was portrayed by Khomutnikov as being currently “in opposition” to his colleague Incarnation, no matter if both were friendly with the British at the time.

Of no less interest is information about Ungern’s secret overtures to the Dalai Lama made in 1920–21 (not in 1922). It is known that the White Baron had long cherished an idea of creating a great Buddhist confederacy in Central Asia, consisting of Buryatia, Outer and Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet, under the aegis of a Manchu Khan (Emperor). Shortly before his army was crushed by the Bolsheviks, Ungern had been considering the possibility of retreating to Tibet (rather than to neighbouring Manchuria), the citadel of Yellow Creed, where he hoped to enter the service of the Living Buddha. One of Ungern’s modern biographers, L. Yuzefovich, suggests that the Baron sent off his Tibetan *sotnia* (squadron) to Lhasa in the summer of 1921 for preliminary talks with the Tibetan authorities.⁵³ However, the Dalai Lama apparently was not enthusiastic about the idea of having a White Russian military detachment in Lhasa, and therefore he did not admit it to Lhasa, as Khomutnikov tells us.

⁵³ Yuzefovich 1993, p. 193.

At the same time, while offering us all this valuable data, Khomutnikov's report abounds in mistakes and inaccuracies (to say nothing of its misspellings of the Tibetan and English proper names and place names), mainly when he quotes other people's information. Some of these mistakes, however, are only minor and do not degrade seriously the quality of his intelligence, such as, for example, his reference to the Lonchen Sholkhan's persecution for his collaboration with the Chinese in 1910. In reality that person was dismissed from his office of Shape and banished from Lhasa by the Dalai Lama during the Younghusband expedition of 1904. Sholkhang was reinstated a few years later by the Chinese and given the rank of Lonchen. He was not in Lhasa at the time of the Chinese invasion and did not collaborate with the invaders. Another mistake: the Panchen Lama visited Calcutta, and not London, in 1904. The paragraph on the Japanese agents in Tibet is not very accurate either. The person who remained in the Snow Land "disguised as a lama" was a scholar-monk at Sera, Togon Tada.⁵⁴

Special attention was given by Khomutnikov to two issues—Indo-Tibetan relations and the British military aid to Tibet—which indicates Moscow's grave concern about its adversary's efforts towards a rapprochement with Lhasa. However, here too, the quality of his intelligence is not always up to the mark, as, for example, shows his account of the Bell Mission. Especially puzzling is Khomutnikov's statement on Tibet's leasing of land to the British, "NW and SE of Lhasa", in exchange for arms. It can be assumed of course that it partly reflects circulating rumours about the reasons why the English mining engineer, Henry Hayden, was doing a survey NW of Lhasa in April–September 1922, when he was hired by the Tibetan Government to look for minerals. The reference could also apply to Tawang, a tract of land in the Assam Himalayas (SE of Lhasa), ceded to the British at Simla; the fact that the British Indian Government gave a large gift of arms to the Tibetans shortly after looked clearly like a pay-off for Tawang.⁵⁵ Further, Khomutnikov's observation that "there are many English subjects in Tibet, serving as instructors in the Army" is a gross exaggeration. It is known that in 1922 there

⁵⁴ Shakabpa 1984, p. 250. See also: Berry 1995.

⁵⁵ Such an assumption was first made by Lamb 1989, p. 25: "It may be speculated that the provision of these weapons was in some way connected with the Tibetan territorial concessions with respect to the McMahon Line".

was a British Trade Agent in Gyantse, David MacDonald, who was half Sikkimese. The same person was also Trade Agent at Yatung. In the 1920s the British Escort stationed in Gyantse for the protection of the Trade Agency consisted of some 75 men, who were all Indian Sepoys. The Escort Commander was Captain Eric Parker of the 90th Punjab Regiment, who, if truth be known, was the only British CO in Tibet at that time. There was also a Medical Officer at Gyantse, a Sikkimese, Bo Tsiring, who was replaced by a European, Captain R. Lee, of the Indian Medical Service in September 1922. One or two other British personnel ran the telegraph, but they were technical personnel and were not engaged in any political work, according to British records. The "platoon at the telegraph" mentioned by Khomutnikov was a part of the Gyantse Escort, and was within the Trade Agency grounds. As for the Gyantse military school, it never existed in point of fact; the Tibetan troops were trained at Gyantse by the escort commander. Finally, speaking of the British troops in Tibet, there was a small Indian military detachment of some 25 men under an Indian officer at Yatung, but no troops were stationed at Gartok, the third British trade mart, at any time, nor at Lhasa.⁵⁶

Furthermore, some of the figures quoted by Khomutnikov are either inaccurate, such as, for example, the amount of arms supplied by the British in 1922 (probably a reference to their first delivery), or largely exaggerated. The latter remark refers mainly to the strength of the Tibetan army which was estimated by Tsarong roughly at 60 thousand and reduced by Khomutnikov in his Report to what seemed to be a more realistic figure of 25–30 thousand, but even this number was obviously too high, as there was no more than 10 thousand men recruited to active military service in Tibet at that time.

* * *

The Soviet leaders were quite content with the results of Khomutnikov's "reconnaissance expedition" to Tibet, and they certainly took whatever intelligence he brought back to Moscow at face value, the more so that it provided some convincing evidence of British imperialist policy with regard to Tibet. On February 2, 1925, upon completion of his service in Mongolia, the Kalmyk cavalry commander

⁵⁶ This information on the British military presence in Tibet was provided to the author by Dr A. McKay in a letter of 17 April 1996.

was awarded the order of the Red Banner—"the symbol of the World revolution"—for his military valour, but also no doubt in appreciation of his secret work in Tibet by the Revolutionary War Council of the Republic (RVSR).

Shortly after Khomutnikov and Tepkin returned to Moscow, the Bolsheviks made a new step towards their rapprochement with Lhasa. At the end of 1922 an unofficial representation of the Tibetan Government in RSFSR, the "Tibetan Legation", was set up on the premises of the Buddhist Datsang in Petrograd, under the aegis of the Narkomindel. This rather spectral entity, unlisted in any reference books (and certainly never mentioned in the mass media as the Soviets sought to keep a low profile for their initiative), was accorded extraterritorial status, something normally done only in respect of foreign diplomatic compounds. The head of the Legation was of course Agvan Dorzhiev, who thus obtained the diplomatic rank of the "plenipotentiary" of Tibet. At the same time Chicherin dispatched a messenger to Lhasa, Sanja Bakbushev, with letters for the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government. These were translated into Tibetan for the Narkomindel by Tepkin, who would later recall his time in Moscow as follows:

Having arrived in Russia, I headed for Moscow to meet Khambo Dorzhiev, who was staying there, and handed over to him a message from the Dalai Lama in which the latter commissioned him, Dorzhiev, to be a representative of Tibet in Soviet Russia. Dorzhiev told me how the revolution began and what happened later; he said that it had been very difficult for the Kalmyk population and clergy during the time of the civil war, but that the situation was now improving, due to state support.

The first four months that I had lived in Moscow there was not much work to do, I was just busy with translation of the letters received from the Dalai Lama and those sent to him in Tibet.⁵⁷

What could Chicherin possibly write in these to the leader of Tibet? No doubt he must have informed the Dalai Lama of the appointment of his elderly *tsanshaw*, Dorzhiev, as the official representative of Tibet in Soviet Russia and the creation of the Tibetan Legation in Petrograd, the event which signified that the world's first government of workers and peasants was the first one to recognize Tibet as a sovereign state!

⁵⁷ AMB RK, Ibid., l. 9, 9ob.

Such a propagandist move, after all, could indeed make a strong impression on Tibet's ruler. At the same time Chicherin most likely raised the question of setting up permanent Soviet representation in Tibet to maintain direct relations between the two countries. (And this was indeed so, as we will see later.) He also must have confirmed his earlier intention to dispatch a fully accredited Soviet diplomatic mission to Lhasa, and, of course, the Narkom had hardly missed the opportunity to supply the Tibetans with more positive, or "correct" to use his own term, information about Soviet Russia, its foreign policy and the life of the Buryats and Kalmyks within their national autonomies.

Along with the Tibetan Legation, Dorzhiev also established Mongolian representation in Petrograd in the late 1922, again with the due approval of the Narkomindel. This functioned practically as a parallel structure to the official Mongolian Legation set up earlier that year in Moscow. The first Mongolian minister to Soviet Russia was Tushegun Dava, the person who had acted as secretary on the 1921 Mongolian Mission to Moscow.⁵⁸ As far as is known, Dorzhiev's Mongolian Legation was mainly concerned with taking care of the Mongolian students arriving in Petrograd for educational purposes, with the mandates of the MPR Party and the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth Union (Revsomol), an equivalent of the Soviet Komsomol.

Proof of the existence of the Tibetan and Mongolian Legations is found in the two letters from Karakhan to the Petrograd city authorities—Petrogubzemotdel (Petrograd Province Land Tenure Department), containing references to the "Mongolo-Tibetan Legations" and their property: the Buddhist temple with a kitchen unit inside, two residential houses, and a separate outhouse with the laundry and bath facilities. All of these were assigned to the Legations at the very end of 1922, in accordance with the arrangements made between Chicherin and Yakovenko, the People's Commissar for Agriculture.⁵⁹

The approved staff of the Tibetan Legation comprised only three officials—Agvan Dorzhiev (its head) and his two aids, or secretaries, Sharab Tepkin and a Buryat ex-lama Badma Namjil Ochirov. In the latter half of the 1920s Tepkin and Ochirov would be replaced

⁵⁸ Tushegun Dava was in office from 24 April 1922 until 19 November 1924, when he was replaced by Yapon-Danzan.

⁵⁹ TsGA SPb, f. 1000, op. 7, d. 49, ll. 152, 155. The first letter is dated 18 June 1923, the second is undated; both are copies.

by Naran Bakbushev (brother of Sanja Bakbushev) and the Ganjurba-gegen Danzan Norboev, again one Kalmyk and one Buryat, both Buddhist clerics of distinction. Accordingly, all these men were issued special mandates by the Narkomindel to certify that they were representatives of the Tibetan Government in Soviet Russia.

Lama Ochirov arrived from Tibet in the autumn of 1922. He, like Tepkin, was also a scholar-monk, who had spent about 12 years at Drepung, and it may be that he was actually encouraged to return to Russia by Khomutnikov. In 1923, Ochirov and Tepkin moved to Petrograd, where they were enrolled for a time as language instructor at the newly-established Institute of the Living Oriental Languages (IJVIA), then the best educational centre for the study of Oriental languages in Russia.

Both the ex-lamas were portrayed quite sympathetically by their Russian colleague in the Institute, B.Ya. Vladimirtsov, in his letter to Stcherbatsky in London:

At present there is a Buryat lama, who lives here at the temple. He has recently returned from Tibet after spending some 12 years there, and he also visited India—Bodh-Gaya, etc. He seems to be a rather learned man; he is very eager to study Sanskrit and therefore is awaiting your return with impatience. S.F. [Oldenburg], whom he wanted to become his tutor, is too busy now. As for our younger Sanskritists, the lama has not yet got in touch with them. Besides he speaks almost no Russian at all.

In general Lamaist Asia is represented here well enough: a very young Tibetan from Lhasa, several Buryats, a Khalka Mongol . . . all at the Oriental Institute. Then, a Kalmyk bhikshu is going to come here in a day or two. He was already here once last autumn; he speaks Russian perfectly, even writes in Russian without mistakes as he had completed some Russian college. He takes a keen interest in Russian philosophy.—So come back quicker, Feodor Ippolitovich! You won't find stars like these in the bourgeois West.⁶⁰

Vladimirtsov was obviously fascinated with the persons of Ochirov and Tepkin as he referred to them again in his next letter to Stcherbatsky:

. . . These both lamas, especially Tepkin, are surely to be of help to you. They heard much about you in Tibet. The Dalai Lama has your big portrait hanging on the wall in his private study.⁶¹

⁶⁰ ARAN, f. 725, op. 3, d. 38, l. 1ob. The letter is dated 9 January 1923. See also, Andreyev 1993b, pp. 319 ff.

⁶¹ Ibid., l. 4. Vladimirtsov to Stcherbatsky, 2 April 1923.

Badma Ochirov has been reading a course of the Khalka dialect of the Mongolian language in the 1923/1924 academic year. In the summer of 1924, however, he quit his job to accompany Agyan Dorzhiev on a secret mission to Peking (which we will discuss in more detail later). As for Tepkin, he remained at the institute until late 1925, when he left for Kalmykia where he was elected Head of the Kalmyk Buddhist Church (Shajin Lama).

"A very young Tibetan from Lhasa", mentioned by Vladimirtsov, was the 22-year old ex-lama Sonon-Dorji. He was enrolled in the Institute in the autumn of 1922, which suggests that he had probably arrived in Russia together with the Khomutnikov Mission. Sonon-Dorji was then admitted into the special two-year Mongolo-Tibetan preparatory program arranged for students from Buryatia, Mongolia and Tibet "who were not quite prepared to attend the regular classes". In early 1923, however, he had to interrupt his studies because of his poor health, and he suddenly died in the summer of that year, already on the way home.⁶²

Another important event of the period, which had some relevance to the Bolshevik Tibetan scheme, was a Buryat Buddhist Council held at the Atsagat-Chelota Datsan in mid-October 1922. It was then that Agyan Dorzhiev, evidently following the example of the Russian Orthodox Church, launched his Buddhist reformation, the so-called "revival of faith" (*obnovlenchesvo*).⁶³ The idea behind the reform movement was to reconcile Buddhist doctrine and practices with the new socialist order in Russia. But also, just as importantly, the reforms were designed to purify the religion of its many distortions by reviving the pure spirit of the Buddha's early *sangha* (community) as expressed in the Vinaya monastic code. The basic principles to which the reformed Buryat Buddhist communities were supposed to commit themselves were 1) giving up luxury, such as silk dresses, rich furniture etc., 2) strengthening moral discipline of the monks, 3) centralizing religious administration and unifying the datsang funds or *jasa*, and, finally, 4) organizing communal life on the basis of equal

⁶² According to the IJVIA records, the institute administration sent Sonon-Dorji, along with a group of other ailing Buryats and Mongols, to their homelands, "to restore their health", on 18 April 1923 (TsGA Spb, f. 7222, op. 4, d. 3, l. 42). The name of the Tibetan was still on the list of students dated 1 July, but it disappeared from it three months later.

⁶³ On the Buddhist reform movement in Buryatia see Gerasimova 1964.

distribution of funds. But Dorzhiev went much further than these prescriptions, as he would later call for the abolishment of the khubilgan or tulku worship cult and the prohibition of divination by both Buryat and alien lamas. Moreover, in 1923 he would attempt to organize the agricultural labour communes in some Transbaikal datsangs so that the monks would not be a burden to the "labouring lay populace".

The Buddhist reformation brought about a dramatic split of the clergy in Buryatia (and subsequently in Kalmykia as well). The opponents of the reforms, referred to as "conservatives", blamed Dorzhiev (the "Red Gushri Khan") for the willful perversion of the Doctrine and they refused to fulfill the resolutions of the Atsagat Council. The controversy was further aggravated following the nationalization of the datsangs, when the local aimak authorities began to lease these to the group of believers who were then to hire lamas to serve therein.

Among those present at this great Buddhist rally were some Mongolian and Tibetan lamas, who then brought word of the meeting to Urga and Lhasa. Dorzhiev himself also reported on the event in a personal message to the Dalai Lama, which he sent off along with some offerings (*mandal*) from the Buryat Buddhists. In that letter he could not, of course, avoid uttering his opinion on the perspectives of Tibet's entering into close relations with foreign powers—China, Britain and Russia. China, being then riven by civil war ("envolved in internal fighting"), was not even taken into consideration by him. Of Britain he spoke with clear enmity: "The British, while they may be very lenient for the moment, will over the long range spill out their guts, leaving only a hollow shell". As for the Soviet Russia, it was undoubtedly regarded with much greater sympathy by Dorzhiev, yet he refrained, wisely enough, from giving counsel to his High Patron as to whether he should seek an alliance with the Soviets:

The new government people are in the habit of saying that they will help keep weaker peoples from oppression by outsiders, and they do help some of them. They are not greedy for land, capital and labour, they say, and such a system actually does exist. For my part, I have clouded thoughts about what is going to happen in the future, so I do not know if things will turn out for the better or for the worse. You must search your thoughts whether or not to make an agreement.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Norbu 1991, pp. 47–48.

Dorzhiev entrusted the Tibetan Donyer (the Dalai Lama's representative) in Urga with the sending of his confidential letter to Tibet. At the same time he must have also sent another one, in a more clearly articulated pro-Soviet vein, as was desired by the Narkomindel, with Sanja Bakbushev. The concluding part of Dorzhiev's Tibetan Auto-biography (from which the above quotation is borrowed) seems to emphasize the fact that the Buddhist teachings were generally in harmony with the recently introduced communist system in Russia. This far-fetched idea, one of the inspirations of the Buddhist reform movement, may after all provide a clue to the Buryat cleric's close collaboration with the Soviet regime in the 1920s.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SOVIET CHALLENGE:
THE BORISOV MISSION, 1923–1925

In 1922–1923 two lengthy articles devoted to Tibet appeared in the journal of the All-Russian Scientific Association for Oriental Studies, "Novyi Vostok" (New Orient). Both were written by a Narkomindel official, Lev Efimovich Berlin.¹ The first, entitled "England and Tibet" mainly discussed the British imperialist policy vis-à-vis Tibet from the late 19th C. to the early 1920s. The other piece, "Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev: Tibet's struggle for independence", was actually designed to commemorate Dorzhiev's 70th birthday, an occasion which allowed the author to dwell in detail on the unusual career of the Russo-Tibetan diplomat (avoiding, of course, any reference to his collaboration with the Soviet foreign office) and at the same time to supply the reader with some of the latest news from Tibet.

In his first article Berlin acknowledged that after the expulsion of the Chinese from Tibet in 1912 the country had become "a de facto completely independent state". However, he argued, its subsequent isolation from Russia during the World War and the Russian revolution drew it closer to the British, for whom "it was much easier to extend their influence over Tibet". This was particularly the case because the Tibetans, having faced the hostility of China via Szechuan Province, had to look for some external support, even if the support was offered by Britain, "the country for which they generally had no special liking". Berlin also discussed the three political factions prevailing among Tibet's ruling circles at that period—those in favour of Britain, of Japan, and of China. The leader of the pro-British

faction, Shada (Shatra) Kalon, had allegedly negotiated an agreement with Britain for arms supply to Tibet entirely on his own. The weapons were supplied but the terms of the transaction remained unknown. Therefore the Dalai Lama, upon Shada's return to Tibet from India, deposed him from his ministerial post and sent him into exile. The followers of Shada were likewise all persecuted and "deprived of the opportunity to influence the political life in the country". Similarly, the Dalai Lama had done away with the Japanophile and Sinophile factions, as these, like the Anglophiles, pursued a policy of "a barely disguised imperialism". This had resulted in renewed Russian influence in Lhasa.

At present, as a result of the liquidation of the factions, Tibet is governed exclusively by the old nationalist group, headed by the Dalai Lama and the followers of Dorzhiev, which, despite its isolation from Russia, is still gravitating towards the latter.²

At the same time, according to Berlin, the British, seeking to regain their position in Tibet, sent a diplomatic mission to Lhasa under Sir Bell in 1920. That mission seemed to have succeeded in fully restoring friendly relations between Tibet and Britain, however, the Tibetans were apparently unhappy with the friendship "imposed on them by the British". According to a report in the Chinese press, the Dalai Lama had recently dispatched three delegates to China's President with a message in which he declared his allegiance to the Peking Government (!?). And the President had responded to this by stating that he regarded the Sino-Tibetan differences as "a result of misunderstanding which would soon be settled".

Politics apart, the Narkomindel official also provided, for the first time ever, a brief Marxist analysis of the class composition of Tibetan society at that time. Its predominant segment, the clergy, was described by him as "well-disciplined and organized"; being "the cultural element" in the country; the clerics "direct, control and regulate all spheres of life of the Tibetans". The numerous Tibetan monasteries were spoken of quite positively as "centres of education and settled life". Other social classes included: a) landowners, government officials, and merchants, b) craftsmen and workers, c) peasants and farm labourers, d) serfs belonging to landowners and landowning

¹ Lev Efimovich Berlin (1897–1974) held some high posts in the political administration of the Volga, Caspian and Baltic Fleets and the RVSR during the civil war. In 1921–1926 he worked as a counsellor (*politreferent*) at the Far Eastern department of Narkomindel. Berlin took active part in the negotiation of the Soviet-Mongolian treaty of 5 November 1921. In 1926–1927 he officiated as the Soviet Consul General attached to the revolutionary government of South China in Canton and then as the first secretary of the Soviet representation in the MPR (Ulan-Bator). Berlin wrote a book on modern Tibet in 1924, which was not published.

² Berlin 1922, pp. 363–364.

clergy. "The officials and landowners", Berlin wrote, "are scattered around (the country) and poorly organized, making a feeble appendage to the Tibetan powerful clerico-theocratic system". The rest of population was the "lawless object" for excessive taxation and exploitation, which explained why the "broad masses" were so downtrodden and ignorant.

The peasantry, being the largest segment of society, suffers bitterly from extortions and shortage of arable land. The peasants often come into collision with their landlords and the large landowning monasteries, which results in endless and ruinous court examinations at the central and provincial law-courts. The number of workers and craftsmen is small and is concentrated in the few Tibetan towns, in the monasteries and goldmines. The class of traders is relatively large, due to a considerable development of trade in Tibet.³

Industry in Tibet, according to Berlin, was slowly emerging, owing to the efforts of the Dalai Lama and his government who "recognize as their first and foremost political task the enlightenment (of population) and development of national economy, through which they hope to attain the political independence of Tibet". The few industrial enterprises in the country were state run, and Berlin referred specifically to two tanneries, one copper and brass foundry, and one arms-cartridges and gun powder factory employing a small number of workers. There was also about 4,000 people working full time in the gold mines, and this was, apparently, the only working class in Tibet he knew of.

Berlin's second article, published in fact on the very eve of the new Soviet mission to Lhasa, carried even more severe criticism of British imperialism. For example, it asserted that after the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, Britain had notably intensified its efforts to seize Tibet. In 1919 the British minister in Peking (Sir John Jordan) insisted that the Chinese Government should recognize the autonomy of both Outer and Inner Tibet, and he proposed to considerably expand the territory of the latter by incorporating in it Upper Mongolia and a part of Kansu Province which included the cities of Xining and Soochow, as well as a tract of Eastern Tibet. The initiatives were supposedly intended to win the sympathy of the Lhasan government and that of the monastic segment in the country.

³ Ibid., pp. 355-356.

This diplomatic offensive by the British made the Soviet analyst extremely apprehensive: if successful in creating Greater Tibet, Britain would assume a position that would enable her to pursue an aggressive policy with regard to China and also to affect the situation in Russian Turkestan, thus turning the entire Inner Asia into her sphere of influence. However, the defeat of the British in the Afghan war, followed by their failure in the struggle against Soviet Russia in the Middle and Near East, as well as the growth of the revolutionary movement within the confines of the British Empire were all negative factors that, in Berlin's opinion, had made the British government abandon their designs for the immediate seizure of Tibet. Instead, London had chosen to conquer the Himalayan realm firstly by economic means, and only then to subjugate it politically. This tactic proved to be successful—having actually placed the Tibetan trade under their control, the British sent "a Sikkimese agent", Charles Bell, on a political mission to Lhasa. Berlin further revealed the details of the secret Anglo-Tibetan arrangement, obviously borrowed from Khomutnikov's report. He also identified one more British "diplomatic intriguer" in Tibet, Sir Eric Teichman, by styling him the British "plenipotentiary" in the country. (In fact Teichman was appointed as British observer at Tachienlu in Eastern Tibet in 1917, and he later mediated in the Sino-Tibetan dispute, having helped to negotiate the Chamdo and Rongbatsa Agreements in 1918-1919).

A special paragraph in that second Tibetan article by Berlin was devoted to the most recent attempts by the British to induce Peking to resume the Anglo-Chinese negotiations over Tibet. Thus, in August 1922, Jordan again "demanded that the Chinese government recognize the autonomy of Tibet, agree to its modified boundary, etc.", but China's foreign minister, Wellington Koo, did not yield to the British pressure. Berlin also quoted the "telegram of the Chinese President" of 3 July 1922 which stated that the interests of China in Tibet could be safeguarded against the British "by the establishment of closer ties with Tibet, for which purpose it would be necessary to construct a railroad to connect inland China with Tibet via Szechuan".⁴

The British diplomatic records, however, give a very different version of the Anglo-Chinese discussions in Peking in 1922. According

⁴ Berlin 1923, pp. 153-154.

to Alastair Lamb, on 13 September of that year, the British minister in Peking, Sir Beilby Alston (not Jordan), raised the Tibetan issue with Wellington Koo by reminding him of the promise made by the Wai-chiao-pu (China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) over a year beforehand to focus on the Tibetan problem and to continue the Anglo-Chinese talks which had been broken off in 1919, once the Washington Conference was over. However Dr. Koo, despite the earlier assurances of his office, told Alston that he was not prepared to resume negotiations on Tibet without first sounding out the views of the Chinese Parliament. No specific demands to Peking regarding Tibet were made by the British diplomat at that meeting.⁵

Speaking of Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev, Berlin focused mainly on his diplomatic mediation between Tsarist Russia and Tibet. His contribution was assessed quite highly, as the Buryat's endeavours had ultimately resulted "in the virtual liberation of Tibet from China's century-long domination and the considerable delay of the British plans for the seizure of that country".⁶ Of Dorzhiev's post-revolutionary activities, Berlin spoke only *en passant*, by stating that in 1919–1923 he had lived among his kinsmen, the Buryats and Kalmyks, engaging in religious work and that during the great famine in Kalmykia he was most active in raising funds for the famine-stricken Kalmyk population in Mongolia and the two Buryat autonomous regions of the RSFSR and the Far-Eastern Republic.

These two articles by the Narkomindel's spokesman clearly show that Moscow had a rather confused vision of the Tibetan situation in the period following the first British and the first Soviet missions to Lhasa. Interestingly, much of this "latest information" on Tibet came from the foreign newspapers (British, Indian, Chinese and Japanese), published mainly in English, as Berlin was the officer in charge of making regular foreign press reviews on the Far Eastern region for Chicherin and Karakhan. From these the heads of the Narkomindel could learn, for example, about Brigadier-General George Pereira's and W.M. McGovern's secret trips to Lhasa, in 1922 and 1923 accordingly, as well as the British Everest Expeditions. These only redoubled their phobia about the secret infiltration into Tibet of British agents disguised as pilgrims and scholars. At the

⁵ Lamb 1989, pp. 130–131.

⁶ Berlin 1923, p. 155.

same time a Japanese daily, the "Osaka Mainitsi", reported on Mahendra Pratap's plans for a new journey to Tibet in March 1923, this actually being his fourth attempt to enter the "Forbidden Land", this time from Chinese territory.⁷

It was against this background that Chicherin finally set about organizing the Narkomindel's "second expedition to Lhasa"—as it was referred to in official papers—in early August 1923. Preparations for the mission had actually begun some two years before, as is evidenced by one of its participants, F.V. Bakhanov, whose narrative provides one of our sources of information on the venture.⁸ Bakhanov, "a son of a poor Buryat and a Komsomol activist", arrived in Moscow from Transbaikalia in the summer of 1921 (possibly together with Shumiatsky and Dorzhiev). He was attached as a guide and interpreter to the Mongolian delegation which came there for the Third Congress of Comintern (held between 22 June–12 July). After the Congress he was enrolled in the recently opened Communist University of the Labourers of the East (commonly abbreviated as KUTV). In September of that year—most likely after the departure of the Khomutnikov mission—he was unexpectedly summoned to the Narkomindel. There he met Chicherin, who made him an unusual proposal—to take part in "the diplomatic expedition to Tibet with the aim of recovering lost connections with the country and its government". Bakhanov agreed and was then introduced to the expedition leader, Sergei Stepanovich Borisov, "an Oirat from Gorno-Altaisk", one of the officials of Comintern's Eastern Secretariat in Irkutsk. He also made acquaintance with two more participants in the mission, both Buryats—Dybchin Molonov, an auditor at the same Communist University, and Bayarto Vampilov (Vampilon). The former was instructed to take care of the expedition's provisions and other travelling necessities, whereas the latter was to conduct all scientific observations during the journey. This suggests that Chicherin decided

⁷ RGASPI, f. 372, op. 1, d. 1206 (Foreign press reports on Japan, China, Mongolia and Tibet, 1922–1923; Compiled at the Far Eastern Department of the Narkomindel for the member of the Dal'buro TsK RKPb, P.M. Nikiforov). The foreign newspapers reviewed were *North China Daily News*, *North China Standard*, *North China Herald*, *Shanghai Times*, *Echo de Chine*, *North Chinese Daily News*, *Far Eastern Times*, *Osaka Mainitsi*, *Times of India*, *Times*, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, etc.

⁸ F.V. Bakhanov, *Skoz' imperialisticheskuiu blokadu* (Breaking through the imperialist blockade), manuscript, c. 1970, in possession of Prof. Yu.O. Oglaev of Kalmyk State University at Elista.

for some reason to decline the services of Dashi Sampilon, who in the autumn of the same year took over as the secretary of the Mongolian Legation in Moscow. As for himself, Bakhanov was assigned the task of photographer, and he was also to shoot a film of the entire journey.

Bakhanov further recalled Chicherin giving a long talk on his first visit to the Narkomindel, one which resembled a political briefing: the foreign commissar spoke with eloquence about the Soviet government "seeking to break the circle of the imperialist blockade" and "looking for ways to establish normal diplomatic and other relations with all countries of the world". Those selected to participate in the second Soviet mission to Lhasa were to undergo special training. This consisted mainly in the study of the works on Tibet by the most celebrated travellers, such as Przhevalsky, Potanin, Kozlov, Obruchev, and Sven Hedin, whereby the mission members were to acquaint themselves with the indigenous tribes in Central Asia, their manners and everyday life, customs and religious practices. They were also to learn special "survival techniques", such as ways of procuring foodstuffs, in case they should find themselves in critical conditions.

On February 6, 1922 Chicherin discussed the budget of the projected mission with Shumiatsky, who had been summoned from Mongolia to Moscow for this purpose. As a result, it was decided to request the Politburo to allocate the necessary funds, initially estimated at 20 thousand gold roubles. To substantiate his petition Chicherin submitted an ad hoc memorandum to the Politburo, which outlined the objectives of the mission:

Our first expedition dispatched in the autumn of 1921 must have already arrived in Lhasa and is preparing there the ground for further rapprochement, in particular for the sending by us of presents of technical kind which are of great interest for the Dalai Lama. The first expedition carried a radio apparatus intended as a gift for the Lama from the RSFSR, which would serve as a basis for our liaison with him. At that moment we did not have radio-telegraphists familiar with the Tibetan language who, because of their adherence to Lamaism, could be admitted to permanent residence in Lhasa. It was with much difficulty that the Narkomindel was able to find Tibetan speaking persons among the Lamaist peoples (the Buryats and Mongols), being at the same time politically trustworthy and loyal. And it took us even greater effort to teach them the complicated job of radio-telegraphy. . . .

The first expedition had as its prime goal the establishment of initial contacts with the Dalai Lama. There were no Orientalists in it. [Therefore] we should dispatch with the second expedition, along with the radio-telegraphists, some Oriental scholars as well, who, together with the Mongolian comrades, would disseminate correct views on Soviet Russia in Lhasa and strengthen their ties with Tibet.

These ties have, primarily, a political significance, since our friendly relations with Lhasa are of paramountcy for the entire Buddhist world. But they also have an economical importance, since they enable us to start barter trading with Tibet, as well as considerably revitalize our barter with other Buddhist nations. Procuring raw materials from these countries, especially products of cattle-breeding, is very important for our overall trade balance. We won't be able to fulfill properly our mission of trade mediators between the Buddhist peoples of Asia and European nations without friendly ties with Lhasa.⁹

(One brief remark: the presents of "technical kind" to be sent to the Dalai Lama with the second mission were most likely a big radio-telegraph station—probably similar to the one the Turkestan Soviet donated to the new Afghan Amir in 1919—and also Russian arms, as these were explicitly mentioned in Dorzhiev's 1921 proposal to the Narkomindel).

However, in the absence of news from Khomutnikov, the Politburo, at its session held on 8 February, resolved to halve the sum requested by Chicherin, having allocated him 20 thousand roubles in silver currency, instead of gold.¹⁰ (One perhaps should compare this figure with 200,000 silver roubles allocated by the same Politburo in late June for the needs of the Mongolian revolutionary party).¹¹ Of this 20,000, 8,000 silver roubles was used by the Narkomindel for the dispatch of its courier, Sandja Bakbushev, to Lhasa at the end of 1922. Bakbushev, who journeyed to Tibet by a land and sea route via China and India, reached Lhasa in early May 1923. He met briefly with the Dalai Lama, to whom he delivered a message from Chicherin, and then travelled back to Moscow as quickly as he could, with the Lama's reply to the Narkom.

⁹ APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 739 (Kitai, KNR—O Tibete, 8 February 1922–30 August 1962), l. 2. Chicherin to the Politburo, 6 February 1922.

¹⁰ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 84, d. 331, l. 62. The Politburo was obviously not unanimous with regard to Chicherin's petition and had to resort to voting in order to pass a decision.

¹¹ Ibid., d. 244, l. 1. Extract from the minutes of the Politburo, 20 June 1921.

* * *

In the latter half of 1921, the Soviet government, having signed treaties of friendship with Persia, Afghanistan, and Turkey, turned their gaze farther eastward, to Inner Asia and the Far Eastern region. Moscow's high priority now was the Chinese Republic, with its nominal government in Peking (which was believed to be in the grip of Anglo-American imperialists), and China's three "outer territories", Mongolia, Sinkiang and Tibet, which became de facto independent states after the Chinese revolution. Thus in August of that year the Narkomindel Agency in Middle Asia, based in Tashkent, dispatched a mission to Urumchi under Kazansky to conclude a trade agreement with the Sinkiang Provincial Governor (*Du-jun*).

Diplomatic relations with Western China had actually been restored a year earlier, when the Soviet and Chinese trade agencies were established in Kulja and Vernyi (Alma-Ata) with consular powers, according to the Ili Agreement of 28 May 1920. Shortly thereafter, A.K. Paikes led the first Soviet mission to Peking to negotiate the Sino-Soviet agreement, despite the fact that the Peking central government had only a small territory in the east of the country under their immediate control. In 1922–1923, this was followed by two more Narkomindel missions—by A.A. Ioffe and L.M. Karakhan. At the same time, both Narkomindel and Comintern sought to strike contacts with the head of the revolutionary government of South China and the founder of the Kuomintang (People's) Party, Dr. Sun Yatsen. To this end, in the spring of 1922, Paikes sent from Peking to Canton a member of his mission and Comintern activist, S.A. Dalin. Finally, in October 1921, a mission from the Mongolian revolutionary government came to Moscow, a visit which resulted in the conclusion of the Soviet-Mongolian treaty of friendship on 5 November. In this context the Soviet overtures to Lhasa in 1921–1922 seem to be properly in place and fitting in well with the Narkom's overall Eastern schemes.

Curiously, in his interview of 24 July 1921 to a correspondent of "*L'Humanité*", the mouthpiece of the recently established French Communist Party, Chicherin, while dwelling on Soviet Eastern policy, emphasized that

underhand plotting and diplomatic intrigues are alien to our method. . . . When the Eastern peoples are awakening to a new life, Britain seeks to ascribe these to our emissaries. We have pledged quite willingly not

to send any secret emissaries anywhere because we believe that the total absence of any imperialistic idea in our policy is the only and genuine source of the tremendous changes taking place in the countries of the East.¹²

Anglo-Soviet relations in this period remained rather tense, in spite of the 1921 Trade Agreement which accorded the Soviets de facto recognition. In the preamble of the accord the Soviet government, as is known, undertook to refrain from any form of hostile activity or propaganda against British interests or the British Empire, especially in India and Afghanistan.¹³ However, the pledge could not halt the Bolsheviks' well-run propagandist machinery, which eventually led to Lord Curzon's lodging a strong protest to Moscow on 8 May 1923, known as "Curzon's Ultimatum". In this, the head of the Foreign Office accused the Soviets, among other provocations, of anti-British activities in Persia, Afghanistan and the area adjacent to the Indian frontier, and he strongly demanded that the Soviet ambassadors in Persia and Afghanistan be recalled at once. Chicherin, of course, flatly denied all the charges of his British counterpart, yet he was apparently frightened by the British threat of breaking off diplomatic relations with the Soviets, as in June 1923 the *polpred* in Teheran, F.A. Rotstein, was replaced by another "red diplomat"—Boris Shumiatsky! In his reply of 11 May, the Narkom spoke sarcastically of Curzon's extreme "suspiciousness" which made him believe that the Soviet representatives in the East could find no other use of their funds than for anti-British propaganda. "The Soviet government", he reminded Curzon, "maintains friendly relations with the Eastern nations not by means of intrigues and gold, but through genuine altruism and goodwill".¹⁴ At the same time the Soviet press reciprocated to Curzon's malicious attacks with their own accusations regarding the British diplomatic agents, who were giving support to the Russian White guards in Kulja (in Western China), such as, for example, the British Vice-Consul at Kashgar, Nicholas Fitzmaurice, and to the anti-Soviet Basmachi movement at Bukhara.¹⁵

¹² Chicherin 1961, p. 193.

¹³ For the text of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement see Ullman 1972, p. 474.

¹⁴ USSR: MID 1957–1974, vol. VI (1962), pp. 291–292.

¹⁵ See *Izvestia*, 22 May 1923, and *Pravda*, 5 June 1923. Both columns are cited among the British documents on Anglo-Soviet relations, 1923–1924, OIOC L/P&S/10/1108.

Curzon's angry note did not seriously affect Soviet Eastern policy, though it certainly signaled to Chicherin that he should be more discreet and perhaps take some extra precautions to camouflage the Narkomindel's expedition to Tibet lest it be spotted by the British. There was yet one more disturbing message he received concurrently with Curzon's Ultimatum. On 6 May 1923, Agvan Dorzhiev submitted his own memorandum to Chicherin to draw his attention to a very alarming religious situation in Buryatia. The paper had been obviously produced in connection with the second Lhasa mission for it addressed precisely those questions which, according to its author, might most detrimentally affect Soviet relations with the countries of the Buddhist East. "At the present time, judging by the information which I occasionally receive from Tibet", Dorzhiev wrote in it,

the Dalai Lama continues to retain his confidence in Russia, and he counts on its assistance, in the event that Tibet's independence is threatened from without. Soviet Russia, to be able to establish firm connections and a friendly relationship with Tibet, . . . will have to reckon with the overriding position of the Buddhist church in the country, and in any event [will have to] strike initial contacts with it, as there is no other way to hold official intercourse with Tibet.¹⁶

The success of the Soviet Tibetan policy, in Dorzhiev's opinion, would thus largely depend on their approach to the religious and other cultural values making the traditional fabric of the Tibetan society. But this, of necessity, implied more flexible policies towards the Buddhist community at home, in Buryatia and Kalmykia. Any oppression of Russian Buddhists in the religious, social or economic spheres, if known to Tibetans, could seriously damage the incipient Moscow-Lhasa dialogue, an idea Dorzhiev tried to bring home to the head of Narkomindel.

Dorzhiev had sufficient reasons to raise the question with Chicherin on the very eve of the Lhasa mission. By the time he wrote his memorandum there had been plenty of evidence of the party functionaries, "the men on the spot", impinging on the religious freedoms of Buddhists (as well as other religious groups), in defiance of the 1918 decree which had separated church from state in Soviet Russia. Some of the instances cited by Dorzhiev called for an immediate reaction from the central administration. For example, the Buryat told the

¹⁶ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, l. 4.

Narkom about a venerated Tibetan incarnate lama, Tegrin-gegen, who had come to Russia (Transbaikalia) a few years ago to collect donations for the Gomang Datsang in Lhasa. The Tibetan was arrested by the militia of the Aga aimak, and all valuables found on him—some 6,400 roubles—were naturally confiscated. (The story strikingly resembled Dorzhiev's own arrest in Kalmykia in 1918). Upon his release, Tegrin-gegen departed for Lhasa where, Dorzhiev believed, he would speak most unfavourably of the Soviets. To hush up the incident, he thought, it would be necessary to make the guilty offenders reimburse the damage suffered by the Tibetan, at least in part, and send the money to him with the Soviet expedition. Dorzhiev also cited similar occurrences when local authorities had laid claim to the things collected by the Buryats for various religious needs. Furthermore there were frequent cases of the excessive taxation of the clergy, as well as of the monks being sent forcedly to work off their duties. "All this", Dorzhiev concluded, "is regarded by the people and the monkhood as persecution of religion".¹⁷ Therefore he called on Chicherin to interfere in the situation, as the issues touched upon were intimately related to the Soviet Eastern policy.

* * *

By the summer of 1923, Narkomindel's original plans for the second Lhasa expedition, as devised in 1921, had undergone some important changes. According to Chicherin's latest scenario, the Soviet diplomatic mission was to be coupled with a purely scientific expedition by the celebrated explorer of Central Asia, Petr Kuzmich Kozlov. The Narkomindel apparently attached some political importance to the latter journey as Kozlov was known to be on friendly terms with both the Dalai Lama and Tsarong, having met them twice, in Urga in 1905 and in the Kumbum monastery in Eastern Tibet (Amdo) in 1909. His new expedition was perceived as a good opportunity to demonstrate the Tibetans the "altruism and goodwill" of the Soviet government and thus could, to some extent, promote a Moscow-Lhasa dialogue. The Russian traveller, despite the fact that he had been a Tsarist general prior to the revolution, was doing fairly well under Soviet rule. In 1918-1920 he had held a high post as the government commissar in charge of the Ascania

¹⁷ Ibid., l. 6.

Nova national park in the Crimea, the job he received due to his wife's long-time friendship with the old Bolshevik, N.P. Gorbunov, who was now Lenin's personal secretary and simultaneously secretary (*upravdelami*) of the Sovnarkom. Subsequently Kozlov travelled to Siberia on a commission from the Russian Geographical Society to inspect their branch offices there. He also published two books in the Soviet state publishing house—"Tibet and the Dalai Lama" in 1920 and "Mongolia and Amdo and the Dead City of Khara-Khoto" in 1923 (the latter incidentally, recounted Kozlov's last meeting with the Lama in Kumbum).

In the late summer of 1922, Kozlov submitted a proposal for an expedition to Central Tibet (which was actually a revival of his 1914 expedition project that had been aborted by the World War) to the President of the Geographical Society, Iu.M. Shokalsky. The plan was for the expedition to focus mainly on the exploration of the upper basins of the Salween, Mekong and Yangtze rivers on the Tibetan Plateau over a three year period. What inspired Kozlov with hopes for a fresh journey to Tibet, with Lhasa as his final destination, was evidently news of a successful "reconnaissance trip" by Khomutnikov, which Kozlov may have obtained from his old friend in Petrograd, Agvan Dorzhiev. After its approval by the Council of the RGO, the project went to Moscow where, thanks to Gorbunov's assistance, it was backed by the Soviet government. Then, in mid-November, the Narkomindel (Karakhan) approved the project, although it declined Kozlov's request for financial support.¹⁸ The necessary funds, however, were readily supplied by the government (Sovnarkom), which at its session on 27 February 1923 acknowledged Kozlov's expedition to Mongolia and Tibet as "timely and expedient". The sum allocated amounted to 100,000 gold roubles and additional 4,000 for presents to the Dalai Lama, which was to be paid from the chest of the "gold section" at the Finance Commissariat (Narkomfin).¹⁹

The state-sponsored and much advertised Kozlov Tibetan expedition was ready to set out from Petrograd at the end of June when suddenly some very odd things began to happen to it. First, the local OGPU took away the foreign passports from its participants, allegedly

"for checking", which immediately put Kozlov's entire project "in suspense". Infuriated, Kozlov turned at once to Gorbunov, posing as his expedition's "government curator", but the man apparently was of little help. It was only in mid-July that the situation got cleared up, at least in part, when the Politburo resolved to attach a political commissar (*politkom*) to Kozlov's party, Daniil Ubugunov, a Buryat communist who had worked previously for Comintern's Mongol-Tibetan unit. The real reason behind the decision was not explained to Kozlov, though he guessed there must have been some sinister intrigue against him by the "Centre". And this was indeed so, as shown by some of the documents from the secret Politburo file on Tibet. What actually happened was that A. Martynov (apparently A.S. Martynov-Pikker, a former Menshevik, then one of the leading research workers at the Marx and Engels Institute in Moscow), send a letter to the OGPU chief, F.E. Dzerzhinsky, on 22 June. In this he denounced Kozlov and other members of his expedition, accusing them of openly expressing counter-revolutionary ("white guardist") sentiments. ("He, or someone from his expedition, I don't remember who exactly", wrote Martynov, "said that in three years, when the expedition would complete its work, there would be neither people's commissars nor the soviets in Russia and that they would not return here"). This fact led the vigilant author of the letter to conclude that the expedition members might use the funds allocated to them by the government on anti-Soviet agitation—"with the help of the British, perhaps, since they would visit the areas within the British sphere of influence"—rather than on scientific exploration. Therefore he thought that Kozlov's project should be either rescinded or reorganized "on a completely new basis".

Dzerzhinsky's reaction to this alarming communication was prompt enough—on 25 June he forwarded a note to the Politburo which read as follows:

The GPU deems it necessary to inform the Politburo that the expedition for the scientific exploration of Mongolia and Tibet under Kozlov will shortly proceed to its starting point. However, considering that it consists of individuals hostile to the interests of Soviet Russia and that its leader, Kozlov, had some contacts with the American consulate at the end of 1921, that Mongolia and Tibet are under the prevailing influence of England and that the NKID has been carrying on a certain diplomatic work in these areas for a number of years, and finally that the present expedition staff could provide an occasion for a new provocation by the British government which could wreck the work

¹⁸ Archive of the RGO, f. 18, op. 2, d. 107, l. 4. Dukhovsky to Kozlov, 17 November 1922.

¹⁹ For Kozlov's expedition to Tibet and Mongolia in 1923–1926 see Andreyev 1997, pp. 92–120.

of the NKID, the GPU is requesting the Politburo to set up a special commission to consider the question of advisability of sending this expedition to Mongolia and Tibet at the present moment.²⁰ (To his note Dzerzhinsky attached a copy of Martynov's letter).

The Politburo, which met two days later, concurred with Dzerzhinsky's arguments and resolved to grant his petition. The proposed commission was then formed and included four men—L.B. Kamenev (the nominal head of the Sovnarkom during Lenin's illness), G.V. Chicherin, F.E. Dzerzhinsky and M.N. Pokrovsky (deputy of the narkom of public education)—who were subsequently to purge the Kozlov expedition staff. For the time being, however, to avoid any possible damage to the Narkomindel's designs, it was decided to attach a "Buryat communist" to the party with ideological control over it, as was proposed by Stalin.²¹ This done, Gorbunov finally cabled his go ahead to Kozlov in Petrograd on 21 July 1923.

On 4 August 1923, shortly after this dramatic incident, when things had calmed down somewhat, Chicherin submitted to the Politburo, again via the Secretary general of the Bolshevik party, Joseph Stalin, his memorandum with a "program" for the second Lhasa mission. This was followed the next day by a petition asking for the allocation of additional funds for the expedition, some 42,674 silver roubles. Together with the monies already obtained (12,000 that was left over from the first amount received in early 1922, 8,000 allocated for presents to the leading Tibetans, and 8,326 borrowed from the so-called Mongolian fund at the Finance Commissariat), the overall estimate of the funds required for the Tibetan Expedition amounted to 71,000 silver roubles (35,000 in gold currency).²² The program indicated nine main items of expenses (given in gold roubles):

- 1) Salary for the staff—11,700 g.r.;
- 2) Travelling expenses—4960 g.r.;
- 3) Provisions, en route and in Lhasa, for 10 persons—5400 g.r.;
- 4) Weapons—1186 g.r.;
- 5) Expedition equipment, including tents, kitchen utensils, various instruments and accessories—2154 g.r.;
- 6) Presents for the Dalai Lama, his ministers, persons in attendance, princes and *gengens*, as well as small gifts for the Buryat and Kalmyk

²⁰ APRF, *ibid.*, I. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I. 4. On 12 July 1923 Pokrovsky was replaced by V.N. Yakovleva.

²² *Ibid.*, I. 21.

lamas residing in Tibet as payment for information and secret services rendered—4000 g.r.;

- 7) Transportation of loads, by railway and steamboat—500 g.r.;
- 8) Courier services and unforeseen expenses—2000 g.r. (couriers were to be sent en route to and from Lhasa);
- 9) Welfare for the families of the expedition members for the time of their journey—3600 g.r.²³

In the opening paragraph of the Mission "program", Chicherin reiterated its two main objectives, as formulated by him the year before. These were the delivery of "items promised to the Dalai Lama" and "formalization" of Soviet-Tibetan relations. "The situation has become more serious since then", he wrote,

and demands more activity on our part, due to the offensive policies of British imperialism in Tibet. At present Britain occupies a part of the Tibetan territory and has its chief representative, Teichman, stationed there. Besides, Britain supports the plans of some Tibetan grandees for the creation of independent Greater Tibet by means of annexation of some tracts of the adjacent Chinese provinces.

Chicherin also reminded the Politburo of the pressure the British had placed on Peking in July 1922 in order to force the latter formally recognize Tibet's autonomy, give up its right to keep the Chinese troops in Tibet, and agree to the revision of the Tibetan boundary. The Narkom described the current situation in Tibet as follows:

According to our information, a small group of the reactionary corrupt high officials yields to the ingratiation of British imperialism. [However], the vast majority of the lamahood and the popular masses are full of hatred for Britain. The head of the progressive party, the Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army, wants to take a pro-Russian orientation. The Dalai Lama himself began to gravitate strongly towards us, as soon as our first expedition dissipated his false misconceptions of Soviet Russia. Still, Britain has been fervently active of late, and in the past year and half or two years Tibet has been visited by a number of British expeditions (Bell, Colonel Bury,²⁴ McGovern, Pereira and others), either under the banner of scientific reconnaissance or with explicitly official commissions.²⁵

²³ *Ibid.*, II. 21-28. Chicherin's Memorandum to the Politburo, with the Estimate of travel costs appended, 5 August 1923.

²⁴ This, according to A. McKay, may refer to the Everest climber Howard Bury.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 18. Memorandum, 4 August 1923.

Chicherin's evaluation of the latest developments in Tibet seems to be too schematic and overdramatised, following Bolshevik ideological cliches, and his accusations of British imperialism are generally unfounded. Neither London nor Delhi, if truth be known, nurtured any aggressive designs with regard to Lhasa. The British had no secret plans for the seizure or annexation of Tibet, whether full or partly; likewise they did not encourage any expansionist aspirations by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan "grandees" towards creating Greater Tibet at the expense of the neighbouring Chinese provinces, as the Tibetan leaders did not cherish such aspirations. Neither did the idea of placing Tibet under its formal protectorate seemed alluring to Whitehall at that time, as this, apart from the severe financial burden, would have inevitably resulted in a serious confrontation with Peking and would also have antagonized other major world powers, especially France, Japan, and the USA, who had territorial interests in the former Celestial Empire. On the other hand, the full independence of Tibet was also not advocated by the British mainly for fear that China and Soviet Russia might take advantage of the situation to form their own political alliances with the country, thus endangering the security of the north-eastern frontier of India. Much more acceptable for London, as long as Sino-Tibetan relations remained unsettled, was the formula which came to be known as the Simla Position: "Symbolic subordination to China, with extensive autonomy, under the watchful eye of Great Britain".²⁶

After this introduction into Tibetan politics Chicherin proceeded to the discussion of the tasks of the Soviet Mission:

The goal of our second expedition is to establish permanent friendly relations with the Tibetan Government. The other side of this task, the struggle against the British expansion, should be carried out with extreme cautiousness, so as not to give occasion to any new Curzon's ultimatums. Unmasking of British intrigues and exertion of influence on the Dalai Lama with the purpose of non-admission of the British troops etc. into Tibet should be accomplished by verbal means only, with all the necessary precautions.

The Narkom further detailed the "expedition program" which consisted of nine points:

²⁶ Goldstein 1989, p. 74.

1. The creation of our official representation in Lhasa may urge the British to create their own official residency there. Therefore we should seek to create the above only if we find out that the British representation has been already established there. For this reason the head of our expedition, comrade Borisov, apart from his mandate to the Dalai Lama, should be also issued the mandate of an official Soviet representative in Lhasa, to be produced only in the case that it turns out that a British official is installed in Lhasa. Otherwise liaison with the Dalai Lama should be maintained via some loyal Buryat or Kalmyk monk, who may stay in Lhasa as a pious pilgrim. This method has been long used by the British. It is desirable also that a delegate of the Dalai Lama be present in Moscow. Liaison with Lhasa will be maintained by regular visits there [by our agents], with the Lhasa-bound pilgrim's caravans.
2. Comrades Borisov and Vampilon, apart from our mandate which they should produce secretly, should also have, as a cover, mandates of religious character from the Buddhist population of the USSR, as well as local mandates from the Buryat Autonomous Republic and the Kalmyk Autonomous Region. These mandates of Buddhist representatives will give the Dalai Lama an opportunity to turn down any British protests, if need be, as Britain itself is acting likewise.

The fact that the question of creating a permanent Soviet representation in Lhasa was the number one issue on Chicherin's Tibetan agenda should be no surprise. The great distance which separated Russia from Tibet—about 3600 versts (over 3800 km.) between Kiakhta on the Soviet-Mongolian border and Lhasa—created a very big problem for the Soviets, one to which they could not readily find any satisfactory solution. The sending of couriers like Bakbushev via India saved a considerable amount of travelling time, of course, but was rather dangerous. A better option seemed to be wireless communication, but Chicherin's memorandum makes no mention of this. The reason was perhaps that this channel proved to be not very reliable, as the British intelligence had succeeded in intercepting a number of Soviet secret air messages between Moscow and Kabul in 1922, which in fact was one of the causes of Curzon's ultimatum. The Dalai Lama was also careful not to use the radio apparatus he had received from Moscow, as this could seriously damage his friendly dialogue with the British. So the Narkom must have finally given up on the idea of a Moscow-Lhasa radio link, one in which the Soviets had at first put so much hope.

On the other hand, Chicherin understood clearly that the official Soviet representation in Lhasa would hardly be able to become a

tool of unilateral political influence on the Dalai Lama, as the British would certainly reciprocate to such a move by setting up their own diplomatic agency in Tibet's capital, which would be much to Moscow's disadvantage at that juncture. Therefore he proposed what seemed to be the only alternative, to secretly install a Soviet agent in Lhasa, some "loyal Buryat or Kalmyk monk", who might easily pose as "a pious pilgrim" there.

However, Chicherin's grave doubts concerning the Soviet representation in Lhasa were very soon resolved. On 18 August the Narkom would report to Stalin:

Bakbushev who had made a preliminary trip to Lhasa brought me a letter from the Dalai Lama of May 5th (year of the Water Pig, 2nd Day of the 4th Moon), with extremely friendly assurances and an expression of his satisfaction concerning the creation of the Buryat and Kalmyk autonomies and the establishment of the genuine freedom for dissemination of the Buddha's teachings in the world's first "workers' state", as well as expressing his great joy about the achievements of our internal and external politics. In the same letter the Dalai Lama is telling me that at the present time there are no representatives of either Britain or any other state in Lhasa, and that if Russia sends its representative or expedition Britain and other powers would hasten to do the same, and it will be difficult to refuse them. Therefore the Dalai Lama asked me to find some other wise means of establishing communication and renewing the former friendship between the two countries.²⁷

The next two points were also of paramount importance:

3. As regards the question of Sino-Tibetan relations, we should adopt a conciliatory stance and point to the necessity of an agreement between Tibet and China. Comrade Borisov should explore the ground cautiously to see if we could offer our mediation. At the same time unmasking of British intrigues should be done with the greatest caution possible.
4. If the Tibetan side will come up with a proposal that Tibet's security should be safeguarded by an Anglo-Russian or Anglo-Russian-Tibetan agreement, we should try to draw China into such an agreement on the basis of a federative program.

No doubt Moscow found itself in a rather awkward situation due to the undefined status of Tibet vis-à-vis its former "suzerain power",

²⁷ APRF, *ibid.*, l. 30.

China, the more so that the Soviets were concurrently striving to normalize their relations with Peking. But the status of Outer Mongolia, now a de facto fully independent state as well, was no less a thorny issue for the Soviet leaders, and it became a serious stumbling block at the Soviet-Chinese negotiations of 1922-1924. The Khalka Mongols, like the Tibetans, had openly declared their independence of China, but the Peking central government continued to regard both "outer territories" as parts of the Chinese republic. The revolutionary government of South China under Sun Yatsen essentially ascribed to the same view. In his "Three Principles of the Peoples" put forward in early 1921, Sun Yatsen made it clear that the only way to free China from foreign imperialists and "the historical shackles of the unequal treaties" they had imposed on her, was to re-unite the peoples of the five races formerly inhabiting the country—Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, Tartars and Han Chinese—into a single Chinese nation.

At the time when the Soviets started their negotiations with Peking, Narkomindel took two different approaches to the cumbersome Mongolian question. Chicherin, citing the principle of self-determination, believed that the Mongolian nation should be granted autonomy, whereas A.A. Ioffe insisted that Outer Mongolia should be ceded to Peking, as this would promote the cause of the Chinese—and hence the world—revolution. Ultimately, the revolutionary line in Soviet diplomacy prevailed, with the result that a special clause was incorporated in the body of the Sino-Soviet Agreement of 31 May 1924 whereby the Soviet government recognized Outer Mongolia as an integral part of the Republic of China and undertook to respect China's sovereignty therein. Accordingly, all Soviet troops had been withdrawn from the Mongolian territory by the spring of 1925. The continuing civil strife in China, however, prevented Peking from extending its sovereign rule over Mongolia, and thus the country retained its de facto independent status under the name of the Mongolian People's Republic.

As regards Tibet, Chicherin seems to have been the only competent authority, apart from Dorzhiev, to advise the Soviet government on their Tibetan policy. And here too the Narkom's approach was largely based on the same cornerstone principle of Lenin's national policy, as his correspondence with the leader of the Chinese revolution shows. Thus in his letter to Sun Yatsen of 4 December 1923 Chicherin wrote:

The entire Chinese nation should clearly see the difference between Kuomintang, the people's mass party, on the one hand, and the militarist dictatorships in various parts of China, on the other. The brotherly peoples, as, for example, the Mongolians, Tibetans and various ethnic nationalities of Western China, should see clearly that Kuomintang supports their right to self-determination.²⁸

Chicherin's view was essentially no different from Comintern's guideline on the national issue in China as expressed in the resolution of its Presidium at about the same time (28 November 1923):

The Kuomintang party must put forward openly the principle of self determination of the nations inhabiting China which, following the victorious revolution against foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism and militarism in China, can be incarnated in the creation of the free and federative republic of China, consisting of peoples of the former Chinese empire.²⁹

The Kuomintang leaders took heed of Narkomindel's and Comintern's recommendations, however, their statement on the national policy incorporated in the Manifesto of the reorganized Kuomintang party (adopted at its 1st Congress on 30 January 1924) deviated somewhat from the above Soviet formula. The Kuomintang recognized the "right of self-determination of all races within the country" by adding that these races would form a "voluntary union" upon the completion of the national revolution.³⁰ Thus the principle of federative state construction was rejected by them as unsuited to the Chinese polity. Moscow, however, raised no objections to this "slight" deviation,³¹ and were generally content with the willingness of the "People's party" to follow its guidelines. Commenting on the decisions of the 1st Kuomintang Congress, Karakhan wrote to Chicherin from Peking:

The Kuomintang is turning into a really live, active and well-organized national revolutionary party, one that we don't have in any other country. Neither in India, nor in Turkey, nor in Persia, will you find a national revolutionary party that would have so much weight as the

²⁸ Ermashov 1964, p. 270.

²⁹ Resolution of the Presidium of Comintern's Executive Committee "On the national liberation movement in China and the Kuomintang party" of 28 November 1923. Cited in Glunin, Gorbunova et al. 1986, p. 43.

³⁰ Quoted in the Manifesto of the 1st National Congress of the Kuomintang, January 30, 1924, see Gangulee 1945, p. 96.

³¹ Mamaeva 1999, pp. 99–100.

Kuomintang party, that would have so much respect and admiration for our authority as this party, and that would so humbly accept our directives and Comintern resolutions.³²

The full independence of Tibet on which Lhasa had insisted continuously since 1913 was certainly not in the interests of either Moscow or Canton primarily because of the "imperialist designs" on Tibet. Like Chicherin, Sun Yatsen regarded Tibet as "the booty of Great Britain" and believed that the country must first be snatched from the hands of British imperialists, after which it would join—of its own accord, of course—the revived China's "voluntary union" of nations. As L.E. Berlin asserted earlier in "Novyi Vostok", the claim for "full independence of Tibet from China", as put forward by the Tibetan representative at the Simla Conference, complied with the desires of London: "The British no doubt were interested in having Tibet totally isolated from China so that they could eventually lay their hands on it".³³ But this was clearly a propagandist overstatement. In truth, Tibet's full independence was also unacceptable for London and Delhi, due, in their perspective, to the no less frightening "Bolshevik factor".

Thus the Soviet formula for an "independent Tibet", as suggested by point 4 of Chicherin's Tibetan program, conveniently combined two of Lenin's principles, those of self-determination and federalism, and, following the example of the Russian Soviet federal republic, envisaged the creation of Tibetan national autonomy" within the borders of the Chinese Federation.

It is worthy of note here that the vague status of Tibet presented considerable difficulty to Soviet cartographers in the 1920s. Thus the early Soviet maps of that part of Asia showed Tibet (as well as Sinkiang and Mongolia) either as lying outside China's state borders (China proper), or within them, as a sphere of "special British interests", and even as a Chinese province. The cartographers from the Communist University (KUTV), however, found a temporary solution to the problem: their Map of China, produced in around 1928 and showing Tibet and Mongolia as parts of the Chinese republic, was supplied with an addendum headlined "Basic information on

³² Tatarenko 1994, p. 374. Karakhan to Chicherin, 9 February 1924 (document # 109).

³³ Berlin 1922, p. 362.

China". This incidentally, stated that "after the 1911 Chinese revolution Tibet and Mongolia declared themselves independent states".³⁴ (The map was actually a reproduction of the German map of China, printed in Leipzig in 1924).

Points 3 and 4 are especially interesting as they explicitly testify to the desire of the Soviet government to act as a middleman in the process of concluding a Sino-Tibetan settlement and, more importantly, to their willingness to come to some sort of agreement with the British over Tibet. This was clearly a major deviation from the Soviet's earlier uncompromising stance on Tibet and was reminiscent of the situation preceding the conclusion of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention. As general public opinion in Great Britain was increasingly pressing for the normalization of relations with Bolshevik Russia in the latter half of 1923, Chicherin, despite his Anglophobia, obviously began to look for ways to eliminate the most dangerous sources of Anglo-Russian antagonism in Central Asia, including the Tibetan problem. We will give a more detailed discussion of this issue below when discussing the Anglo-Soviet Conference in London in April 1924.

The next two points dealt with Soviet military aid to Tibet:

5. The lending of military or military-technical instructors to Tibet—Buryat and Kalmyk Red Army men—is desirable, if only in small quantity (so as not to arouse British suspicions), on the condition that the Tibetan Government will cover the expenses for their travel and their maintenance costs. These instructors would function as volunteers invited by Tibet.
6. The selling of arms and munitions (sub-machine guns, light mountain and anti-aircraft guns, explosives etc.) to the Tibetan Government for cash down is possible, if the latter agree to the prices of the Revolutionary Military Council. Britain won't be able to find fault with that, since she herself supports Tibet [directing it] against China, however the Dalai Lama will prefer to purchase the arms from us, rather than Britain. Since Tibet has its own Army, the arms sale won't upset our relations with China.

³⁴ The National Russian Library (NRB), St Petersburg, Cartography section, Map of China: Compiled by the Eastern & Colonial Policy Unit at the Communist University of the Labourers of the East named after Stalin; published by the "Moskovskii Rabochii", Mospoligraph, [after 1927].

There is evidence that Chicherin discussed these questions with top Soviet military officials in the summer of 1923, however, the file in the Soviet military archives with the correspondence to that effect between the Narkomindel and the RVSR remains closed.³⁵ Chicherin must also have had a brief discussion about Soviet military aid to Tibet with the Chairman of the Revolutionary War Council of the Mongolian People's Army, Elbek-Dorji Rinchino (who he knew very well), during his visit to Moscow in June–July of that year at the head of the Mongolian military and diplomatic mission.

Point 7 of Chicherin's Programme provided for another Soviet-Tibetan link in the sphere of education, following the British example. It read verbatim: "It is desirable to encourage the Tibetan youth to enter our educational establishments. Britain has already been doing this".

Finally, the last two points focused on the need to promote Soviet trade (and presumably Mongolian as well) with Tibet:

8. It is desirable to promote penetration of industrial and trade capital into Tibet from countries which do not threaten Tibet's independence. Which countries in particular will be disclosed by word of mouth.
9. Counteraction to the imperialist powers trying to obtain industrial concessions in Tibet should be exercised with extreme cautiousness.

It will be recalled at this point that precisely in the same period the Soviet government was trying hard to further their economic cooperation with Mongolia, along non-capitalist lines, to serve as an example to other Eastern nations. In 1923 the Soviets signed their first trade agreement with the Mongolian leaders and in the following year they set up a joint Soviet-Mongolian bank for trade and commerce in Urga. Numerous Soviet trade companies, such as Sibgostorg, Dalgostorg, Stormong, and Sherst, opened branch offices all across Mongolia with a view to stimulate barter within the Mongolian home market. (It goes without saying that these entities provided a good cover for activities other than trade). Finally, the Mongolian Central Cooperative or Montsenkop, established with Soviet assistance in 1921, had rapidly developed into a huge network (including some 108 local trade agencies), by the end of 1924.

³⁵ This secret file belongs to the RVSR Collection (f. 33987, op. 3). The "opis" (document inventory) itself containing the file description is also classified and not released to researchers.

Trade was indeed a very promising area for fostering friendship with both Mongolia and Tibet, an idea Petr Badmaev had tried to impress on the Russian Tsarist government some 30 years before. There was one specific item that the Tibetans were particularly keen to receive from Russia, apart from weapons, and that was brocade. This fine Russian fabric (used mainly for the monks' clothing) was very highly valued in Tibet for its superb quality and attractive design. In the old Tsarist days, Dorzhiev used to order a special brand of brocade from A. & V. Sapojnikov trade house in Moscow for the Dalai Lama and other Tibetans. The design of the brocade was specially created by Tibetan artists. However the revolution and the civil war disrupted the manufacture of brocade in Russia. In one of his friendly conversations with Kozlov in 1924, Dorzhiev would much bewail this fact, but what made the Khambo-lama particularly sad was that in the meantime the British had seized the opportunity to start their own manufacture of brocade after the Russian patterns and of the same high quality. This was a telling blow to Russian prestige in Tibet!

We do not know what specific proposals regarding trade Borisov was to make to the Tibetans. We only know that the Soviet agent was carrying a letter from Sharab Tepkin to two Indian traders in Lhasa—Sodala Nila Sumdar and his relative Butta Rodna. The latter, according to Tepkin, had a prosperous business in Lhasa with some branches outside Tibet, one of which was in Calcutta.³⁶ These traders were probably known to Tepkin as having pro-Russian feelings, which explains why he wanted to put Borisov in touch with them.

Some more light on Soviet plans for the revitalization of Russo-Tibetan trade relations is shed by a short review of Kozlov's book "Tibet and the Dalai Lama" carried by the "Novyi Vostok" in 1922:

The feeling of friendship of the Tibetan people for Russia must not grow weak; on the contrary, the Russo-Tibetan economic and political ties must become stronger. The best way to achieve fruitful results in this respect can be a Russian scientific expedition to Tibet. It will prepare the ground for subsequent sending of a trade mission there. Thus, by way of scientific exploration and commercial ties, the political relations [between the two countries] can be strengthened.³⁷

³⁶ AMB RK, file 940-r, p. 79. Interrogation transcript of Sharab Tepkin, 8 July 1931.

³⁷ F.A.A. 1922, pp. 662–663.

The reviewer, incidentally, quoted Kozlov's description of the Dalai Lama as "a rare individual, of great intellect, philosophically educated, and truly faithful to Russia which is friendly to neighbouring Tibet".

Chicherin's memorandum concluded with a few final remarks intended for Politburo members:

The importance of the venture for us lies in the fact that the Dalai Lama exerts a tremendous influence over the entire Buddhist world. The East consists of not only the Muslim, but Buddhist countries as well, and so we should seek to strengthen our relations with the latter.

I would like to stress that our expedition will proceed in the guise of pious pilgrims. It consists of comrades capable of performing this task. Its leader, comrade Borisov, is a staunch enough communist, sufficiently developed politically for his leading role.

Concurrently with our political expedition to Tibet will proceed the scientific expedition under Prof. Kozlov. The political commissar of that expedition (Ubugunov) has been already appointed. Herewith I attach a draft of instructions for com. Ubugunov which com. Borisov will hand over to him personally either in Irkutsk or Urga.³⁸

The two key persons on the Soviet Lhasa Mission, Borisov and Vampilon, should now be introduced to the reader. Sergei Stepanovich Borisov, an Oirot (Altai Turk) by origin, was born in 1889 in a village Suzob of the Biisk *uezd* (district) in the Gorno-Altaisk area.³⁹ Despite having received a religious education in Tomsk in 1908, he was not ordained as a priest but embraced a secular profession instead. Until 1917, the young man had worked in the same town as a proof-reader in the printing house which published a popular daily "Sibirskia Zhizn'" (Life in Siberia). During the February revolution, Borisov sided with the Mensheviks and he subsequently took an active part in the work of the elective district administrative organs, the Altai Provincial Board of the Zemstvo in Barnaul and the Siberian Regional Duma in Tomsk. In 1919 Borisov moved to Irkutsk where he soon "changed colours", joining the Bolsheviks who, in May 1920, put him at the head of the Mongol-Tibetan unit of the Sekvostnar (which would later become the Far Eastern Secretariat of Comintern). Shortly after he had joined the Bolshevik party in March 1921, Borisov was appointed as Comintern's representative in Mongolia, and in November of the same year he took over as

³⁸ APRF, ibid., ll. 17–20.

³⁹ This area bordering on Kazakhstan and Mongolia became the Oirot Autonomous Region in 1922.

the deputy chief of the Narkomindel's representation in Urga, which marked the beginning of his diplomatic career. His active participation in the struggle against Baron Ungern was highly appreciated by the Mongolian revolutionary government, which awarded him the Order of the Ulaan Tug (Red Banner) in 1921. In May 1922 Borisov was taken on the staff of the Narkomindel's head office in Moscow, probably on Chicherin's recommendation, to direct the preparations for the second Soviet Lhasa Mission.⁴⁰

Boris Vladimirovich (Bayarto) Vampilon (Vampilov), a Buryat from the Alar district of the Irkutsk Province, was born in the same year as Borisov (1889). At the age of 20 he came to St. Petersburg to receive higher education. Like his friend Elbeg-Dorji Rinchino, Vampilon enrolled in the law faculty at St. Petersburg University. He remained in the imperial capital for the time of his studies until around 1915. The tiny Buryat colony in the city was then largely taken care of by their country man, Agvan Dorzhiev. It was under the latter's influence perhaps, that Vampilon, a baptized Orthodox Christian like most of the Irkutsk Buryats, changed his creed, adopting Buddhism in 1910. There is also some evidence that Bayarto occasionally helped Dorzhiev to supervise the construction of the Buddhist temple in Staraia Derevnia, posing in official papers as a "confident" of the "Tibetan representative". At the same time, the Buryat showed some keen interest in scientific research, sponsored by the Russian Committee for the Exploration of Central and Eastern Asia. According to the records of the Committee, in 1912 and 1915 he made two research trips to the Balagan uyezd of Irkutsk Province to collect ethnographic and folklore materials there.

Together with Rinchino, Jamtsarano, Baradiin and other Petersburg-educated Buryats, Vampilon was highly active in the national liberation movement of the period, demanding religious freedoms and autonomy for the Buryat ethnic minority. He hailed the February revolution, but was, like the vast majority of Buryats, hostile to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in October 1917, which earned him and his friends the scornful label of "ideologues of Buryat bourgeois nationalism". In February 1919 Vampilon, posing as a representative of Buryatia (along with D. Sampilon, E. Rinchino, N. Dylykov,

⁴⁰ These facts relating to S.S. Borisov's biography come from his registration form as a member of the Communist Party (1936), preserved in RGASPI.

R. Bimbaev and Ts. Tsydypov), took part in the pan-Mongolist Chita Conference which resulted in the creation of the so-called Dauria government of Great Mongolia under Neise Gegen.⁴¹ However Vampilon, along with other leading Buryat intellectuals, went over to the Bolshevik side, at the end of the civil war, when Soviet power was restored in Eastern Siberia.⁴² We know little else about Borisov's aid.

Chicherin's Lhasa expedition program was approved by the Politburo on 9 August 1923. The financing of the project was assigned to the Labour and Defense Council (STO), a special Sovnarkom structure administering national economy and defense. The Mission was scheduled to depart in mid-August, but it was delayed as Borisov unexpectedly faced some problems with obtaining the monetary funds for the journey. The Soviet banks, he explained to Chicherin in a message presumably sent from Irkutsk on 25 August, refused to supply him with the silver currency, offering silver ingots instead. But these were of little use, as "in case of exchange, we'll lose quite a lot". Borisov and his mission finally got to Urga where, on 29 September, he received a ciphered cable from Chicherin:

To Urga. Attention of Borisov. 28.9.1923: According to the Commissar of Public Education of the Buryat Republic, Baradiin, Tagrin is an unreliable companion for the expedition, [as] he may engage in [money] extortion etc. on the way. If possible, you should choose another caravan. For your reference, the staff of the Kozlov expedition will be revised, and therefore its departure will be delayed.⁴³

More troubles for Kozlov began when one of the Bolsheviks in his team, the Chinese and Turkic languages interpreter, Nasyr Kasimov, sent a secret report to the GPU. This offered more "proof" of the anti-Soviet leanings of some members of his expedition, which only poured oil on the flames. "It turns out now", Chicherin wrote with irritation to the Politburo on 21 September, "that Kozlov ill-treats the commissar, and the GPU has been informed lately by one of

⁴¹ Re the Buryat participation in the Dauria Conference and government see Tyubikov 2000, pp. 343–355.

⁴² These few facts about Vampilov's life and activities are gleaned from various archival sources, such as RGIA, f. 821, op. 138, d. 115, l. 17 f.; ARAN f. 148, op. 1, d. 71, 76. See also references to Vampilon (Baerton Vampilun) in Basaev, Erbanova 1989, pp. 26, 28.

⁴³ APRF, ibid., l. 35.

the communists included in the expedition of extremely aggressive utterances made by some of its participants. If the expedition, having this kind of staff, with the absolute helplessness of the communists attached to it, will reach Lhasa, it may carry on some shameless agitation there against the Soviet government and the Soviet state system, which could actually wreck all of our Mongolian politics". Therefore, Chicherin proposed that some of Kozlov's "unreliable companions" be replaced, while Kozlov himself, being "an extremely prominent scientific figure", should be allowed to remain at the head of the party.⁴⁴ As a result, the Politburo decreed at its session of 27 September that the staff of Kozlov's expedition should be thoroughly revised by V.R. Menzhinsky (Dzerzhinsky's deputy) and M.Ia. Lapirov-Skoblo.⁴⁵

The situation around Kozlov's Tibetan expedition continued to unfold dramatically, as his project was put "in suspense" for the second time by the Centre towards the end of September 1923. Shortly after that, three members of the team, including Kozlov's right-hand man, Glagolev, were recalled to Moscow (in addition to the two persons who had been denied foreign passports by the Narkomindel while in Petrograd). Moreover, the Soviet leaders thought it would be wise under the circumstances to replace the *politkom* as well, because of his inability to keep a check on the expedition leader. Daniil Ubugunov who had rather unwillingly joined the caravan in Troitskosavsk, along with his wife, also a Bolshevik, showed no particular desire to roam across Central Asia for long three years, and even less to travel to distant Tibet. He therefore requested Chicherin to relieve him of his post, probably fearing he would not be able to cope with his important task. According to the Narkom's thoroughly detailed instructions, the *politkom* was to keep vigilant watch over the expedition leader and members, especially when in Tibet. He was to see in particular that they did not engage in anti-British or anti-Chinese agitation among the Mongols and Tibetans and did not enter into any political discussions with either the Dalai Lama and his government or any faction in Lhasa. In the event, however, if contacts with these were impossible to avoid, Kozlov and his companions were to use the occasion to stress the purely scientific char-

acter of the Soviet expedition, and they were to provide the Tibetans only with positive information about Soviet Russia, its friendly relations with other nations, the progressive national and religious policies, etc. Special care was to be taken by the expedition when dealing with the Buryat and Kalmyk residents in Lhasa, as there were cases, the Narkom noted, when the British used some of the Kalmyk émigrés as "anti-Soviet agitators" in Tibet. He particularly mentioned the former Khambo-lama of the Don Kalmyks, Khaglyshev, allegedly dispatched to that end by the British from Constantinople in March of the same year.⁴⁶

Kozlov's mishaps, however, did not end with the second purge of his expedition staff. On 22 November, when Borisov was about to set out from Urga, Gorbunov made some more radical proposals to the Politburo concerning Kozlov's expedition:

In connection with the current complications in international relations, the difficulty with finding a political head of the expedition and the need for its complete reorganization, we request the Politburo to adopt the following resolution:

1. The expedition must be postponed for one year and its staff completely changed;
2. Additional funds must be allocated to cover the expenses connected with the expedition delay.⁴⁷

These proposals were immediately approved by the Politburo, and in a few days Kozlov received a cable from Gorbunov which notified him about a "temporary delay" of his expedition "by a decision of the Soviet government". The news was a horrible shock to Kozlov as the cable further demanded that the expedition members (except for the Siberians), return to Moscow and Petrograd, and that the equipment of the party be taken across the border into Soviet Russia and placed there in safe custody. As for Ubugunov and his assistants, they were to turn in their mandates to the Soviet Embassy in Urga and proceed to Irkutsk. This seemed to be the end of a journey which had not yet really begun.

The Politburo decision was no doubt directly connected with Chicherin's Tibetan plans. Only a week before the Politburo met at its session in the Kremlin, Kozlov had recorded in his travel diary

⁴⁴ Ibid., I. 33.

⁴⁵ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 384. Protocol #36, point "g", 27 September 1923.

⁴⁶ APRF, ibid., ll. 21-24.

⁴⁷ Ibid., ll. 43-44.

with some embarrassment: "There's another expedition, next to mine, here in Urga, fully equipped and ready to go. The Urga residents call it 'a mysterious mission to the land of lamas and monasteries....'"⁴⁸ Narkom evidently had to give up on his Tibet twin expedition project, due to Kozlov's lack of political loyalty as revealed by the GPU. The scientific expedition, if it engaged in anti-Soviet agitation in Tibet, could wreck the Soviet's secret talks with the Dalai Lama, hence it needed to be stopped and called back to Moscow. As for Kozlov, he, being unaware of the Narkomindel-GPU intrigue behind his back, continued stubbornly to stick to his guns. On 28 November he cabled back to Gorbunov requesting permission to remain with his party in Urga. The selling of the already hired expedition caravan, consisting of 60 camels, would, he argued, result in the loss of half of their cost, and the transportation of the expedition equipment to Troitskosavsk alone at that time of the year would require some huge expenses. These arguments sounded convincing enough, therefore the "Centre", after two month long deliberations, allowed Kozlov, in the early spring of 1924, to stay in Mongolia with the remaining members of his party. The result of this new decision was that Kozlov started the excavation of the Hunn burial mounds north of the Mongolian capital, at Noin-Ula, which led, as is well known, to sensational findings later that year. As the Russian saying goes: *Net khuda bez dobra* (Every evil thing has some good side to it).

Theodor Stcherbatsky, who visited Urga in mid-1924, sheds more light on the circumstances which made the Soviet authorities crack down on Kozlov's expedition so suddenly in late November 1923. In a letter to Oldenburg, the eminent scholar gave the following reason "why Kozlov became an archeologist":

During his preparations [for the journey] he (Kozlov) had a quarrel with the members of the "real" expedition, and on Moscow's orders had to be recalled. However he begged the officials to let him stay, if only as a screen, at the head of his "Tibetan expedition", and got down to the excavation work, in cooperation with Jamtsarano. The real expedition, headed by an Altaian Borisov, a speaker of Mongolian, being a staunch communist, is rumoured to have already reached Lhasa.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, St Petersburg, Kozlov's expedition diary, Notebook I, entry for 15 November 1923.

⁴⁹ ARAN, f. 208, op. 3, d. 685, l. 117ob. Stcherbatsky's letter to Oldenburg from Iamarovka, 22 August 1924.

Kozlov's travel journals abound in references to Borisov, designated cryptically as "B", yet they say nothing of any personal contacts between the leaders of two rival expeditions in the autumn of 1923. Such contacts, however, seem quite plausible, as both Kozlov and Borisov were frequent visitors to the Soviet embassy in Urga. But what could be the reason for their quarrel, if that quarrel did indeed take place? One possible answer to this question is Bulat Mukharain, the person who appears in the British intelligence records under the names of Po-lo-te and "the Fat Mongolian".

Bulat (Khotchin) Mukharain, an official of the Burrevkom (Buryat Revolutionary Committee) in Chita, volunteered to participate in Kozlov's expedition as early as April 1923. It was then that he wrote a letter to Agvan Dorzhiev hoping that his outstanding countryman would help him to be enrolled on the expedition staff "in whatever capacity". "I know the military craft, office work, book-keeping and economy, as well as the Mongol-Buryat language. . . . My request is motivated by a strong desire to visit the country of our ancestors, to go through privations and hardships, and experience, if possible, some great adventures".⁵⁰ Mukharain joined Kozlov's expedition in Troitskosavsk near the Mongolian border on 26 August. The few references to the Buryat found in Kozlov's journals show that Kozlov, for some unknown reason, badly needed his services. Mukharain had stayed with the Kozlov party for some very short time, and then he suddenly quit and went over to Borisov. Kozlov was, of course, enraged, probably thinking that his rival had lured Mukharain away from him, and this might easily have stirred up the quarrel, which, if Stcherbatsky is correct, had such detrimental consequences for Kozlov.

* * *

The Borisov Mission set out from Urga in late January 1924, according to Bakhanov. The reasons which delayed it for nearly five months (!) in the Mongolian capital remain unclear. (Tagrin Gegen must have left for Lhasa much earlier, probably with the regular Mongolian caravan which departed on 8 December, so Kozlov tells us). The party consisted of some 14 or 15 members, of which we know six names for certain—Sergei Borisov (posing under the alias of Tseren

⁵⁰ P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, Mukharain to Khambo-Lama, Verkhneudinsk, 20 April 1923.

Dorji), Bayarto Vampilov (Bayartu), Dybchin Molonov, Bakhanov (Damba), Bulat Mukharain, and Endon (a Buryat lama engaged as interpreter). To these we must add one more name, that of Jigme Dorji, which comes from the records of the British Indian political department in Delhi.⁵¹ This must be the Buryat lama Jigme-Dorji Barduev from the Atsagat Datsang, apparently another protégé of Agvan Dorzhiev. The group was carried by the Mongolian post relay service, or *urtons*, to Yum-beise, the last settlement on the very edge of the Gobi. There the mission joined the already assembled caravan of 50 pack and saddle camels, which, on 4 February, proceeded further westwards in the direction of An-hsi on the Sinkiang trade caravan route running between Lanchow and Kuldja. "The Mongols helped to mount the expedition", Bakhanov wrote in his memoirs, "by providing camels, horses, mules for transportation purposes, long-lasting food products, as well as guides up to Gobi".

Unmolested, the party reached Upper Mongolia (Tsaidam) in a month or so. There Borisov, perhaps in return for services rendered to him, presented one of the local chieftains ("princes") with a valuable gift—a German-made "Singer" sewing machine. The stretch of journey across Tsaidam, a flat country of salt-marches, was extremely difficult. Both men and animals, Bakhanov recalled, suffered bitterly as tiny grains of salt got into their eyes and mouths, making it hard to see and breathe. Having mounted the Tibetan highlands (Chang-tang), the travellers then had to adjust themselves to the extreme rigours of the climate—rarefied air and stiffening cold and incessant blizzards—that were usual at that time of the year. Luckily, they were not harassed by the militant tribe of the Goloks, who had given Kozlov such difficulties during his expedition in 1908.

Finally, the caravan arrived at the first frontier post on the road to Nagchu. Here the Russians, to avoid the luggage examination, offered the Tibetan customs officers some pieces of fine cotton fabric, so-called *dalemba*, as "presents". The Tibetans were apparently pleased and agreed to put off any examination until the next post.

⁵¹ This is what F.M. Bailey wrote to the Foreign Secretary of the Indian Government on 20 November 1927: "In 1924 some Mongolian agents of the Bolsheviks arrived in Lhasa. They were accompanied by a young Mongolian lama, named Jigme Dorji, who had been studying at Drepung Monastery for the degree of Geshe (the highest academical degree in Tibet, and one which required 7 years of hard study to acquire). This Jigme Dorji had gone from Lhasa to Mongolia and returned with the Bolsheviks in 1924". OIOC, L/P&S/11/277.

Borisov then immediately dispatched a courier to Nagchu to arrange matters with the local governors. Interestingly, Bakhanov remarked at this point that "the English agents had gotten wind of the Reds coming to Lhasa", a statement which indicates that the Tibetan officials were already expecting the Red Russian mission. (They most probably learnt about it from the Mongolian caravan, which had passed here earlier, rather than the British). On the other hand, the "English agents" were also expecting the same mission, as is suggested by the correspondence between the British Indian authorities and HM Consul-General in Kashgar. On 31 May 1924 the latter received a communication from the Foreign and Political Department at Simla which read as follows:

According to information received, Soviet mission was on its way from Urga to Lhasa under one Zyrianian early in March. Papers sent by post. This is probably a party to which you refer. You must abstain from all action which might be represented as hostile or even unfriendly in view of recognition of Soviet Government by HM Government.⁵²

By the time the Borisov Mission had arrived at the second frontier post at Nagchu (which was the main one in fact), one of its participants, Lama Zodbo, died. His body was then "buried in Nagchu, according to local custom", i.e. probably taken to a special open ground and left there for the vultures to devour.

The Nagchu customs officers turned out to be rather strict and they demanded that the "Mongolian pilgrims" show them the contents of their luggage. Therefore Borisov had to play the same trick as Khomutnikov had done before—he said that his load was actually the property of the Dalai Lama and so it would be improper to subject it to customs examination. (The proof of the fact was, of course, a covering letter from the sender, Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev). Consequently, word was sent to the Dalai Lama to inform him of the arrival of the Mongolian mission, and he gave orders that its luggage be delivered to Lhasa by a special messenger. According to Bakhanov, the mission had stayed at Nagchu for only four days, but this apparently was not enough time for an exchange of messages between Nagchu and the Potala.⁵³ Before setting out for Lhasa,

⁵² Public Record Office, FO 371, 10403, p. 196.

⁵³ Four days would be normal for a mounted messenger to cover the distance of 150 miles between Nagchu and Lhasa at that time of the year (i.e. for only a one way trip). Khomutnikov in his report also says that a reply message from the

Borisov dispatched a "quarter-master lama", ahead of the main party, whose job was to find suitable lodgings for it.

While at Nagchu, the Russians heard some rumours about "a Russian-speaking Englishman, accompanied by two physicians and 40 Indian soldiers" who had allegedly "camped out" some 10 or 20 km. away from the Dalai Lama's summer residence of Norbulingka. This was in fact the mission of Lieutenant-Colonel F.M. Bailey, the same Bailey who in 1918 had led, with much risk to his life, a secret British reconnaissance party from Kashgar into Soviet Turkestan (Tashkent), a mission that he described years later in one of his books.⁵⁴

It is from the Lhasa Diary of this British intelligence officer and diplomat that we learn the exact date of the Borisov Mission's arrival in the Tibetan capital, 1 August 1924. Bailey got this from one of his Lhasa informants, Zambo Khaglyshev (Haldinov), the Kalmyk émigré who gave such a headache to Chicherin. On 2 August Bailey recorded in his Lhasa diary: "Haldinov came in that morning and said that the suspicious Mongolians had arrived last night. He was watching them. 5 were Kalmyks from the Astrakhan Province and were certainly all-right. There were 6 or 7 Buryats whom he suspected".⁵⁵ So it took Borisov half a year (!) to get from Urga to Lhasa. But it was actually almost a full year (!! since the moment when the Politburo had approved Chicherin's plans for the second Lhasa Mission. In the meantime, while Borisov and his comrades were on the road to Lhasa, many important events had transpired both in and outside Soviet Russia, such as recognition of the USSR by the newly appointed British Labour Government (2 February), the renaming of Petrograd as Leningrad following Lenin's death on 21 January, the conclusion of the Soviet-Chinese Agreement in Peking (31 May 1924), the death of the 8th Bogdo-Gegen, Jebzundamba Khutuktu, the Mongolian "constitutional monarch" (20 May 1924) and consequent proclamation of Outer Mongolia as a "People's Republic" (5 June).

Dalai Lama was received by him at Nagchu "in a few days". On the other hand, Kozlov quotes in his diary Dorzhiev as saying that "B" (Borisov) was delayed for "a usual one month period at Nagchu" (Notebook III, entry for 2 April 1925).

⁵⁴ Re Bailey's adventures in Russian Turkestan in 1918–1919 see Bailey 1946; and Hopkirk 1984.

⁵⁵ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F. 157/214a.

The situation in Tibet had also changed dramatically after the Panchen Lama (9th, Chokyi Nyima, 1883–1937) fled from his Tashilhumpo residence on 26 December 1923. It is generally believed that his flight into voluntary exile was caused primarily by the Dalai Lama's new fiscal policy—the imposition of a special tax on monasteries and individual land-owners for the maintenance of the reorganized Tibetan army. This seriously damaged the interests of the Panchen Lama, holder of large estates, mainly in the province of Tsang, and receiver of revenues from many small estates in different parts of the country. According to some rumours circulating, the Lama, being unable to pay the large accumulation of arrears, has "taken bad advice" and left the country. But there must have been other deeper motives for the Panchen's rash action as well.⁵⁶ Tension in the relations between the two highest incarnations was of long standing—the Panchen Lama's dealings with the British in 1904 and with the Chinese in 1911 were seen as indicative of his political disloyalty by the ruling circles in Lhasa, so that the Panchen had a sufficiently good reason to apprehend some kind of reprisal against him a decade later, now that he had openly expressed his opposition to the Dalai Lama's reforms. In the instructions that he left for the remaining officials in Tashilhumpo the Panchen Lama claimed he was leaving only for a short time "to make it easier" for the Dalai Lama, and in order "to secure any one to mediate between us".⁵⁷ However, the conflict, which went far beyond a personal disagreement, was not resolved, and the Panchen never returned to Tibet. His movements in Inner Asia and covert activities were henceforth monitored by diverse political forces in Japan, China, and British India, but they were closely watched by Mongolia and the Soviet Union as well.

From the moment the Panchen Lama reappeared in Western China, until his death in 1937, he would remain continuously under the OGPU spotlight, considered as a major destabilizing factor in Central Asia and later even as someone presenting a potential threat to the People's Mongolia and Soviet Russia. As early as March 1924 the Russian language newspaper in Urga ("Urginskaia Gazeta") reported, with reference to a communication from Calcutta, on the

⁵⁶ These motives are discussed in Lamb 1989, pp. 150–151.

⁵⁷ Goldstein 1989, p. 114.

flight of the Panchen Lama from Tashilhumpo. It stated that he, according to some rumours, was heading for China, "hoping to get in touch with Inner Mongolia to overthrow, with its help, the Lhasan government". Two months later (on 7 May), the same newspaper informed its readers that an attendant of the Panchen's, Lama Losun, had arrived in Peking "in search for his master", who was "hiding somewhere in the frontier area". The Tibetan "confirmed" that his master was "seeking asylum in China from the pursuit of the Dalai Lama". Shortly after that, the Soviet officials in Urga got news that the Panchen Lama had safely reached An-hsi-chow in Kansu Province via Kokonor, where he was given a "ceremonial welcome" by local Chinese administrators.⁵⁸

It was in An-hsi, a lively trade centre on the pilgrim's route to Tibet, that the Borisov mission, quite unexpectedly, ran into the Panchen Lama's party. (Thus it must be Borisov who reported to Urga on the Lama's sojourn there). Bakhanov's memoirs say nothing of the mission leader's meeting with the high-ranking Tibetan fugitive, but there is evidence to support this fact in one of Stcherbatsky's letters to Oldenburg in 1924:

The situation in Lhasa, by the way, is this: the Dalai Lama and his associates have given themselves up to militarism, much to Agvan's distress. Militarism requires considerable expenses, such as were unknown before. So monasteries had to be taxed and the lamas' privileges infringed upon, which has given rise to protests and discontent. At the head of those displeased, as it turned out, was the Banchen who sent his embassy to Lhasa led by a courageous monk. The embassy was received quite coldly and its leader executed. This frightened the Banchen, and so he fled. He made his way unnoticed beyond Lhasa heading for Mongolia, but was intercepted near Labrang by the Chinese. The latter showed him great esteem, yet do not want to let him go, planning to install the Banchen in Wu-Taishan, and they are assembling an anti-Dalai Lama faction around him.

Borisov, on his way to Lhasa, met the Banchen and held talks with him. Meanwhile, the ferment in Lhasa has not yet subsided due to the confrontation between the new military and the clergy. There have even been clashes, but this time the Dalai Lama has managed to pacify the unrest. In a camp at Aldershot in England about a hundred Tibetans are undergoing military training. Such a training is a burden for the Tibetan treasury which has lost all of its income from Russia. A group of our party members has now arrived in this cauldron, preach-

⁵⁸ Quoted in [Trofimov] 1937, p. 62.

ing the International, which, in its very peculiar interpretation, tends to inflame the hearts of the Orientals, simply as some kind of new religion.⁵⁹

The source of this thrilling information was no doubt Agvan Dorzhiev, referred to by Stcherbatsky simply as "Agvan". Borisov's meeting with the Panchen Lama must have taken place some time in early May, and it was probably no more than an ordinary worship ceremony, as it seems unlikely that the mission leader could initiate on his own accord any "talks" with the dissident-incarnation at that point, at least without due authority from the Narkomindel. Whatever information Borisov was able to gather about the Panchen Lama and his differences with the Dalai Lama, he must have relayed it at once, with a courier, to the Soviet embassy in Urga, which was not difficult to do either from An-hsi or Labrang. (We know from the available material on the Khomutnikov Mission of a specially devised code language for communication between the mission leader and the Soviet officials in Mongolia).

Various rumours of some catastrophic developments in Tibet began to trickle into Urga in February-March 1924. At first nothing was known for certain—people spoke of a revolution in Tibet, of the flight from the British of the Dalai Lama (!), who supposedly was heading for the capital of Red Mongolia to secure protection from the Bogdo Gegen, of British plans for placing the Panchen Lama on the throne in Lhasa, etc.⁶⁰ This "news" were soon aggravated by more dramatic events when the Bogdo Gegen died and the Soviets signed an agreement with Peking, recognizing China's sovereign right in Outer Mongolia. The latter fact especially terrified the new Mongolian leaders, who believed that Peking would now surely use the occasion for military intervention in their country. At this very point Agvan Dorzhiev, as soon as he learnt that the Panchen Lama was staying in Labrang and that he intended to move from there to China's capital to get in touch with one of the northern warlords,

⁵⁹ ARAN, f. 208, op. 3, d. 685, l. 118 f. Stcherbatsky to Oldenburg, undated letter (presumably written in August 1924).

⁶⁰ These rumours were recorded by P.K. Kozlov in his travel journals, see, for example, entries for 18 and 24 March 1924. The Tibetan representative in Urga (the Donyer), when meeting with Kozlov, tried, however, to reassure him, saying that, according to the Tibetans, who had just arrived from Lhasa, "everything was quiet at our homeland, Tibet".

U Peifu (head of the Chihli military clique, then in control of Peking), left Urga suddenly with a view to meeting the Panchen somewhere on the road to Peking. The details of his journey, as well as of the Panchen Lama's "Chinese intrigue", were disclosed in 1931 by Sharab Tepkin:

... At the moment of his flight from Tibet, the Panchen Bogdo dispatched one of his officials, Lubsan [Tib. Lozang—A.A.], with a letter to U Peifu in Peking, in which he wrote that he had been compelled to flee from Tibet and asked for support. In return, he had promised to join him, U Peifu, with all the Tibetan provinces under his (Panchen's) control.

When Dorzhiev learnt about the whereabouts of the Panchen Bogdo and his intention to proceed to Peking via Mongolia, he rushed to meet him. Thus Dorzhiev travelled as far as Peking, but was unable to meet the Panchen Bogdo. In Peking, however, he found some of the attendants of the Panchen Bogdo, companions of Lubsan, who had been left behind by the latter. From them Dorzhiev learnt about the Panchen Bogdo's letter to U Peifu and that U Peifu had sent out a delegation to receive the Panchen Bogdo so that he would travel directly to him, U Peifu, without stopping in Mongolia. Lubsan also joined this reception party.

Having concluded from all this that he would be unable to see the Panchen Bogdo, Dorzhiev left a letter for him with the men of Lubsan. In this letter he suggested mainly that he, the Panchen Bogdo, should make it up with the Dalai Lama. After that Dorzhiev returned to Mongolia.⁶¹

The story had a continuation—in the same year or early the following year, according to Tepkin, Dorzhiev received a reply from the Panchen Lama. In that missive the exiled incarnation wrote that he had no differences whatsoever with the Dalai Lama and that "their enmity, his flight from Tibet, etc. was the outcome of the struggle between his followers and those of the Dalai Lama".

Dorzhiev's secret journey to Peking might have taken place some time between September and November 1924, judging by the Urga Journals of P.K. Kozlov, who meticulously recorded all of his meetings with the remarkable Buryat. Thus on 4 November, the traveller wrote about "a very interesting rendez-vous" he had had with the Khambo-lama, who supplied him "with full information" on Tibet, the Dalai Lama, the Banchen-Erdeni, etc.:

⁶¹ AMS RK, file 940-r, l. 53. Interrogation transcript of Tepkin, 8 July 1931.

Now I obtained confirmation that the Banchen-Bogdo's assistant, Lupsan, a supporter of China, sold a corner of Tibet to the Chinese. Hence, it emerges that the Dalai Lama has Namgan, and the Panchen Bogdo [has] Lupsan in Tashilhumpo, each of whom is conducting their own policies: Namgan, together with the British, and Lupsan, with the Chinese, both with the enemies of the Tibetan people....⁶²

It would be difficult to imagine that Dorzhiev was acting entirely on his own, without the knowledge or authority of the Soviet officials, given the political implication of his mission and the fact that he posed formally as the Dalai Lama's representative in the USSR—which laid a certain responsibility on him. Besides, being a prominent figure in Mongolia, it would have been impossible for Dorzhiev to undertake his Peking journey discreetly, unnoticed by either the Mongolian State Interior Security service (GVO) or numerous Soviet OGPU agents in the country. Getting ahead of the narrative, it is worthwhile telling the reader that Dorzhiev would continue his secret mediation endeavours: in 1931 during the arrest of one Murzin, a resident of Verkneudinsk (today's Ulan Ude) at whose house Dorzhiev used to lodge when coming to the town, the OGPU confiscated the Khambo-lama's belongings, including the items he intended to send to Lhasa, such as bails of brocade and several thousand golden roubles, as well as copies of his letters to the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama.⁶³

The Soviet leaders were no doubt extremely puzzled by the Panchen Lama's flight from Tibet, the more so that he chose to seek asylum in China, rather than in neighbouring British India, as would seem natural. But this could signify only one thing—that he had finally split from his British protectors. By establishing direct contacts with the Panchen Lama and helping him mend relations with his rival incarnation, Moscow probably hoped primarily to put an end to the political schism in Tibet, which threatened the country's integrity and could only play into the hands of "world imperialists". At the same time, the Panchen's alliance with Peking, which since late 1924 had been under the control of General Feng Yu-hsiang, who was known for his pro-Soviet leanings, provided a unique chance to the Soviets to offer their mediation in the Sino-Tibetan settlement. In

⁶² P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, P.K. Kozlov's Mongol-Tibetan expedition diary, Notebook II, entry for 4 November 1924.

⁶³ AMS RK, ibid., l. 52.

any case, a link with the Panchen Lama and his Sinophile entourage seemed to promise some political dividends to the Bolsheviks at that stage that they were not likely to give up.

* * *

On December 9th, 1923, the celebrated Swedish explorer of Tibet, Sven Hedin, returning from his lecture tour in the USA, arrived in Moscow, "der Haupstadt der Bolsheviki" by a Trans-Siberian express train en route to Stockholm. There he was hailed enthusiastically as "a great friend of new Russia" by Soviet officialdom, academic circles, and general public. This meant that his Soviet hosts had readily consigned to oblivion the sorry incident a decade before when Hedin published a "slanderous" anti-Russian brochure, one that led to his ostracism in Russia and eventually to his expulsion from the Russian Geographical Society.⁶⁴ The Narkomindel sent a car to the Yaroslavskii railway station to pick up the traveller, and on the same day Hedin was received by the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs in his office on the Kuznetskii Most. Their conversation, which was in German, lasted for two hours. Chicherin, as Hedin recalled in his memoirs, had shown great concern about the current situation in the Far East and Central Asia, especially in China and Tibet: "(He) asked me about my impressions of America, Japan, China and Mongolia, and he shared my admiration for the advanced age-long culture of the Chinese". The conversation then switched to Tibet:

With keen interest he (Chicherin) dwelt on Tibet and showed himself to be remarkably well-informed about the geographical, ethnological and religious features of that mysterious land. Incidentally he expressed his opinion on the likely political development of Tibet which was determined by its position between China and British India. He could understand the discontent of the Chinese with the influence England had lately wielded over Tibet, the country which not so long ago had been under Chinese overlordship.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ In his brochure "Ett varningsord" (A Word of Warning) published in Stockholm in 1912 Hedin accused Tsarist Russia of having had imperialistic designs on Sweden since the days of Peter the Great. This publication scandalized Russia with the result that many of Hedin's Russian friends turned their back on him. Moreover, the Russian Geographical Society expelled Hedin from its membership in 1915. On this see Andreyev 1997b, pp. 29–76.

⁶⁵ Hedin 1924, pp. 200–201 (translated from German by the author).

It is not clear from Hedin's recollections whether he mentioned to Chicherin his plans for a new Tibetan expedition and his wish to cooperate with the Soviet explorers in these regions, especially his old Russian friend, Petr Kozlov. The Swede had begun to nurture such plans as early as 1921. His idea then was to start from Russian Turkestan (Tashkent), as he had already done before, but for that he needed the permission of the Soviet authorities. So he wrote a letter to his other friend in Moscow, the well-known geologist and traveller, V.A. Obruchev, asking him for mediation. Obruchev, however, was quite skeptical about the feasibility of Hedin's project, considering the sad state of affairs in Russia which was "generally unfavourable to any scientific journeys". Even to obtain an official invitation for a visit to the country was a big problem. "I, for my part", Obruchev wrote in reply, "have no chance to negotiate this issue with the people's commissar (these politicians do not mingle with the great scholarly minds) and I will have first to arouse interest in your plans with some big institute which will then take necessary steps".⁶⁶ However, this strategy did not work, and the Swedish explorer had to abandon his project until a more propitious time.

Personally, Hedin quite liked the foreign commissar and his unassuming manners:

Chicherin made on me an impression of a learned philosopher, a thinker and a dreamer, placed by force of circumstances, in close touch with the horrible realities. He was calm and reserved, and when speaking of anybody, he did it without fervour or sarcasm; rather it seemed that he finds great pleasure in the study of the people and their ways, the world and its onward movement. However, below this tranquil surface there lay hidden a workshop which laboured day and night, moulding his future goals in full clarity.⁶⁷

As Hedin's observation unambiguously shows, the future of Tibet in Chicherin's perspicacious vision, was definitely linked with the great China, the country he openly admired so much. However there was still the vexing factor of British imperialism, which made the Tibetan situation so dramatically complicated in the eyes of the Narkom—

⁶⁶ The National Archive, Stockholm. Sven Hedin Collection. Correspondence (Ryssland). Letter from V.A. Obruchev to Sven Hedin, Moscow, 15 October 1921 (translated from German by the author).

⁶⁷ Hedin, op. cit., p. 202.

the ongoing British economic, political and military intervention in the country.

The fall of Stanley Baldwin's conservative cabinet in London, with the hawkish Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, and the subsequent forming—for the first time in British history—of a Labour Government under Ramsay MacDonald in early 1924, seemed to have infused some hopes into the Soviet leaders. And indeed on 2 February the Labour Cabinet gave de jure recognition of the Soviet state via a note handed to the Narkomindel by the British diplomatic agent in Moscow, R. Hodgson. This was a major break-through in the anti-Bolshevik isolationist policy of Western powers and it certainly looked like opening up a new era in their relations with Soviet Russia. A special Anglo-Soviet Conference which was to be held in London later that year was to negotiate a general Agreement between the two governments and trade regulations to replace the 1921 Convention. It was also hoped that the discussions would help to resolve all other difficult issues separating the two states, including the Eastern question. While making preparations for the meeting, Chicherin had a long conversation with Hodgson on 24 February. "I gathered from one or two remarks made by M. Chicherin", the British official reported to Foreign Office, "that he has in his mind to put forward suggestions for the definition of areas in which Russian and British interests are liable to clash.... He mentioned more particularly China in this connection but was doubtless thinking also of Central Asia and Persia".⁶⁸ Chicherin believed it was imperative to include in any agreement that might be reached between the Soviet and British governments "something in the nature of a non-aggression clause designed to obviate the possibility of friction in these areas".

However, despite all expectations, the Conference which started its work in April 1924 confined itself mainly, as far as the Anglo-Russian competition in Central Asia was concerned, to the final abrogation of the bilateral treaties which were no longer in force (such as the 1895 Agreement on the Pamirs, the 1907 Convention concerning Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet, and the special arrangement dealing with scientific missions to Tibet of 1910/1911), as well as some general declarations made by Ramsay MacDonald and Kh.G. Rakovsky, head of the Soviet delegation (the then Soviet minister in London). Rakovsky, for example, proposed laying down some gen-

⁶⁸ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1108, p. 186.

eral principles as the basis of the policy of both the Soviet and British Governments in the countries of the East. The main principles, according to him, should be "disinterestedness" and "safeguarding the interests of the Eastern nations", the very principles that had in particular been given expression in the Soviet treaties with Persia, Turkey and Afghanistan.⁶⁹ Rakovsky also rejected all attempts at dividing the territories of the countries of the East into spheres of influence as violating the sovereignty and hindering the economic development of these countries.

However, these loud declarations changed little in the nature of Anglo-Soviet rivalry, which continued to corrode the flimsy relations between the two powers. On 20 May "Izvestia" carried an article (apparently a propagandist forgery) speaking of an alleged incursion of British troops into Tibet and refusal of the Dalai Lama to grant mining concessions to the British. "The chief of police at Lhasa and principal advisor of the Dalai Lama is a British agent", asserted the Soviet columnist.

The Tibetans are highly incited against the English, and the people are begging the Dalai Lama on their knees to drive out the English. The behavior of the English soldiers towards the population is abominable. The Dalai Lama has at last realized his true position but is powerless to alter it. He has nevertheless refused the English demand for the grant of concessions for the exploitation of the mineral riches of Tibet.

With the restoration of diplomatic relations with Great Britain and other Western powers, the focus of the Soviet struggle against "world imperialism" began to shift more and more from the ideological sphere into that of economy. An important instrument in that struggle was the Russo-Eastern Chamber of Commerce (RVTP). This was set up under the auspices of the Commissariats of Foreign Trade and Foreign Affairs in December 1922, with a view to promoting economic cooperation between Soviet Russia and Eastern countries (Bukhara, Khorezm, Persia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Western China, Mongolia and Japan), "owing to their mutual interests in trade and industrial development". The activities of the RVTP included exploration of indigenous markets by means of individual agents and special trade expeditions and helping the Soviet state-run companies

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 363 (Document handed to the British Delegation by the Head of the Soviet Delegation, Rakovsky, at the plenary session on May 15, 1924).

find their Eastern partners. This led to a considerable growth of trade between the USSR and its southern neighbours, and the heads of the Chamber began soon to talk about the necessity of expanding into new markets in some more distant countries. No doubt Tibet was also included in their number, judging by Chicherin's instructions to Borisov. Speaking at the annual session of the RVTP on 15 February 1924, Chicherin outlined its immediate tasks as follows:

At first our friendly relations with the Eastern countries were exclusively of political nature, when the Soviet Republic and the Eastern states were fighting for their political independence against their common enemy—world imperialism. Now we and the Eastern peoples are facing a task which will take a much longer time to accomplish, that is the development of our productive forces and winning back or protection of our economic independence.⁷⁰

What this "winning back" meant in practice was to begin intensive subversive work to exclude competing Western (mainly British) capital from the Eastern markets. This important subsidiary task was carried out mainly by Soviet trade representatives through a wide network of their branches in the Eastern countries. In his memorandum to the Narkomfin (Commissariat of Finance) of 27 January 1926, for example, the deputy Narkom of trade, M.N. Frumkin, laid special emphasis on the necessity for "active exclusion from Mongolia of the intervening foreign trade because it seeks to use the Montsencoop (Mongolian Central Cooperative) to paralyze the gradual penetration of our trade capital into Mongolia via 'Gostorg' and the 'Sherst' (Wool) Company".⁷¹ The document also cited a few instances of how Soviet commercial agents were combating Western capitalism in the country, such as the buying up by the "Sherst" of the wool-washing facilities from the British firm "Kaufman and Co" (which actually ruined the latter), or attempts at wrecking an agreement between the Montsencoop and a Tientsin firm, "Wilson and Co", because it was concluded "without the due approval of the Soviet trade representative in China".

While evaluating the prospects for Soviet-Eastern trade, the RVTP heads assumed "a priori" that Soviet domestic industry would in the course of time be able to supply the whole of the East with what-

⁷⁰ USSR: MID 1957–1974, vol. VII (1963), p. 114.

⁷¹ RGAE, f. 47c, d. 2, l. 1. Frumkin's Memo to the Commissariat of Finance, dated 27 January 1926.

ever commodities it needed, and that buying things from Russia would benefit the Eastern customer much more than obtaining the same goods from far-off West European countries.⁷² This was partly true, especially considering the fact that market pricing had become state-controlled under the Soviet system of foreign trade's state monopoly. But, prices apart, the quality of some Russian items was also believed to be more attractive to the Easterners, including Tibetans. For example, the Dalai Lama, according to Kozlov, always admired Russian goods, such as fire-arms, various technical devices and, of course, their brocade.

* * *

It was at about the same time that the RVTP members were rejoicing at their first year accomplishments on the Narkomindel premises in mid-February 1924 that someone who Dorzhiev styled as the Dalai Lama's "diplomatic courier" arrived in Urga. This was one Jamba Togmat (Champa Thogmed), probably, to judge by his name, an ethnic Tibetan. The person was accompanied by four young Tibetans who, as the Dalai Lama wrote in his letter to Dorzhiev, were dispatched by him to Soviet Russia for "training in the manufacture of rifles, artillery weapons and gun-powder". Dorzhiev immediately contacted the head of government of the newly established Buryat Autonomous Soviet Republic, M.N. Erbanov, asking him to "give material and moral support" to the Tibetan boys,⁷³ and probably approached the Narkomindel in Moscow as well. Erbanov, for his part, promised to render all possible assistance "for the practical realization of the petition of the Dalai Lama", and he then sent a letter to that effect to Chicherin, with a copy for the deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council (RVS SSSR), the famous civil war hero, M.V. Frunze.⁷⁴ In the meantime the four Tibetans were enrolled in the Buryat technical college in Verkhneudinsk where they apparently remained, pending Moscow's decision, until 1925. Kozlov, incidentally, briefly met them there in late December 1924, when he stopped in the town on his way to Moscow. "It was especially nice", he wrote in his diary, "to meet among the Buryat youngsters

⁷² Rossiisko-Vostochnaia Torgovaia Palata 1924, p. 8.

⁷³ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 84, d. 715, ll. 12–13. Dorjiev to the Chairman of Sovnarkom of the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Republic, M.N. Erbanov, 18 February 1924.

⁷⁴ Ibid., l. 11. Erbanov to Chicherin, 28 March 1924.

four Tibetan boys, with their fiery dark eyes. Dressed in uniforms, they merged together with their northern mates. To my greeting "Demu arro?" they replied cheerfully "Demu, demu in".⁷⁵ (The fact that Kozlov addressed the Tibetans in the Amdo dialect suggests that all—or some—of them were probably from Amdo and not Central Tibet.) Finally, the Buryat Ministry of Education and Narkomindel arranged with the rector of the Institute for the Living Oriental Languages (IJVIA) in Leningrad, P.N. Vorobiov, that he would admit the Tibetans to the school. As a result the four Tibetans—Agwan Chinrab Baljergi, Choindon Gelegi, Wangchuk Dorje (Dorzhiev), and Sonam-Dashi Atze—were enrolled in the institute on 5 November 1925. At first they joined the preparatory Mongol-Tibetan courses, as had earlier their countryman, Sonon-Dorji. They were all accommodated in the Buddhist hostel in Staraia Derevnia where Dorzhiev's aid in running the Tibeto-Mongolian Legation, Badma Ochirov, looked after them along with the students from Mongolia.

The life of the young Tibetans in Leningrad was difficult not only because of the city's generally unhealthy climate (known for its excessive dampness, frequent drizzles and bitter frosts), but also for social reasons because they, like other foreign residents in the USSR, had to adapt to the extremely ideologized and regimented Soviet way of living. Testimony as to what this was like is given, for example, by one little document from the institute records, a list of clothing provided to one of the Tibetan students which included "a kepi, a 'tolstovka' blouse, (a pair of) trousers, (a pair of) boots, an undershirt, (a pair of) drawers, (a pair of) socks and a handkerchief".⁷⁶ We also know that three of the Tibetans (Sonam-Dashi Atze, Choindon Gelegi, and Wangchuk Dorje) were accepted for the Komsomol (Young Communist League) and the Soviet trade workers union, perhaps not without encouragement from their Soviet hosts.

After the reorganization of the institute in 1926, the Tibetans were attached to the Eastern department of the newly founded Northern *Rabfak* (Workers' faculty—*Rabfaks* in the USSR provided general education to young people who wished to be admitted to the higher educational establishments) in Detskoe Selo (today's Pushkin). This

⁷⁵ P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, Kozlov's Mongol-Tibetan expedition diary, Notebook III, entry for 20 December 1924.

⁷⁶ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 30, d. 224, l. 7.

beautiful little town was formerly a summer residence of the Tsars in the environs of Leningrad. In early 1927, however, they moved back to Leningrad after the *Rabfak* had been transferred to the city. Their curriculum included mainly general subjects, yet there was one special class arranged for the Tibetans by the institute administration in 1928, that of the "gun-powder making technique" which was run by a Red Army instructor. In their out-of-school hours the Tibetan boys, like their Soviet classmates, attended the hobby groups where they could acquire some practical skills, this being a part of the Soviet system of working education. Thus three of them attended a radio circle, where one could acquaint himself with the simplest radio sets and the principles of radio transmission, and one an art circle, where one could learn to draw propaganda posters and slogans for the decoration of the *Rabfak* students' club and study rooms. The Tibetans usually spent their summer vacations in Buryatia or elsewhere in the USSR. As one of the senior officers of the OGPU agency in Leningrad, Sharov, wrote to Vorobiov in June 1928, "it is desirable for political reasons to arrange it so that the Tibetan students from your institute do not go to either Mongolia or Tibet for summer vacations but stay at the holiday homes in the south of the USSR instead".⁷⁷

In 1926, the 18-year old Baljergi, whom the Russians nicknamed Vladimir (a very popular Russian name since Lenin's death), fell seriously ill, and was diagnosed as having a duodenal ulcer. After a course of medical treatment the Tibetan resumed his studies, although not for a long time, and his ailing condition finally made him quit the school in spring 1927.⁷⁸ Even more serious trials befell another Tibetan, Choindon Gelegy, who was only a year older than Baljergi. Firstly, some time after his enrollment the doctors discovered that he had syphilis, so Gelegy had to undergo a cure. Then, in late 1926, after recovering, he went to Verkhneudinsk for students' practical training. In Novosibirsk, while he was on the train, his documents and cash money were stolen and Gelegy had to cable desperately to Leningrad calling for help. Upon his return to Leningrad in early 1927, the Tibetan was expelled from the institute "for not making satisfactory progress, poor health and lack of general discipline". He

⁷⁷ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 38c, d. 5, l. 29. Sharov to Vorobiov, 12 June 1928.

⁷⁸ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 30, d. 224 (Baljergi's student file).

was then sent back to Buryatia, whence he probably returned to Tibet.⁷⁹

In January 1927, another Tibetan, the 22-year old Gendun Thubten, a resident of Lhasa, was enrolled in the institute at Dorzhiev's request in order to replace the unlucky Gelegy.⁸⁰ Thus, by mid-1927, there were only three Tibetans who pursued their studies at the *Rabfak*. One of them, Wangchuk Dorje (also listed as a Tibetan "from Lhasa") was incidentally employed by the faculty, from 1 December, as a part-time lecturer of the Tibetan language. The LIJVIa administration, however, planned to increase the number of Tibetan students by eight more people in the 1927/1928 academic year, as was proposed by the Tibetan representative in the USSR, Agvan Dorzhiev. This initiative was readily supported by the Narkomindel and the Committee in charge of the scholarly and educational establishments at TsIK USSR.

Later in the year Dorzhiev approached the institute with another petition asking the Northern Faculty to admit precisely the same number of Kalmyk and Buryat students, who were allegedly intended "for work in Tibet".⁸¹ In general, it appears as if Dorzhiev was trying to launch a kind of Soviet-Tibetan educational exchange program, since in late 1927 he dispatched a small group of Buryat and Kalmyk monks to Lhasa to complete their higher religious education in the datsang schools there.⁸² However, Dorzhiev failed in subsequent years to bring more Tibetan students to Leningrad. Those few who remained at the *Rabfak* (Dashi-Sonam Atze, Wangchuk Dorje and Gendun Thubten) graduated from the school, having completed the full four-year course of studies, the former two in 1931, and the latter presumably in 1932. Interestingly, in the latter half of 1928, the institute administrators wanted to cancel the Tibetan military class, because they did not have sufficient funds to run it, but the Narkomindel

⁷⁹ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 30, d. 750 (Gelegi's student file).

⁸⁰ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 38, d. 2, l. 1. Mel'nikov in the Far Eastern department of Narkomindel to Vorobiov, 30 December 1926.

⁸¹ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 8, d. 1, l. 51ob. Protocol of the meeting of the institute council of 4 October 1927. Dorzhiev is referred to in this document as "the representative of the Tibetan Government in the USSR".

⁸² See Zaiatuev 1991, p. 42. According to this author, Dorzhiev sent five young monks to Tibet at the end of 1927, all from the Atsagat (Chelota) Datsang. One of these, Agwan-Nyima, would later become a prominent Buddhist scholar, who would also act as a tutor of the 14th Dalai Lama's elder brother, Thubten Jigme Norbu, and other Tibetan scholars from Western Europe.

strongly objected to this by pointing out that it would be "undoubtedly undesirable" to terminate the class at that stage.⁸³

There is very little that we know about the three Tibetans after their graduation from the *Rabfak*. One of them (Atze), for example, expressed the wish, in September of 1931, to continue his studies at one of the institute departments. His motivation as given in his written request deserves to be quoted here:

To the Leningrad Oriental Institute named after A.S. Enukidze.
From a graduate of the Eastern Peoples' *Rabfak*,
a citizen of the Tibetan Republic,
Atze, Sonam-Dashi

Having an ardent desire to acquire appropriate knowledge to be able to take part in the liberation cause of the oppressed Eastern Nations, and Tibet in particular, I herewith request the LOI to enroll me as a student of the Mongolian department and arm me with the necessary knowledge towards this end.

Atze⁸⁴

The Tibetan was then admitted to the department, but shortly after that he found a much better way to improve his knowledge. In October 1931 he joined a post-graduate program at the prestigious Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow, which had been named after Stalin (KUTV). In the same year, Atze is also known to have joined the Communist Party of the USSR.

According to Atze's Curriculum Vitae, he was born in 1910 in Kosa (?), a town in Tibet. As a small child he worked first as a farm-labourer and then, at the age of eight, took service with a merchant. Two years later (in 1920) he made a trip to India, together with his father. In 1924–1925, Atze claimed that he again journeyed to India, probably to do business, this time along with his boss, and then went to Mongolia. Strangely enough, his CV makes no mention of the deputation by the Dalai Lama of the Tibetan boys to Soviet Russia, but says that he was dispatched to Moscow with a group of Tibetans by the Mongolian government. Having completed post-graduate study at the KUTV, Atze worked in Mongolia for some time (in 1934–1935) as the personnel department manager at the state enterprise "Sodnom". He then moved to Moscow again

⁸³ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 38c, d. 5, l. 39. Kozlovsky in Narkomindel's Far Eastern department to Vorobiov, 2 November 1928.

⁸⁴ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 30, d. 181, l. 1.

where he joined the "Scientific-Research Institute for the Study of National and Colonial Problems" (reorganized KUTV). Still aspiring for knowledge, so it seems, the untiring Tibetan a year later changed this establishment for the Politechnical Institute. And that was the last that we know of him in the Soviet capital.^{84a}

A few more Tibetans studied at the Communist University in the early half of the 1930s, such as Atse's classmate Wangchuk Dorje, Nyima and Danzan (Batma-Tsiten). However, very little information of them is available in the KUTV records.

Apart from the Tibetans, there were also several Buryat and Kalmyk students at the Oriental Institute in Leningrad who had spent many years in Tibet and returned to Russia in the latter half of the 1920s, apparently under the influence of pro-Soviet propaganda in Lhasa. One of these was an ex-monk of the Aga Datsang, Dava-Sambo Dugarov. His story was quite simple. Until the age of 17 Dugarov had lived and studied at his monastery, one of the best in Transbaikalia. In 1916, however, he left for Tibet together with his Buryat tutor. Having reached Labrang, the older lama decided to remain there, whereas his pupil proceeded further to Lhasa in the company of another monk, also a Buryat. Of his time in Tibet Dugarov briefly recounted as follows:

I spent my first three years in a monastery in Lhasa. I took a course of studies there, and I lived at the expense of one lama, who hired me to do some work for him. Then I abandoned the monastery, and I earned my living by copying books. In 1925 I wanted to leave Tibet with the Russian expedition of Borisov, but I received the permission only two months after the departure of the party. Therefore I returned on my own. I came back to my homeland with the purpose of continuing my studies, as this is a most important thing for me.⁸⁵

Another Buryat repatriate whose name is worthy of mention here is Choinzan Baldano. He was also an ex-monk, who was enrolled in the IJVIA in early 1928 (about the same time as Dugarov), with Narkomindel's backing. The reason why the Soviet Foreign Ministry became interested in Baldano was given in a letter, through which

^{84a} These facts of Atse's later life were kindly provided to me by Yu.N. Tikhonov. According to Tikhonov, Atse's personal file at the KUTV, originally over 120 pages long (!), was severely censored in the 1930s so only few pages remain in it today.

⁸⁵ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 30, d. 809, ll. 15–17. Dugarov to the administration of the institute, 28 September 1930.

the head of the Eastern department of Narkomindel, B.N. Melnikov, recommended him to the rector of the institute, Vorobiov:

Baldano is a young man, an ex-lama and a Transbaikal Buryat by origin. During his nine years of studies in Tibet he learnt the Tibetan language well, having thoroughly mastered both types of the Tibetan script—the church, and, what is especially important, the civil scripts. (There is no one in the USSR, as You know, except A. Dorzhiev and, partly, Acad. Stcherbatsky, who is familiar with the latter script). Apart from that, Baldano has a good command of conversational and written Mongolian, speaks some Russian, and can read and write Russian.

He is a gifted person, has acquired the habit of working with books, and can be used now, especially after he receives the necessary training, as a translator and also for doing some other work; therefore he deserves a very special attention from our side.⁸⁶

Despite Narkomindel's protection, both Dugarov and Baldano were able to pursue their studies at the school for only two years. In 1930, they were expelled from it as "socially alien elements" during one of the Stalinist purges of the institute.

* * *

How successful was the Borisov mission? The ex-Soviet Mongolist, Nicholas N. Poppe, answered this question negatively—the delegation, according to him, returned to Moscow "empty-handed", because "the Soviet proposals contained nothing acceptable, with the exception of one item—assistance against Great Britain".⁸⁷ This opinion is contradicted by the Buryat author Gombo-Namjil Zaiatuev, who claimed in his short biographical sketch of Agvan Dorzhiev in 1991 that the mission "had fully accomplished all its tasks". One of its participants, "a professional photographer", F.V. Bakhanov, was said to have taken over 700 photos in Tibet which "are now preserved in the archive of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs".⁸⁸ Curiously, Zaiatuev, who was the first Soviet author to mention the secret mission openly, spoke of it as having mainly religious and scientific objectives. The latter, in his words, were assigned specifically to Bakhanov and Dashi Sampilon, "the well-known figure of the Buryat-Mongol national movement". However, there are reasons to doubt

⁸⁶ TsGA SPb, f. 7222, op. 38s, d. 5, l. 3. Melnikov to Vorobiov, 23 January 1928.

⁸⁷ Poppe 1960, p. 176.

⁸⁸ Zaiatuev, op. cit., p. 41.

the fact of Sampilon's participation in the mission: firstly, because his name is not given in the Bakhanov's memoir, and, secondly, because Sampilon, who since 1921 had worked in the Mongolian Legation in Moscow, appeared several times in public in Moscow in February 1924, some time after the mission's departure. For example, he attended the annual session of the RVTP on 15 February, together with the Mongolian ambassador Tushegun Dava, and they were both then elected onto the Board of the Chamber, which would have been impossible if Sampilon was on the Lhasa mission staff.⁸⁹

There are three main sources of information on Borisov's visit to Lhasa, which, if put together, provide us with a reasonably coherent picture. These are: 1) Bakhanov's account, 2) the transcript of Borisov's lecture on Tibet, and 3) Bailey's Lhasa Diary and a special addition to his report, submitted to the Government of India in the latter half of 1924.

According to Bakhanov, the Soviet emissaries, upon their arrival in the Tibetan capital, were accommodated in "the residence of one important official", where they occupied several rooms on the second floor. In the evening of the same day their hosts welcomed them with a "service of worship", conducted in the main temple of Lhasa, and lasting for nearly three hours. The British trade agent in Gyantse, David McDonald, gives a similar version of the occasion, which he had probably heard from his Tibetan informants. In his memoirs, he recalls that the "Russian mission, consisting of 23 delegates, in the guise of pilgrims", was "received with some honour, a military guard being furnished for their reception"; which could well be true.⁹⁰

On the next day, Bakhanov continues, the mission was invited to the Norbulingka for an audience with the Dalai Lama. Among those present were Borisov, Vampilon, Dybchin Molonov, Endon (a Buryat lama-interpreter), and himself. The Soviet delegation leader presented the Ruler of Tibet with a variety of precious items—porcelain vases, golden bowls, silver dishes, etc. With these, Borisov handed over to the Lama two letters, from M.I. Kalinin and the Soviet government, which were received by him "rather favourably". The Dalai Lama then offered his Russian guests the traditional Tibetan tea, but they accepted it with much caution—"because we feared we could be

⁸⁹ *Izvestiia*, 16 February 1924. See also *Rossiisko-Vostochnaia Torgovaia Palata* 1924, n. 65.

⁹⁰ McDonald 1932, p. 99.

poisoned". (The Russians probably suspected that the Lama's servants were all "British paid agents".)

While in Lhasa the Red Russians, *urusu marpo*, also had a few meetings with Tsarong Kalong (Tsarong Galdan), who was still in charge of the Tibetan Army. They spent some time in his company, visiting the Mint and Armoury, both of which were under his control. Tsarong seemed to be quite friendly, and he even gave his Russian guests a tour of the armoury, where he showed them the process of manufacture of the 5-round magazine rifles, made on the model of the 7.62 mm. Mosin magazine rifle of Russian make (the so-called *triokhlineika*).

After their first interview with the Dalai Lama, which must have taken place on the 2nd of August, Borisov remained in Lhasa, whereas Bakhanov, "with the permission of the head of the Tibetan government", set out on a long journey with the purpose of "studying the country, its nature, and economy". He took numerous photographs and even did some filming. In this way Bakhanov spent two and half months travelling around Tibet, according to his own account. At this point his narrative broke off somewhat abruptly, without any mention of the political negotiations that Borisov had had in Lhasa with the Dalai Lama or his other activities.

A tiny bit of additional information is provided by the KGB records, according to which the Borisov Mission was joined in Lhasa by an extra-member, a Buryat lama Dashi Dorji Banzaraksheev. This monk was formerly educated in Tibet (in 1909–1915) and held the Dorampa degree. In 1922 (after Khomutnikov returned from Tibet), he journeyed to Lhasa once again, which suggests that he could have been one of Dorzhiev's confidants and possibly a Soviet secret agent as well. "I did not enter (any) school (there), but studied on my own", Banzaraksheev would tell his OGPU/NKVD interrogator in 1935. "I had lived in Tibet until 1925. In 1924, I took part in the Soviet scientific expedition to Tibet in the capacity of guide and interpreter".⁹¹ It was this monk who probably helped Borisov in his negotiations at the Potala and also assisted him to establish contacts with the Russian Buddhist colony and other Russophile elements in Lhasa.

⁹¹ Archive of the Federal Security Service, St Petersburg, file P-63020 (Banzaraksheev interrogation transcript, 31 May 1935).

Three years later, in May 1927, Sergei Stepanovich Borisov, then the deputy chief of the Narkomindel's Far Eastern Department, was invited by the faculty of the Foreign East Department at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East to read a lecture on modern Tibet. This was probably a closed meeting for the faculty members only, but, luckily, the lecture was stenographed, and its transcript survived the closure of the university in the late 1930s.⁹² The most important part of it is Borisov's highly intriguing account of his stay in Lhasa, his confidential talks with the Tibetan leaders and his general assessment of the current political situation in Tibet and its possible evolution in the future. This situation was described by one of the leading Narkomindel officials as extremely complicated and unstable due to the growing friction between the conservative monastic faction and the "Anglophilic military clique," the latter headed by the war and finance minister Tsarong and comprising a group of young Tibetan officers who had been formerly trained in India. Tibet's break up with China, according to Borisov, had brought about an economic reorientation of the country from the latter to British India. The key role in the process was played by the "new military", the army officers, who were concurrently shareholders in various Indian trade companies and thus represented the gradually emerging class of "national bourgeoisie" in Tibet. As a result the military faction began to exclude the once predominant monastic section from both the commercial sphere and that of the state administration.

The Dalai Lama himself adhered to the policy of "sitting between two stools", in Borisov's words, by cautiously balancing between the two major political factions, the clerical and the military. In these conditions, the role of the monks, as a force which "organises the masses", in opposition to Tsarong's military clique, was regarded quite positively by Borisov. He particularly emphasized the role of "the petty, rank-and-file clergy", the monks closely connected with "our Buryat-Mongol colony" at Drepung. Among these people there was quite a number of Russophiles, "sympathizers of the revolutionary Russia", who saw the latter as an "antipode" of Britain. The Tibetan clergy, according to Borisov, was occasionally agitated by

⁹² RGASPI, f. 532, op. 4, d. 343. According to the stenographic transcript of the lecture, it was read by Batorsky (apparently an alias of Borisov) in two stages, on 12 and 26 May 1927. Of his Lhasa mission Borisov spoke on the latter date.

all kinds of rumours about the Russian advance in Asia—that the Red Russians had already come to China and some of them had even penetrated further into India; that they supported the Indian national movement; and that the Indians would soon expel the British, with the Russian help, from their own country; etc. The monks were also keen to know about Gandhi and his teachings, as well as his connections with the Soviet government, and whether the latter would give support to him.

As for the Tibetan officials, "the responsible Tibetan rulers", their attitude to the new Russia was described by Borisov as "ambivalent and vacillating" at the same time. Thus, the Dalai Lama admitted that "the importance of Russia as a factor of the international politics is almost the same as it was before", but he made it clear that he still doubted "the stability of her position" and therefore, "before turning to the Soviet government officially, he would like to wait for some time to make sure there would be no surprise in that area".⁹³

Much of Borisov's account of his time in Lhasa was devoted to Tsarong and the long chats he had with him, which suggests that the Soviet diplomat was a frequent visitor to the home of the powerful Tibetan. One could probably see in these visits attempts to make friends with Tsarong, which is easy to understand as the Tibetan war minister was the Dalai Lama's right hand man and he played a key role in Lhasan politics at that time. It was actually Tsarong who championed the innovations in Tibet and who was bringing into effect the Dalai Lama's program of reforms, allowing the latter to keep a low profile without publicly demonstrating his pro-British leanings. "Generally I had very interesting conversations with him in private", Borisov told his audience, however he remarked that his communication with Tsarong and other leading Tibetans was made difficult at first by the fact of the presence of a British "resident" in Lhasa.

He demonstrates his sincere disposition towards us. He used to visit Mongolia before, where he met Russians. He says that they [the Tibetans] have to pursue a forced policy with the British, and shows this visually—taking out the drawings and maps, he points to the border lines and outposts and says: "No matter what you do, the British will be here in a few days. Even if we turn to you officially for help. Besides they've got airplanes which could play the same trick they did

⁹³ Ibid., l. 43.

with the Afghans. We are both yours and theirs—our hearts are with you, and our heads with them".⁹⁴ (The latter statement was accompanied with eloquent gestures).

On the whole, Tsarong impressed Borisov as a man of "the new formation", sensible and pragmatic, someone he could easily get along with.

He wears a European suit, teaches his son to speak English, and has a lot of French liqueurs at home, in a word, he has completely Europeanized.... He begins conversation not by making any reference to God's grace, as is usual with them, but by self-praises, saying boastfully that he managed to increase the export price of wool, that he is trying to promote the Lhasa electrification project, that he is going to build a cloth factory, etc.... He is expanding trade, which is very extensive, according to local standards, and he even trades in arms.

Borisov said nothing of his attitude to Tibet's modernization, but one can assume that he perceived it somewhat negatively because the reforms were largely inspired and sponsored by the British, and thus could only lead to the economic and political subjugation of the country. It will be recalled here that in the early 1920s the Soviet press hailed the administrative and social reforms launched by Amanulla Khan in Afghanistan, such as his abolition of slavery, formation of a new court system, his fighting against the "obscurantism of the reactionary clergy", etc. Through these and other measures the Amir-reformist was supposedly seeking to establish "the independent and progressive Afghan national state". Likewise, Moscow supported the modernization of Persia by Reza Khan, but the Soviet reaction would undoubtedly have been very different if the Afghan and Persian rulers had turned for support to the British and not to the Soviets.

Tsarong seemed to have been exceptionally well-informed about many things, including Bolshevism, though much of his knowledge of the latter, as he himself admitted, was borrowed from the British.

When the conversation turned to the essence of our teachings or laws, as they call it, he says: "The British are telling various things about you". He stresses all the time: "Not we, Tibetans, but the British". What are the Bolsheviks? They are the men who defile the earth. We call people like you by a word "tyn" (?). To explain this he takes a cup in his hand and says: "I am holding this cup by the handle, and every normal person will hold it like that for drinking. But not so with

⁹⁴ Ibid., l. 44.

a Bolshevik who will take the cup, break the handle off and then will drink from it. This means they are people who don't have a normal attitude to things and who do everything topsy-turvy, by applying their own standard to all alike.

To support his allegation Tsarong alluded to the publication of treaties by the Bolsheviks, a fact that made him especially indignant. "Unreliable men they are! Try to negotiate with them, and you'll have to pay a price for that".⁹⁵ Such a derogatory opinion of the Bolsheviks, according to Borisov, was spread among the Tibetans by "Colonel Bull", which may be a reference to Charles Bell rather than to F.M. Bailey. One of the tasks of the British agent was allegedly to recruit a special group from the Buryats and Kalmyks for reconnaissance and propaganda purposes. With this aim in view, he once brought an eminent lama from Constantinople to Lhasa, a man who had spent some time in jail in Turkestan in 1919 and was now telling tales of his trials under the Bolsheviks "as an eye-witness". "At some point of time", Borisov further added, "we had even expected this Colonel Bull (and here he definitely means Bailey, not Bell) to pay us a visit, because he showed much interest in the Buryat pilgrims".

Tsarong's attitude to the Soviet system of government was also very negative: "You know what kind of government you have? It is being oriented on the indigent, whereas my country is governed by men of property like myself. Think of what will happen if your teachings penetrate here, what will the results be?"

By saying all this straightforwardly to Borisov, Tsarong had obviously forgotten that he was instructed by the Dalai Lama "not to talk about Bolshevism" with the Russians. But when receiving visitors from Soviet Russia there was no way to avoid this hot topic! Borisov, however, does not seem to have been insulted by the caustic utterances of the war minister, and he even admitted in his lecture that the Tibetans "generally have a rather concrete and even correct perception of the Bolsheviks".

Tibet's knowledge of the Russian revolution and the ensuing civil war was actually very confused. For example, the struggle of the Reds with the Whites was seen by the Tibetans as a kind of religious rivalry, such as took place in Tibet centuries before between

⁹⁵ Ibid., l. 45.

the two leading Buddhist sects, the Red Hats and the Yellow Hats. At the same time the Tibetans, surprisingly, had some accurate information on later developments in Russia—the recognition of the Soviet state by other Western powers, the Bolshevik national policy and even the economic reforms launched by Lenin in 1921, the so-called NEP (New Economic Policy). As a result, so Borisov asserted, “a positive image of Soviet Russia began to spread in Tibet”. Still there was much dispute among the Tibetans about the Soviet line in Mongolia—some said that the Reds helped the Mongols to get rid of the Chinese overlordship, others that the Reds persecuted the Mongolian clergy.

The Panchen Lama’s flight from Tibet was presented by Borisov as follows. The British Indian government had formerly “oriented itself” on the Panchen, whose estates lie close to the Indian border. However, since the British authorities had lately begun to carry out a policy of support for national bourgeoisie in India, so in Tibet they had similarly staked their interests on the military group they had set up there. Therefore the British “gave up” their former friend, the Panchen Lama, to the Tibetans, and the Dalai Lama “liquidated” him.⁹⁶ Of his secret meeting with the Panchen Lama en route to Lhasa Borisov, of course, preferred not to make any mention in public.

At the same time the Soviet diplomat expressed himself unambiguously on the nature of Soviet policy in Tibet.

For us counteraction to British incursion and consolidation of our own influence in Tibet by various means are stimulated primarily by Tibet’s proximity to India and by the fact that the country is essentially the last point of the dividing line between us and Britain that begins in Turkey and terminates in China. To have a certain base there for ideological penetration into India is certainly a big plus in the practice of our relations with the British. Besides, there’s one other thing to remember. At the time when the Tsarist Russian government concluded an agreement with England, Tibet was a kind of a bargaining chip at the negotiations. In the future we will also have to seek a modus vivendi with the British, and the Tibetan question will then no doubt emerge on the agenda (again).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ibid., I. 35.

⁹⁷ Ibid., II. 50–51.

Of the Soviet “nearest perspectives” on Tibet, Borisov spoke with guarded optimism. While describing the political situation there he especially emphasized two points—the “emergence of new trends” in public opinion due to the “disintegration” of the bulk of the monks and the extremely oppressed condition of the popular masses, which compelled them to “take the road of political struggle”.

What is needed now is to bring the situation to a head, which is already there, in the form of the conflict between the military and the clerical factions. No doubt it already exerts some influence on the masses. The important thing is that these (new) feelings take a certain course, have a certain outward expression and program, that they take the revolutionary course.⁹⁸

Borisov’s hopes for radical changes in Tibet, like those of Chicherin, were linked primarily with the Chinese revolution, which had reached its climax by 1927.

Our task and that of the most conscious elements among the Tibetans, being recruited from the midst of the lamahood, the task of the nearest future, is to establish political and organizational contacts with the Chinese revolutionary movement. This is the only solution (of the Tibetan problem), natural and rational, prompted by the entire situation.⁹⁹

A few attempts to establish this kind of contact had already been made by the Kuomintang, according to Borisov, but they had hitherto borne little fruit. The earliest of these contacts was probably the participation of some Tibetans in the 1st Congress of the Kuomintang in January 1924. The rally, as is known, was attended by 165 delegates from all parts of China, including its outer territories (Sinkiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet).¹⁰⁰ Another instance quoted by Borisov was “a national group” set up by the Kuomintang in Gandjao (Kantze?), in Inner Tibet. This group issued a declaration in July 1926 which spoke of the pressure of British imperialism on Tibet and called for contacts with revolutionary China, namely the Kuomintang party, on the basis of Sun Yatsen’s formula for unification of the five nations. However, Borisov suspected that this initiative was in fact no more than “window dressing”. The problem was that the

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ The list of participants in the Congress can be found in Zou Lu 1931, pp. 358–361.

"People's party" had no satisfactory national program for joint action in regard to the borderlands of China.¹⁰¹ As for Sun Yatsen's formula, it seemed to be "demonstratively centralistic" with regard to the borderland peoples, which explained why the Mongols had rejected it. What was most needed now, in Borisov's opinion, was a formula of "realistic national policy", one that would take into account the "centrifugal tendencies" in the borderlands and which could serve as a basis for a definite political agreement. This much desired formula was actually provided by Lenin's principle of national self-determination, but to make it work in Tibet the formula had to be filled with a concrete and realistic content and declared accordingly.

Another perspective was closely linked with the evolution of Anglo-Soviet relations. Tibet, Borisov reminded his audience, was used as a bargaining chip by the Tsarist Russian and British governments at the time when they tried to resolve their differences through an amicable agreement. "In the future we, too, will have to establish some kind of a "modus vivendi" with the British, and the Tibetan question will then no doubt emerge on the agenda (again)". But this, Borisov concluded, meant that Tibet "will have a chance to play a role of its own along the line of establishing peaceful relations with England".¹⁰²

Borisov explained the "forced penetration" into Tibet by the British as due to a number of causes. The foremost of these was, quite naturally, their desire to secure the northern frontier of India. This followed Curzon's formula for the "active defense of India". This certainly became a priority now, in connection with the rise of the revolutionary movement in China. Secondly, the British government was also seeking to obtain "a new and very advantageous initial position for putting pressure on the Peking authorities". Borisov alleged that by gaining access to Tibet, Britain would seize the upper basin of the Yangtse river, which was navigable within Tibet proper and in neighbouring Szechuan as well. That would mean that British gunboats, apart from merchant vessels, would be able to sail up the river and threaten China from the West. Thirdly, the British could extend their influence from Tibetan territory into Kashgaria (Chinese Turkestan). "Having gained a foothold in China, they would obtain

¹⁰¹ RGASPI, *ibid.*, I. 48.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, I. 51.

a vast territory in Central Asia, and having entered into political relations with the (Tibetan) monkhood, they would be able to influence (Tibet's) feeble connections with Sinkiang, with mainland China and could increase their pressure on the Kashgar market". Fourthly, Tibet had a powerful attraction for British industrial capital (as a market, the country itself was of little interest to them). In addition, there were alluring prospects for British navigation if the Brahmaputra were to be connected with the Yangtse and Mekong rivers in the south-east corner of Tibet, where these three rivers came close to each other. "There are intervening spaces there, with the rapids, and the British have already passed them on motor boats, so after making some small changes in the course of the river, the navigation would become possible".¹⁰³

Finally, Borisov cited an opinion expressed by the eccentric Mahendra Pratap, who once said in an interview that the British, if they succeeded in the seizure of Tibet, would surely begin to recruit Tibetans into their army and would drive them, like the Nepalese Gurkhas, against the Indians.

* * *

Now we will examine the Borisov Mission from the other side, through the eyes of the British, by calling on our last major source, the records of F.M. Bailey. The new PO in Sikkim¹⁰⁴ was formally invited for a visit to Tibet by the Dalai Lama in early March 1924, when Borisov and his comrades were already on the road to Lhasa. This may suggest that the Tibetan Head of State was either ignorant of the latter fact (albeit he certainly knew of the Soviet plans for their second mission), or perhaps that he did not find it inappropriate to have both the British and Soviet representatives in Lhasa at the same time, now that the two countries had normalized their relations. Yet, outwardly, it seems rather confusing that he, after having made certain arrangements with the Soviets via Khomutnikov and Bakbushev, later issued an invitation to the British. But this, after all, only confirms Borisov's observation that the Lama was trying "to sit between two stools".

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, I. 50.

¹⁰⁴ Bailey held the post of the PO in Sikkim between June 1921 and October 1928, with a half a year intermission in 1926 (May to December). For a hagiographic account of Bailey see Swinson 1971.

Another puzzling piece of evidence is that the Soviet emissaries came to Lhasa precisely at the time when the Bailey Mission was visiting there, though this may have merely been a coincidence. Borisov would have probably arrived at a much earlier date had he not been delayed for many months at Urga. On the other hand, theoretically, knowing of the departure of the Soviet mission from Urga and the time it normally takes a pilgrims' caravan to get to Lhasa, it would not be too difficult for someone like Bailey to arrange things in such a way that his visit and that of his Soviet rival overlapped.

The purpose of Bailey's own journey to Lhasa was primarily to establish personal relations with the Tibetan ruling circles. The formal occasion for such a visit was provided by a very disturbing situation in Tibet following the mysterious flight of the Panchen Lama. The British feared that the fugitive might turn his steps to Urga, as had happened with the Dalai Lama two decades before, and seek asylum at the court of the Bogdo-Gegen, or even further northward to Red Russia. Their fears remained quite strong for the greater part of 1924 until the moment when the Panchen, after months of roaming in Central Asia, finally arrived in Peking. On 11 September, the *Morning Post*, for example, reported some sensational rumours about the march of a large Mongolian force on Lhasa and preparations for the flight of the Dalai Lama(!) Thus Bailey was to find out the reasons which had made—in the Dalai Lama's interpretation—the Panchen abandon Tibet, and he was probably intending to offer his mediation in the conflict. At the same time there were some minor issues to discuss with the Tibetan government, such as Tibeto-Nepalese relations, the unauthorized visit of Dr McGovern to Lhasa, the British Everest expeditions, etc. In addition, Bailey was to assess firsthand the progress of the British-sponsored modernization of Tibet. The alarming question of Bolshevik intrigue was not overlooked by the planners of his mission either, as the British realised that the Soviets were already trying to extend their propaganda to Lhasa via Mongolia. (Of Khomutnikov's visit, however, judging by the records of the India Office, they had not the slightest idea.) For this reason Bailey was issued with instructions by O. Latimer, deputy secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department, as early as 7 February, i.e. before the formal invitation from the Tibetan government had even reached Delhi. According to these, Bailey was to warn the Tibetan rulers against Bolshevik propaganda, and he was also to obtain information on some suspi-

cious individuals, allegedly the Bolshevik agents—Dsen-Bad, Lun-Van, and Hermann, to which three more names, those of Zyrianin, Ugyen Dorji, and Zerempil, were added later.¹⁰⁵ However, Latimer advised Bailey via his telegram of 28 May to be careful in discussing these delicate matters with the Tibetan officials because of the British government's *de jure* recognition of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁶

On 16 July, Bailey arrived in Lhasa in the company of Major J.H. Hislop of the Indian Medical Service, and he stayed there for a whole month, until 16 August. Only the day after his arrival, the British diplomat had Zamba Khaldinov (or Khaglyshev, as the name is spelled in the Russian sources) to lunch, the meeting that started their long-time friendship. On the 18th July, Bailey was received in a private audience by the Dalai Lama. In the course of this first interview the Ruler of Tibet broached two subjects which seemed to be of greatest concern for him at that time: the departure of the Panchen Lama and, quite unexpectedly for Bailey, Bolshevik intrigue. The latter issue, however, concerned the Soviet presence in Red Mongolia, and not Moscow's overtures to Tibet. The Dalai Lama looked anxious in the light of rumours that were circulating about the Panchen's flight towards Mongolia, as he, like the British, feared that this might result in a Mongolian campaign to overthrow him. (He was already informed of the Bogdo Gegen's death, which automatically turned Outer Mongolia from a "constitutional monarchy" into a "people's republic".) In his Lhasa diary, Bailey recorded some of the Dalai Lama's alarmed questions addressed to him:

He asked where Tashi Lama was. I said 9/6 due Lanchow and 15/8 due Wu-Tai-Shan. He said Tashi Lama was a good man and a real friend of his but he had bad advisors. He added that he himself had

¹⁰⁵ These instructions are contained in O. Latimer's two demi-official letters to Bailey of 7 February (No. 620-X) and 25 June 1924 (No. 37-X). The names of suspicious individuals Dsen-Bad, Lun-Van, and Hermann were mentioned in Major Heal's letter, which was appended, so it seems, to the first of Latimer's letters. Two more names, those of Ugyen Dorji and Zerempil come from Latimer's letter to Bailey of 25 June (No. 37-X). (A reference to this is found in a confidential letter from O. Latimer to F.M. Bailey of 2 September 1924, the Public Record Office, F.O. 371/10291, p. 66.) Zerempil is actually a product of the literary pen of the German explorer of Tibet, Willhelm Filchner, who made him a hero of his much-talked-of adventure novel from the Great Game: *Sturm über Asien, Erlebnisse eines diplomatischen Geheimagenten* (Berlin, 1924). According to that book, the Buryat secret agent, Dorzhiev's confident, left Moscow at the end of 1921 by the shortest route to Lhasa.

¹⁰⁶ Public Record Office, F.O. 371/10291, pp. 66–67.

previously had bad advisors (probably referring to 1904). He asked about Red Mongolia. I told him that Russians had agreed to evacuate it and leave to China.¹⁰⁷

While discussing the Red Russians, the Dalai Lama mentioned Zamba Khaldinov, probably as one his informants, but this suggests that he had discussed the subject earlier with the Kalmyk.

The Red Russian issue would then emerge time and again during Bailey's meetings with the leading Tibetans, Tsarong and other Shapes (Cabinet ministers). Here are a few entries from Bailey's diary which show that the Tibetan officials also shared the Dalai Lama's concern:

22 July. I paid an official call on the Kasha—the cabinet consisting of 4 Shapes—in their office at the Tsuk-la Kang temple in the city.... We were surrounded by clerks and servants and I was surprised that the delicate question of Bolshevik propaganda was raised so publicly. This is perhaps at present the most important question in their eyes.¹⁰⁸

... Tsarong said several of his friends in Mongolia had been killed by Bolsheviks.... He said Bolshies were against their religion but I said also against all religions but were now much better and more tolerant.

23 July. Went to lunch with Lonchen, Hislop, Tsarong, Rai Bahadur Norbu and Laden La present. We talked about Kozlov, Sven Hedin. Tsarong said Kozlov must be over 70 and unless he came in a dandy he could not travel to Lhasa. He asked if he was red and I said he probably was pretending to be red in order to get out of the country but his companions would be red.

24 July.... Kenchung [the Tibetan trade agent at Gyantse—A.A.] talked to me about Bolshevik designs. He said the Tibetans were really frightened. I had written a letter warning them of Bolshie designs and a trader came from Urga by sea who reported that Bolshies had killed many people and were taking 20% capital levy from all traders and others.¹⁰⁹

On 26 July, Bailey learnt that the Khenchung had suddenly been called to Lhasa by the Dalai Lama. "At the time", he wrote, "we did not know the reason of his sudden visit but it transpired later

that, as he has a thorough knowledge of Mongolian, he was required to examine some suspicious Mongolians". This was undoubtedly the Borisov Mission, already in Nagchu, at the gates of Tibet. On the next day, when Bailey had his second interview with the Dalai Lama, the subject of the Bolshevik designs again emerged spontaneously in their conversation. The Dalai Lama expressed his great anxiety in connection with Bailey's letters to him "about Bolshevik intrigue". They also spoke at length about Dorzhiev, as the Lama wanted to know Bailey's opinion on his former advisor. "I said", Bailey recorded,

I could not understand how Dorzhiev who had always been a great friend and servant of His Holiness had turned against them, which he certainly had done if he was helping the Red Russians.... I said that I passed any news on to the Tibetan Government which I received, which would, I thought, be of use to them, and he should consider what I said and confirm it by other reports.

To this the Lama replied that "he had done this and was convinced that Dorzhiev was Red". He then told Bailey about "16 suspicious Mongolians" who had arrived at Nagchuka "of whom about two were ill and the rest were expected here in a day or two". Bailey, however, was certain that the "real Red Russians" could not come to Lhasa, and they were employing Mongolian agents such as were these people at Nagchu. He concluded his speech on a quietly reassuring note, by saying that the Red Russians, when they started, were rather violent as they killed many people, forbade trade etc., "but now they were much better".

The news of the arrival in Lhasa of a group of Red Russians in the guise of Mongolian pilgrims reached Bailey on 2 August, when he was right in the midst of his mission. This certainly alerted him to the reality of the Soviet menace to the British position in Tibet, something which had hitherto not been seriously appreciated by either London or Delhi. As a result, the PO in Sikkim started to gather whatever information on the Soviet emissaries he could obtain, his main source still being Haldinov. Moreover, he seems to have even been willing to visit them personally in their residence in Lhasa under pretence of his scholarly interest in the Buryat-Mongols, as is suggested by Borisov's lecture.

On 11 August, the Dalai Lama told Bailey that he had already seen the party of "the Mongolians" (Buryats and Kalmyks) and that "they did not seem suspicious" to him. The Lama also informed

¹⁰⁷ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F. 157/214a. Bailey's mission diary (long version), entry for 18 July 1924.

¹⁰⁸ OIOC, MSS. F. 157/213. Bailey's mission diary (short version).

¹⁰⁹ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F. 157/214a.

him about the recent arrival at Nagchu of a party of Kansu Muhammedans ("Hui Hui"), one of whom, supposedly a Russian, was very suspicious because "he had yellow hair and blue eyes". When asked by HH what he should do, Bailey suggested that the Tibetans should collect more information about the party and, if possible, obtain the name and a photograph of the supposed Russian. Bailey also advised him to henceforth stop all people about whom there were any suspicions, especially Russians. (The odd looking person in the Chinese caravan, as it turned out later, was indeed a Russian, A.W. Schlakov, a wool trader from Xining.)

After his conversation with Bailey, the Dalai Lama wrote a letter to the head officers of the Nagchu district in which he ordered them to detain the Mohammedan traders, together with the Russian, "for the time being", on their "arrival in our jurisdiction". The officers were also instructed to ask for his photo and find out his name and send these to the Potala "with a report of what he has to say".¹¹⁰

Apart from the vital questions of the Panchen Lama and Bolshevik intrigue, Bailey had discussed a number of other important problems with the Tibetans. For example, the Shapes wanted to know if the Chinese could be persuaded to come to an agreement as Tibet found it difficult to maintain a large army on the Chinese frontier. To this Bailey replied that the Indian government had done their best in this respect but, given China's disintegrated condition at present, no agreement could be arrived at with Peking. It was also unlikely that any treaty signed in Peking would be recognized by the provinces.

Much of his time in Lhasa Bailey spent in the friendly company of Tsarong, probably without knowing that the latter was simultaneously entertaining his Russian guests. The war minister took him to the arsenal at Dote, where he saw water-driven machinery making rifles supervised by a Chinese engineer. It was here that Tsarong planned to install the hydro-electric equipment purchased from the British for the electrification of Lhasa. When discussing various aspects of British military assistance, Tsarong again raised the question of teaching the Tibetans to make cordite, one he had previously addressed to Bell. But Tsarong was to be disappointed again as Bailey made

¹¹⁰ PRO, F.O. 371/10291, pp. 70–71. Translation of a letter from Tsedung Trakpa Gyamtso and the representative of Sho trunk Nang kar, officers in charge of the Nagchuka district, dated 17 August 1924, pp. 70–71. Enclosed in Bailey's dispatch to O. Latimer of 2 September 1924.

it clear that to make cordite successfully would require much education, experience and special machinery than was available in Tibet. (Incidentally, the Afghan military also failed to obtain the necessary knowledge concerning cordite manufacture and had to import cordite cartridges from India).

In general, Bailey wasn't very impressed by what he saw in Lhasa, but he considered it would probably be too optimistic to expect any substantial progress in the modernization of such an economically backward country as Tibet in just two and a half years. Still the reforms, modest though they seemed to a European visitor, were quite impressive by Tibetan standards. In the summer of 1922 a telegraph line was extended from Gyantse to Lhasa, which thus connected the Tibetan capital with India, and hence the rest of the world. The Gyantse-Lhasa telegraph link was constructed by W.H. King of the Bengal Telegraph Department who, having completed this work, then laid on the telephone cable between the Norbulingka, the Potala (the Dalai Lama's summer and winter palaces) and the Kashag office, which housed the Tibetan government. There was also a postal system set up in Tibet, the six main post offices being located in Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse, Phari, Chamdo, and Gyade. However, Bailey thought it was very inefficient at that time. In the same year, 1922, a British geologist, Henry Hayden, had carried out a survey of the mineral resources in the vicinity of Lhasa, though without much success. Finally, the British helped the Tibetans to establish an English school in Gyantse which was designed mainly for children from aristocratic families, and in 1924 the police service was inaugurated in Lhasa by a Sikkimese, S.B. Laden La (a superintendent of police in Darjeeling). However this last innovation turned out to be the most controversial one, as it soon led to a number of complaints from the Lhasan city dwellers, particularly the monks. This is how Kozlov commented on the situation in his Urga diary:

It (the police) is both frightening and incomprehensible, especially for the lamas. The lamas detest it as they cannot understand why they, who often have to wake up at night and walk to their temples, should be stopped on the way, in an authoritative manner and even rudely, and demanded to show permits. . . . This may be a minor occasion for discontent, still the discontent is great.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, Kozlov's Mongol-Tibetan expedition diary, Notebook II, entry for 31 March 1924.

Unlike Kozlov, Bailey viewed the Tibetan police force in a more positive light, as the fact of their presence "has reduced crime in the city considerably and the inhabitants appreciate this".¹¹²

Bailey was already on the road to Gyantse, when quite suddenly, on 23 August, he received in his camp office at Singma Kenchung two letters from the Dalai Lama. These had some very interesting enclosures—the photograph and the visiting cards (a French and a Chinese one) of Alexandre Schlakov, and, more importantly, two "Mongolian letters", delivered to him by the Soviet mission leaders, Borisov and Vampilon. Both letters bore Bolshevik seals, with the sickle, hammer and some Russian and Mongolian inscriptions. The first one, as it transpired, was from the Buryat-Mongol Government (Sovnarkom), signed by none other than its head, Erbanov, and the other was from the representative of the Kalmyk Autonomous Region at the People's Commissariat for Nationalities, signed by one Naso Ho (Nasokhov?). The letters were dated 28 July and 3 June 1923 respectively. These were apparently the "local mandates" issued by the Buryat and Kalmyk national administrative bodies mentioned in Chicherin's program for the second Lhasa mission. The Dalai Lama also attached the Tibetan translation of the letters for Bailey, and he asked him to return the original copies. The Buryat letter read as follows:

To
His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is the lord and protector of the people of Tibet and defender of the Buddhist faith.

The letter is sent by the head office of the Mongolian Buryats. We, the Buryats, who have embraced the Buddhist religion, pray that Your Holiness will keep an eye of pity on us and it is our hope that Your Holiness will pray to maintain forever our Buddhist doctrine and the prosperity of all creatures. We are very glad that we, the Mongolian Buryats, and Tibet embrace the same religion of Buddhism and through your merit this is in ascendancy. We are sending this letter, with a silk scarf, through Tsering Dorji and Bayar tu, who are pilgrims. We beg to give you here a brief account of the new form of Government under which we, the Buddhist portion of the Buryats, are living at present. The working of the Government is as follows. Up till now the people invariably smarted under the fear of foreign aggression and internal strife, but now there does not exist this fear. On the other hand, there is uninterrupted communication and traffic between the states. The internal administration is being carried on after consulta-

¹¹² L/P&S/10/1113, p. 160. Bailey's report on visit to Lhasa, 1924.

tion and with the consent of every one, and the people are leading a very peaceful and happy life. We consider that the present form of justice has never previously been adopted. Formerly, the small and poor states were forced to observe the old custom (bad laws). Unless we apply the same laws to every one as one desires, the good administration itself would cease to exist. The principle of our present form of Government is to be friends with people of all shades and colours and to see that one person does not maltreat and plunder the property of the other, i.e. every one should be on an equal footing. It is our hope that this good system of Government will last long. The pilgrims will give the details of this. Kindly question them. The Buddhist Buryats have been able to rid themselves of the fear of the war and are now living in peace; for we have, within our territory, obtained self Government. This form of Government, which under the former king-emperors we would never have been able to attain, is the result of our united efforts. In the year 1922, in the great assembly of the Buryat officials—both monks and ministers—it has been decided that the monks should come under the ecclesiastical laws. This form of our Government is stable, and we hope that it will be beneficial to the Buddhist religion. On account of the great distance, there is no doubt that people should have reported to you that this is harmful to the Buddhist religion. But let us assure you briefly and clearly. If a glance is cast at the principal rules called *Tsa trim*,¹¹³ it is clear that one can embrace any religion one takes a liking to. During the time of the king-emperors, the main religion was Christianity and those people, who followed other religions experienced great trouble. But in these days no such things need be apprehended. With regard to the Trulku (incarnate lama) who has come from a distance, the head office held, on receipt of reports from several people, enquiries for one or two days and after that this property has been restored to him and he has been given a passport and has been instructed to go to Lhasa via Urga. He has never been put to any trouble. We always assist any lamas or other incarnate lamas of any rank from Tibet. Kindly be kind and merciful to the Buryat monks who are in the holy provinces of U and Tsang as heretofore. As an augury for the stability and prosperity of the Governments of Tibet and Buryat we offer you a scarf and would ask that you will offer prayers for this.

Sent in the year 1923, 13th year of the 28th day of the 7th month of the Mongolian era.

By Yar Wang, the chief leader of the country, Tawo Shor who is the Chief Secretary and Clerk Zodpa.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Tsa trim* is probably corrupted "tshul khrims" (from Sanskrit "shila") which means a moral law or moral precepts.

¹¹⁴ PRO, FO, 371/10291, pp. 71-73. Enclosed to Bailey's dispatch to O. Latimer of 2 September 1924.

The incarnate lama "who has come from a distance" was Tagrin Gegen (or Lama), about whom Dorzhiev wrote to Chicherin in May 1923. Bailey must have met him during his visit to Drepung on 28 of July, although his diary did not mention that meeting. Upon return to his Residency in Gangtok, Bailey wrote a letter to Latimer on 14 October, in which he supplied more information on the venerated Tibetan cleric.

He (Tagring Lama) stated that he was arrested and imprisoned by the Bolsheviks for 7 days. He was very badly treated and his property taken from him. With the aid of Kozlov, whom he knew previously and with whom he managed to communicate secretly when in prison, he was released. He had the greatest difficulty on the railway. After obtaining a permit to travel by train it was some days before a train left and then he had to bribe many people to get on to it. The train travelled about as fast as a horse and every few miles the passengers had to get down and collect fuel for the engine. Altogether he has given the Tibetans a very unfavourable account of Bolshevik Russia which is in no way countered by the feeble apology in the letter to the Dalai Lama saying that after enquiries for one or two days his property was restored to him and he was given a passport.¹¹⁵

Kozlov's intercession on the Lama's behalf is a very interesting point, unknown to his biographers. However it presents us with some chronological and other problems difficult to resolve. Firstly, we do not know the date and place of Tagring Lama's imprisonment, though it can be assumed that this happened some time before May 1923 (when Dorzhiev mentioned the Tibetan in his letter to Chicherin) and that the lama was probably taken to Chita, the main administrative center of the region where the Aga Datsang is located. As for Kozlov, prior to his expedition, he had visited Eastern Siberia only once, in February–March 1921, when he made an inspection trip of the branch offices of the Russian Geographical Society. However, he never travelled farther than Verkhneudinsk, which is quite a distance from Chita. There he spent two or three days at most in the second half of March 1921. So it remains a mystery how the arrested Tibetan could know about Kozlov's coming to the place and communicate with him, even if we assume that he was put in jail in Verkhneudinsk, not in Chita. On the other hand, the Lama could

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 56. Letter from Bailey to Latimer, 14 October 1924. See also F 3788/1741/10 (Return of Tagring Lama from Russia, his impressions of Russia).

easily have contacted Kozlov while in Urga in the autumn of 1923, which seems to be a far better option. So Bailey's account probably combines two different stories—about Tagring's arrest, presumably somewhere in the Aga area where he was residing (then in the jurisdiction of the Buryat Autonomous Region of the Far Eastern Republic), and some services rendered to the Lama by Kozlov in Urga. Two years later the Soviet newspaper in Mongolia "*Izvestiia of Ulan-Bator-Khoto*" would report that the "houses of the Tibetan lama Tagrin Gegen located in the Zagaidskii Datsang of the Aga aimak", because of their neglected condition, were recognized as the "property of the Buryat Republic", i.e. confiscated by the state.¹¹⁶

The second "Mongolian letter" was a shorter one, though written much in the same propagandist vein:

To

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is the lord and protector of all the people who embrace the Buddhist religion.

The Kalmuks have placed a representative in Moscow in Russia. I beg to offer Your Holiness, through Tsering Dorji and Bayar tu, who are pilgrims, a scarf as a mark of respect. These two pilgrims have been asked to explain to Your Holiness the state of our affairs. We pray that Your Holiness, who has come into this world like the sun, will have mercy upon this country of Kalmuk who are under you for their religion and nationality. Kindly permit us to give you some news of these days. The old and bad form of Government has been altogether done away with and the people are leading a peaceful and happy life under the new form of Government, which is known as "autonomy", in which business is conducted by general consent of good custom. In the time of the previous emperor the ordinary people and lamas who had settled in villages and towns in Russia adjoining our country were merely told to observe religion but they were told not to take too much to the celibate life and therefore this order has made the people very sorry. At present these orders are changed and going on peacefully.

This news is sent by Naso Ho on the 3rd day of the 6th month of 1923.¹¹⁷

Having reached Yatung on the following day (24 August), Bailey telephoned the Dalai Lama to tell him about the receipt of his letters. They agreed that he would send Schlakov's photo and visiting

¹¹⁶ *Izvestiia Ulan-Bator-Khoto*, # 190, 21 June 1925. "Zagaidskii" is apparently a corrupted name of the Zugalaevskii Datsang.

¹¹⁷ FO. 371/10291, pp. 73–73.

cards, together with the originals of the enclosed Mongolian letters, back to him in one month time.

So Borisov and Vampilon, judging by their "mandates", posed formally as ordinary pilgrims who came to Lhasa for religious purposes, as well as to bring news to the Head of Northern Buddhists of the peaceful and happy life of his co-religionists in Buryatia and Kalmykia, who were now enjoying independent (autonomous) status within the brotherly family of other peoples in Soviet Russia. But, as one will remember, they also had Narkomindel mandates which authorized them to hold political talks with the Dalai Lama on behalf of the Soviet government, something which the Dalai Lama would have hardly confided to the British.

When compiling the final report of his Lhasa Mission for the Government of India, Bailey for some reason omitted from it the discussion of three subjects—those of the Nepalese half-breeds, of the Everest expeditions, and . . . of Bolshevik intrigue. These questions, as it transpired, were dealt with separately by him, however, no special additional report on the latter issue could be found among Bailey's papers in the India Office archive. But in 1994, while working in the Public Record Office in London, the present author located there a collection of Bailey's documents relating to his Lhasa Mission, which were apparently previously unknown to British scholars.¹¹⁸ The first of these was Bailey's "very confidential" letter to Latimer of 2 September, headlined "Soviet activities in Tibet", which could be that missing report of his. This spoke of a rather negative attitude by the Tibetan government towards the Soviet Russians, mainly due to their violent activities in Mongolia. "His [the Dalai Lama's] chief source of information regarding Bolshevik methods was from travellers from Mongolia who reported that many had been killed by the red Russians". At the same time the letter contained pieces of information on the Buryat-Kalmyk party (the Borisov Mission) in

¹¹⁸ These include a "very confidential" letter from Bailey to O. Latimer, headlined "Soviet activity in Tibet", dated 2 September, with five enclosed English translations of 1) the Dalai Lama's short letter to Bailey of 20 August, 2) a report from the Tibetan officers in charge of Nagchuka district of 17 August, 3) another letter from the Dalai Lama to Bailey of 20 August, 4) and 5) two letters by the Buryat and Kakmyk Buddhists (the "mandates" of Borisov and Vampilov). FO. 371/10291, pp. 66-74. To these we should add Bailey's other "confidential letter" to Latimer of 14 October, also headlined "Soviet activity in Tibet", which contained the above related story of Tagring Gegen's trials in Bolshevik Russia (p. 56).

Lhasa and that of the Kansu Mohammedan traders that Bailey was able to obtain from the Dalai Lama, Tsarong and Zamba Khaldinov. The former party consisted of 12 men out of those "16 suspicious Mongolians" who had come earlier to Nagchu.

. . . Of them six were Kalmuks and known to Zamba Haldinoff; six others were Buryats and sometimes spoke Russian among themselves. Their names were Bayar tu, Tsering Dorji, Jigme Dorji, Debching, Damba and Jaltsen. Two of them were especially suspected—one, Bayar tu, because he wore a beard, and Tsering Dorji because he could not speak Mongolian perfectly. The Tibetan Government eventually came to the conclusion that they were harmless and the Dalai Lama himself granted them an interview.¹¹⁹

Bailey, however, failed to establish the identity of any of the alleged Bolshevik agents in Tibet, whose names or aliases had been given to him by Latimer. One of them, Zyrianin, who was claimed to be the leader of a Bolshevik Mission destined for Lhasa, was none other than Tsering Dorji. The name Zyrianin could be a slightly corrupted (Russified) form of the Tibetan name Tsering as both look very similar phonetically. On the other hand, Bailey was able to obtain some very accurate information on the Kozlov expedition in Urga—that it had received 100,000 roubles from the Russian government "for expenses" and then for some unknown reason was suddenly recalled to Moscow by telegram.

His report concluded with a following statement:

The only danger which the Tibetan Government fear from Bolshevik propaganda is connected with the Drepung monastery. This is the largest monastery in Tibet and is situated about 2 miles from Lhasa. It contains nominally 7,700 monks but in actual fact more; a great number of these men are not of Tibetan race, but are Mongolians, Kalmuks, Buryats, besides people of doubtful loyalty from the Chinese frontier. When Sir Charles Bell was in Lhasa there was trouble between this monastery and the Tibetan Government.¹²⁰

Other documents were a few enclosures from Bailey's letter, the most important being the Buryat and Kalmyk "Mongolian letters" to the Dalai Lama, and the report by the Nagchu officers about the detained Xining traders caravan, all in English translation. On 14 October,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

Bailey forwarded another short message to Latimer with the story of Tagring Lama, also headlined as "Soviet activity in Tibet". And this was practically all, so it seems, that Bailey could report to his government on the Bolshevik Tibetan intrigue. Of Borisov's political talks with the Dalai Lama and Tsarong he apparently knew nothing. Still the information he relayed to the Indian government via Latimer was regarded as quite alarming by the British officials in both Delhi and London. The War Office in its special memorandum titled "The Recent extension of Soviet influence in Central Asia" (drawn up towards the very end of the year 1924), made a specific reference to the two letters to the Dalai Lama from the Buryats and Kalmyks as "typical examples of Soviet endeavours to initiate intercourse with Lhasa". "Examined on their own merit these two letters might appear to be harmless, but viewed in conjunction with our knowledge of Bolshevik methods of intrigue in other theatres and communities they form one more link in the chain of evidence of Soviet revolutionary activity in Central Asia".¹²¹ Consequently, the author of the memorandum proposed that "steps should be taken to consider that further measures are necessary to counteract the endeavours of the Soviet authorities". The document further spotlighted Soviet activities in the Central Asian "zone of disturbance", including Persia, Afghanistan and Chinese Turkestan:

In the first place we have to face the fact that the USSR is now preparing the way for a contiguous frontier with that of British India in the neighbourhood of Chitral and the Indus States. Thus, Bolshevik rule has made the first move towards attaining an objective which was successfully denied by us to Russia under Tsarist Government through many decades. If successful, the cordon of buffer states will be successfully pierced and facilities largely increased for the passage of Bolshevik propaganda into Northern India.

Secondly, the integrity of Afghanistan is directly threatened and it looks as if in the near future we may expect a further period of unrest and revolts against the authority of the Amir on lines similar to the recent Mangal-Zadran-Ghilzai rebellion.

And, thirdly, in Persia, Soviet intrigues to undermine British influence are now not even concealed. The diatribes of Shumiatsky are broadcasted as often as not "en clair" and the inspired Rulers of Moscow

¹²¹ PRO, FO. 371/10403. Memorandum of the War Office for the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 23 December 1924, p. 228.

contain almost daily allusions to the forthcoming expulsion of the British from these areas.¹²²

The British military were also very concerned about the recent conduct of the Turkoman tribes which had taken up arms against Persian authority and which were believed to have received support or at least been instigated by Moscow. Although there was no direct proof of Soviet complicity in these Turkoman activities, the War Office pointed out that "whereas till recently these tribes have been amongst the staunchest opponents of Bolshevism, we now see them, actuated by the national tradition of raiding Northern Persia, fighting in furtherance of Soviet aims".

* * *

In the latter half of March 1925, the Borisov Mission, having spent about three months in Tibet, again returned to Urga, travelling by a land and sea route via India and China. In Peking, according to Banzaraksheev, he—and possibly some other mission members as well—stopped briefly to pay homage to the Panchen Lama. (The Buryat claimed that he did not conduct any talks with the Panchen, only worshipped him in his palace). True, no tangible results were achieved by the mission in the form of any practicable agreements with the Tibetan government, which perhaps should be ascribed not so much to Borisov's lack of diplomatic skills or a poor command of Mongolian language but rather to Bailey's success in counselling the Tibetan leaders, which suddenly made the Dalai Lama so suspicious and intractable. A part of the blame should also be laid with Bailey's informant, Khaldinov (Khaglyshev). The latter's venomous criticism of the Bolshevik regime no doubt damaged the Soviet "positive image" in the eyes of Tibetans high and low, especially the Dalai Lama, and it certainly played a role in the failure of Borisov's efforts.

Chicherin must have been exasperated by the stories Borisov told him about the Kalmyk's anti-Soviet propaganda in Lhasa, to the point that Narkomindel urged the Kalmyk Buddhist leaders to stage a public condemnation of Khaglyshev at the 5th Kalmyk Buddhist Council held in September of the same year. Khaglyshev was criticised for his "anti-Soviet work" by Agvan Dorzhiev and Naran

¹²² Ibid., p. 230 f.

Bakbushev (brother of Sanja Bakbushev), who turned out, incidentally, to have been one of the Kalmyk participants in the Borisov mission. As a result, the rally passed a resolution calling the Central Spiritual Board and the Kalmyk Buddhists "to forward a petition to the KalmTsIK and VTsIK USSR, and Narkomindel in particular, requesting them to send a religious delegation to the Dalai Lama, in order to denounce Khaglyshev's provocative fabrications".¹²³ The person nominated to lead the delegation was Naran Bakbushev.

Yet despite Borisov's unsuccessful negotiations with the Tibetan leaders, his Lhasa mission, like that of Khomutnikov, certainly yielded some positive results. These were primarily the numerous contacts and encounters made by the Soviet diplomat with various strata of Tibetan society—lamas, the military, traders and government officials, to say nothing of his meetings with the key actors on the Lhasan political scene, the Dalai Lama and Tsarong Shape. Of great value for Moscow was Borisov's first-hand account of a very unstable situation in Tibet, in particular of the growing social ferment in the country due to the emergence of the Anglophilic "new military" and "disintegration" of the bulk of the monks. Most stunning, however, was the news of the Panchen Lama's flight from Tibet, because of his opposition to the Dalai Lama and allegedly his rupture with the British. That introduced a new and rather promising aspect into the Soviet-Tibetan relationship. And, of course, one should not disregard the propaganda work conducted by the mission members among the Tibetans and the Russian Buddhist colony in Lhasa, the last but not least achievement of the Borisov mission.

¹²³ NARK, r-3, op. 2, d. 508a. Materials relating to the 5th Buddhist Council in Kalmykia, 22 September 1925, l. 125.

CHAPTER FIVE

PLAYING THE MONGOLIAN CARD:
THE CHAPCHAEV MISSION, 1926–1928

On 13 February 1925, Kozlov had a long interview with Chicherin in his Narkomindel office. As usual, it took place past midnight. The explorer came to Moscow to report to a specially assembled government commission on the outstanding achievements of his expedition, as well as to get its approval for his future plans. The prospects of visiting Tibet still looked rather vague at that moment. Despite the Dalai Lama's personal invitation and a special permit to enter Lhasa delivered to him in Urga by the Lama's messenger Galsan (Kelsang Dondup), Kozlov could not obtain the Chinese travel documents for his party from the Soviet embassy in Peking. Narkomindel officials blamed it all on a "very difficult" international situation, referring specifically to British pressure allegedly imposed on Peking authorities to bar the Soviet expedition from visiting Tibet. However this explanation was obviously a lame excuse, as the British diplomatic records provide no evidence of any secret intrigues by London against Kozlov. This, for example, is what the British minister in Peking, R. Macleay, wrote in his 1923 China Annual Report:

Various applications for permission to travel in Tibet were made during the year . . . The well-known Swedish and Russian explorers, Sven Hedin and Kozlov, are both understood to be projecting further expeditions to Tibet, the latter with the support of the Russian Government. . . . As regards the actual position at present in regard to foreign travel in Tibet, while the Chinese authorities show no special interest in preventing foreigners from crossing the Chinese border into Tibet, the Tibetan authorities refuse all travellers permission to cross their frontier from Chinese territory, unless their objections have first been overcome by a special recommendation from the Government of India in the case of particular travellers.¹

¹ Public Record Office, FO. 371/10291. R. Macleay, China Annual Report, 1923, Peking, April 22, 1924.

So Kozlov's problems were definitely created not by Peking or London, though British Indian intelligence certainly monitored his movements in Central Asia.²

The firsthand conversation with Narkom which Kozlov vividly described in his diary shows that the Soviet leadership was gravely concerned about the current developments in Tibet:

So I finally met Chicherin. We have talked about Mongolia and Tibet for almost one hour and a quarter. My general impression of Chicherin is that he is full of fears; he handles matters with caution and is a typical diplomat, a double-minded man. He told me many interesting things about Tibet—about the feud of the lamas with the military segment, about Namgang, who, as a staunch supporter of the British, was provided with everything for his army by them . . . The lamas revolted, arrested Namgang, punished him and eventually had him imprisoned in one of the high towers. Tibet is under pressure from two opposite sides: the Chinese from the East, who captured the Tashi Lama, and the English from the West, who assist the Dalai Lama himself. The result of all this is awful discord, internal strife, civilian machinations, etc.³

Chicherin tried hard to discourage Kozlov from travelling to Tibet—the Chinese, he said, “under the threat of Europeans, particularly the British”, would not allow him to travel freely, not even to Kharkhoto in northern Gobi, to say nothing of a more distant Tsaidam. And Kozlov, being an Anglophobe himself, fully believed him.

The Narkom's thrilling story of the friction between the clerical and military parties in Tibet which culminated in the lamaist revolt and the subsequent “imprisonment” of the powerful Tsarong (Namgang) was apparently based on some rumours that must have trickled into Moscow by that time. In fact only a part of this story was true. Tsarong is known to have left Lhasa in September 1924 to inspect the new Mint in Yatung, and thence he went on a pilgrimage to India and Nepal. He only returned to Tibet six months later, towards the very end of March 1925. In the meantime, a number of senior army and police officers had been suddenly demoted one after another by the Dalai Lama. Tsarong himself, when he turned up in Lhasa, was also dismissed from his post of Commander-in-

Chief, though he retained his position as a Shape in the Kashag. The fall of the de facto secular ruler of Tibet was indeed a big sensation for Moscow, however it was not Borisov who brought this news there, since he had left Lhasa about the same time as Tsarong. The Soviet leaders learnt the dramatic details of the “coup in Lhasa” from the British press, and this was only in early August of 1925.⁴

The main reason behind the reprisals was the strong opposition of the influential lamaist segment to the pro-Western (or rather pro-British) modernization of Tibet. The lamas were particularly unhappy with the new military gaining too much power and thus jeopardizing their traditionally predominant role in the country. The villagers often complained to Lhasa of exactions by military officers, who were in habit of demanding money to excuse persons from military service and also for the upkeep of the army. In addition, feelings against the newly established police force in Lhasa ran very high. The police were strongly disliked by the monks, who considered them a purely Western innovation and were not infrequently harassed by them. The police were also unpopular with the government (except Tsarong) because of their expense. However what made the Dalai Lama ultimately come down on this modernist force in early 1925 was the evidence which came into his hands of the army and police officers—Tsarong Shape, Laden La, Pedma Chandra (Laden La's assistant), and others—conspiring in a plot against him in order to deprive him of temporal power.

It is difficult to say now how far the intentions of the plotters went, and whether they had a real scheme to “overthrow” the Dalai Lama. Be that as it may, Tibet's ruler was gravely alarmed and he reacted promptly, with some nudging from an influential monk official, Dronyer Chenmo. According to the British researcher Alex McKay, the plot could have been actually conceived and directed by F.M. Bailey, the British Political Officer in Sikkim, whose aim was ultimately to take the secular power from the Dalai Lama and transfer it to Tsarong Shape. “Bailey had apparently come to the conclusion”, McKay reasons, “that the only way to modernize Tibet to the extent where it would provide a secure northern border for India

² PRO, F 253/11/10 (Soviet Russian mission to: movement of Col. Kozlov).

³ P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, Kozlov's Mongol-Tibetan expedition diary, 1923–1926, entry for 13 February 1925.

⁴ News about the coup in Tibet appeared in the British papers only on the last day of July 1925. See, for example, *Morning Post*, 31 July 1925 (Trouble in Tibet. Reported plot against lamaism) and *Daily Telegraph* (Modernism v. Lamaism).

and exclude Russian influence in the region was by establishing a secular government in Tibet under Tsarong Shape's leadership".⁵ However, if Bailey indeed made such audacious plans prior to his Lhasa visit, the Russian menace could have hardly dominated his considerations at that point, since he had no other "evidence" of Bolshevik intrigue in Tibet than some vague rumours of an alleged Soviet mission heading for Lhasa under one Zyrianin, which he had actually received only two weeks before his own departure. Bailey knew nothing of the earlier Soviet overtures to the Tibetan Government, via Khomutnikov and Bakbushev, and the news of Kozlov's scientific expedition certainly could not have worried him too much.

All told, the crackdown on the military and police by the Dalai Lama signified a reversal of the political course he had followed with some moderate success for nearly a decade. The modernization plans (which had been supported mainly by the "Anglicized" military party made up of the British-educated aristocratic army officers) now lost their major driving force and had to be abandoned in favour of a more traditional policy, placing greater emphasis on Tibet's spiritual values than on Western innovations.

The official Soviet reaction to the dramatic developments in Tibet was one of blatant triumph. On 12 August 1925, "Izvestia" carried a lengthy article by Chicherin, headlined "The East's New Success", which offered the reader a typically Marxist analysis of these changes. "The news from London about the outburst of the national-liberation movement in Tibet and the crushing of the Anglophile clique should be given our greatest attention", Chicherin stated in the opening paragraph of his piece. He further outlined the main features of the British policy of "gradual penetration" into the Tibetan economy and politics: the English sought to draw some elements of Tibet's upper social strata into Anglo-Indian trade and other capitalist interests, and they also tried to establish a kind of a "praetorian military force" in the country to hold the Tibetan Government under their sway. Their policy of "terrorizing" the latter went too far, and Tibet, under the double pressure of pecuniary interests and the rude physical force of the British-armed military units and police ("gendarmerie") was slowly "turning into something reminiscent of a British protectorate". The young and energetic war minister, Tsarong (Tsaran-

⁵ McKay 1997a, pp. 419, 422. See also McKay 1997b, p. 112.

Galan), "also connected with the Anglo-Indian trade capital", had become "a de-facto dictator of Tibet", and the Dalai Lama, as well as the Tibetan Government, had to recognize his dominant position and follow the political course traced by him. According to Chicherin, another "most odious figure" on the Tibetan political scene was Tsarong's protege, Major Badma Zandra (Pedma Chandra), the head of the gendarmerie, which provided the main support for the Anglophile clique. He "played the role of a British unofficial representative" in Tibet. Zandra tried to escape to India, but was intercepted and killed, which "illustrates most vividly the defeat of the Anglophile clique". The ascendancy of the new military was opposed by the "broad popular masses", assisted by the strong Tibetan monkhood, which also took up arms against "the new lords of the country and its traitors". Thus Chicherin's sympathy clearly lay with the Tibetan "conservatives", because from the Marxist viewpoint they played a socially progressive role in these conditions.

Chicherin further dwelt at some length on Curzon's "theory of active defence" of India. According to that theory, the Narkom explained to Soviet readers, the British sought to extend their control over the two countries which insulated the Indian Empire, Afghanistan and Tibet, yet the situation had changed drastically when Afghanistan became a fully independent state under the new Amir. The latest developments in Tibet, Chicherin concluded, showed clearly that the latter country was also going to follow the Afghan suit.

But ultimately Tibet was something more than a mere buffer or "an external glacis" for the defence of British rule in India. Tibet provided a direct link with Inner Asia and the whole of the Mongolian world. "Tibet dominates over the ancient main route leading from China to our Semirechie Region and dividing the northern and southern inland deserts. Thus the major interior roads passing through Asia can be controlled by whoever rules Tibet". This was a rather revealing statement by the Narkom who, by overly emphasizing the military-strategic importance of Tibet, incidentally lifted the veil over the Soviet's special interests in the region, which largely concurred with those of the British. At the same time his bold utterances offered a striking parallel to those Petr Badmaev had written about two decades ago:

Tibet is the key to Asia. He who holds sway over Tibet, will rule over the Kokonor and the Szechuan Province; by ruling over Kokonor he

will rule over the entire Buddhist world, including the Russian Buddhists, and by ruling over Szechuan he will also rule over the whole of China.⁶

Indeed Chicherin must have known these seemingly prophetic words at the time he was writing his article, as Badmaev's China's annexation project, along with his other similar political revelations were, strange as it may seem, published in the USSR in the same year, 1925.

Chicherin's piece further noted that Tibetans had a much greater sympathy for the Russians than the British, mainly due to their common Buddhist interests. In his words, "the English were unable to stop the stream of pilgrims coming to Lhasa from the Buddhist countries", and thus they could not break "the living ties between Lhasa and the Buddhist peoples associated with the Soviet Union in some way or other".

The Tibetan leaders have said time and time again to the Northern Buddhists pilgrims that these northern countries are far closer to them than England, which is ever grasping power among them and striving for ascendancy. These sentiments could not fail sooner or later to bring about an outburst. . . It must be admitted that thereby has been accomplished an important step forward on the road of the liberation movement of the peoples of the East.⁷

The news of the crushing of Tsarong's military clique in Tibet, which testified to a serious defeat of the British policy of "gradual penetration" into Tibet, signaled to Moscow that it should lose no time and must take advantage of the situation to promote its own influence in Tibet. Chicherin must have been contemplating ways to activate Soviet policy with regard to Tibet by diplomatic and other means as soon as he had learnt about the "Lamaist rebellion" in Lhasa. Thus when the new Soviet *polpred* in Japan, V.L. Kopp, reported to Moscow in late May 1925 about the Indian rebel Mahendra Pratap's arrival in Tokyo, the Soviet foreign office advised him to show the Raja great consideration not only because he enjoyed some influence in India but also because of his still cherished Tibet expedition plans.

⁶ Memorandum by P. Badmaev "On counteracting the British in Tibet", 1 January 1904, cited in Semennikov 1925, p. 110.

⁷ Chicherin, "Novyi uspekh Vostoka", *Izvestia*, # 182 (2515), 12 August 1925. Reprinted in Chicherin 1961, pp. 443-447.

The Narkomindel thought it would probably be worthwhile to attach one or two reliable Buryats or Mongols to Pratap's mission "for the sake of our penetration in Tibet".⁸

Then, in late July 1925, A.V. Barchenko approached Chicherin with his new plans for an expedition to Tibet and Afghanistan "for tracing the remains of a pre-historic culture". His project, which was actually designed to establish contacts with the "secret brotherhoods" in these two countries—the spiritual leaders and the "scientific elite" of Shambhala—was supported by the OGPU, which allocated considerable funds (100,000 roubles) for the journey. Chicherin, however, was skeptical about Barchenko's theory and he strongly objected to the Afghan part of his project. "I told him [Barchenko], that a visit to Afghanistan certainly is out of the question", Chicherin wrote to the Politburo, "because Afghan authorities will not admit our Cheka men to any secret brotherhoods, and the very fact of their appearance [there] could lead to serious complications and even campaigns in the British press". On the other hand, the Narkom perceived the Tibetan journey of the Russian scholar and mystic in a more positive light, "because an extra trip to Lhasa could strengthen our ties with Tibet to some extent".⁹ However he put forward several conditions for the approval of Barchenko's extravagant project: first, that the personality and background of the expedition leader be cleared up, second, that he should be accompanied by some "serious party controllers", and finally that he promise "not to talk in Tibet on political matters, especially on the relations between the USSR and the Oriental countries".

For reasons now difficult to ascertain, Barchenko was unable to undertake his Shambhala journey. Some of his modern biographers consider that this was because OGPU attached one of their most sinister men, Yakov Blumkin, to his party as a *politkomissar*, and Barchenko said "no"—as he considered that Blumkin, who was reputed to be a terrorist who had assassinated the German ambassador, Wilhelm Mirbach, in 1918, was morally unworthy of admittance to the Pure Land of Shambhala. The story rings true, but

⁸ RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 252. Copy of letter, presumably from Narkomindel (Chicherin), to the Eastern Department of Comintern, 30 May 1925.

⁹ Andreyev 1997a, pp. 170-171. Re Barchenko see also Andreyev 2001c.

there seems to have been a weightier argument which made the Soviet authorities change their mind—in the same August of 1925 Chicherin started preparations for another Soviet mission to Tibet.

* * *

Shortly after the publication of his article in "Izvestia", Chicherin received a long letter from the head of the Narkomindel's agency in Central Asia, A. Znamensky. This Soviet official was also agitated by the latest developments in Tibet and thought these required most serious analysis. The Dalai-Panchen Lamas controversy was viewed by him as an outcome of the British penetration into Tibet, and he incidentally informed the Narkom of the latter incarnation's arrival in Peking in March 1925 after his one year stay in Kansu. There the Panchen Lama, according to Znamensky, was accorded a ceremonial reception by the Chinese authorities "as a true spokesman for Tibet, its spiritual leader", because, theologically speaking, his incarnation was believed to be superior to that of the Dalai Lama. As an expert on Central Asian affairs Znamensky proposed a number of urgent measures such as:

1. to verify the events reported to have taken place there, find out the Panchen Lama's attitude to them, a task which can be fulfilled via Peking, Urga, and partly Kashgar (Keria);
2. to organize a regular dispatch of pilgrims and traders, who through various methods can keep Tibet under their observation; for this a special cadre of well-trained and loyal individuals should be recruited from among the Mongols, Buryats and European Kalmyks;
3. to consider the question of sending a scientific expedition to Central Asia which should visit the most important areas along the Indo-Kashgar frontier, the Tibetan regions etc., however such an expedition should not follow the example of P.K. Kozlov.¹⁰

By the time Chicherin received this letter he had already mapped out some concrete measures of his own towards a further Soviet-Tibetan rapprochement. Their implementation was entrusted to the new Soviet ambassador (*polpred*) and simultaneously trade representative (*torgpred*) in Mongolia, Petr Mikhailovich Nikiforov.¹¹ On the

¹⁰ RGASPI, f. 62, op. 2, d. 245, ll. 27–29. Znamensky to Chicherin (Memorandum "On the Tibetan events"), 13 August 1925. Received by the Narkomindel on 22 August.

¹¹ A native of Irkutsk, P.M. Nikiforov (1882–1974) took an active part in the

very day Nikiforov received his appointment Chicherin briefed him thoroughly on the Soviet policy in Outer and Inner Mongolias and Uriankhai (Tannu-Tuva).

We declare formally the autonomous status of the Mongolian Republic under China's protectorate. However we conduct our practical work there in such a way as to bring the country, as far as its inner political and economical construction is concerned, closer to the Soviet forms . . .

As regards Inner Mongolia, we object to the plans of the Outer Mongolian Government to annex it for reasons of our political position in China. The annexation might be attributed to our influence and might irritate the Chinese public opinion.

Uriankhai we regard as a separate people's republic, an autonomy under double protectorate of China and Mongolia. Therefore we object to the unification of Uriankhai with Mongolia.¹²

On August 2, when meeting with the deputy Narkom of finance, A.O. Alsky, and Erbanov, Nikiforov received more instructions, this time specifically concerning Tibet. His "Tibetan tasks" included four main points: setting up Mongolian representation in Lhasa and a Soviet trade agency in Shachow (Sachow), establishing an efficient communication link with Lhasa, and finally taking steps to increase the number of Tibetan students in the Soviet higher educational establishments.¹³ Concurrently, the new *polpred* was assigned a special task of establishing control over one of the Chinese warlords, Feng Yu-hsiang (General Fyn).¹⁴ This revolutionary General, who staged a coup in Peking on 23 October 1924, began to play quite

revolutionary movement in Russia from 1904 when he joined the Communist party. In 1920–1922, he was a member of the Far Eastern Bureau of the TsK RKPb. In 1921, Nikiforov also presided for a short time over the Council of Ministers of the Far Eastern Republic. After moving to Moscow in October 1922, he headed the Goskhran (State Valuables Depository) and then, until 1925, held a senior position in the Foreign Trade Department. According to Nikiforov's diary, he received his diplomatic appointment to Mongolia at the Narkomindel on 12 July (RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 7, l. 3), and it was then approved by the Politburo on 27 July 1925.

¹² RGASPI, ibid.

¹³ Ibid., l. 4ob.

¹⁴ Re Feng Yu-hsian see Tatarenko 1994, passim; A.N. Khokhlov, "Peregovory Fen Yuisiana v Moskve i ego vstuplenie v Gomindan (Neizvestnye stranitsi biografii kitaiskogo voennogo lidera)" in *Obstchestvo i Gosudarstvo v Kitae, 26-ia nauchnaia konferentsiya*, Moscow, 1995; J.F. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord. The Career of Feng Yu-hsian*, Stanford, 1966.

a prominent part in Soviet plans for promoting the national revolution in China, especially after Sun Yat-sen's death in March 1925. Feng's troops, which participated in the coup and were then transformed into the Kuominchun (People's) Army, presented a considerable military force in its own right, one which the Soviet strategists wanted to use against the most powerful warlord in northern China, the head of the Fentiang military clique, Chang Tso-lin. Therefore the Politburo decided, in March of the same year, to provide military assistance to Feng,¹⁵ as his victory over Chang Tso-lin could eventually lead to the formation of a new coalition government in Peking, one loyal to the Soviets.

On 13 August Nikiforov had another meeting with Chicherin. This focused mainly on Soviet policy in Mongolia and Tibet. In his diary he referred to this in the following words:

With great attention and intensity he (Chicherin) keeps track of all political changes in the Far East and particularly in Mongolia. He regards Mongolia as the most important outpost for the advance of revolutionary ideas into Tibet and Indo-China. He reacts very nervously to the blunders of our representatives in Mongolia.

He spoke at length about the Tibetan question. He did not chart any course of Tibetan policy, it's only when I asked him whether Tibet politically should be in the same position towards China as Mongolia he said yes, this position should be retained because it already exists de facto. To my idea of establishing a trade representative or agency in Tibet he reacted positively, but advised to act with much caution. Regarding liaison with Tibet, he is inclined to adopt the proposal of the unofficial representative of the Dalai Lama, according to which the Soviet side should take upon itself one third of the maintenance cost of the mail road service. Towards the end of our conversation he brought me a huge file of materials and suggested that I look through these".¹⁶

Before Nikiforov left for Ulan-Bator-Khoto (renamed Urga) in mid-September, he received more instructions and recommendations from the head of the Soviet Red Army, Narkom Voenmor M.V. Frunze. Frunze briefed him on the desired state of the relations of the *polpred* with the Mongolian military. He also told Nikiforov that the Dujun (Military Governor) in Sinkiang was openly hostile to the

¹⁵ Tatarenko 1994. See, for example, documents ## 146 and 152 (pp. 547 and 567).

¹⁶ RGASPI, ibid., l. 7ob.

Soviets and suggested that "all measures should be taken to replace him by a representative of Kuomintang". "Our task in the Mongolian Army", he added further, "is confined mainly to intense political education. With the help of the army political group we can influence the military policy of Mongolia. We resort to the same tactics with regard to Fyn".¹⁷

The question of Soviet arms supplies to the Chinese revolutionary armies—those of Feng Yu-hsian, who had his headquarters at Kalgan, and of the Kuomintang generals, who, since July 1925, had acted under the auspices of the National Government of the Chinese Republic established by Canton—must have also been touched upon in the conversation, since the weaponry was to be delivered through the territory of Outer Mongolia. In addition they must have discussed Frunze's recent project for setting up a special international force in Mongolia to reinforce the Kuominchun Army.

As regards the promised Soviet military aid to Tibet, it was not yet forthcoming due to the absence of any formal Moscow-Lhasa agreement to that end. However, Nikiforov was already contemplating the possibility of arms transportation to Lhasa via a trade agency he was going to set up in Shachow in Kansu province. He would refer to this plan in one of the entries in his business notebook entitled "The State Priority Issues" as follows:

Since we will inevitably have to provide Tibet with the military equipment, it is necessary to create a joint-stock trading company for the Soviet trade with Tibet which should be assigned the task of arms supply to the Tibetan army.¹⁸

There is highly intriguing evidence coming from Kozlov, who claimed in his travel diary that a caravan "laden with items most needed by Tibet and its newly established army" proceeded from Urga to Lhasa at the end of 1925.¹⁹ Kozlov obtained this information first hand from the Tibetan Donyer in Urga, so it appears quite reliable. There is also a cryptic telegram which was received from Tientsin by the British trade agent at Gyantse on 7 September. This informed one "General Gingle" in Lhasa (Tsarong?) about a dispatch of some "Russian goods" to him and requested 6000 *lans* for these. The

¹⁷ Ibid., l. 9ob.

¹⁸ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 44, l. 52.

¹⁹ Kozlov's expedition diary, Notebook IV, entry for 27 December 1925.

money was to be paid to "a Bakabasheff" in Tientsin.²⁰ (Could it be Naran Bakbushev, one of the supposed Kalmyk members of the Borisov Mission?) However, it would probably be too hasty a conclusion to take these two references as proof of some secret Soviet arms delivery to Lhasa. It will be recalled at this point that there was a busy traffic in contraband arms between Mongolia and Tibet in the 1920s. The weapons were largely the trophies from Baron Ungern's days—they were usually purchased by Buryat and Mongolian lamas in Transbaikalia (Troitskosavsk Aimak), smuggled across the Mongolian border, and then resold to the Tibetans in Urga, who carried them further to their homeland. The Mongolian authorities, of course, tried to stop this illegal business, and their security service is known to have arrested a large group of traffickers in 1925.²¹ Kozlov, for his part, recounts a semi-detective story of how his Tibetan friend Galsan, posing as the Dalai Lama's emissary, purchased "a small consignment of arms" in Troitskosavsk in late 1923. This was detained by the Soviet customs officers at Altan Bulak, so the Tibetan had to turn to Kozlov for help. The latter approached immediately Elbek Rinchno, who then held a key military post in the new Mongolian army, asking him to issue Galsan a safe-conduct pass providing for the storage and further transportation of the weapons to Lhasa, since they "belonged" to the Dalai Lama. How the story ended is not clear, yet it can be presumed that the Dalai Lama's "property" was finally retrieved by Galsan and sent to Lhasa, an event described by Kozlov as "the beginning of a friendly intercourse" between Soviet Russia and Tibet.

Before his departure for Urga, Nikiforov also had a few meetings with Dorzhiev in Moscow in August 1925. They mostly discussed the Buryat's project for connecting Mongolia and Tibet by a series of *urton* or post-relay stations, to be established between Urga and Nagchu. "The sad eyes of the old man showed that he spent his whole life in the search of rescue for a collapsing Tibet", Nikiforov wrote after one of his conversations with Dorzhiev. "It's apparent that Tibet is in the firm British clutches now. The Dalai Lama wants

²⁰ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1088, p. 293 (confidential letter of PO in Sikkim to Secretary, Government of India, 21 September 1925).

²¹ NARB, f. 1, op. 1, d. 657, l. 74 ("O sovremennoem polozhenii lamstva v Mongoli?").

to keep closer to the USSR, yet at the same time he is scared of the British". And he then added in brackets: "They hold him fast, but we'll measure swords with them"; a statement which looks like an expression of the essence of Soviet Tibetan policy.²²

Dorzhiev also characterized the Dalai Lama's representative in Urga, the Donyer Lozang Chorden in the following words: "He is too young and inexperienced, therefore I ask you to give him support, if need be".

* * *

Having arrived in the Mongolian capital early in October, Nikiforov immediately set to the practical realization of the tasks he had been assigned by Chicherin. His job, in the situation where Outer Mongolia was gradually becoming a Soviet protectorate—or "satellite", to use Owen Lattimore's term, conveniently combined the functions of a Soviet diplomatic and trade representative with those of an unofficial political advisor to the Mongolian government. The new Mongolian administrative machinery, largely modeled after the Soviet pattern, was actually geared at all levels by numerous Soviet advisors. According to the Mongolian historian Baabar, "Any Soviet representative to Mongolia was regarded by Mongolian leadership as a leader whose words were to be obeyed at once. Government advisor Rinchno, plenipotentiary Vasiliev, first secretary of the plenipotentiary mission Yudin, Communist Youth International envoy Starkov, representative to Western Mongolia Natsov, Chief of Internal Security Baturin, and many others, were high authorities in Mongolia".²³ But Nikiforov, to an even larger degree than his predecessor, A.N. Vasiliev, was also to become the chief promoter of Moscow's Tibetan schemes, with their special emphasis on trade, which was seen as the most powerful tool for extending Soviet influence to Lhasa.

The Soviets made their first step in this direction in the early half of 1925, attempting to set up a trade agency in Soochow, half way between Mongolia and Tibet. According to Kozlov, Vasiliev discussed this plan with him confidentially in June, and then they made an automobile trip from Urga to Soochow to reconnoiter the road between these two places. The Soviet choice of Soochow, a center

²² RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 7, l. 9, 10 (entries for 20 and 25 August 1925).

²³ Baabar 1999, p. 265.

of brisk trade located on a caravan road leading from Sinkiang into the heartland of China, is easy to understand. The agency was to serve as an "observation post" (in Kozlov's words): an "observer" installed there could easily "watch" the roads in both directions—the ones running eastward to Lanchow and those leading to Dzungaria and further into Soviet Turkestan. The same person could also monitor the movement of pilgrim caravans operating between Urga and Lhasa, which certainly attached great strategic importance to Soochow. However, judging by Chicherin's later instructions to Nikiforov, the Soviets must have changed their mind at some point, as they then talked about establishing a trade agency in Sachow in the north-eastern corner of the same Kansu province. Sachow was also a trading post, connected to both Hami in Sinkiang and Lanchow, the main town of Kansu, though certainly of less significance than Soochow.

Kozlov's travel diary provides us with some further evidence revealing this secret Soviet scheme for "a closer approach to Tibet". In late December 1925, Kozlov was visited by one of Nikiforov's assistants, the secretary of the trade agency, B.I. Merkulov. The latter wanted to obtain from such a great expert on Central Asia as Petr Kuzmich Kozlov some information on Yum-baise, a minor Mongolian settlement with a Buddhist monastery of the same name at its center, which bordered the Gobi. This, Merkulov told Kozlov, was to become "an observation post" for the time being, and he added that later on a Soviet consulate might be established there that would "extend its influence up to Inner Mongolia and the Chinese territory".²⁴ The Soviet official, according to Kozlov, was at that time thoroughly studying the book about his (Kozlov's) journey in Mongolia and Kham in 1899–1902,²⁵ which clearly suggests that the Soviets had begun to take great interest in this area, which separated Outer Mongolia from Tibet.

About the same time, incidentally, the great traveller was approached by some suspicious representatives of the "Sherst" company, who were trying to extend their activities deeper into China. (This company is believed to have served as a cover for Soviet secret agents, and Kozlov was particularly indignant when one of them suddenly

²⁴ Kozlov's expedition diary, Notebook IV, entry for 23 December 1925.

²⁵ Kozlov 1948a.

started to ask him all sorts of "improper questions" which apparently had little to do with either economy or trade).

Merkulov's survey resulted in a special report which he submitted to his superiors in late March 1926. Communication between Yum-beise, some 60 versts away from the border of Inner Mongolia, and Tibet, Merkulov wrote, was normally maintained by means of camels, exclusively so in the period from fall to spring. Beyond that time Mongolia remained practically isolated from Tibet, mainly because camels were not fit for travelling in the summer season, as they could not endure the excessive heat of the Gobi desert. Motor cars too could run between Yum-beise and Tsaidam, though in winter time only. At other times the road was practically impassable for motor transport due to the numerous salty marches and rivers on its way. Neither was such a journey safe. The biggest problem was the stretch of road leading through the Majin Shan mountains, some 300 verst south of Yum-beise. This area was difficult to traverse not because of its elevated terrain, but because it was inhabited by people who had formerly belonged to the Ja Lama gangs, and they still regularly harassed passing caravans. (This information was provided by a Mongolian conductor of the Borisov caravan, Jarantai). Thus, Merkulov concluded, the road to Tibet would remain extremely dangerous unless the Majin Shan area was cleared of the robbers.²⁶

The number one task on Nikiforov's Tibetan agenda, however, was to arrange with the Mongolian Government to send their diplomatic mission to Lhasa. The mission, though formally posing as Mongolian, was in fact to represent Soviet interests and be headed by a Soviet official, to be appointed by Narkomindel. This was no doubt one of the craftiest designs of Soviet diplomacy, unprecedented, so it seems, in world diplomatic practice.

The blueprint of this new Soviet mission was again drafted by Chicherin, who apparently sought to make further use of the Soviet-Mongolian connection, as well as of the Russian Buddhists. The ultimate goal of the venture was to effect a political alliance between Mongolia and Tibet by inducing the Dalai Lama to conclude an agreement of friendship with the new Mongolian People's Government.

²⁶ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 149 (Merkulov's report to Nikiforov, 23 March 1926).

There was, however, a more practical objective to be pursued—an exchange of diplomatic representatives between Lhasa and Ulan-Bator, something which would allow the Soviets to install their own agent in Lhasa.

Immediately after coming to Ulan-Bator, Nikiforov discussed this project in broad terms with the Mongolian premier, Tseren-Dorji, and the Foreign Minister, Gevabalchir. The Mongolian leaders did not raise any objections to it. On 8 October, Tseren-Dorji informed the Soviet polpred that the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (TsK MNRP), having examined the question of sending a Mongolian plenipotentiary to Tibet, had passed a resolution to that effect. And, he added, in a less official tone, that "although Mongolia doesn't have much to do in Lhasa, yet it is important for us to have our representative there". Nikiforov then asked the premier to fix a date for the departure of the mission, but Tseren-Dorji sidestepped the question by saying only that the venture would be rather costly and therefore needed financing. "I told [Tseren-Dorji and Gevabalchir] to draw an estimate of travelling expenses", Nikiforov recorded in his diary, "and promised to send them an estimate of the mission maintenance from my side. We also talked of the necessity of establishing a mail-service link with Tibet and decided to set up a committee to discuss Dorzhiev's project".²⁷

The discussion of the projected mission continued between Nikiforov, Tseren-Dorji, Gevabalchir and Dorligjav (Mongolia's new Foreign Minister) until the end of the year. In the meantime a member of the Narkomindel Board ("Kollegia"), S.I. Aralov, presumably acting on Chicherin's instructions, submitted the proposals for a new Soviet mission to Lhasa to the Politburo. "Considering the current political situation in Tibet, as well as the results achieved by the Tibetan expedition which had returned from its year and a half journey this May, the Narkomindel deems it necessary and timely to raise the question of a dispatch to Lhasa in the near future of the unofficial Soviet representation in the guise of the representation of the Mongolian People's Republic".²⁸ Such a mission, according to Aralov, was to be headed nominally by "a suitable candidate from the Mongols", appointed by the Mongolian government, whereas in reality "it will be directed by our counsellor, attached to the Representation". The

²⁷ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 149, l. 15 (entry for 8 October 1925).

²⁸ APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 739, l. 62.

program for the joint Soviet-Mongolian Mission included seven main points; which we will review below:

"1) Setting up a channel of reliable, quick and regular information on the situation in Tibet via an intermediate observation post, the Soviet consulate, to be opened soon in Lanchow-fu in the centre of the Chinese Province of Kansu, close to the north-eastern border of Tibet, and by various other means such as through the Buryat and Kalmyk lamas, pilgrims and traders, etc."

(So the Soviet choice fell finally on Lanchow, the administrative center of Kansu Province, some 1,800 km away from the Russian border, although it is not clear whether the Bolsheviks thereby abandoned their earlier plans for setting up a trade agency either in Soochow or Sachow. The strategic, political and economic importance of the town had originally been highlighted by Dr. Badmaev, who, as one will remember, proposed to connect Lanchow by rail-road with the Trans-Siberian main line to make it accessible from the Russian territory, and again later by V.F. Ladygin, a participant in Kozlov's Mongol-Kham expedition.²⁹ Thus it looks as if some of the ideas and recommendations of the notorious Tsarist secret operator were finally appreciated by Soviet strategists).

- "2) Dissemination of correct information on the real state of things in the USSR and Mongolia, on the international situation, the character of the British policy in Tibet, etc.;
- 3) Counselling of the Dalai Lama and the Russophile (nationalist) group on the questions of the current general and economic policies; rendering assistance to and strengthening of the growing Russophile national political faction, headed by the Dalai Lama;
- 4) Clearing up the relations between Tibet and the Mongolian People's Republic and preparation for the conclusion of an agreement between them, similar to the agreement signed in 1912;
- 5) Making arrangements for providing artillery equipment and military instructors from Mongolia, Kalmykia and Buryatia, to the Tibetan Army; for sending Tibetan youth to schools in the USSR and Mongolia for military and general training; for modernization of the local military industrial works; and for drawing Tibet

²⁹ In his Memorandum to the Tsar Alexandre III of 13 February 1893, Badmaev emphasized the political importance of Lanchowfu (Semennikov 1925, p. 52). See also Ladygin 1902.

into participation in the exhibition of the Oriental Buddhist culture in the USSR, etc.;

A brief comment on the Buddhist exhibition. This was actually a long-cherished dream of Agyan Dorzhiev. He tried to realize it several times in the early half of 1920s, but with no success, even on his final attempt in 1925, when he had the support from the Russian Academy of Sciences (Stcherbatsky and Oldenburg), which was then celebrating, with much pomp, its 200 anniversary. The purpose of the exhibition, to be staged on the premises of the Buddhist temple in Leningrad, was to demonstrate to the Soviet public that Buddhism was essentially an atheistic philosophy and not a "religion" at all. Dorzhiev, however, failed to raise funds for his educational show. On June 25 of that year, he wrote sadly to the head of the Buryat Buddhist church (the Bandida Khambo-lama): "With the purpose of providing an illustration, and encouraging many a scholar to discuss the fact that the divine Buddhist religion cannot be put on the same plane with other religions, it has been decided to organize an exhibition in the Petrograd temple. We have planned to arrange everything in a big way, but, because of the paucity of funds, I remain in a puzzling fix now".³⁰

The program concluded with the following points:

- 6) Carrying out an economic survey of Tibet to find out the needs of its market and organizing the export-import operations between Tibet, the USSR and MPR with a view to excluding British goods [from the Tibetan market];
- 7) Clearing up the current state and character of the Buddhist movement in India, as well as the possibility of establishing contacts with it in order to strengthen the position of Tibet in her national liberation struggle and employ the semi-independent states between India and Tibet in the capacity of buffer formations or allies".³¹

The new Soviet proposals to Tibet, as is clear to see, largely overlapped those mapped out by Chicherin for the Borisov Mission two years before. Yet there was something new this time, such as point seven, speaking of a possible alignment of anti-British lamaist forces in Tibet with "the Buddhist movement" in India, presumably with

³⁰ NARB, f. 1, op. 1, d. 657, l. 13. See also "Buddiiskaia vystavka", *Krasnaia Gazeta* (evening news issue), Leningrad, # 110, 9 May 1925.

³¹ APRF, ibid., ll. 62-63.

the Buddhist communities in opposition to the British Raj.

The same point seven also suggests that the Soviets had revived Chapchaev's old scheme for raising the populace in the Himalayan buffer states (Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal) against the British. If so, they might have well considered the supply of arms to these frontier tribes via Tibet at some point in future. Another important remark needs to be made here: the Soviet leaders, despite the failure of their talks with Lhasa in 1924, still regarded the Dalai Lama as "head of the Russophile national faction" in Tibet. This was wishful thinking, of course, but it seriously distorted the Soviet perception of the Tibetan situation. True, Tibet's "public opinion" was split between Anglophiles and Anglophobes, but that does not necessarily imply that the latter were all looking in the northern direction, toward "the great Soviet protector of the oppressed Eastern nations". However Marxist-Leninist doctrine viewed the world as painted only in black and white colours, with no half-tints in between, so the anti-British Tibetans, according to this thinking, must be basically pro-Soviet. Hence, the Dalai Lama, who crushed the Anglophilic military clique in his country, would automatically become the head of the "Russophile national faction"!

The project further offered a number of formal "pretexts" under which the Mongolian Mission could be dispatched to Tibet. These were as follows:

- 1) The need to settle some disagreement between the Mongolian and Tibetan clerics relating to their "ecclesiastic property";
- 2) protection of the interests of the Mongolian colony, as well as that of the Buryats and Kalmyks, in Tibet;
- 3) maintenance and promotion of [Mongol-Tibetan] trade and cultural ties, settlement of customs issues and other questions relating to the activity of the Tibetan traders in Mongolia, and
- 4) representation of the religious interests of the [Mongolian] segment [in Lhasa], in the same way the Dalai Lama has his permanent representation in Ulan-Bator in the body of his spiritual representative; maintenance and development of the historical mutual [Mongol-Tibetan] friendship, originating from the common interests of Mongolia and Tibet, being of the same ethnus and embracing the same religion".³²

³² Ibid., l. 64.

However Aralov's strongest argument for sending a Soviet mission to Lhasa was the concurrent British activity in Tibet:

Before Britain seized the foremost commanding positions in Tibet, it is imperative to counteract her aggression with all our available means, and therefore we should send without any further delay [our] unofficial representation to Tibet. Our work in Tibet will meet with especially favourable conditions, as compared to those of Britain and China. . . . The feelings [of Tibet] for the USSR, being far more positive than towards Tsarist Russia, are becoming stronger and they must remain strong in the future.³³

In conclusion Aralov requested the Politburo to allocate 24,355 US dollars for the maintenance of the mission, in accordance with the appended "Estimate of expenses".³⁴ The staff of the Soviet-Mongolian representation was to include five persons: a plenipotentiary, a counsellor, a secretary, an interpreter of Russian, Tibetan and Mongolian languages, and a clerk, who were to stay in Tibet for a 12 month period. The liaison of "the embassy" with the Center was to be maintained via Kalgan, either by telegraph or by sending couriers in two stages: from Lhasa to Lanchow and from Lanchow to Kalgan. The Narkomindel also asked for "special funds", money for presents to the Dalai-Lama and other leading Tibetans, for intelligence acquisition, as well as for representation purposes.³⁵ This paragraph of the Estimate was detailed as follows:

"A: Presents to

- 1) the Tsogchen [a great assembly of monks, presumably that of the Drepung monastery—A.A.]—\$500;
- 2) the Samlo Khamtsen [a monk fraternity at the Gomang Datsang to which the Mongolians, Buryats and Kalmyks belonged—A.A.]—\$100;
- 3) the Khalka-Mitsen (one of the units in the Khamtsen)—\$100;
- 4) the Dalai Lama:
 - a) at the first reception—\$300;
 - b) at the New Year—\$300;
 - c) at his birthday—\$100;
 - d) on the day of Lhasa Monlam—\$200;

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., ll. 67–69.

³⁵ Ibid., l. 68.

e) on the day of official reception in the Winter Palace, twice a year—\$400;

5) the Longchen, Kalons (ministers), and Chigyab Khembo (minister of the Dalai Lama's Court)—\$600.

B: Intelligence Acquisition—\$400.

C: Representation expenses—\$250.

Total: \$3250.

The question of the Soviet-Mongolian mission to Lhasa was then included twice in the agenda of Politburo's weekly sessions, on 7 and 14 January 1926, but on both occasions its consideration was postponed to a later date, upon Chicherin's request. The reason for the delay was that the Narkom was finalizing his project at that time with the Mongolian side, namely the Chairman of TsIK MNRP, Damba-Dorji, who had just come for an official visit to Moscow. On 17 January, just a few days before the next Politburo meeting, Chicherin forwarded a letter to this "Highest Instance" which added more weight to Aralov's arguments:

An uprising has erupted in Tibet against the Anglophilic clique which seized all power in the country. If we don't hurry up, some more developments might take place, so that Britain, by means of bribes and by attracting the material interests [of the Tibetans], can usurp power again.

The question of British influence in Tibet is of tremendous importance for all Buddhist countries, in particular for the Mongolian People's Republic and our autonomous republics with the prevailing Buddhist population. Through the medium of the Tibetan government Britain can exert a hostile and corrupting influence in the entire sphere of Buddhist nations.³⁶

As a result, the Politburo, having met at its session on 21 January 1926, approved "the Narkomindel's proposals for the dispatch to Lhasa in the near future of the unofficial Soviet representation in the guise of the representation of the Mongolian People's Republic", and it also allocated 20,000 gold roubles for its maintenance.³⁷ This decision was then communicated to the Mongolian premier via Nikiforov. Tseren-Dorji took the news in his stride, saying that the

³⁶ Ibid., l. 72.

³⁷ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 541 (Protokol 5, point 6). The Politburo decision comes from the "Osobaia papka" (special top secret file).

Mongolian government, for its part, "would also allocate in such a case 20,000" for the mission.³⁸ (This sum, given in gold roubles again, made roughly \$40,000).

The key persons on the mission were four—two from the Mongolian and two from the Soviet side. The nominal head, bearing the title of "Elchin Said" (Mong. "ambassador"), was Gomboidchin, to be assisted by a secretary, Amulang (as their names are given in Soviet documents). Both of them were to be appointed by the Mongolian Foreign Ministry. Originally, the Mongols wanted to place at the head of the mission a Buryat emigrant, Tseden-Ishi Gochitsky, who had formerly worked for Comintern and who now chaired the Board of the Montsencoop. Yet Nikiforov objected to this, saying that "the plenary powers of ambassador were incompatible with those of a Montsencoop official". So Gotchitsky had to be relieved of his post as head of the Montsencoop in March 1926. Nonetheless, he was not to lead the mission. It appears that Moscow had some serious doubts as to Gochitsky's political loyalty, so Tseren-Dorji had to search for a more reliable candidate than the Buryat.

The real leader of the mission was a Kalmyk, Arashi Chapchaev, formally employed as the Embassy councillor. He was assisted by two more Kalmyks, Matsak Bimbaev and Shagdyr Lundukov, both former instructors of the Mongolian Army, who were to serve as an escort, and one Buryat ex-lama, Jigme-Dorji Barduev, a veteran of the Borisov Mission.

Arashi Chapchaevich Chapchaev was born in 1890 into a family of nomadic Kalmyk cattle-breeders from the Malo-Derbet *ulus*. From an early age he had dreamt of becoming a teacher, to promote education among the Kalmyks. His dream came true in 1912 after he had graduated in Kazan with a diploma as a "people's teacher" (*narodny uchitel*), from a prestigious teacher's college for non-Russians. Since that time Chapchaev had been teaching continuously in a primary school in his native Kalmykia, until March 1917, when, responding to the call of the February revolution in Russia, he turned to political activity. He was elected a member of the Malo-Derbet *ulus* executive committee, a local administrative body. His political orientation by that time was already largely pro-Bolshevik, although it was not until 1919 that he would join the Bolshevik party. After the

³⁸ Nikiforov diary entry, 30 January 1926.

1917 October coup, the Bolsheviks placed Chapchaev at the head of their government in Kalmykia—the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet deputies of the Kalmyk toilers (KalmTsIK), in July 1918. He held this high governmental post until 1924, with a short hiatus in 1921–1922, when he participated in the suppression of the anti-Bolshevik Kronstadt mutiny. Chapchaev's other notable accomplishment from this early period was assisting S.S. Petrovsky, deputy head of the Commissariat for Nationalities, to draft Lenin's well-known appeal "To the Kalmyk brethren", issued on 22 July 1919.

Chapchaev, though fully sharing communist ideals and ardently working for their realization, was not, however, blind to all the excesses of Bolshevism. He spoke out openly against Red Army vandalism and marauding during the civil war, which greatly antagonized the Kalmyks and scared them away from the Soviets. He also supported the Kalmyk re-emigration movement and tried to put an end to the Kalmyk's anti-Bolshevik resistance through peaceful negotiations with their leaders. This made him a target for severe criticism by the uncompromising party functionaries, who labeled Chapchaev "an advocate of the steppe banditism".

The "nationalist deviation" in Chapchaev's work began to seriously annoy Moscow, as the popular Kalmyk leader became too independent and unruly. As a result, in late April 1924, soon after Lenin's death, Chapchaev was removed from his post in Kalmykia. At the same time the Central authorities "encouraged" him to take a three-year course of Marxism-Leninism at the Communist Academy in Moscow, perhaps hoping that this would remedy his political bias. Chapchaev graduated from the Academy in mid-1926, by which time he had already received his diplomatic assignment personally from Chicherin.³⁹

Apart from the tasks listed in the official expedition program as approved by the Politburo, Chapchaev was given an extra one by the Narkom—to try to "turn out" of Lhasa "the British agent" Zambo Khaglyshev.⁴⁰ For security reasons, Chapchaev was to pose as a Kalmyk *bakshi* (religious teacher) during the journey, while his younger companion, Matsak Bimbaev, was to play the role of a disciple. According

³⁹ Re Chapchaev see Naberukhin 1990.

⁴⁰ AMB RK, file 422-R, l. 122. Chapchaev's interrogation transcript, 28 September 1937.

to Bimbaev, the Kalmyks also had another cover-story to disguise their identity while in Lhasa, they posed as "Kashmiri traders".⁴¹

Matsak Bimbaev's real name was Naran Tonheevich Manzhinov. He was born in a poor Kalmyk fisherman's family in 1900. In his memoirs Bimbaev traced his ancestry to the "black bone" Kalmyks or *har yasta*, the lowest class of Kalmyk society.⁴² To earn a living after his father's death in 1913 the boy had had to take a job in the local (*khoton's*) fishing cooperative. At first Naran worked as a cook and later, after he turned 17, as an auxiliary worker trailing the sweep-nets. In December 1918, after the Bolshevik revolution, as soon as the 2nd congress of the Kalmyk Soviets announced mobilisation, Naran, like many of his young fellow-villagers, volunteered for the Red Army. They did so not because of their sympathy for the Bolsheviks, but rather because every recruited soldier received a horse with a harness, which was a real treasure for any Kalmyk. This was the beginning of Bimbaev's life-long military career. He was subsequently enlisted in the newly formed Red Kalmyk cavalry regiment under Khorti Kanukov and Vasily Khomutnikov. These two commanding officers or "commissars" taught him many useful things and, what is more, as he would proudly claim years later, they made him "a real Bolshevik".

With his Red cavalry regiment Bimbaev fought many battles against the Whites in Russia in 1919–1920, and in early 1921, along with a group of Kalmyk junior commanders, he was sent "on an international mission" to Mongolia, to assist fellow Mongolians to liberate their country. It was then that he was given a new name, one he would retain for the rest of his life. Matsak Bimbaev took part in all the major battles of the joint Soviet-Mongolian force, including the Urga campaign of June 1921. After the expulsion of the "White Baron" from Urga, Bimbaev, like other Kalmyks, remained in Mongolia in the capacity of a military instructor, attached to one of the squadrons of the newly assembled First Cavalry Regiment of the Mongolian People's Army. In January 1923, he participated in the liquidation of a "counter-revolutionary" plot by the Yeguuzer Khutuktu in Eastern Mongolia, serving as a member of a special shock squad headed by Choibalsan and Baldan-Dorji, head of the Mongolian State Security.

⁴¹ Author's interview with Matsak Bimbaev, Elista, 14 April 1993.

⁴² Bimbaev 1983.

Since his time in Mongolia, Bimbaev had been particularly friendly with Choibalsan—their friendship was further cemented by Bimbaev's marriage to the latter's sister, though that marriage turned out to be a short-lived one. On 11 September 1923 he, together with Choibalsan and other Mongolian commanders, left for Moscow to enter the Military Academy. There the young Kalmyk, as well as his Mongolian comrades, was enrolled in the preparatory class, which he attended until the summer of 1926. In his published book of memoirs "My Military Destiny" Bimbaev makes only a passing mention of his being sent then "on a long-term official errand", the details of which he would disclose confidentially years later to some of his interviewers, including myself. This is what Matsak Bimbaev told the present author of how he had got on the Lhasa Mission in the spring of 1926:

I was an auditor of the Military Academy in Moscow when I received a secret assignment from the Intelligence Department of the Red Army. I was to participate in the Tibetan Mission. The persons who supervised the mission from the military's side were Berzin and his assistant Bortnevsky.⁴³ They briefed me about my task. They also supplied me with a German camera and film for taking pictures in Thubet [Bimbaev would pronounce the word in the peculiar Mongolian fashion—A.A.]. Chapchaev, for his part, was instructed by Borisov at the Narkomindel office in Moscow. He was to fulfil the duties of an advisor to the Mongolian head of the mission. I also met that person and received some instructions from him, namely to strike up contacts among the common people and tell them how good life is in the Soviet Russia. We were given new names for the journey—Tsepag Dorji, Chapchaev, and Gombo, myself.

The mission was led by two Mongolian officials, the "Elchin Said" Gomboidchin, and his secretary Amulang. Gomboidchin, as far as I remember, came from some Eastern Aimak, today it's Choibalsan Aimak. He had a princely title of "gun" and was a very pious man. It seems that formerly he was a teacher. Apart from them, there were eight more Mongolians in the delegation, all of them Buddhist pilgrims from different aimaks, and not officials of the Foreign Ministry. The purpose of the mission was to negotiate the exchange of ambassadors between Mongolia and Tibet, as the countries had not yet entered into diplomatic relations".⁴⁴

⁴³ Ian Karlovich Berzin (1889–1938), whose real name is Kuzis Peteris, of Latvian origin, was head of the intelligence department (Razvedupr) of the Red Army Headquarters, later known as Chief Intelligence Directorate (GRU), between 1924–1935 and in 1937. Bortnevsky could be Bronislav Stanislavovich Bortnovsky, a senior official of the Headquarters.

⁴⁴ Interview with Matsak Bimbaev, Elista, 14 April 1993.

There is reason, however, to doubt Bimbaev's identification of the mission's leader as a "Mongolian prince" (gun). Kozlov, who had a chance to talk to Gomboidchin in Ulan-Bator in September of the same year, claimed that the person was a Buryat (!). He asked the Russian traveller many a question about Tibet, which would seem rather strange for a pious Mongolian Buddhist, especially considering the fact that Kozlov himself had never gone farther than the north-eastern fringes of the country. This suggests that the few things Bimbaev told me about Gomboidchin were probably a part of the latter's official cover story.

According to Chapchev, both Gomboidchin and Amulang were "Sinophiles and champions of the restoration of theocratic rule in Outer Mongolia".⁴⁵ It is well known that in the years following the Bogdo-Gegen's death in 1924 the Mongolian People's government embarked upon the gradual dismantling of the "feudal-lamaist" (i.e. theocratic) infrastructure in the country. Its first steps were to begin taxing lamas, as well as the monasteries' cattle (which made up, incidentally, one third of the entire Mongolian cattle stock of 12 million head), and liquidation of the Bogdo's Great Shabi Department, which consisted of a large number of his monk-serfs, or *shabis*. Then, in 1926, the government issued a decree which separated Church and State, as a result of which thousands of Buddhist novices, youngsters who had not yet attained their full majority, were barred from monastic schools. Such a restrictive policy was clearly a deviation from the earlier pledge by the MNRP, written down in its 1921 Rules, that the party would work "for the strengthening and promotion of the Mongolian state and religion".

Another severe blow to the Mongolian Buddhist church was the abolition of its highest incarnations—*khutukhtus* and *khubilgans*, including the Bogdo-Gegen's next (ninth) incarnation. This measure, however, caused strong opposition from the still powerful monastic segment. At first the clerics tried to invite the Panchen Lama to Mongolia with a view to installing him on the empty Bogdo's throne, an initiative which even received some backing from the party's right wing. But the Panchen Lama did not respond to their invitation.⁴⁶ Then,

⁴⁵ AMB RK, file 422-R, l. 121. Interrogation transcript of Chapchaev, 28 September 1937.

⁴⁶ The idea of inviting the Panchen Lama to the MPR was suggested by Tseben Jamtsarano, see Information letter from A. Kallinikov to Karakhan, 30 June 1927, AVPRF, f. Karakhan's Secretariat, op. 10, portfel' 178, papka 32, l. 140.

in the summer of 1926, the lamas discovered a baby in the locality of the Iro river whom they identified as the Bogdo Gegen's incarnation, an event which profoundly stirred up the Mongolian population. The MNRP leaders found themselves in a very awkward situation, as this happened on the verge of their mission to Lhasa. Finally they chose to resort to a truly Solomonic decision—to address the question to the Dalai Lama: concluding that if he confirmed the reincarnation, the MNRP and the Mongolian Government would not object to it! As a result, the 3rd Great Khuruldan convened in Urga (now Ulan-Bator-Khoto) in early November 1926 resolved to abstain for a time from inviting the Bogdo's 9th incarnation from Tibet since it was not mentioned in the sacred books, and to enquire the Dalai Lama's opinion on the matter. The decision was no doubt designed to make a good impression on the Lama, by demonstrating to him that People's, or Red Mongolia, remained essentially a religious state. The same Khuruldan also passed another important resolution which was to justify the dispatch of Gomboidchin's embassy to Lhasa: it resolved to establish contacts with Tibet and to seek an agreement of friendship with that country via a representative of the Mongolian Government.⁴⁷

Religion apart, the Urga authorities were also deeply concerned about the escalation of hostilities in China, in view of their ailing relations with Peking. In particular, they feared that Feng Yu-hsiang might turn his Nationalist armies against Outer Mongolia. Nikiforov therefore had to interfere and try to "smooth over contradictions" between the MNRP and Marshal Feng. He insisted that the Mongols should come to an understanding with this Soviet ally, which was imperative because the arm supplies to Feng were carried by way of Mongolia.⁴⁸

Having won several victories at the end of 1925, Marshal Feng, in whom Moscow had invested heavily, was then badly defeated by the superior forces of Chang Tso-lin, and had to retreat in the north-western direction in the early months of 1926. On March 22, the Chinese warlord suddenly appeared in Urga, together with his family. He said he was going to the USSR to learn more about the Soviet system, but he also intended to request the Kremlin for more

⁴⁷ Clause 9 of the Resolution of the 3rd Great Khuruldan (AVPRF, Eastern Department Rezidentura po Mongoli).

⁴⁸ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 149, ll. 62–63, Nikiforov to Chicherin, undated (presumably September 1925).

financial and military assistance. "Fyn asked me", Nikiforov recorded in his Urga diary after his meeting with the Marshal, "to raise before the Soviet Government via Karakhan the question of granting him a 4 million rouble loan for the needs of his army. And he offered at once as guarantee either Peking's share of income from the Chinese Eastern Railway or the 6 million rouble indemnity for the Boxer Rising, the money that will be at his disposal when he comes to power. I agreed to fulfil his request".⁴⁹

Feng was indeed badly in need of Soviet arms and money, as his military strength was by far inferior to that of his adversaries in Northern China, Generals Chang Tso-lin and Wu Pei-fu. This forced him to considerably moderate his political ambitions and even to deviate from his firm stance on the Mongolian question, and he now made some declarations obviously designed to please the Kremlin leaders—claiming that he wanted to recognize the independence of Outer Mongolia and was also thinking about granting autonomy to Inner Mongolia.

At this very moment, preparations for the second Soviet Tibet expedition were already under way in Moscow, although Narkomindel quite unexpectedly encountered some difficulties in obtaining the allocated funds for the mission. Chicherin was annoyed, of course, as this meant that it would not be able to depart before the beginning of the summer season and would probably have to be postponed to the fall. He blamed it all on the lack of cooperation between Narkomindel's two divisions—the administrative unit headed by Aralov and the Far Eastern Department. In the meantime, in Ulan-Bator, the man in charge of mounting the expedition, Nikiforov, was not sitting idle. In July 1926 he sent a special agent to the Ordos-Kokonor-Tsaidam area to collect information on the trade (mostly wool) market there, as well as to reconnoiter the faster route to Tsaidam via Kalgan, Paotou, and Xinin.

Kalgan was a Chinese town where Feng Yu-hsiang had his headquarters and where the Soviets had established a consulate general under the 1924 Peking agreement. It was easily accessible from Ulan-Bator by a motor road which continued on to Lanchow. The distance of over 1,000 km. between Urga and Kalgan was usually covered by motor cars in just four days. The vehicles were provided

⁴⁹ Ibid., Nikiforov's diary entry, 6 April 1926.

by the Soviet-Mongolian-Chinese transport company set up in Kalgan in 1925 (at Feng's suggestion), under the auspices of the Soviet trade representative in Peking.

The agent was not actually a Soviet official but someone specially hired for the job by Nikiforov. This was Bulat Mukharain, who is already known to the reader. He did not return to Buryatia after his journey to Tibet but settled down in Ulan-Bator instead. There he was employed as an auditor at some newly established Mongolian financial institution, and he also maintained close contacts with the Soviet embassy.

Mukharain's solo expedition started at Kalgan. From there he took a train to Kuku-Khoto (Kukhot) in Inner Mongolia, and from Kuku-Khoto he proceeded further to Paotao, the railway terminal. At Paotou, the Buryat joined Feng's army and marched with it into the Ordos. Thence, in the company of three lamas and two *badarchins* (wandering monk pilgrims), he headed for the Kumbum monastery where he stayed for some time. His final destination was Kutluk-beise in Tsaidam. Mukharain returned to Urga by a different road, via Soochow, Yundun-beise and Zain-Shabi. The entire journey took him full 10 months. Gombozhab Tsybikov, who met Mukharain in Ulan-Bator in May 1927, briefly recorded in his diary some of his countryman's observations resulting from his expedition. There was a great amount of wool for sale in Kokonor which was of far better quality than Mongolian wool. In general the indigenous population of the Kokonor was badly in need of manufactured goods, especially hardware. By supplying these to them, Mukharain concluded, it would be easy to conquer the Kokonor local market. Politically, the locals were considered very ignorant, as they had been in the past. They had a distorted notion about the Mongolian revolution and were telling fabulous stories about the Khalka Mongols, such as, for example, that the latter had killed all the *noyons* (nobles) and lamas in their country, taken away their property and distributed it among the poor, and they also spoke of Russia's dominant influence in Outer Mongolia.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ G. Tsybikov, *Dnevnik poyazki v Urgu* (Urga Diary), 1927 in Tsybikov, G. 1981, p. 130.

The Soviet members of the Mongolian Mission arrived in Ulan-Bator in the summer of 1926. According to Narkomindel's original plans, the mission was to depart some time in August, but it was again delayed for several months and must have left only in the latter half of October, some time prior to the opening of the 3rd Great Khuruldan. As Matsak Bimbaev recalled:

We spent about three months in the Mongolian capital, the time required for equipping the caravan, receiving instructions, etc. All of us carried some quantity of arms for individual self-defence—revolvers, 5-lead rifles of Japanese make, one heavy and two light machine-guns, those with 32 cartridge drums of the Hotchkiss system. All these weapons were given away as presents to the Tibetans.

Since we were on an official mission, there was no need for us to be disguised as pilgrims. Still we were dressed in traditional Mongolian clothing, so-called *deels*. I remember that I wore a light yellow *deel*, and Chapchaev, a dark red one.

On arrival in Urga we were accommodated in different places—Chapchaev at the house of Amulang, and I stayed with Choibalsan, a good friend of mine. There was a large and motley Russian colony in Urga at that time consisting of Soviet military advisors, Comintern workers, trade agents, Buryat émigrés, as well as White Guard officers who formerly served under Ataman Semionov and Baron Ungern. Before we left, we received some last minute instructions from the Soviet ambassador.⁵¹

Chapchaev, for his part, supplies us with the names of people he associated closely with while in Ulan-Bator—Khomutnikov, Nikiforov, Kallinikov (chief editor of the Soviet newspaper “Izvestia Ulan-Bator-Khoto”), Amagaev (Comintern’s representative in Mongolia), and Losev (advisor in one of the Mongolian ministries). Sampilon, who, after he had resigned from his diplomatic post in Moscow, managed the “Mongoltrans” agency in Ulan-Bator, helped Chapchaev hire horses “for sending off his luggage in advance”—presumably to Yum-beise, where the Soviets had their trade representative.⁵² Chapchaev also met with a Soviet advisor in Kalgan, A.Ya. Klimov, who must have come to Ulan Bator to provide him with the latest information on Marshal Feng and his plans.⁵³ There is evidence that the

Soviet leaders were not happy with some of the initiatives of their ambitious ally, such as his designs for creating his own government on the Kuominchun-occupied territory in Central and Western China. “The separation of [several] provinces [from Peking]”, Nikiforov wrote to the Soviet Consul General in Kalgan, Fesenko, presumably in July 1926, “can be regarded by England as our aggression against Western China and hence used as a pretext to intensify her aggression against Tibet. And this might complicate the policy we are planning to pursue in Tibet. Besides, it may give cause for the British to escalate their aggression in the Kashgar-Urumchi area”.⁵⁴

Our knowledge of Chapchaev’s journey to Lhasa comes mainly from two sources: an extract from what seems to be his official report, discovered in the Nikiforov Collection at the former Party archive (RGASPI),⁵⁵ and Bimbaev’s oral account related to the present author. From Ulan-Bator to Yum-Baise the Mongolian Mission travelled in “Dodge” vehicles which must have been provided by Nikiforov. There the party switched to camels as means of transport. On 5 November they set on the road across the Gobi. According to Chapchaev, from Yum-beise the Mission proceeded under the cover of a large Tibetan merchant caravan consisting of nearly 200 camels. By moving no less than 10 hours daily, the travellers reached Shobuchin, the first settlement in Upper Mongolia, in just three weeks. In Shobuchin they changed half of their camels and continued in the direction of Shara Gol (Yellow river). The passage through the mountainous area (Sartyn) leading up to Tsaidam was a particularly hard one, and without exception all the mission members suffered badly from altitude sickness, especially Gomboidchin. His condition became critical when the caravan was passing over Khotandaban. “Gomboidchin’s life was hanging by a thread”, Chapchaev wrote in his report, “however the *Polpred* recovered, as soon as we had descended from the mountains into Tsaidam”. Overall, the stretch of journey between Yum-beise and Tsaidam was made by the travellers in 45 days.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Interview with Bimbaev, 14, 17 April 1993.

⁵² Chapchaev’s interrogation transcript, 28 September 1937, l. 121.

⁵³ There is a photograph in the GARF Collection which shows A.Ya. Klimov together with the members of the Soviet-Mongolian Mission in Ulan Bator, shortly before its departure.

⁵⁴ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1. d. 149, l. 200. Nikiforov to Fesenko, undated.

⁵⁵ Only this fragment from Chapchaev’s Final Report covering the mission journey from Ulan Bator to Lhasa is accessible to researchers now, see GRASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 42, ll. 12–17.

⁵⁶ Ibid., l. 14.

Bimbaev's account adds a few more curious details to Chapchaev's narrative:

There were 13 pack animals in our caravan corresponding to the number of the mission staff. It took us about a month to cross the Gobi. At night, we used to sleep in tents, so-called "maikhans", warmed by stoves placed in the middle. Though I preferred to sleep outside, making myself a bed between two camels—it felt so warm there as if you were lying between two stoves. During the journey I kept a diary—every morning before setting out I would spend a few minutes making a new entry into it.

That journal had remained with the Kalmyk for a long time after he had returned from Tibet. Surprisingly, his military bosses from Razvedupr never asked for it, having contented themselves with the official report he had submitted to them. But the diary was destroyed some time during the war when a bomb hit the house where Bimbaev lived with his family in Simferopol, on the Crimean peninsular.

In Tsaidam the way-worn travellers spent a month and a half, the time needed for rest, as well as to hire fresh camels for the final leg of the journey. In early February, the mission set out in the direction of the barren Chantang, or Northern Plateau, by a short route via Taijinar. "Everyone was very much afraid of that most difficult part of our travel", Chapchev noted in his report. "While moving across Sartyn [the term here applies to the Tibetan Plateau—A.A.], all members of the expedition felt sick. We buried one of our caravan-drivers at Dumbure. The doctor of Tibetan medicine got to Nagchu half dead, his body swollen all over. During our last two weeks in Sartyn I was so weak I could not even keep myself upright on the camel's back, so they tied me to the pack".⁵⁷ Matsak Bimbaev also said he had suffered much from headaches, yet he was tough: "I gradually got used to the [rarified] atmosphere", he told me and added philosophically: "One can get used to anything".

Of no less threat to the mission were militant Tibetan nomads, the Gologs, who earned their living mainly by robbing passing caravans and who did not recognize the Dalai Lama's authority over their territory. According to Chapchaev, the gangs of Gologs, consisting of some 50 to 200 men each, armed with primitive flint matchlocks, roamed within the uninhabited area of the Torai, Marco-

Polo, Kokushile and Dumbure ranges on Chantang's northern fringe. He remembered having met them thrice, yet the Gologs did not dare to attack the well-armed Mongolian caravan. Still, the danger they presented, not only to pilgrims' caravans but also to inhabitants of Upper Mongolia, was great, and it was only to increase with time. "Since the tide of the Chinese revolution has already reached Kansu and Szechuan", "the Gologs, these professional brigands . . . will surely try to obtain rifles of European make by whatever means. And then they will finally seize all the roads leading from Upper Mongolia to Tibet". This was a serious warning that the Kalmyk wanted to bring to the notice of the Soviet leaders.

In his report Chapchaev meticulously recorded all the Tibetan frontier posts he had passed by on the way to Lhasa. The first one was on the river Napchatai-Ulan-Morin, the second on the Mur-Usu river, the third in a place Kitan-Shirin, before the Tangla Pass, and the fourth on the Shagchu river. From this last post it was only 3 to 4 day travel to the main Tibetan customs post on the Northern Road to Lhasa, Nagchu. Each of these posts was guarded by a military cordon of 20 to 30 Tibetan soldiers who, like the Gologs, were armed with the flint matchlocks and big Tibetan swords. In winter time the first two cordons, stationed on the Napchatai-Ulan-Morin and Mur-Usu rivers, moved closer to the Gorbun-Khartsaga mountains, towards the first nomad settlements.⁵⁸

While passing through the Chantang, Chapchaev discovered some serious mistakes in the map he was using, the one originally drawn by Kozlov. For example, the Napchatai river flowed between the Tangla and Dumbure ranges, close to the Buha-Mongna (Lob Yak Samtse) mountains, and not between the Marco Polo and Kokushili ranges, as Kozlov's map showed. There was another river, Chumra (or Chumar), a tributary of Napchatai-Ulan-Morin, that Chapchaev found there, which meant that Kozlov placed the Napchatai river far to the north of its actual site. The map also did not indicate the important Golan Daban pass at the very entrance to Lhasa, well known to every pilgrim (an error which the Kalmyk explained by the fact that Kozlov had never travelled in this area). His general conclusion was that "Kozlov's map cannot be used for further expeditions of the Narkomindel as well as for scientific expeditions of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., l. 17.

other agencies, unless my aforementioned corrections are introduced into it".⁵⁹ (Getting ahead of the story, I should note here that Chapchaev would produce a detailed map of his entire journey, drawn to a 40 versts to 1 sm scale, that he would attach to his final report to Narkomindel).

The crossing of the Chantang up to Nagchu took another 40 days, not counting the time for occasional stops. The Mongolian Mission reached the threshold of "Forbidden Lhasa" on 15 March 1927. "It was a happy day", Chapchaev recorded in his report. "I quickly began to recover, and the doctor of the Tibetan medicine died in a few days". The last stretch of road, judging by Bimbaev's account, was fairly easy:

When we got to Nagchu we sent a message to the Dalai Lama. We spent about two weeks there before we proceeded further. From the Nagchu outpost we were travelling on mules. Approximately some 30 km. away from Lhasa we were met by two Tibetan officials, specially dispatched by the Dalai Lama to receive us.

It was these Tibetans who brought the party to Lhasa. This must have happened some time in the latter half of April. British sources also confirm the fact that the Mongolian Mission entered Lhasa without any problem. Its leader told the Nagchu district officer (*jongpen*) that they were Mongolians visiting Lhasa in connection with the death of the Great Lama of Urga. The *jongpen* reported this to the Potala and received orders from the Dalai Lama that the party could come. However, later on when it turned out that the Mongolians were disguised Bolshevik emissaries, the Tibetan Ruler dismissed the Nagchu *jongpen* for having allowed them to pass. Furthermore, he sent the Colonel commanding his body-guard with 15 soldiers to Nagchu to report "whether any further people of this sort were coming".⁶⁰ Thus one gains the impression that the Mongolian Mission was not welcome in Tibet, contrary to Moscow's expectations, and it was able to enter Lhasa only because the Nagchu *jongpen*, and hence the Dalai Lama, took it for a religious mission.

There were some more surprises lying ahead for the mission when it arrived in Lhasa. The Dalai Lama received the Mongols in his Potala Palace on the next day but he treated them only as ordinary pilgrims who came for his blessing, and evaded any political dis-

cussions with their leaders. This is how this first reception was related by Bimbaev:

The audience began with an offering of presents. We presented the Dalai Lama with some rolls of brocade with gold and silver bullion being placed on top of these. He then blessed us, one after another, by laying his hands on our heads and hanging a *zange* protective knot on everyone's neck. He did not give us any presents in return, though he offered us *khadags* (ceremonial scarves). This was followed by a refreshment ceremony at which we were served a traditional Tibetan tea and *bortsiks* [a sort of biscuit—A.A.]. All conversation was conducted by our leader Gomboidchin who stepped forward in front of others, and addressed the Dalai Lama, sitting on his high throne. Neither Chapchaev nor myself participated in the talks on that occasion.

Chapchaev's subsequent attempts to obtain a private audience with the Dalai Lama met with little success—the Mongolian "embassy" was only allowed to greet the "Precious Protector" on the day of his birthday in the fifth Tibetan month, but this again was a public meeting. The Dalai Lama also forbade his ministers and other state officials from getting into contact with the Red Mongols. On the whole it seems that their visit made him suddenly very suspicious and watchful, given the turbulent developments in the adjacent Chinese provinces and the still remaining social tension inside Tibet.

By the time the Soviet mission came to Lhasa there had taken place some major changes in Tibet's upper administrative strata. The elderly prime-minister Lonchen Sholhan, whom both Khomutnikov and Borisov had met in Lhasa and who seemed to be a secret Russophile (evidence for which could be Sholkan's correspondence with Dorzhiev in those years), was no more. He had died at Lhasa on 12 January 1926 and been replaced by a new premier, Lonchen Yabshi Langdun Kung, a relative of the Dalai Lama. The Lama's Chief Steward, Dronyer Chenmo, believed to have been one of the main instigators of the clerical movement against the military party, also passed away in early 1926. The post of the Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army, after Tsarong's dismissal, had been taken over by Trumba Dzasa, a young nephew of the Dalai Lama, but he was soon replaced by an abler military commander, Dogpa Tomba. However, these new administrators did not play any significant part in the decision-making by the Potala. The person who wielded considerable influence over the Dalai Lama at that time (1927) were his new favourite, Kusho Lungshar, the accountant general and a fourth rank official. (It was Lungshar who had taken the four Tibetan boys

⁵⁹ Ibid., I. 16.

⁶⁰ OIOC, L/P&S/11/277, Bailey to the Government of India, 30 June 1927.

to England to give them Western education in 1913). Lungshar was believed to be pro-Chinese and anti-British in his political views, which made him the exact antipode of Tsarong. The Dalai Lama used to consult Lungshar on all important matters, but not on the question of the "Bolshevik Mission". (Two years later the British would be surprised to know from the reports of their agents in Tibet that Lungshar had Russophile leanings). As for Tibet's ruler himself, he seemed to be getting more autocratic with age. He took little heed of the opinion of either his prime-minister or the Kashag, but was swayed by his unofficial advisors. The pro-Western reforms, though largely curbed, were not altogether abandoned by him—for example, on 8 November 1926 (which incidentally was the 8th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution) electric lights were installed in his two palaces, the Norbulingka and Chenselingka. Concurrently Tsarong Shape was trying to arrange the purchase of motor cars from a French company for mail service between Phari and Gyantse. And yet, at the same time as this small progress was being made, the Tibetan-English school at Gyantse was closed, and its head-master, Mr. Frank Ludlow, left for India in 1926. The Indian Government, however, did not regard the altered Tibetan political course as basically hostile to Britain. In Bailey's observation, Tibet was not "less friendly than in the past, but more independent of us", the situation he explained mainly by the fact that the disintegration of China "removed for the moment the main influence which in the past threw her (Tibet) into our arms".⁶¹

It would be wrong, however, to think that the Dalai Lama was completely ignoring the Red Mongolian Mission because of his revived pro-British feelings. In fact he was quite curious to know about the purpose of its coming, yet he wanted to deal with the suspicious Mongols discreetly, as he did in 1924, through his special interpreter and go-between, the Tibetan trade agent in Gyantse, Kusho Khenchung. So the Lama summoned Khenchung to Lhasa, and he also took measures to keep the Mongolian party under constant observation. Two policemen were placed at the entrance door of the house in Lhasa where they were accommodated (Ketyoba House),

⁶¹ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1088, Bailey to Sir Denis Bray (Foreign Secretary to the GI), 9 June 1927.

and they were instructed to watch and report all of the mission's contacts and movements to the Potala. As Bimbaev recalled:

We were put up in a special residence, a stone two-storeyed house, which was not far from the centre of the city. Chapchaev and myself stayed in separate rooms on the 1st floor. Who the house belonged to I don't know, but I remember there were guards posted at the entrance. Every time any of us would go out, one of them would follow.

At the same time Bailey, when he received word of the Bolshevik mission in Lhasa from the Tibetan premier, Yabshi Kung, dispatched there without delay his personal assistant, Rai Bahadur Norbu Dhondup. Both Khenchung and Dhondup advised then the Dalai Lama to turn the party out at once and send it back to Mongolia, yet he did not follow their advice. Ejecting "the Bolshevik emissaries" from Lhasa would obviously have been fraught with grave political consequences, as the event would certainly have been taken as an offence by both Moscow and Ulan-Bator and might have provoked, at the worst, their armed invasion of Tibet. But it would also surely have hurt the feelings of the large Mongolian community in Tibet, particularly the monks of the Drepung monastery who in the past had often expressed their discontent with the Lhasan administration and politics. And this was dangerous too. But there were probably other considerations as well which restrained the Dalai Lama, such as a possibility of retaliatory actions on the Tibetans in Ulan-Bator or anxiety over the safety of his savings, amounting to 2 lakhs of rupees, which had been placed in a Mongolian bank he had set up in Urga in 1905. Thus, he let the mission stay in Lhasa.

It was mainly through the Khenchung that the Dalai Lama found out some details about the Mongolian Mission—the names of its leaders, the things they brought with them, and the ostensible purpose for their coming. Much of this information Khenchung shared with Norbu Dhondup, who then relayed it to Bailey. On 30 June, the PO in Sikkim sent to Delhi the first of his many communications regarding "the Bolshevik mission to Tibet". In this he recounted how the party got into Lhasa via Nagchu due to the negligence of a Tibetan frontier officer and some more intriguing facts which deserve to be quoted here:

- "4. There are four chief men in the party believed to be Buryats. Their names are Tsepag, Jigme Dorji, Gompu Yishe and Amgola.

The latter speaks Chinese fluently. The rest of the party are Mongolians. They are accompanied by 3 interpreters, who are ex-monks of Tashi Lhumpo monastery. These monks went to Mongolia some years ago where they married and were then unfrocked.

5. They have brought quantities of arms and ammunition with them, which have been taken from them and deposited in the Dalai Lama's Summer Palace of Norbu Linga. They also have large amounts of gold and silver and distributed some in the Sera and Drepung monasteries.
8. <...> The people of Lhasa are genuinely afraid of Bolsheviks and it seems that the Dalai Lama is taking a line of action in accordance with public opinion, as represented by general talk (there being no newspapers in Lhasa).
9. HH the Dalai Lama has so far refused them audience. They have also not been permitted to see any of the Shapes".⁶²

However, the goals of the mission remained unknown to Bailey for quite a long time. It was only towards the end of August that Norbu Dhondup reported to him whatever information he had been able to collect on the supposed objectives of the Red Mongolians. "I have learned from one of the [Dalai Lama's] favourites, Nandon La", Norbu wrote to Bailey on 22 August, "that these agents have informed Dalai Lama that they want to keep a permanent representative here in Lhasa, and they desire to encourage more friendship between Mongolia and Tibet than before".⁶³ And four days later: "Their chief object is to keep a representative here and ask the Dalai Lama to stick to the treaty already drawn up between Tibet and Mongolia (1913)".⁶⁴ Dhondup then attempted to trace the document in question in the Potala archives, but could not find it there.

In one of his letters Norbu Dhondup related a rather curious story of how "the Bolshevik agents" had tried to arrange a private interview with the Dalai Lama. First, they (Chapchaev et al.) approached Khenchung with this request but he asked them to state the object of their visit so that he could report it to His Holiness. Chapchaev obviously did not want to disclose his secrets to Khenchung, sus-

⁶² OIOC, L/P&S/11/277, Bailey to the Government of India, 30 June 1927.

⁶³ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F.157/240, Norbu Dhondup to Bailey, 22 August 1927.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Dhondup to Bailey, 26 August 1927.

pecting him to be "a British agent". So he refused the services of the Tibetan and turned for help to other Potala officials, but to no result. Finally, having realized there was no other way to get access to the Dalai Lama, he told Khenchung that the mission had come to ask the Precious Protector to send one learned lama to Ulan-Bator to represent the Tibetan Government and also to reform the monasteries in Mongolia which suffered considerably during the Red (Ulang) rule there (?!). This answer must have nonplussed the Dalai Lama, who understood only too well that by granting this request he would provide the Red Russians with a pretext to ask him to appoint in return one of their men to look after the interests of the Mongolian community in Lhasa. So the Lama replied them via Khenchung that "Mongolia and Tibet have been very good from the beginning till now", so there was no need for any new arrangement. He also decided that Khenchung should go to the Samye monastery for a retreat "so as to avoid these people in pressing their object".⁶⁵

However, despite their great fear of the Red Russians at that time, the Dalai Lama and his ministers, much to Bailey's distress, also entertained some strong ill-feelings towards the British, as was evidenced by his personal assistant:

Dalai Lama's attitude towards us is not so favourable as was before. Parkhan Shappe, Ngabo Shappe, Lungshar, Trumpa Dzasa, Lonchen Shatra se—4th rank official, and many other juniors are all anti-British.

To make them alter their opinion, Dhondup, of course, tried hard in his conversations with the Dalai Lama and other leading Tibetans, to emphasize the danger of the Bolshevik penetration in Tibet.

"They are all afraid but Shapes think that it is difficult to foment trouble among the Tibetan officials, but they are afraid of poor people, beggars, etc. So I pointed out that middle class people and others who are not officials may rebel in time and kill officials".⁶⁶

Norbu Dhondup remained in Lhasa until October 1927 and all through that time he continued to supply Bailey with various information about the Mongolian Mission, including bazaar gossip. As for the Khenchung, he left Lhasa in mid-July on pilgrimage, from which he only returned after two months. Being left to themselves,

⁶⁵ Ibid., Dhondup to Bailey, 14 September 1927.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Dhondup to Bailey, 25 August 1927.

the Bolshevik agents, according to Dhondup, spent their time "roaming here and there"—some of them would go to distant villages and after spending a day or two come back to Lhasa. Bimbaev's narrative, on the other hand, sheds more light on the activities of the Soviet members of the mission in Tibet:

We associated a lot with the Tibetans in Lhasa. They were somehow aware that we were not Mongolians, but came from Russia. Nonetheless they were hospitable and friendly. There was a small circle of people especially sympathetic towards us. We used to meet at the house of one Tibetan, who was a photographer. He was some 30 years of age. Others were mainly traders. They asked us many questions about Russia and seem to have taken some keen interest in our revolution. On the whole, this group of people was oriented on the Panchen Lama, who was then in China, that is they were pro-Chinese in their outlook. We also met with some Indian merchants—in fact, all Indians in Lhasa were merchants. [One of these incidentally was again Sodala Nila Sumdar, to whom Chapchaev brought a letter from Tepkin—A.A.]

We also paid visits to the Tibetan ministers and other high officials, whose names I do not remember now. They did not mind getting into contact with us Russians. The reason for this, I think, is that they liked to receive valuable presents. In general the Tibetans have a weakness for *belegs* [Mong. "presents"—A.A.]. One of our chief contacts in Lhasa was Namgan, former head of the Tibetan army. In his company I attended firing practice twice. Military drills of the Tibetan soldiers were generally no secret to anybody—I was permitted to watch these and even to take pictures. My camera did not seem to scare anyone in Lhasa—the Tibetans would readily pose for a picture. Thus I was able to take hundreds of photographs.

The city itself, Lhasa, left a good impression on me. A beautiful place, a beautiful landscape. Nonetheless life was not easy there. We had to follow a rather rigid day-to-day pattern of living, to attend all the major [Buddhist] services. Every morning all of us would go to the main temple for worship, as was a custom in Lhasa. I remember having once participated in a ritual of carrying a water-skin with holy water around the statue of the Buddha, Ju, thrice-repeated. One should have enough strength and be skillful for that. Speaking generally, life was pretty cheap in Lhasa at that time, as compared to Mongolia. We fed mainly on *tshampa*, which was not bad. For the cold season, we brought sheepskins with us".

Bimbaev also spoke of his comrades visiting all large monasteries in Lhasa and its environs and even making a trip to Tashilhumpo, although this must have been on their return journey. These visits, however, were financially burdensome, as visitors, according to cus-

tom, had to order a worship service and then to entertain the monks to dinner. Besides, one had to make a general offering to the monastery and this required considerable funds.

One particular monastery outside Lhasa attracted the Soviet agents most of all—Drepung, and there they spent a good deal of their time. It was during the party's first visit to Drepung in late April 1927, at the invitation of the Kalmyk community there, that Chapchaev suddenly bumped into Zambo Khaglyshev. The Kalmyk lama came up to his fellow countryman and started a conversation. He told him of his trials in Russia and abroad during the civil war—how he joined the Denikin Army to save himself from the "godless" Bolsheviks and then fled with the white Ataman to Istanbul in Turkey, and how he later on moved to Tibet via India on a British steamship. Khaglyshev ended his sorrowful story with the request least of all expected by Chapchaev—to help him to re-emigrate to Russia. Chapchaev, as he would confess to his NKVD interrogator in 1937, thought at first that that might be a part of some intricate espionage scheme by the British, as Khaglyshev was clearly their agent, however, he then remembered the "special task" he had been given by Chicherin. So he agreed to help Khaglyshev and said he would give him a recommendation letter for the Soviet consulate in Pekin—but only in exchange for his correspondence with Charles Bell.⁶⁷

According to Norbu Dhondup, it was Zambo who brought the Red Russians to Khenchung, shortly after their arrival in Lhasa, which was a rather dubious service rendered by him to Chapchaev. Zambo's sudden desire for repatriation must have astonished his Tibetan friends but he explained it to them—and later to Bailey as well—by saying that it was dangerous for him to remain in Lhasa because of "these men". Another puzzling fact is that Zambo volunteered to convey a message from Khenchung to Bailey in Gangtok, but, as it turned out, it was never delivered to the PO⁶⁸ and probably

⁶⁷ AMB RK, file 422-r, ll. 121–123. Chapchaev's interrogation transcripts of 5 April and 28 September 1937. In an interview with the OGPU officer, B.A. Bak, upon his return to Moscow, on 28 July 1928, Chapchaev speaks briefly of his deal with Khaglyshev: "I've got Khaglyshev's correspondence with the British, which I demanded from him when he requested me to assist him in returning to the USSR. I told him roundly: 'If you want to go to the Soviet Union, give me all that you have'. See RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, l. 144. This correspondence must have been handed over then by Chapchaev to the OGPU officials.

⁶⁸ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F.157/240, Norbu Dhondup to Bailey, 6 August 1927.

landed in Chapchaev's hands instead. It is difficult to see what Zambo was really up to and which side he was actually playing on, but he accepted Chapchaev's condition. Their deal went through and in a few months the Kalmyk left Lhasa for Peking. He failed, however, to obtain a Soviet visa. Nonetheless, he remained in the Chinese capital, having settled in the main Buddhist monastery there, Yung-hogun (Yunggun), and never tried to go back to Lhasa.

From Khaldinov's correspondence with Bailey preserved in British archives we know that he lived out a miserable existence in Peking in the 1930s. He received some help from the British and his other friends though, including Bailey, by then the representative of the Indian Government in Kashmir, who occasionally sent him money via the British Legation in Peking. Zambo seems to have made several more attempts to obtain a Soviet visa, but to no result. On 1 February 1935 he wrote to Bailey in despair:

Owing to the great influence which the Red Russians are wielding, I have not the least hope of being able to return to my mother country. I am here in Peiping in great trouble.⁶⁹

The Kalmyk monk presumably died around 1937, by which date is marked his last letter to Bailey.

* * *

The Dalai Lama had finally made up his mind to grant a private interview to the Red Russians shortly after Khenchung's return from his "diplomatic retreat", as this was the only way to make them leave without stirring up public opinion in Lhasa. According to Norbu Dhondup, on 16 September the three leading agents of the Bolsheviks (Gomboidchin, Chapchaev and Amulang) were invited to Norbulingka where they met the people they already knew—two Tibetan monks and one lay official through whom the Dalai Lama was secretly liaising with their mission (Trunsyik Chenmo, Khenchung and Yabshi Phunkang). A gentleman's agreement was then reached between the two parties: Khenchung promised to arrange an audience for the Mongolian Mission and "the Bolsheviks" promised to go back to their country after that.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Khaglyshev's correspondence with F.M. Bailey, in 1933–1937, includes five of his letters and one postcard (in Tibetan with translations), and two replies by Bailey. See OIOC, MSS. Eur. F.157/251.

⁷⁰ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F.157/240, Dhondup to Bailey, 17 September 1927.

It looks as if the Dalai Lama had overcome his vacillations and was now prepared to negotiate with the Bolsheviks. The change in him came suddenly, so it seems, after he had received a secret letter together with a verbal message from Agvan Dorzhiev through a Tibetan trader. In it his elderly Buryat *tsanshav* wrote:

I am an old man and will die very soon. Mongolia is not a peaceful country as it was formerly. The Government is deadly against the religion and monks and they are helpless. Please don't have anything to do with the mission. I had to write a letter at their dictation to Your Holiness for these Bolshevik agents to take with them, but please do not take any notice of that letter.⁷¹

The Dalai Lama showed this letter to Khenchung and they were both very pleased with it. In his open letter sent through Chapchaev, Dorzhiev must have praised the Mongolian Government and advised the Lama to do as their mission requested.

This seemingly treacherous act by Dorzhiev could only mean one thing—that he, after years of close collaboration with the Bolsheviks, had chosen not to continue his ambiguous role, trying to please both the Kremlin and the Potala. The reason behind his decision, as the later story will show, was the Soviet's oppressive religious policy, which threatened the very existence of the Buddhist *sangha* in Soviet Russia. In the past Dorzhiev had repeatedly addressed the Soviet Government via Narkomindel asking them to curb their frenzied anti-religious propaganda, exempt the Buryat and Kalmyk clerics from conscription, allow the lamas to openly practice Tibetan medicine, and also to guarantee Buddhist novices free access to religious (datsang) schools. The latter issue was the most vital at the time as, in accordance with new Soviet legislation, candidates had to be over 18 in order to be entitled to religious education. But this was clearly at odds with the ancient Buddhist tradition prescribing parents, for the sake of Dharma, to send at least one of their sons to the monastery at the age of 7 or even earlier. To this end, as early as 1925, shortly after Borisov's return from Lhasa, Dorzhiev wrote a long and angry letter to Chicherin, one that actually seemed like an ultimatum. In this he reminded the Narkom of the great services he had rendered

⁷¹ OIOC, L/P&S/11/277, Bailey's confidential letter to the Government of India, 26 September 1927. Also, MSS. Eur. F.157/240, Dhondup to Bailey, 17 September 1927.

to Soviet diplomacy in the past and pleaded with them, "for the last time", to again raise these issues with the party and government bodies responsible and urge them to take prompt action to improve the situation.

"During these years [early 1920s—A.A.] there was not a single caravan or pilgrim, with whom I had not forwarded to Tibet and the remote corners of Mongolia letters and information about the situation in Soviet Russia. In doing so I always indicated to the Dalai Lama, and other persons of high rank in the Buddhist hierarchy, that Russia, having proclaimed the principles of freedom and new life, not only implements these actively itself, but also carries the banner of freedom to all oppressed nations of the world, especially to the peoples of the East".⁷²

Chicherin, if truth be known, was himself quite unhappy with the party line in the religious sphere, as it seriously damaged his Eastern policy, in particular his rapprochement with the Buddhist East. However Chicherin was not a member of the Politburo and therefore enjoyed little authority with its secretary general, Stalin. Thus he was unable to press the matter at the top party level. So things remained as they were until the "All-Union Buddhist Council" was held in Moscow from 20–29 January 1927. This was Dorzhiev's major attempt to consolidate his reformist forces on a nation-wide scale, by giving decisive battle to his opponents still prevailing among the Buddhist clergy. He personally assigned paramount importance to this Council, seeing it as an "absolutely unprecedented occasion in the history of the Buddhist East". But it also had a great political dimension, according to Tepkin, in the sense of "unifying the Buddhist clergy on the principle of freedom of conscience granted by the Soviet power".⁷³

The monks' rally was presided over by the leading *obnovlentsy* (reformists)—Dorzhiev, Tepkin and Munkujapov, which allowed them to dominate the discussions and eventually to influence the decision making. The Council adopted the All-Union Statute (*Ustav*) and the Regulations concerning the Buddhist clergy in the USSR, which was

⁷² NARB, f. 1, op. 1, d. 657, l. 16 (Dorziev to Chicherin, 24 April 1925).

⁷³ Archive of the Institute for Oriental Studies, St Petersburg, r. II, op. 1, d. 373 (Protocols zasedaniia 1-go Vsesoiuznogo Dukhovnogo Sobora buddistov SSSR).

based largely on similar reformist documents approved by the earlier Buryat councils of 1922 and 1925. The same Council also resolved to "ban categorically the worship of *choijins* (divinators) and incarnate lamas among the Soviet Buddhists" and to "deprive *khobilgans* and *gurtens* (oracles) of their special privileges". But, more importantly, it confirmed the most controversial point of the reformist program—the age limit for the *khovaraks* set at 18. There is little doubt this was done under pressure from the authorities seeking to distract youth from religion and so break the existing spiritual lineage, as no lama would agree to accept a disciple past a certain age. Thus the reformists, by adopting the item, had actually laid a trap for themselves. But the Bolsheviks also fell into the same trap as precisely this *khovarak* issue would soon become a stumbling block for their further rapprochement with Lhasa. However, it seems that Dorzhiev hoped that the Soviet leaders would soon lift the restriction in their legislation (and he might have even reached a verbal agreement with them to that effect), in order not to complicate their relations with the Dalai Lama.

There was a few Tibetans attending the Buddhist Council in Moscow as "honorary guests", the people invited by Dorzhiev from Urga. Their names in the official papers were given as Yala and Denze, to which Tepkin adds one more name, that of Galsan Thubden. The representatives of Tibet addressed the council through their interpreter, Norbu Sambu, who said that the Buddhist gathering in Moscow laid a solid foundation for further flourishing of the Buddha's precious teachings. This was important for all Buddhists and also served as proof of the fact that the Soviet power protected minor nations. In conclusion the Tibetan hailed the Soviet power and the strengthening of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Tibet.

The Buddhist Council was certainly a propaganda show orchestrated by Soviet leaders, whose motives are clear to see. Shortly after its completion, the leaders of the reformists, Dorzhiev and Tepkin, asked the Narkomindel for permission to send their delegation to Tibet to "establish a religious connection with the Dalai Lama". They said they wanted to inform the latter about the "freedom and flourishing of the Buddhist religion under Soviet rule", as written down in the Council's Address to him. However, in reality, as Tepkin would confess to the OGPU in 1931, he and Dorzhiev intended to tell the Lama about the pressure the Soviet government had begun

to exert on their religion, one example of which was the setting of an age limit for Buddhist *khowaraks*.⁷⁴ It must have been at that time that Dorzhiev wrote his "secret letter" for the Dalai Lama and dispatched it via some of his Tibetan friends in Ulan-Bator.

* * *

Dorzhiev's revelation only confirmed some of the very disquieting news that had reached Lhasa about the same time, concerning the persecution of 88 Buryat lamas. The monks were participants in the so-called Borzi movement, which was directed against the administration of the autonomous Buryat-Mongol Soviet Republic. These lamas, coming mainly from the Tsugol and Aga Datsangs, protested in the early 1927 against the oppressive religious and economic policies of the Buryat authorities and called on the Buryats to migrate to the Borzi *uyezd* (district) in the neighbouring Chita Region, which was under Russian jurisdiction. There, they said, the Buryats, as an ethnic minority, would be exempt from taxation and military service. The result of the monks' agitation was that an increasing number of Buryats began to refuse to pay income tax and to accept conscription, saying that they wanted to move to the *somon* (settlement) "Novaia Zaria" (New Dawn) in the Borzi *uyezd*. The activists of the movement were soon arrested and were put on trial in Aginskoe in May-July 1927. Most of them were sentenced from 1 to 5 years hard labour. The event was widely covered in the Buryat local papers,⁷⁵ and it seems that some of the publications somehow found their way to Lhasa. Norbu Dhondup, naturally enough, tried to use this information to political ends:

The messenger reached here today, the 2nd September, which means he took 10 days to reach here. I shall inform Dalai Lama about the 88 lamas having been punished. In fact I am handing over the newspaper cuttings too to satisfy him. First I will show to Shapes, then hand over to the Dalai Lama.⁷⁶

Two days later he wrote more on the subject to Bailey:

No sooner I received the cuttings, I have translated the summary of 100 white Russians, including one prince and one woman being exe-

⁷⁴ AMB RK, file 940-r, l. 54. Transcrip of Tepkin's interrogation, 20 June, 1931.

⁷⁵ See, for example, the articles in the *Buriat-Mongol'skaya Pravda*, 10 June ("88 lam pod sudom") and 23 July ("Delo o 88 lamakh") 1927.

⁷⁶ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F. 157/240, Dhondup to Bailey, 2 September 1927.

cuted within a fortnight, and have mentioned about the punishment of 88 lamas.

That made a bad impression on the Shapes against the Bolsheviks.⁷⁷

There was yet another worrisome subject which was uppermost in the minds of the Tibetan leaders—the escalation of the Chinese revolution. In early July 1926, the Kuomintang armies, under Chiang Kai-shek and T'an Shen-chi, launched a campaign against the alliance of northern warlords, Chang Tso-lin and U Pei-fu, the so-called Northern Expedition, with the ultimate purpose of national liberation and unification of China. At the same time Marshal Feng Yu-hsiang, having returned from the USSR in September 1926, joined the Kuomintang and made a pact with Chiang Kai-shek. After his Kuominchun troops were reorganized with the help of Soviet advisors, he took the offensive again, in early 1927. By the time the Chapchaev Mission reached Lhasa, Feng had established firm control over Shensi, Kansu and Western Henan provinces, and it was expected that he would soon advance farther to the West in the direction of Sinkiang and Eastern Tibet. Moscow at this juncture sought to encourage Feng to strike contacts with the Lhasa government. In his message of greetings to the "leader of the People's Revolutionary Army" of 11 February 1927 Nikiforov, for example, wrote:

It would be helpful if you could come to an arrangement with the Tibetans about the border. This would reassure them and, at the same time, would relieve tension at your [Western] flank and in the rear, which is absolutely essential.⁷⁸

The Dalai Lama was well aware of Feng's latest progress which fact, coupled with the news about another group of Red Russians allegedly heading for Lhasa, made him deeply concerned. As Norbu Dhondup reported to Bailey,

The Dalai Lama called me yesterday suddenly. He said he got the information of the 19 Bolshevik agents alright, but he has heard from Siningfu that some more Red Russians were on their way to Tibet. He was anxious and says that Fing Yeu Hsian, a Chinese military officer, who is a friend of Red Russians, is [gaining] the victory, and he may join with the Red Russians and create trouble for Tibet.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid., Dhondup to Bailey, 4 September 1927.

⁷⁸ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 40, l. 30.

⁷⁹ OIOC, MSS. Eur. F.157/240, Dhondup to Bailey, 1 September 1927.

So it was against this background of mounting fears and suspicions that the Dalai Lama had finally received Chapchaev in a private audience at the Potala, presumably in the latter half of September 1927. The last major obstacle to their meeting was Chapchaev's strong objection to Khenchung's acting as interpreter at it, but it must have been overcome somehow. According to Bimbaev, the person who was asked to translate was a Buryat lama, but not the one that came along with their party. Anyway, it was definitely not Khenchung, for if it were him, the British would most likely have known all the details of the conversation. Bimbaev's account unfortunately is very scanty, as he didn't take part in the meeting:

"The main objective of the mission was not attained. The Dalai Lama did not agree to an exchange of ambassadors with Mongolia, declining Gomboidchin's proposal. He was reluctant to enter into diplomatic relations with foreign countries. Apart from that issue, other questions were discussed, such as economic: for example, trading in livestock. The Tibetans wanted to purchase the undersized Mongolian horses of hardy breed whom they highly valued". [N.B.: the Soviets were also purchasing these horses for their cavalry in 1924–1926].

There was at least one break-through in the discussions, as we learn from Nikiforov's notebook: "We won't object to your country's trade operations in Tibet", the Dalai Lama told Chapchaev, "provided they are conducted unofficially".⁸⁰

The British, who obtained their information on the Soviet-Tibetan talks in Lhasa mostly from Bailey, provide us with more intriguing facts, however one should perhaps not give too much credit to these without knowing the specific sources they came from. In one of his reports to the Indian Government, for example, Bailey wrote:

"It is believed in Lhasa that the Bolshevik Mission pointed out to the Tibetan Government that as the British had troops, telegraph office etc. at Gyantse on the road to India, so the Russians should be given similar rights at Nagchuka, a place on the road to Mongolia, the same distance from Lhasa as Gyantse is.

It is also reported that they wished to open up a motor road from Mongolia to Nagchuka".⁸¹

⁸⁰ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 42, l. 8. (*Materialy i zapiski po nauchno-torgovoi ekspeditsii v Tibet*, 1929).

⁸¹ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1088, Bailey to the GI, 13 April 1928.

There is at least one story which seems fairly reliable since it comes from the person who acted as interpreter at Chapchaev's interview with the Dalai Lama, a Buryat monk ("a Buryat-speaking Mongolian") from the Drepung monastery. (He told it to his Mongolian fellow inmate at Drepung, and the latter relayed the account to Colonel J.L.R. Weir, Bailey's successor as Political Officer in Sikkim, in 1931). According to the Buryat lama, when the Dalai Lama fled to Urga in 1904 he met with a high Russian official (possibly D.D. Pokotilov) to whom he gave a paper agreeing to accept a Russian representative permanently at Lhasa. In return he received various valuable presents. Tsepag Dorji (Chapchaev) brought this paper to the Dalai Lama and asked him to fulfil his promise. The Dalai Lama, however, argued that the paper had been issued to the Tsarist Court and that the promise was therefore no longer binding on him. Accordingly, he retained the paper and handed back the presents, in which the seals were still unbroken. Tsepag Dorji was nonplussed, but took the presents back with him to Urga, where he reported his lack of success.⁸²

On the other hand, we have Chapchaev's own account covering one part of his interview and devoted mainly to the discussion of religious questions. According to what the Kalmyk agent told the OGPU officials upon his return to Moscow, the Dalai Lama expressed his great concern about persecution of Buddhism in Russia. It was precisely this issue that their conversation had unexpectedly stumbled over. Below we will quote some of the most interesting points from Chapchaev's story.

"1. The Dalai Lama, in his own words, receives regularly the full information from the USSR of the state of the Buddhist religion there. The sources of this information, I presume, are Khambo Dorzhiev, Tepkin and the Buryat, Mongol (primarily), and Kalmyk lamas visiting Tibet. During the summer that I spent there some four or five lamas came from Buryatia. There is approximately from 30 to 40 Kalmyk lamas and from 60 to 70 Buryat lamas in Tibet, altogether.

They often receive letters from the USSR, mainly from Buryatia. These letters are censored by the Tibetan Government, and the lamas are generally being spied upon, as some of them speak against

⁸² OIOC, L/P&S/11/277, Weir to the GI, 24 January 1931.

the Dalai Lama. For example, there's one highly educated Buryat lama who criticizes him continually and systematically.

2. The information from the USSR about the state of the Buddhist religion is definitely negative, especially the information provided by the lamas who travel illegally from the USSR to Tibet. This is confirmed by the fact that the Dalai Lama has twice referred in the course of our business talk to the question of persecution of Buddhism in the USSR, stating that he has accurate evidence of this from Soviet sources. Before I left Lhasa, the Dalai Lama asked to bring this to the notice of the Soviet Government and Chicherin in particular, giving it to understand that the policy should be abandoned for the sake of [Russo-Tibetan] friendship.
3. At my audience with the Dalai Lama when I asked him who could replace Dorzhiev, already in his declining years, he said: "There is one relatively young man, Tepkin".
4. Dorzhiev is spoken of in Lhasa as a "Russian man" who "resides in Moscow and not in a monastery", and who is "dressed in European cloths", etc. The Buryat lamas are intensely propagating all sorts of provocative rumours against him. This propaganda finds its way to the high spheres at the court, which have changed radically since Dorzhiev's departure from Tibet.

The Dalai Lama himself, as it seems, regards Dorzhiev as a serious man, but his entourage apparently is trying to influence his politics.

<...>

7. In my conversation with the Dalai Lama, when he asked me about the age limitation for the *khovaraks* set at 18 years, I, being unaware of the decisions passed by the All-Union Buddhist Council, reassured him, by saying that this could hardly be so. It turns out now that I have misled him. However, if I confirmed the fact, it would be much more difficult for me to talk with him at all".⁸³

* * *

The Mongolian Mission left Lhasa on 9 December 1927.⁸⁴ It departed in two parties: the Mongols travelled back by the Northern Route

⁸³ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, ll. 142–143. Chapchaev's interview with the deputy head of the Eastern Department of the OGPU, H.S. Petrosian, 28 July 1928.

⁸⁴ OIOC, L/P&S/11/277. The date comes from the letter of the Tibetan premier,

via Nagchu, whereas its Soviet members again chose the circuitous land and sea route via India and China. According to British sources, the latter were accompanied by "three other Russians", who were monks from the Drepung monastery. It was said that the Tibetan Government gave them transport for their homeward journey and also sent 10 soldiers from the Dalai Lama's bodyguard a certain distance with them as a special mark of honour.⁸⁵ Chapchaev gives the name of one of the monks returning to Russia as Sanja Sanjiev, a Kalmyk by birth. He also reported that a "trade representative" of the Dalai Lama, one Nandigla, journeyed with them to Ulan Bator. The person, Chapchaev remarked, was not much of an authority with the Dalai Lama, who had appointed him to this post. The Tibetan would actually have to follow the policy of another person, who is a kind of a "travelling representative": "he travels from country to country, such as Mongolia, China, Japan and Korea, and reports on everything he sees to the Dalai Lama when coming to Lhasa".⁸⁶

Chapchaev and Bimbaev must have returned to Moscow some time in April or May 1928. They then submitted their reports on the mission to respectively the Narkomindel and the Intelligence Department (Razvedupr) of the Red Army Headquarters.⁸⁷ Subsequently Bimbaev's material was used by some Soviet military analyst for producing a memorandum analysing the condition of the Tibetan army entitled "Voennoe Delo v Tibete" (Warcraft in Tibet).⁸⁸ This document, while assessing the contemporary military strength of Tibet, sheds some light on Bimbaev's work as a scout. For example, it describes in detail the test firing of 10 mortars newly manufactured in Lhasa which he personally witnessed. The occasion was widely celebrated

Yabshi Langdun Kung, to F.M. Bailey, 10 January 1928: "The reason of sending this letter by the Prime Minister of Tibet. With regard to the arrival of the few Mongolians to Lhasa, I sent a report there and then. They discussed the religious relations existing between Tibet and Mongolia. They left Lhasa on the 16th day of the last month (9th December 1927) and went back via Nagchuka. I am sending this news privately in view of the friendly relations existing between the British and Tibet. Please report the matter to the British Government and send me any reply that is necessary". Red big square seal of the Prime Minister.

⁸⁵ Ibid., J.L.R. Weir to the Indian Government, 13 May 1932.

⁸⁶ RGASPI, Chapchaev's interview with the OGPU, I. 144.

⁸⁷ In general, the Razvedupr obtained intelligence on Tibet from two main sources: the intelligence unit at the Middle-Asian Military District (SAVO) in Tashkent and that of the Mongolian People's Army in Ulan Bator.

⁸⁸ NARK, r-137, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 153–164 (Voennoe Delo v Tibete, po dannym k kontsu 1927 goda).

by the people of Lhasa. The mortars, according to Bimbaev, were of a rather primitive model as they fired ordinary solid iron balls. The target was placed at the foot of a mountain, within 2 km. firing range. Each gunshot produced a cloud of bluish smoke and resounded with considerable thunder in the mountains, although none of them actually hit the mark. The shooting was supervised by some elderly Chinese technician dressed in national clothes. None of the Tibetan artillery officers, with one exception, knew how to handle the guns; so they cautiously kept away from them and panicked every time a mortar fired. The firing itself was staged in public and was attended by the new Tibetan war minister, Dogpa Tomba, who seemed to be no military expert at all.⁸⁹

One of Bimbaev's informants was the above-mentioned Dalai Lama's "trade agent", Nandingla. It was probably he who told the Kalmyk about the three arms factories in the vicinity of Lhasa. The largest of these, equipped with European machinery, was located 7 miles north of the capital, at the Golan Daban pass. The same factory was also minting currency. According to Nandingla, the Tibetans were trying to produce their own rifle after the model of a Russian cavalry carbine. Only the construction of the Russian carbine, he said, was simple enough to be copied by the local gunsmiths, whereas English rifles were too sophisticated for them. Two of these plants, where arms were made by hand, produced from 6 to 8 rifles every month, and Bimbaev was unable to find out about the production rate at the third one, which was the most advanced technically. The factories also manufactured gun powder, though not the cordite, so much needed by the Tibetan military.

Bimbaev, referred to in the paper vaguely as "the Source", was particularly interested in seeing the rifle manufacture at the Golan Daban factory. Therefore he made friends with its manager, possibly Ringang, a close associate of Tsarong, and then tried to sneak into the factory workshops. However he was detained by the military guard at the entrance. To avoid a scandal, the Kalmyk quickly jumped on horse back and dashed away at full gallop.⁹⁰

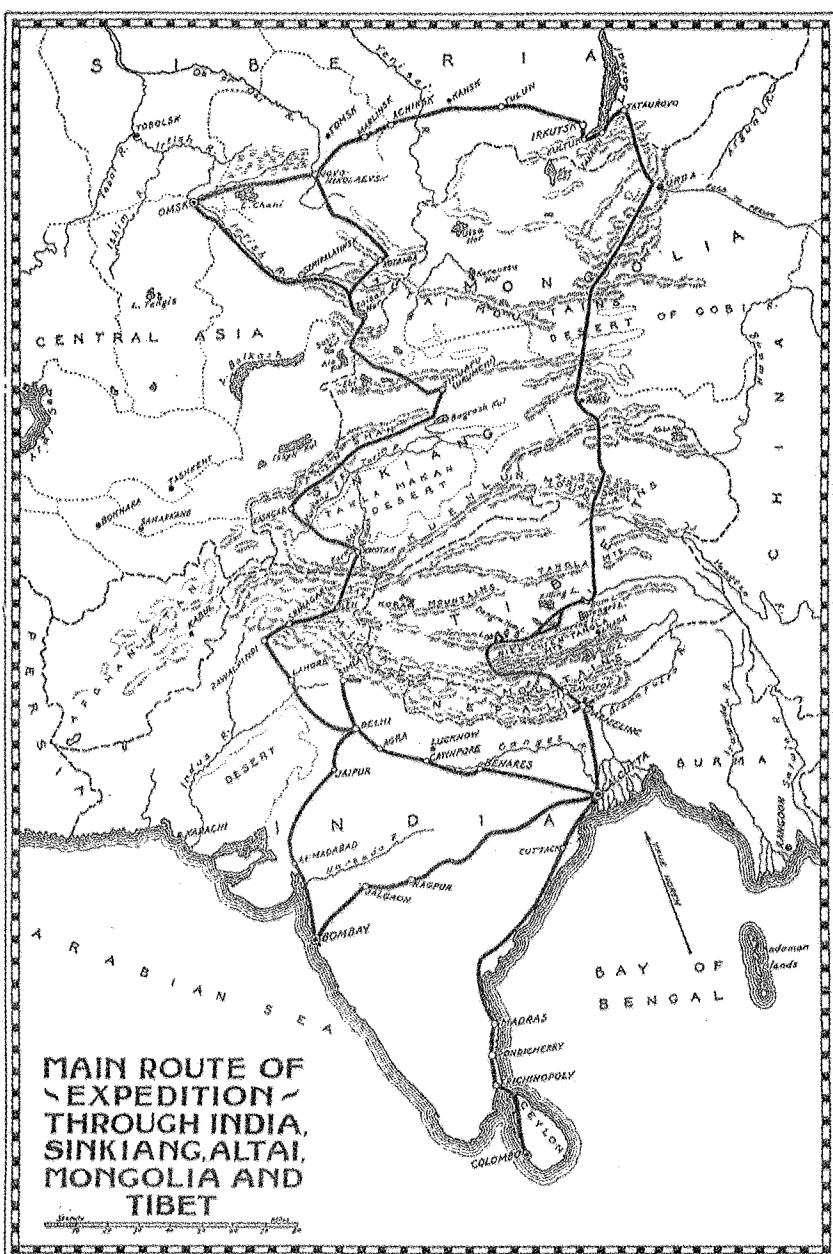
Of other intelligence obtained by the Chapchaev mission mention should be made of one rather curious document, entitled in Russian

⁸⁹ Ibid., ll. 156–158.

⁹⁰ Ibid., l. 161.

as "Spisok lits grazhdanskogo i voennogo upravleniya Tibeta"—The list of persons of the civic and military administration in Tibet.⁹¹ Only a fragment of it was discovered in the Stcherbatsky Collection at the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, this being a draft translation from Tibetan, which suggests that the source of this information must have been some senior Tibetan official (possibly the above mentioned Nandigla). The document spells out in great detail all the established posts in the key administrative bodies and names the highest officials holding these. Among the agencies mentioned are the office of the Chief Minister Yabshi Langdun (Srid-lon-khang), the Kashag (Council of Ministers), the finance ministry, the office of the state deeds (under the Ta Lama from the Moru monastery), the income-tax department, the monastery estates revenue department, the departments of police, and of the Lhasan warehouses, etc. The person, who provided this extremely valuable information, was apparently a Sinophile, as he placed the non-existent Chinese Amban, "the Source of general management", at the head of the Kashag. Other officials in this highest government agency were given in the following order: Menkhab Todpa ("an official attached to the person of Amban"), Tsarong Kalon, Trimon Kalon, Ngabo Kalon, Dzasa Gyaltsen Puntsok, three chief chamberlains (*shod-khan-srai*, *san-bui-srai*, *man-tod-srai*), three state clerks (*bon-shod-pa*, *de-khan-pa*, *srig-ship-pa*), and four lay officials ("door-keepers at the ministerial cabinets").

⁹¹ ARAN, f. 725, op. 4, d. 74, ll. 1–4, manuscript, undated. If translated literally, the heading of the document read: "The list of the persons, who are sources of the meek and harsh actions, managing the affairs in the great Palace, possessing a hundred of pleasures of the Great King". The mention of Yabshi Langdun as Tibet's premier suggests that the document was compiled some time after April 1926, presumably in 1927 when Chapchaev visited Lhasa.



Main Route of Expedition through India, Sinkiang, Altai, Mongolia and Tibet (N. Roerich Museum, New York)

CHAPTER SIX

NICHOLAS ROERICH AND HIS
“WESTERN BUDDHIST EMBASSY”

The Capchaev caravan was still approaching Lhasa when, in mid-April 1927, another mysterious expedition set out from Ulan-Bator in the direction of Tibet. This was led by an emigre Russian painter and mystic, Nikolai Konstantinovich Roerich (1874–1949).¹ In fact, this was a secret religious mission, “the Embassy from Western Buddhists to the Head of Eastern Buddhists, the Dalai Lama”, as it was rather pompously styled in the travel diaries of Roerich’s companions. Financed by one of the American followers of Prof. Roerich, a thriving Wall Street broker, Louis P. Horsch, the mission was also backed by the Soviet government, with both Narkomindel and OGPU being privy to Roerich’s secret designs.

When the Bolshevik revolution occurred, Nikolai (Nicholas) Roerich was staying with his wife, Helen (Elena Ivanovna), and two sons, Yuri (George) and Sviatoslav, in Karelia, then part of Finland. In 1918 they found themselves unwillingly “in emigration” after Finland had declared its independence from Russia. A year later the Roerichs went to London, where Nicholas was invited to design the sets for A.P. Borodin’s opera “Prince Igor”, to be staged at the Russian musical season by the celebrated impresario Serge Diaghilev. In the latter half of 1920 the artist and his family moved further to the United States. Having finally settled in New York, Nicholas Roerich worked untiringly to promote art and culture in America, having laid the foundations of several artistic institutions, such as the Master Institute of United Arts (1921), International Art Center or Corona Mundi (1922), and the Roerich Museum (1923), all in New York City. At the same time he was also notably active as a guru and preacher. Being a staunch Theosophist and a follower of E.P. Blavatsky since his St Petersburg days, Roerich joined the Theosophical Society in London in 1920, and then in New York he set up an esoteric

¹ On Roerich’s life and activities see Belikov, Kniazeva 1972; Rupen 1979; Fosdik 1998; Meyer, Brysac 1999; Rosov 2002.

circle of his own on the premises of his art museum. (In the meantime, his elder son, George, who would become in the later years an eminent Buddhist scholar, pursued Indological studies at Harvard University).

In his political views Roerich was at first strongly anti-Bolshevik. While in Europe, he is known to have given lectures and contributed articles to the White Russian emigre press in which he severely criticized the Soviet regime. However, his aversion to Bolshevism—"the impudent monster that lies to humanity"—suddenly gave way to a fairly sympathetic, if not friendly, attitude, while he was in America. This change could be largely attributed to a series of mystical insights that Roerich claimed originated from his spiritual masters, the Himalayan "Mahatmas", who were communicating with him telepathically, through the medium of his wife, Elena, who was also a mystic and a clairvoyant. It was these "enlightened" beings, allegedly belonging to some esoteric Buddhist community in India, who told Roerich that Russia was destined for a lofty mission on this planet, and this inspired him to articulate, in the early 1920s, his master plan—"the Great Plan". This envisaged the unification of millions of Asian peoples, through a religious movement, using the name of the Future Buddha, Maitreya, into a great Buddhist confederacy, the Sacred Union of the East. Here, in the vision of the Russian mystic, the king of the Buddhist "Pure Land" of Shambhala, would, following an ancient prophesy, soon make his appearance to fight the great battle against all evil forces on earth which impeded human evolution. (The latter Roerich understood as "perfection towards Common Good"). This new polity (occasionally referred to as the "New Land") was to incorporate a part of the Soviet-controlled Siberia (the southwestern Altai, Tuva, Buryatia), the Outer and Inner Mongolias, Western China (Sinkiang) and Tibet (as a whole or its north-eastern part only). Its capital would be in Zvenigorod, the "City of Tolling Bells", which was to be built at the foot of Mount Belukha in the picturesque Upper Uimon Valley in Altai (an area which some old Russian legends associated with the mysterious Land of White Waters, Belovodie).

In 1922 the same Mahatmas revealed to Roerich (via his wife) his previous incarnations, one of which, surprisingly, turned out to be that of the person of the 5th Dalai Lama²—the "Great Fifth", the

² Fosdik 1998, pp. 77 and 289. Diary entries for 29 July 1922 and 14 August 1928.

one who instituted the high office of the Panchen Lama of Tashilhumpo and built the magnificent palace of Potala. (The theological implication of the fact was of paramount significance: because of the doubtful legitimacy of the Dalai Lama's sixth incarnation Roerich could claim that he was the continuation of the Dalai's true lineage disrupted in the 17th century!). The Mahatmas also prompted Roerich that he should lead a religious mission to Lhasa for the sake of the unification of Western and Eastern Buddhists, as well as for the purification of Buddhism.³

Nicholas Roerich, who regarded himself as a "practical idealist" rather than a mystic, set out to realize his grand project in late 1923 when he, together with his wife and elder son Yuri, travelled to India and the Himalayas. They settled in Darjeeling, lodging in the same house where the Dalai Lama had stayed during his Indian exile ("Talai Pho-brang"). Nicholas spent his time painting the breathtaking Himalayan skyline and receiving all sorts of visitors, including F.M. Bailey, Lady Lytton, and the members of the 1924 British Everest Expedition, as well as some leading Tibetans such as Laden La, Kusho Doring, and Tsarong Shape. According to British intelligence reports, some Tibetan lamas from the Moru monastery in Lhasa recognized him as the incarnation of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama by virtue of the moles on his right cheek, which formed the astronomical design of the Ursa Major, thus confirming Elena's earlier revelation.⁴ It was in Darjeeling too that Roerich learnt about the Panchen Lama's secret flight from Tibet. The event immediately signalled to him that the Maitreya prophesies were coming true and the new era of humanity, the "Age of Shambhala", was finally approaching.

At the end of 1924 Roerich suddenly interrupted his idyllic retreat in Darjeeling and rushed back to Europe and America. In Berlin (on his way back from America to India), the artist visited the Soviet embassy where he told the *polpred* (plenipotentiary), N.N. Krestinsky, about his projected artistic and archeological expedition across Central Asia. Roerich asked for Soviet diplomatic protection during his journey along the Leh-Khotan route, i.e. in Sinkiang (where the Soviets had their representatives in Khotan and Urumchi) and said he would

³ Rosov 2002, pp. 43, 165. See also Fosdik 1998, p. 143. Entry for 21 December 1922.

⁴ Sidorov 1988, pp. 244–245.

place whatever "materials" he might gather at the disposal of the Soviet government. He also shared with Krestinsky his firsthand impressions of the political developments in India, the Himalayan borderland, and Tibet.

The occupation of Tibet by the British", Roerich asserted, "goes on continuously and systematically. The English infiltrate (there) in small parties, by separating themselves, under some pretext, from military units passing near the frontier or, for example, from the Everest expeditionary parties. . . In Tibet the British conduct intensive anti-Soviet propaganda, by exploiting the crass ignorance of the Tibetans and exaggerating absurd rumours about the anti-religious activity of the Bolsheviks, their persecution of national minorities in Turkestan, etc.".⁵

Krestinsky reported this meeting to Chicherin, who, incidentally, was one of Roerich's university classmates. In his message the ambassador pointed out that the artist had "absolutely pro-Soviet leanings, which looked somewhat Buddho-Communistic", that he had established good contacts with the Indians and Tibetans through his son, who spoke 28 Eastern languages, and that he was also cautiously carrying out some agitation among these peoples in favour of Soviet Russia.⁶ Chicherin was most exited with this news, and he asked Krestinsky "not to lose sight of that half-Buddhist, half-Communist". "Hitherto", the Narkom wrote to him, "we've never had such a good connection to those important centers. So we should not lose the opportunity by any means".⁷

Apart from Berlin, Roerich also visited Paris, where he approached another Soviet high official—a *polpred* in France, who was concurrently the head of the Concession Committee, L.B. Krasin. The purpose of the visit was to procure from the Soviets the mining and agricultural concessions in the Altai area as the first step in the building of the utopian Buddho-Communist "New Country". Returning to Darjeeling, Roerich at once set about mounting his Central Asian expedition, which he launched in March 1925. After a short stay in Kashmir, the party proceeded to Ladakh, and then across the Karakorum Pass to Khotan. Everywhere it passed Roerich "saw"

numerous "signs" of the approaching global upheaval. Moreover, he even tried to precipitate the fulfillment of the apocalyptic Shambhala prophesy by distributing via a young Ladakhi ex-lama, Ramzan, a leaflet, saying in Tibetan that: "Maitrya is coming".

In April 1926 the expedition reached Urumchi. There Roerich easily befriended the Soviet Consul General, A.E. Bystrov, to whom he confided his further plans, which involved visiting Moscow and thence making a journey to Lhasa, via Altai and Mongolia. In his business diary the Soviet diplomat described this meeting as follows:

Today Roerich, his wife, and son have visited me. He told me much that was interesting about their travels. According to what he said, they study Buddhism and are connected to the Mahatmas and very often receive their directives regarding what must be done. By the way, they said that they have letters from the Mahatmas for Comrades Chicherin and Stalin. The task of the Mahatmas supposedly is to unite Buddhism and Communism and to create a great Eastern Union of Republics. There's a prophesy and belief among the Indian and Tibetan Buddhists that their liberation from foreign oppression will come precisely from the Reds in Russia (the Northern Red Shambhala).

The Roerichs are bringing several prophesies of this kind to Moscow. They are also bringing some Indian and Tibetan paintings, executed to that effect. From what Roerich says, one may conclude that their trip through India, Tibet, and Western China was the fulfillment of a mission of the Mahatmas, for the execution of which they were obliged to get to the USSR and then to Mongolia, where they were to get in touch with the Tashi Lama (aid to the Dalai Lama in spiritual matters), who fled from Tibet to China, and get him to Mongolia, and from there to set out in a spiritual procession for the liberation of Tibet from the British yoke.⁸

With Bystrov's assistance, the Roerichs and their two attendants, the Ladakhi Ramzan and a Tibetan lama Lobzang, obtained Soviet entry visas without any trouble, and two months later, on 9 June 1926, they all suddenly emerged in Moscow. There Nicholas at once contacted some of the leading Bolsheviks, including Chicherin, Lunacharsky, Kamenev, Krupskaia (Lenin's widow) and the Soviet cultural elite. To Chicherin, Roerich handed over two written messages from the Mahatmas in Russian translation, one addressed to Chicherin personally and another one for the "Moscow Communists". He also said that he brought a special gift of the Mahatmas intended for the

⁵ Zarnitsky, Trofimova 1965, pp. 98–99.

⁶ AVPRF, op. 04, op. 13, papka 87, l. 13a. Krestinsky to Chicherin, 2 January 1925.

⁷ Ibid., l. 14. Checherin to Krestinsky, 31 March 1925.

⁸ AVPRF, f. 0304, op. 1, p. 4, d. 30, l. 76 (entry for 19 April 1926).

Soviet Government—a small ivory casket with Himalayan soil for the grave of "Mahatma Lenin", their spiritual brother. The messages of the Indian Masters contained a eulogy of Bolsheviks' great achievements in Russia, along with a concrete proposal:

If the Union of the Soviets recognizes Buddhism as a doctrine of Communism, then our Communities will be able to proffer their active assistance [to the country], and hundreds of millions of Buddhists spread around the world, will provide the necessary might most unexpectedly. Our messenger Akdorje [alias Roerich—A.A.] is entrusted to expound the details of our proposal: we can assert that measures should be urgently taken to introduce Communism worldwide as a step towards the necessary evolution".⁹

To the Narkom Roerich further disclosed his (or rather the Mahatmas') scheme for the great unification of the Buddhist nations in Asia. This consisted of 9 points:

1) The Buddha's Doctrine presents a revolutionary movement; 2) Maitreya is the symbol of communism; 3) Millions of Asian Buddhists can be drawn in the world movement in support of the ideals of Community; 4) The basic law, or Gautama's simple teachings, will easily penetrate into the popular masses; 5) Europe will be shattered by the union of Buddhism and Communism; 6) The Mongols, Tibetans and Kalmyks agree about the dates when the Maitreya prophesies will be fulfilled and are prepared to apply these to the present evolution; 7) The Tashi Lama's departure from Tibet provides an unprecedented occasion for a [revolutionary] action in the East; 8) Buddhism explains the negation of God as a natural phenomenon; 9) Action should be urgently taken, jointly with the Soviet Government, taking fully into account the local conditions and the Asian prophecies.¹⁰

The pragmatic Chicherin must have been totally bewildered by these clearly messianic, if revolutionary, proposals. Right after his meeting with Roerich (which took place on 10 June 1926) the Narkom scribbled a note to the secretary of the Party's Central Committee (TsK VKPb) V.M. Molotov:

Dear Comrade,

The painter Roerich, who arrived in Moscow and is a great expert in Buddhism, has just made a tour of a considerable part of Tibet and the Chinese Turkestan. He also managed to penetrate into some

⁹ Both Mahatma letters are quoted in Rosov 2002, p. 180.

¹⁰ Quoted in Rosov 2002, p. 147.

areas of northern India. There are Buddhist communities there which reject the orthodox lamaism and adhere to the early teachings of Buddha with their primitive consumers' communism. This makes them sympathize with [our] communist program and the USSR. This fact is related to their struggle against the official lamaist upper strata in the Buddhist countries.

These Buddhist communities commissioned Roerich with the task of laying a little casket with the soil from the Buddha's birthplace on the grave of Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin]. Roerich brought the casket with him and is asking what he should do with it. He proposes to give it to the Lenin Institute. Besides, these Buddhist communities sent letters with greetings to the Soviet state. In these [letters] they put forward the idea of the world union between Buddhism and Communism. Roerich says he wants to hand the letters likewise to the Lenin Institute. The translation of these two letters is enclosed herewith. Should it be considered permissible from our point of view to publish these letters, we will still have to enquire of Roerich whether this will be good from a conspiratorial perspective, given the extremely despotic methods of the British administration in these regions.

With communist greetings,
Chicherin¹¹

Copies of this note were forwarded by Chicherin "for information" to the Politburo members, the Narkomindel Board as well as to some high officials, such as I.S. Unshliht (Revvoensovet), M.A. Trilisser (OGPU), and K.B. Radek (Comintern).

What happened to the precious gift and the original letters of the Mahatmas is unknown. On his own behalf, Roerich also donated to the Soviet leaders eight or nine of his paintings of the Maitreya series, executed in the course of his expedition. One of these portrayed a Mahatma wearing a steel helmet, with his head turned to the East, a face strikingly resembling that of Lenin. The meaning of the canvas Roerich explained neatly as "The time has come for the Eastern peoples to wake up from their age long slumbers and throw off their fetters". To the Narkom of Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Roerich gave his other canvas depicting the Buddha Maitreya on red horse.¹²

Chicherin no doubt was also anxious to obtain from his extravagant visitor more information about British espionage activities in

¹¹ Also quoted in Rosov 2002, p. 149. The Lenin Institute was set up in 1923, under the auspices of the TsK RKPb. It merged with the K. Marx and F. Engels Institute in 1928 and was closed in 1930.

¹² Zarnitsky, Trofimova 1965, pp. 104–105.

Central Asia, such as the way in which their agents infiltrated secretly into Tibet. But he certainly could not approve whole-heartedly of Roerich's project for a Buddhist Mission to Tibet because of its clearly adventurist character. And indeed, the Panchen's return to Tibet at that stage with a pro-Chinese military escort would not be a peaceful homecoming, considering the existent antagonism between the Sinophile and national factions in Lhasa (which was to a large extent antagonism between the Panchen's and the Dalai Lama's followers). That might easily spark off a new social explosion in Tibet, a kind of Buddhist revolution. But this, in Chicherin's thinking, was fraught with very serious consequences, such as a full-scale British invasion in Tibet and their final annexation of the country.

Interestingly, in one of Roerich's most mystical writings, his book about Shambhala, one will find an intriguing, if obscure, passage which presents in a prophetic form the spiritual march to Lhasa, led by the Tashi (i.e. Panchen) Lama jointly with . . . the Great Dalai Lama, the latter being clearly a reference to the Ambassador of Western Buddhists, Nicholas Roerich. The march was to end with the imminent overthrow of the present Dalai Lama should he choose to oppose the "liberation" of Tibet through the lofty name of the Buddha Maitreya:

The Banner of Shambhala will pass round the Middle lands of the Blessed One (i.e. Maitreya Buddha—A.A.); those who acknowledge Him will rejoice, those who reject Him will shudder.

The Tashi Lama will ask the Great Dalai Lama what will be the destiny of the last Dalai Lama.

[And he will reply:] The one who rejects will be judged and consigned to oblivion, and on will march the Host under the Banner of Maitreya, and the City of Lhasa will become dark and empty.

Those who rise against Shambhala will be subverted.

The Banner of Shambhala will flow like blood around the lands of the New World for the wicked, and [will shine] like the burning sun for the enlightened ones.

The Tashi Lama will find the Great Dalai Lama and the Dalai Lama will say: "I'll send my best sign to you—the bolts of lightning; go and take hold of Tibet. The Ring will protect [you]."¹³

According to V.A. Rosov, Nicholas Roerich seriously contemplated the possibility of launching a religious war against Tibet at an early

¹³ Roerich 1979, p. 106.

stage of his mission planning. The troops were to be assembled in Mongolia and brought into the mountain country under the Shambhala banner by one of his trusted associates, a former White Guard colonel N.V. Kordashevsky (who would later be taken on the Roerich mission as the head of escort). Elena Ivanovna Roerich vaguely hinted at this plan in her 1924 diary:

Invasion of Tibet [can be] useful. The course of events will affect the religion . . . There'll be a thunder over the desert. The right path will lead to a bloodless victory. We do not plan to fire guns. Just one shot at the Buddha [will] amount to a real battle.^{13a}

It seems very unlikely that the arch-cautious Chicherin could welcome a proposal for a military expedition to Tibet, even if the Shambhala shock troops were to be recruited from the midst of Mongolian red *tsereks*. Anyway, one should recall that by the time Roerich arrived in Moscow, the Narkom had already elaborated a program for peaceful negotiations with Lhasa to be conducted by Chapchaev, one that was apparently at odds with Roerich's venturesome plan for a Buddhist revolution in Tibet—"the Shambhala war".

As for the Mahatmas' appeal to Moscow, it was unacceptable for purely ideological reasons, as no sober-minded Bolshevik leader at that time would agree to such a heretical idea as to merge Leninism and Buddhism, much less so to place the entire Politburo under the supreme guidance of obscure Indian masters.

In general, Chicherin had some mixed feelings towards this "semi-Buddhist, semi-Communist" sponsored by American capital. What made the Narkom particularly suspicious was Roerich's hectic efforts to obtain the mining and agricultural concessions in the southwestern corner of Altai through the US-based joint-stock company "Belukha", run by his American disciples Louis Horsch and Maurice Lichtman (Vice-President of the Roerich Museum). Therefore when he learned, in June 1925, about negotiations going on in Paris between the "Belukha" and L.B. Krasin he immediately interfered, sending a cable to the latter in which he asked him to exclude from the discussions the issue of trade by the Americans in Western China and Mongolia, as this was "undesirable for the USSR". Yet this time, despite all his doubts and suspicions, Chicherin did not obstruct

^{13a} Rosov 2002, p. 173.

Roerich's plans for a Buddhist mission to Lhasa, probably hoping to gain some political benefits from these. Moreover, it seems that he even wanted to couple Roerich's journey with Narkomindel's own diplomatic mission under Chapchaev. The Russian painter, I.E. Grabar, recalled in his memoirs that Chicherin had phoned him somewhat unexpectedly in the winter of 1925–1926 to inquire about Roerich's whereabouts,¹⁴ which was precisely when the Narkom submitted the mission project to the Politburo.

On the other hand, Roerich's pan-Buddhist (rather than pan-Mongolist) scheme was regarded much more sympathetically by the OGPU. There, according to one of Roerich's most devoted followers who was then in Moscow, Zina Fosdik (the wife of Maurice Lichtman), Roerich had "a most remarkable meeting at which the names of Maitreya and Shambhala were pronounced. [His] offers for cooperation were received with enthusiasm".¹⁵ The high official he met with—though his name is not given by Fosdik—was M.A. Trilisser, head of the OGPU's Foreign Department (the Soviet counterintelligence service), another influential figure behind Moscow's Tibetan schemes.

Having finally obtained, on 11 July 1926, the mining concession from the Chief Concession Committee (Glavkontseskom) of the USSR and secured some Soviet backing for their Lhasa journey—at least from OGPU—the Roerichs proceeded to East Siberia. They went first to the Altai mountains and thence to Mongolia (Ulan Bator), where they arrived in September 1926. By then, their departure date had already been fixed for mid-April of the following year. The trip to Altai was actually their first visit to the area. The Roerichs made a tour of the picturesque Upper Uimon Valley, and they surveyed the place where the capital of the "New Country", Zvenigorod, was to be founded.

In Ulan Bator Nikolai Konstantinovich established friendly contacts with the Mongolian government, to whom he also donated one of his paintings of the Lord Maitreya ("The Great Rider"). At the same time, he and Elena Ivanovna published two of their ground-

¹⁴ Grabar' 1937, p. 296.

¹⁵ Fosdik 1991, pp. 34–35 (diary entries for 1926). Sina (Zina) Fosdik came to Moscow from New York, together with her husband, Maurice Lichtmann, to join with the Roerichs, in the summer of 1926.

breaking works, expounding the basics of Roerich's teachings, which blended Buddhist doctrine with that of Marx and Lenin, producing something which Gombojab Tsybikov described as "neo-Buddhism".¹⁶ Roerich also encountered Kozlov, who had just completed his Mongol-Tibetan expedition, and possibly met with Gomboidchin and Chapchaev as well. His priority at this point was to get in touch with the Panchen Lama, the key figure in his global Buddhist scheme. Yet, unluckily for Roerich, the Chinese authorities denied him a visa to go to Peking while he was visiting Altai. Still, there is some evidence to suggest that Nikolai Konstantinovich did make a trip to the Chinese capital in the fall of 1926. According to a Russian Sinologist Yu.L. Krol', his teacher, B.I. Pankratov, who was then working at the Soviet Embassy in Peking, claimed that he had met with Roerich there around 1927–1928.¹⁷ But Roerich had no particular reason to go to Peking after the completion of his Tibetan journey, that is in 1928. Besides, the Panchen Lama moved from Peking to Mukden in late 1926, so the only time Roerich could actually get in touch with the Lama in Peking before his journey was some time between September and December 1926. Pankratov was also quoted by Krol' as saying that the painter "wanted to enter Tibet as the 25th King of Shambhala, who was said to come from the North to bring salvation to the whole world. For that reason he (Roerich) wore some lavishly ornamented lama's clothing".

Roerich's contact with the Panchen Lama could have been effected through the same Pankratov, who was a fluent Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan speaker, or through Yuri Roerich. As yet one will find no reference to their meeting in either Roerich's writings or those of his close disciples, although the encounter, because of its apparently historical magnitude from Roerich's perspective, would surely have been mentioned if it did take place. On the other hand, there must have been some secret exchange of letters between Roerich and the Panchen Lama in 1926–1927, but it is hard to say to what extent the latter was aware of Roerich's grand designs and whether he really wanted to return to Tibet in the company of a Western Buddhist Mission.

¹⁶ These were *Obstchina* (The Community), Ulan Bator, 1926, and *Osnovy Buddizma* (The Basics of Buddhism) 1927. The latter was written by E.I. Roerich under a pseudonym Natalia Rokotova.

¹⁷ Krol' 1971, p. 90.

A graduate of the Oriental Institute in Vladivostok, Boris Ivanovich Pankratov (1892–1979) went to China in 1919, allegedly for linguistic practice. Until 1921, the young man had lived in Hankow, the cradle of the Chinese Revolution, and then moved to Peking. There he took up a job with the Chinese section of the Russian telegraphic agency (ROSTA) and also started teaching at the Russian Language Institute, sponsored by China's Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In 1923, Pankratov was employed by the Soviet Embassy under Karakhan as an interpreter of the Chinese, Mongolian and Tibetan languages, a post he retained until 1935 when he returned to the USSR. Pankratov subsequently worked in the Mongolian department of the Oriental Institute in Leningrad, with an interval between 1942–1948 when the Soviet Foreign Ministry dispatched him back to China, to the Urumchi and Chungking areas, probably in the same capacity of interpreter. Apart from his brilliant linguistic skills, he also had a solid knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and art.

When talking to his colleagues, Pankratov was very reticent about his former life and work in China. According to the Institute records, during his first years in Peking he closely associated with the Chinese revolutionaries, such as Prof. Li Ta-chao, one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party and an advocate of the Kuomintang-CCP “united front”. Pankratov widely travelled in China proper and also visited Inner and Outer Mongolia, as well as Tibet,¹⁸ though he personally strongly denied this fact. There is a highly intriguing story recounted by people who had known Pankratov intimately in the 1970s, of how on one occasion he visited the Kumbum monastery, dressed in a monk’s robe with a revolver hidden beneath, calling himself “a disciple of Panchen”—P'an-k'o-fu (which was actually a Chinese transliteration of his name). The eminent Soviet Sinologist, V.M. Alekseev, who met with Pankratov briefly in Peking in July 1926, spoke of him as a very sociable person, who told him frankly over breakfast at the house of the Russian emigre Orientalist, A.A. Stael von Golstein, that he served . . . in the OGPU (!)¹⁹

¹⁸ Archive of the Oriental Institute, St Petersburg, f. 152, op. 3, d. 452, l. 71. According to Pankratov’s character reference of 31 December 1949, he “had lived for a number of years in China, Tibet and Mongolia where he mastered to perfection the conversational languages and [his knowledge of] literatures of these countries”.

¹⁹ V.M. Alekseev, China Diary, 1926, entry for 25 July. The diary is in the possession of Alekseev’s daughter, M.V. Ban’kovskaya.

Thus it would not be too incredible to suggest that Pankratov had some part to play in Roerich’s intricate Tibetan scheme, if only that of a liaison between him and the Panchen Lama. There is yet another important question that needs to be asked here—what was the general attitude of the Mongolian government towards Roerich’s plans to bring the Panchen to Ulan Bator, as an initial step towards the latter’s homecoming journey (and the high point of Roerich’s Great Plan). Surely, if Roerich went to Peking to invite the Panchen to come over to Ulan Bator, his initiative must have been backed by the Mongolian leaders or at least some of them. Be that as it may, some kind of preliminary contacts, direct or indirect, between Roerich and the Panchen Lama seems to have been absolutely indispensable at that stage of Roerich’s Buddhist project.

The Soviet *polpred* in Mongolia P.M. Nikiforov, for his part, strongly advocated the idea of lending the Panchen Lama a helping hand to assist him to return to Tibet. This is, for example, what he wrote to Chicherin on 6 December 1926:

... I dare say that Bogdo’s further sojourn in China can have some undesirable consequences for our policy in the Inner and even Outer Mongolias: by providing the Panchen Bogdo with the funds for his pious subsistence, Japan, by way of compensation, can easily use him to its own ends. This issue has been of great concern to me for a long time, but I did not raise it until it assumed a rather threatening aspect, as I have mentioned above.

... I believe the time has come for us to adopt an active posture toward the Bogdo. I think he should be completely withdrawn from use by both Japanese and British politics.

According to some information, it is high time for the Panchen Bogdo to return to Tibet, and the Dalai Lama wants it very much. It must be admitted that Bogdo’s forced isolation from Tibet has become a source of political anxiety for the Dalai Lama. The latter’s unofficial representative in Ulanbator confided to me that it would be very bad if the Panchen Bogdo were unable to return to Tibet soon enough, that he lived a very hard life in China, and that he himself was willing to return, but was prevented by the Chinese.

I believe that we should interfere in the situation in terms of assisting the Panchen Bogdo to return to Tibet, and, if need be, also helping him to flee from China. In addition to the things mentioned above which make me raise these questions, there’s still one more circumstance to be considered.

There is a well-known painter and traveller Nikolai Konstantinovich Roerich, who has recently appeared in Mongolia and is presently residing in Ulanbator. He plans to go to Tibet next August and is pressing persistently for giving assistance to the Panchen Bogdo’s return to

Tibet. When I asked him, why did he think that the Panchen Bogdo should return to Tibet, he cited some theological concoctions necessitating his return. I believe that Roerich is working for someone—who the person is I am trying to find out now—or it may be that he just wants to ascertain our attitude to this issue. One thing is clear however—there is someone, who is also interested in Panchen Bogdo's return to Tibet.

In my thinking, this is a very serious question, so I would like to have Narkomindel's opinion on it.²⁰

There is another curious piece of evidence—a short entry in Nikiforov's work diary, presumably from early 1927, when the dissident Lama already settled in Mukden (to where he had moved at the invitation of the pro-Japanese warlord Chang Tsolin), which reveals the Soviet diplomat's tentative scheme for the solution of the vexing issue of the Panchen.

The Banchen Bogdo who fled from Tibet is now under a strong influence of Japan which is seeking to obtain from him a mandate to extend her influence via Chang Tsolin over the Inner and Outer Mongolias. Such a mandate, if Japan obtains it, may serve as a tool for her intrigues in both Mongolias.

The only way to frustrate the Japanese designs is to invite the Banchen Bogdo to the USSR via the Buryat and Kalmyk lamas. By snatching him from the hands of Japan and Chang Tsolin we can assist him in returning to Tibet where he apparently wants to go and where he is being expected.²¹

No doubt Chicherin fully realized the importance of removing the Panchen Lama from the Japanese sphere of influence in the Far East. Yet there were also some alarming notes in Nikiforov's letter which could not but sustain his former suspicions about the person of the Russian emigre painter and guru, who was so eager to help the Lama return to his homeland.

The Panchen Lama became a source of much anxiety for Moscow in early spring 1927. It was then that the Soviets learnt about the Panchen's plans for a visit to Inner Mongolia at the invitation of the "reactionary" princes and lamas there, and possibly to Outer

Mongolia (the MPR) after that as well. The Panchen reportedly also articulated his desire to return to Tibet as soon as possible. According to a report by the Soviet military intelligence at the Mongolian People's Red Army of 1 March 1927, the population of the Bandidgegen area in Inner Mongolia was informed by the lamas well in advance about the Panchen Lama's forthcoming visit and also that he would proceed thence via Yugodzir (Yeguuzer) to Ulan Bator.

Judging by the above", the report continued, "it can be inferred that Chang Tsolin is planning an armed intervention against the MPR, with the Panchen Lama's participation. For the time being, however, all the local Chahars and Udzumchins show much more sympathy for Feng and his National Armies in general than Chang Tsolin.²²

Thus, by removing the Panchen Lama from the politically sensitive area in north-eastern China, the Soviets could considerably weaken Chang Tsolin's position, especially in Inner Mongolia, which was one of the targets for their ally, Marshal Feng.

News of the Panchen Lama's plans to come to the MPR stirred up great enthusiasm among the general population of the country and it was particularly welcomed by the Mongolian nobles and lamas. The right-wing of the MNR Party also tended to regard the visit of the exiled Tibetan leader to Red Mongolia quite sympathetically at first. In the opinion of Tsyben Jamtsarano, "the honourary captivity" of the Banchen Bogdo in Mukden made him an instrument of Chang Tsolin's political intrigues. Therefore the party, he believed, should do its utmost to snatch the Banchen from the hands of the Chinese warlord. In particular Jamtsarano proposed that the Banchen Bogdo should be invited to Ulan Bator and placed "in special conditions" there with a view to encourage him to issue several religious "edicts" recognizing the Mongolian People's rule, the separation of Buddhist Church from State, and other reforms in the country. In case the Bogdo did not agree to cooperate, the Mongolian authorities could rid themselves of him by sending him "to the North", i.e. to neighbouring Soviet Russia. (After his arrest in 1937, Jamtsarano would tell the OGPU/NKVD investigators that in 1926–1927 he established contacts with the Banchen Bogdo by sending a Mongolian

²⁰ Quoted in Rosov 2002, p. 62.

²¹ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 40, ll. 45–46. Nikiforov's notebook "Gos. Voprosy" (State priority issues). Nikiforov resigned from office at the end of May 1927.

²² RGVA, f. 25895, op. 1, d. 842, l. 217. A monthly China Report of the intelligence section of the Mongolian People's Red Army, 1 March 1927.

lama to him. In reply the Banchen twice sent him with special couriers his "counterrevolutionary proclamations", which were to be distributed among the Mongolian monks.)²³

However, Jamtsarano's opponents in the party argued that the Banchen Bogdo's visit to the MPR would most likely revive the popular campaign for the search of the Bogdo-Gegen's 9th incarnation. Also, his stay in Ulan Bator would, they said, be extremely burdensome for the Mongolian finances, while his "edicts" would hardly work miracles to sustain the people's rule in the country. More important, such a visit could further complicate the Dalai-Panchen Lama's uneasy relations. This last argument was especially emphasized by them, since friendly relations with the Dalai Lama—who held the reins of power in Tibet—was politically more beneficial for People's Mongolia than friendship with the exiled Panchen, who had no real power at all.²⁴ The result of the discussion was that Jamtsarano agreed with the above arguments, and the MNR Party finally decided not to invite the Banchen Bogdo to the MPR. (This decision, however, strongly displeased the Mongols and even provoked a series of anti-government risings, mainly in the Kobdo area in Western Mongolia).

* * *

Thus Roerich had to considerably curtail his far reaching designs, restricting them solely to his Buddhist Mission project. The Great Plan was apparently not working out the way it was originally conceived. While in Ulan Bator, Roerich is known to have been corresponding intensely with Chicherin and Mel'nikov (head of Narkomindel's Far Eastern Department), probably finalizing his mission scenario. He also liaised closely with Nikiforov and Berlin (1st secretary of the Soviet Embassy), and was especially courted by one of OGPU's most sinister agents, their new resident in Ulan Bator, Y.G. Blumkin. (In 1927, OGPU appointed Blumkin as their chief representative in MPR and chief advisor of the Mongolian State Interior Security, GVO. He concurrently functioned as advisor on intelligence and counter-intelligence work in Feng's Kuominchun

²³ Reshetov 1998, p. 34.

²⁴ AVPRF, f. Karakhan's Secretariat, op. 10, por. 178, papka 32, ll. 138–143. A. Kallinikov (in charge of the information unit at the Soviet Embassy in Urga) to Karakhan, 30 June 1927.

Army).²⁵ Finally, both the Narkomindel and OGPU, despite all their reservations, had given Roerich their go-ahead.

The Roerich's mission set out from Ulan Bator on 13 April 1927. The Soviet Embassy provided the travellers with some quantity of arms (those left behind by Kozlov), provisions, gasoline as well as vehicles to take them across Mongolia to the Gobi. The party consisted of over 20 people, including servants, convoys, guides, etc. The mission staff at first comprised only five members: Nicholas Roerich, his wife Elena and son Yuri, Dr K.N. Riabinin, and P.K. Portniagin. Two more persons joined the mission in late July—the previously mentioned N.V. Kordashevsky, and A.A. Golubin, both of whom came from Tientsin via Soochow and Paotou. The latter seems to have been a particularly dark horse, as his life story and background remains hitherto entirely unknown, unlike other of Roerich's companions. From the recently published travel diaries of Riabinin and Kordashevsky we only know that Golubin had lived for many years in China, spoke several Oriental languages, including Tibetan, and that he worked for an Anglo-Chinese trade company in Tientsin, with a branch office in Paotou.

Roerich, already on the road, was eagerly awaiting news about the Panchen, and he was most excited to learn that the latter still intended to return to Lhasa and that the luggage he had sent in advance had already arrived in Kumbum. The Panchen's caravan, in fact, was detained by the Mongolian *tsereks*, who found it suspicious that several camels were carrying tanks with petrol, yet Marshal Feng ordered that they let it go.²⁶

Still, even without the Panchen Lama, Roerich's journey looked very much like a spiritual procession all the same, his party marching under the "Shambhala banner"—a Maitreya *tangka*, being a kind of personal standard of the Ambassador of Western Buddhists, and the American Stars and Stripes. Nicholas Roerich (now posing under the Tibetan name of Reta Rigden) would preach continuously in front of his companions gathered in Elena Roerich's tent at the end of the day, on a variety of subjects which then occupied his mind. He would speak of the future evolution of humanity, of the coming sixth race as one of spiritual human beings, of the Maitreya world community and the world government as represented by the elusive

²⁵ Re Ya.G. Blumkin see Leonov 1993, pp. 20–21.

²⁶ [Trofimov] 1937, 2, p. 65.20; Quoted in Rosov 2002, pp. 61–62.

Himalayan Brotherhood, of the unification of nations in Asia and creation of one universal Asian language, of cooperation, of Einstein's relativity theory, of Indian yoga, and so forth. These spiritual discourses would be accompanied by readings from works by Swami Vivekananda (particularly his "Inspired Talks"), Aurobindo Ghosh, Romain Rolland and other Eastern and Western "enlightened" authors. At the same time his wife Elena would be engaged in some strenuous psychic experiments with the "supreme Agni-yoga", following the example of E.P. Blavatsky, trying to communicate with the "subtle worlds" and, of course, the Mahatmas. While crossing the solitary Tsaidam plains, the mission members would raise their spirits with Wagner's energizing music, by playing the records of "Valkyrie" and "Parcifal" on the American gramophone. On the other hand, Yuri Roerich would conduct painstaking scientific exploration en route such as road surveys, collecting archeological artifacts and objects of art, as well as filming the most interesting sights.

Near Tsaidam Roerich's party was joined by a small "Dalai Lama's caravan" headed by a Tibetan official in Urga, called Jimpa (Chimpa), carrying arms and ammunition. The story of this "special load", as it is referred to in Dr Riabinin's travel diary, is worth telling here in greater detail. According to Yakov Blumkin's secret dispatch to OGPU, the caravan departed from Urga on 23 November 1926 (that is shortly after the Chapchaev Mission). It consisted of 39 pack camels, 19 convoys (4 of which were Tibetans: Jimpa, Chanchub Dava, Norsang and Puene, all from the "Tibetan representation" at Ulan Bator) and 19 Buryat pilgrims. A part of the caravan load was 100 infantry rifles with 10,000 cartridges. These rifles and ammunition were in fact purchased by the Tibetan *polpred* (Donyer Lobzang Cholden) from the Soviet embassy for the sum of 8,000 Mexican dollars! (The currency in use at that time in China and Mongolia). The purchase had been stored on the territory of the Soviet consular settlement for some time before it was taken by car—on the very eve of Chimpa's departure—to the Tibetan representation where it was packed up. The transportation was supervised by a courier of the Soviet Embassy. The loading of arms on the truck was done in the presence of the Tibetan Donyer and Yuri Roerich (probably acting as interpreter).²⁷

²⁷ The International Roerich Center (Moscow). Manuscript section: f. 3, op. 1, d. 26, l. 7. (Quoted in Shaposhnikova 2001).

Selling arms to Jimpa by the Soviet "Torgpredstvo" (Trade Representative) was most likely designed to make a good impression on the Dalai Lama and hence facilitate both Chapchaev's and Roerich's negotiations with, as the latter called him, the "Yellow Pope". Jimpa's caravan, however, got bogged down in the middle of the journey, on the edge of Gobi, for many months. According to Dr Riabinin, Jimpa was struck down with pneumonia at Yumbelise, due to severe cold, and was left behind there by his Buryat companions who, so it seems, then delivered the greater part of his load to Lhasa. These Buryats were actually *khuvarak* boys, 14 in number, so Riabinin tells us, sent by Agvan Dorzhiev to Lhasa to obtain higher religious education.²⁸ (Dorzhiev's initiative was also clearly timed to coincide with the dispatch of the Chapchaev Mission).

With the arrival of Jimpa, the Roerich expedition caravan would proceed further under one more spiritual symbol (another product of Roerich's ingenuity)—the Dalai Lama's yellow flag, inscribed in Tibetan: "Hail to the Unshakable Vajra Holder, the 13th Dalai Lama". Jimpa, despite all the treatment given to him by Dr Riabinin, soon passed away, and the mission leader had to take upon himself the delivery of his "special load" (the remaining 29 rifles with ammunition) to the Master of the Potala.

In early October, the Roerich party was halted by a Tibetan frontier outpost at Chu-nargen, north of Nagchu, at about the same place where Przhevalsky had been stopped half a century before. The Tibetan passport issued to Roerich by the Donyer in Urga proved to be useless, and the fact that he was leading a Buddhist mission to Lhasa was totally disregarded by the "ignorant" Tibetan frontier guards. For five long months the Mission leader had been waiting eagerly for permission from the Potala to enter Lhasa, but it was not forthcoming. Neither of his epistles to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan ministers, including the premier (Lonchen Yabshi Kung), was answered. In the first of these, written on 28 October, Roerich informed Tibet's ruler of the lofty purpose of his mission—that he, as the Head of Western Buddhists, "elected by the Buddhist Council in America", was going to present him an official letter (*gramota*), together with the image of the Victorious Lord, the All-Conquering Buddha, and he also complained of the "insulting detention" of his "peaceful Buddhist Embassy" outside Nagchu, "amidst the winter

²⁸ Riabinin 1996, pp. 231–232 (entry for 29 July 1927).

cold". Roerich's second letter of 8 November already sounded the alarm, telling the Lama of the desperate condition of his Mission—that many of its members were ailing severely and that half of the caravan animals already perished.²⁹ (The first letter, as it turned out, was actually dropped on the road by a Tibetan courier, and the second one simply returned to Roerich by the Nagchu jongpens). Roerich also wrote a few times to his Tibetan friends, Kusho Doring and Tsarong Shape, as well as to F.M. Bailey in Gangtok, but to no avail. He did not know, however, that it was the Political Officer in Sikkim who was responsible for the detention of his party, having informed Lhasa that Roerich was "a Red Russian".³⁰ This news, which reached the Dalai Lama while Chapchae was still in Lhasa, coupled with some other bad rumours, only deepened his fears of Bolshevik intrigue. He apparently did not know about the real purpose of the Roerich Mission. But even if he did, it is most unlikely that the Dalai Lama would have agreed to the unification of Eastern and Western Buddhists under his high patronage, which actually meant opening up Lhasa to Western visitors. Roerich's reckoning that the Lama might welcome his proposal to that effect was profoundly utopian.

In the meantime, suffering badly from the climatic rigours of Changtang and having actually lost most of his caravan animals, Roerich had no other option but to give up on his mission plans (though not on his Great Plan as a whole). On 9 November 1927 Kardashevsky recorded in his diary:

N.K.R. has changed his plans under the circumstances. On 24 November, the head of Western Buddhists must be elected in America. If by that time the Buddhist Center in New York receives no communication from N.K.R., he says his mission in Tibet will be completed, since the West will actually have another Dalai Lama and there'll be no need in any talks with Lhasa. Therefore N.K.R. is dictating a new letter, this time personally to the Dalai Lama of the East, saying that the Western Buddhists, in view of the fact that HH is obviously unwilling to hold talks with their Embassy, will elect [their own] Dalai Lama on 24 November. N.K.R. believes that his mission in Tibet is completed and is asking HH for permission to let the Embassy go to the south, to India.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 367–368, 389–390.

³⁰ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1145. Ministers of Tibet to Bailey, 19 October 1928.

³¹ Dekroa 1999, p. 176.

The election of "the Dalai Lama of the West" in America, scheduled for November 24, 1927, as referred to in the message, was in fact to be carried out by a group of Roerich's followers, the members of the so-called "Buddhist Center" at the Roerich Museum in New York. So Roerich's claim that he was representing numerous Buddhist communities in the West was an overt exaggeration.

On 19 January 1928, Roerich's party moved from Chu-nargen to Nagchu, and thence, a month and half later, back to India via Sikkim, their return route having been duly approved by the Lhasa authorities. Shortly before his departure the embittered Russian guru forwarded one more missive to the Dalai Lama. In this Roerich asserted that he came to Tibet to ask His Holiness to head the Western Buddhist sangha, but he, the Dalai Lama, did not care to send any official to receive his Embassy. So his mission was over now. The separate head of Western Buddhists has been already elected, and "the stream of Dharma is presently flowing freely in the West".³² (This newly elected Western Dalai Lama, as one might guess, was none other than Nicholas Roerich).

Upon his arrival in Darjeeling in late May 1928, Roerich wrote one last letter to the Tibetan rulers (the Dalai Lama and the State Council), demanding explanation of the humiliating treatment to which he, as someone whose "name is honoured in 25 great countries", was subjected by the Tibetan officials. In particular he wished to know why his expedition (not spoken of as the "Buddhist mission" any more) was detained for five months in the Changtang, and why the local population was forbidden to sell foodstuffs to his party, which resulted in the casualty of many men and animals.³³ The letter was actually written in connection with the anticipated arrival in India in the summer of 1928 of several representatives of the Roerich art institutions in the USA to investigate the causes of forceful detainment of Roerich's American expedition in Tibet. But this at best was only an attempt at face-saving after his mission had suffered a complete fiasco.

The Tibetan ministers (Kalons) were obviously baffled by Roerich's letter (and probably also slightly scared as Roerich stated he would report the incident to the "Most Lofty Government of the USA"),

³² Ibid., p. 241.

³³ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1045, pp. 309–311 (Roerich's letter to the Dalai Lama, 13 June 1928).

so it was only natural that they turned to F.M. Bailey for advice. In their letter to the PO in Sikkim of 19 October 1928 the Tibetans offered their own interpretation of the dramatic happenings, which incidentally evidenced their hostile attitude to Soviet Russia:

You know that foreigners are not allowed to come to Tibet casually and in case of Roerich, particularly after the fact of his being a red Russian has been brought to our notice, we could not allow him to come to Tibet. Accordingly we had him stopped at Nagchuka and persuaded him to go back from there. Meanwhile there had been an unusually heavy snow fall in the northern region and many ponies and camels belonging to the party died of the intense cold. They also ran short of foodstuffs. They fell sick owing to the rigours of the climate. In other words, they were put to great hardship and it was simply impossible for them to go back. They therefore, of their own accord, went to India through Sikkim, following the Changtang route. We sent you a detailed report about this on the 1st day of the 4th month (20th May) 1928.³⁴

Bailey obviously found himself in a rather awkward situation as shows the confidential letter he wrote to the Foreign Secretary to the government of India on 3 November:

It is not easy to suggest a suitable reply, especially as they (the Tibetans) were acting under our instructions in refusing him (Roerich) entry into Tibet. I would suggest that the Tibetan Government might reply that since the outbreak of the revolution in Russia they have issued stringent orders against the entry of any foreigners into Tibet by the Northern Route, and for this reason refused to have any dealings with the Roerich Expedition which followed that route to Tibet. I do not think it would be advisable to inform the Tibetan Government by letter that they should send such a reply. They can be informed by telephone when I go to Gyantse next year or I can inform the Tibetan Trade Agent there verbally.³⁵

Roerich's failure to negotiate with the Dalai Lama and also the way he was treated by the Tibetan officials eventually made the artist and guru into one of the most severe critics of Tibet under her present ruler. The books that Nicholas Roerich subsequently wrote about his Tibetan journey as well as the travel diaries of his companions (Riabinin, Kordashevsky, and Portniagin) are filled with many harsh words and invectives against the Dalai Lama, blaming him for the

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 306–307.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 303.

ultimate degradation of Tibetan Buddhism, labeled as primitive "shamanistic Lamaism". But the Lama was also made responsible for the dramatic "schism" of Buddhism into separate Western and Eastern traditions. At the same time Roerich praised the Panchen Lama, placing him high above his "impious" incarnation colleague. "The spiritual leader of Tibet is not the Dalai Lama, but Tashi Lama, of whom only good things are known", he would write in his travelogue "Altai—Himalayas". "They (the Tibetans) condemn the current situation in Tibet more than we do. They are anticipating the fulfillment of the ancient prophesy about the return of the Tashi Lama who will become the one Ruler of Tibet and under whom the Precious Doctrine will flourish again".³⁶ In his other work, "The Heart of Asia", Roerich also quoted a wide-spread prophesy coming from the Tengyaling monastery that the present 13th Dalai Lama would be the last one.³⁷

At the same time one will find in the diaries of Riabinin, Kordashevsky and Portniagin³⁸ many references to the Chapchaev Mission, which were mainly stories told by the Mongolian pilgrims returning from Lhasa. For example, their notes confirm the fact of Chapchaev's cold reception at the Potala and that his "embassy" was actually put under arrest by the Tibetan government. There is also a curious mention of the Soviet "trade agent" in Tsaidam who allegedly had to abandon the place because of his strained relations with the local ruler, Kurlyk-beise, which must be a reference to Bulat Mukharain. More importantly, these three persons were the first to identify Roerich's venture as a Buddhist Mission and reveal its secret tasks.

Back from Tibet, Chapchaev too had a story to tell about Roerich to his superiors in Moscow. Thus in his interview at the OGPU he claimed that he had heard of the Roerich expedition in Tibet for the first time at Nagchu on his return journey to Mongolia (which must have been in mid-December 1927). Roerich was said to be camping down with his caravan at Chu-nargen, two days journey north of Nagchu, but when Chapchaev arrived at the place he did

³⁶ Roerich, N. 1992, p. 324.

³⁷ Roerich, N. 1979, p. 142. Tengyeling (*Bstan-rgyas-gling*) monastery in Lhasa belonged to the followers of Demo-Rimpoché, the Regent during the 13th Dalai Lama's minority. Its monks were known for their Sinophile leanings.

³⁸ Riabinin 1996, Portniagin 1998, Dekroa 1999.

not find Roerich there (since the latter had moved with his camp shortly before to a nearby monastery, Sharugen). "On the way to Lhasa", Chapchaev stated further, "Roerich conducted some anti-Soviet agitation, saying, at the time when he was detained by the local authorities and not admitted to Lhasa, that 'You let pass the real Red (Russians) but are halting me who is a pure Buddhist'".³⁹

George Roerich, unlike his companions, produced a more scholarly account of the journey in 1931 which, of course, made no mention of either its religious or political aims. This work, entitled "Trails to Inmost Asia", with its miscellaneous geographical, ethnographical, archeological and other data, is still of considerable interest to scholars of Central Asia and particularly of Tibet. This is, for example, the story of the Bolshevik revolution in the peculiar Tibetan interpretation that Roerich heard from the civil governor of Nagchu:

The khan-po told us that formerly the religion of Russia had been somewhat similar to the religion of Tibet, but since the victory of the Reds, there was no religion in Russia. Present-day Russia was ruled by a man who killed the Tsagan-bator Khan (White Mighty Ruler—A.A.) with a revolver. Pictures of this man were to be seen everywhere and his name was Nenin. This man on committing the deed, climbed a high tree and proclaimed from the top of it that Tsagan-bator Khan was no more, and that the religions of Yisu (Jesus) and Buddha had been destroyed. But, unfortunately for him, a woman possessing the knowledge of Red and White customs, who was formerly the wife of a big official under the Tsagan-bator Khan, was still alive, and resolved to revenge the death of the great Khan. She approached the man ruling Russia and shot him dead, after which she committed suicide! That is the story of the Russian Revolution according to Lhasa.⁴⁰

After the completion of his Tibetan journey Nicholas Roerich remained in India, under the "unobtrusive observation" of the Indian Government. (In the subsequent years he would visit the USA and Europe, though not Russia, only twice—in 1929 and 1934). In early 1929, Roerich purchased from the Maharaja of Mandi an estate in Naggar, Kulu Valley. There he founded a Himalayan Research Institute, accommodating a wide range of field research (archeology, ethnography, botany, medicine, biochemistry etc.), under the auspices of

³⁹ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, l. 144.

⁴⁰ Roerich, G. 1931.

the Roerich Museum in New York,⁴¹ as a basis for the future "City of Knowledge", Urusvati. By that time Roerich's flirtation with the Soviet leaders had been over, due to Moscow's totally unsupportive attitude to his Mahatma-inspired global schemes, so he turned anti-Bolshevik once again. In 1934–1935, Roerich made a fresh attempt to establish a Buddhist confederacy in Asia (centred around Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, as a buffer between the USSR and Japan), now turning to the American government for support. Yet, despite all the assistance lent to the Great Plan by his most highly placed disciple in America, then U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace,⁴² his resumed work to create a new world order was again a fiasco. The world was obviously not ripe enough to embrace Roerich's advanced ideas of "cosmic thinking" and human evolution.

⁴¹ See *Illustrated weekly of India*, 23 August 1931.

⁴² See Rupen 1979, pp. 3, 10–11; Fosdik 1998, pp. 612, 616, 623–24, 654, 664, 666; Meyer, Brysac 1999, pp. 474–82, 486–90.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FINAL EFFORTS TO WIN TIBET OVER

The Tibetan question emerged on the Soviet agenda once more in early 1928, in connection with the increasingly unsettled situation in the Far East. On 27 February, while Chapchaev was still on his way to Moscow, the Antireligious Commission at the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party (TsK VKPb) approved Dorzhiev's latest proposal for a Soviet Buddhist Mission to Lhasa. The delegation, consisting solely of Buryat and Kalmyk reformists (*obnovlentsy*), loyal to the regime, was to depart in early autumn, right after the completion of Buddhist councils to be held in Kalmykia and Buryatia in June and August respectively. The main idea was that the mission should try to allay the Dalai Lama's concerns about the "persecution of Buddhism" in Soviet Russia. For that reason, apart from giving verbal assurances, the reformists were also to deliver him the appropriate resolutions specially adopted by these councils.

On 29 June a group of top party and government officials supervising the project on behalf of the state, E.M. Yaroslavsky (a member of the Presidium and Secretary of the Central Control Commission of the VKPb, and also head of the League of Militant Godless), P.G. Smidovich (head of the Anti-religious Commission), M.A. Trilisser (deputy head of OGPU), and L.M. Karakhan (Chicherin's deputy again) sent a letter to Stalin emphasizing the political importance of the venture.¹

... Since the reactionary Buryat and Kalmyk lamaist clergy try by all means possible and not without success to exercise systematically negative influence on the Tibetan religious centre, and since the competent organs have lately come across several cases when the reactionary lamas sent their special messengers to the Dalai Lama, complaining of persecution of the Yellow creed by the Soviet power, an appropriate counter-influence on Lhasa through the Buddhist reformists, headed by Dorzhiev, would be quite timely and expedient at this very moment.

¹ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 171. The letter was originally drafted by Yaroslavsky and Smidovich on 28 May 1928, then signed by Trilisser and Karakhan, and finally forwarded to Stalin on 29 June.

The need to establish a closer link between the reform movement of our Buddhists and the Dalai Lama, with a view to reinforce the reformists by the latter's authority, is further dictated by the fact that the Panchen Bogdo, the Dalai Lama's antagonist who fled from Tibet and who is only second to him in the Buddhist world, has resided of late in Mukden, in the Japanese sphere of influence. The Chinese reactionaries, in the person of the Chang Tso-lin clique and the Japanese, have been successful in using the name of the Panchen Bogdo (for their own ends) in Inner Mongolia; they also seek to establish through him liaison with the clergy in Outer Mongolia and the USSR. Now their activities will surely become more intense, hence we should not lose time in taking some counter-measures.²

Yaroslavsky and his colleagues also informed Stalin that preparations for the mission were already under way, with the Buryat and Kalmyk lamas collecting donations for the journey at their monasteries. However, these funds seemed to be insufficient to cover all expenses and therefore the authors of the letter asked for an additional sum of 50,000 roubles. In conclusion, they assured Stalin that "our reliable agents" attached to the mission would see to "the reasonable expenditure of the funds", and they would also exercise "general control" over the delegation conduct. Apart from that, the same people would be charged with the task of "political reconnaissance" in Tibet.³

The proposal for the Buddhist mission was then submitted for the consideration of the Politburo on 19 July by Karakhan (which suggests that Tibet was still one of Narkomindel's priorities), and approved on the same day.⁴ A week later the deputy head of the Eastern Department of OGPU (the entity specializing in counter-intelligence), H.S. Petrosian, invited Chapchaev to his office for a special talk "on religious matters", in view of the projected Buddhist mission to Tibet. In the course of this the Kalmyk tried to bring home to one of the OGPU's leading officials the Dalai Lama's great concern about his Buddhist coreligionists in the USSR:

In order to establish good relations with Tibet, we will have to lift or somewhat modify the restriction concerning the age limit for the *khorvaraks*, which is the only real solution to the problem. But this is, of course, if we want to proceed from the interests of our higher, international politics, and not from our domestic interests. Without this,

² Ibid., l. 3.

³ Ibid., l. 4.

⁴ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 696. Minutes of the Politburo session of 19 July 1928.

there is no point to even look in the direction of the Buddhist East, especially Tibet. The more so that the Dalai Lama told me that "the Chinese and the English have acknowledged his authority in religious matters over Buddhists, whereas Russia, though it is believed to be much closer to Tibet, has not yet done so with regard to her own Buddhists.⁵

When asked to give his opinion about the forthcoming mission, Chapchaev said "it would have some import for the Dalai Lama, as he had never been visited by a religious delegation from the USSR". The delegates, he thought, should raise before the Lama the questions of "purification" of religion and of exempting the monkhood from military service. However, the Kalmyk believed that the mission could hardly attain its ends, unless the *khovarak* issue was resolved.

The Dalai Lama would immediately ask the delegates about it, and they would have nothing to say. If they say that the All-Union Council passed such a decision [the one that set the age limit for the *khovaraks*—A.A.], this could only harm their relations with the Dalai Lama, and this would ultimately undermine the authority of Dorzhiev in Lhasa as someone who "sold himself".

As a palliative, Chapchaev proposed "to enlarge the sop" to the Tibetans, "mainly by sending in more brocade", which obviously meant presents to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan elites.

There was also some discussion over the question of Dorzhiev's successor at the head of the Tibetan Legation in Leningrad, as the aged "Tibetan diplomat" had expressed his wish to see in this post a Buryat incarnate lama Danzan Norboev, commonly known as the Ganjurba-Gegen (lit. "a gegen who knows the entire text of the Kangyur by heart"). Norboev, who was educated in Lhasa and personally known to the Dalai Lama for his great scholarship, returned to Russia in 1918 and settled at the Tsugol Datsang. He would later claim that the Lama presented him with a special *gramota* (official letter), saying that he, Norboev, "while staying in the Northern Land, should by all means, even at the risk of his life, take care of the needs of the state government of Tibet".⁶ And indeed in 1921–1922

Norboev dispatched a caravan load to Lhasa, consisting of "nine pack-horse loads, four or five *poods* of weight each". These were designed for the Dalai Lama and Tsarong Shape, as evidenced by a Buryat lama, Dava-Sambu Dugarov, then residing at the Potala as one of the Dalai's attendants. According to this lama, Tsarong even sent two Tibetan officials to Buryatia to safeguard the delivery of the load to Lhasa. The stuff sent by Norboev included "military rifles, cartridges, [rolls of] silk, silver goods, gold bullion and things made of gold, such as rings, brooches etc., as well as ivory-made articles".⁷ With the onset of the Buddhist reformation the Tsugol Datsang, being located close to the Mongolian border, became one of the citadels of anti-reformist monks, who sought to win the influential and much venerated Ganjurba-Gegen over to their side. To remove Norboev from their "vicious influence" Dorzhiev decided to bring the Buryat to Leningrad and install him in the Buddhist temple there as his "deputy on Tibetan affairs". For this purpose he wrote a letter to Chicherin in May 1928, commending his protege:

Norboev's knowledge of the Russian language and life in the USSR, on the one hand, and his connections with the Dalai Lama and the influential circles in Tibet, on the other, could be helpful in the future to promote Soviet-Tibetan rapprochement. I believe that he, considering my advanced age, would be able to replace me soon and continue my work to which I have been whole-heartedly devoting myself up to the present moment. This opinion of mine is undoubtedly shared by the Dalai Lama...⁸

However, it was not so, as the Dalai Lama, according to Chapchaev, had named Tepkin and not Norboev as Dorzhiev's successor. "If Dorzhiev appoints Norboev now as his deputy", the Kalmyk added, "this is entirely his own trick".⁹

Despite Chapchaev's information, Chicherin did not object to Norboev's appointment, perhaps hoping that it would not be difficult to deal with him should Dorzhiev die or wish to resign because of his age or ill-health. (Years later in an interview with the present author, Vladimirtsov's daughter, Liudmila, would speak of Norboev as "a very meek and yielding person, one of pure and gentle soul").

⁵ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, l. 143.

⁶ Archive of the Oriental Institute, St Petersburg, r. II, op. 1, d. 370. Norboev's letter to the TsIK of the Buryat Republic, 12 July 1929.

⁷ Nimaev 1993, p. 39. Dorzhiev's letter to Chicherin, 12 May 1928.

⁸ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, l. 142.

As a result the Ganjurba-Gegen moved from Buryatia to the Buddhist temple in Leningrad, and on 10 February 1929 the Narkomindel issued him a "special mandate", which placed Dorzhiev's assistant under their diplomatic protection.¹⁰ Still Dorzhiev had to ask formally for the Dalai Lama's consent. This was duly granted in a letter from the Potala that he received in early July of the same year. The Lama obviously concurred with the arguments of his old *tsanshav*, authorising Norboev to act as his representative in Soviet Russia.

Shortly after that (on 12 July), Norboev forwarded a letter to the TsIK of the Buryat Republic concerning his ambiguous civic status. In this, curiously enough, he petitioned to be recognized "as a Tibetan citizen", because of his diplomatic post and because he had not yet been formally admitted to Soviet citizenship, only being registered at his birthplace in the Aga Aimak by the local *somon* authorities. However, if it turned out that he was regarded as a de facto Soviet subject, Norboev requested this Buryat supreme body of government to raise before the Centre "the question of releasing him from Soviet citizenship".¹¹ What reply the newly appointed "Tibetan diplomat" was given by the authorities in Verkhneudinsk remains unknown, although it seems unlikely that his requests were granted by them.

In August of the year 1928, in anticipation of the Buddhist council in Buryatia, Dorzhiev and Tepkin came up with a rather unusual initiative to resolve the cumbersome "khovarak issue". They forwarded a petition to the VTsIK via P.G. Smidovich, in which they, as Tibetan representatives in Russia, pleaded with this highest legislative organ, by referring to the Dalai Lama's personal request to abolish the age limit for the *khovaraks* and grant Buddhists the right to educate their children in monastic schools, on reaching the age of seven. Smidovich was known as a soft-liner among the Soviet leaders and Dorzhiev no doubt hoped that he would be able to convince his party comrades to amend the acting legislation to satisfy the needs of the Buddhists (and hence please the Dalai Lama), considering their important role in Soviet Eastern policy. And indeed Smidovich responded to the petition quite favourably at first. According to Dorzhiev, one of the copies of the document which was returned

to him bore an inscription by Smidovich saying that "an exception for the Buddhist cult could possibly be made after the preliminary study of the case". This, of course, infused hope in Dorzhiev by making him believe that VTsIK would soon issue a special decree to that effect, but he was to be disappointed in his expectations. (In reality, Smidovich's "resolution" may have been no more than a skillful tactical subterfuge to which the high Soviet official resorted to placate Dorzhiev and his followers on the eve of the Buddhist Mission.) However, five months later, Dorzhiev sent a new petition to Smidovich. In this he again emphasised the political implication of the "khovarak issue"—the Dalai Lama, Dorzhiev reasoned, would be much relieved to hear about the lifting of the restriction, and this consequently would promote the rapprochement between the USSR and Tibet.¹²

In general one gains the impression that there was some strange lack of cooperation between the central authorities in Moscow and the Buryat local administrators in Ulan Ude regarding the "Lamaist question". While the former openly flirted with the leaders of the reform movement, whose services they badly needed in Lhasa, the latter, not infrequently, acted in complete disregard of the considerations of Soviet "higher politics". Thus in the summer of 1928 the first two Buryat monasteries in the Cis-Baikal area, the Alar and Ungin Datsans, were actually brought to the point of closure. Then an accident occurred on the Soviet-Mongolian border in Altan Bulak when the customs officers arrested a consignment of Tibetan medications which Dorzhiev had purchased for his Atsagat medical school (which was under Narkomindel's formal protection). As a result, Dorzhiev had to strongly protest to the same Smidovich on 10 August. In his other "note" to the official Dorzhiev spoke very critically of the anti-religious debate staged by the activists of the "League of Militant Godless" in Verkhneudinsk in March 1928. He was especially annoyed by the current "tactical" methods of anti-religious propaganda in Buryatia, which insulted the religious feelings of Buryats and even threw them "into a state of panic terror". More importantly, the activities of the local "anti-religionists", in his opinion, seriously damaged the reputation of the Soviet power among a broad sector of the popular (*ulus*) masses.¹³

¹⁰ See fn. 6.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² NARB, f. 1, op. 1, d. 591, l. 22 (a copy), dated January 1929.

¹³ Nimaev 1993, pp. 42–43. Dorzhiev to Smidovich, 11 May 1928.

Despite all his discontent, however, Dorzhiev continued to play the dubious part assigned to him by the Soviets in their "Tibetan game". From 21 to 24 August he presided over the 3rd Buddhist council in Buryatia together with Danja Munkujapov, head of the Buryat Buddhist Church, and Aragva Nasankiev. As with all previous rallies of the kind, it was largely manipulated by the Buryat regional party organization (the Burobkom) and, of course, OGPU. The reformists (*obnovlentsy*)—who in fact achieved little with their far-fetched plans for the "revival of faith"), as the majority of clergy were still clinging to the "old practices", renewed attacks on their opponents, the conservative lamas, by labeling them "enemies of religion, counter-revolutionaries, debauchers", etc. On the other hand, they clearly used the council as an arena for demonstrating their political loyalty. (It will be recalled at this point that the Buddhist assembly was held shortly after the notorious Shakhtinsky Trial in Moscow, which triggered the hunt for "hidden enemies" of the Soviet regime throughout the country). The followers of Dorzhiev, the "Dorzhievites", ultimately sought to urge the Soviet Government to ban all Buddhist factions except their own, which seemed to be the only way to overcome the continuing schism in the Buddhist Church. Dorzhiev, therefore, in his address, loudly praised the Soviet government "for opening up a broad path to the flourishing of the sacred Buddhist religion", as was evidenced by such acts as the separation of Church from State, granting Buddhists the freedom of conscience and religion, permission to convene their councils, setting up a special Buddhological Institute in Leningrad, exemption of monks from military service, and much more. There was, however, the vexed "khovarak issue" which Dorzhiev could not, of course, avoid in his speech. "The central government", he said, "has allowed the Muslims religious education of young men under 14, hence it can be hoped that the age limit for the Buddhist *khovaraks* will not be restricted to the age of 18".¹⁴

Finally, the Buryat Buddhist Council passed a resolution on sending a religious delegation to the Dalai Lama, jointly with the Kalmyks, "to inform him of the condition of Buddhists in the USSR".¹⁵ The delegation was to be headed by the Bandida Khambo Lama, Danja Munkujapov. Its other members were to be exclusively adherents of

¹⁴ Archive of the Oriental Institute, St Petersburg, r. II, op. 1, d. 373, l. 30.

¹⁵ Ibid., l. 35.

the reform movement, both monk and lay, as approved by the council. The Russian Academy of Sciences also wanted to send its "representative" with the mission. This was Galdan Jamtsaranov, a lama from the Aga Datsang (then on staff of the Buddhological Institute), who was to purchase rare books and manuscripts in Tibet.¹⁶

Apart from religious discussions in Lhasa, the Buddhist Mission was assigned another, much shadier, task to be fulfilled en route, in Ulan Bator. According to one OGPU document, the mission members were to start the important work of splitting the bulk of Mongolian monkhood, in order to create a reformist cadre from the midst of the lowest monastic strata. "Towards the same end, in connection with the delegation's visit [to Ulan Bator], it will be necessary to send Agvan Dorzhiev there, on the pretence of making preparations for their journey", the paper further stated. "He, on the one hand, will have to provide verbal information [to the Mongolian lamas] on the condition of the Buddhist religion in the USSR, and on the other hand, will prepare the ground for launching the reform movement in Mongolia".¹⁷ Thus it appears that the Soviet ideologists had, with Dorzhiev's active involvement, already sketched a scheme for undermining the integrity of the Mongolian clergy based on the methods used in Buryatia and Kalmykia.

Yet things did not work the way they were planned in Moscow, and the Buddhist delegation went neither to Tibet nor to Mongolia in the fall of 1928. When it came down to receiving the allocated funds for the journey, the Narkomindel again came across some unexpected difficulties. On 29 September the vice-chairman of the Sovnarkom USSR and of the Council of Labour and Defence (commonly abbreviated as STO), I.E. Rudzutak, reported to the Politburo (Stalin):

According to the Finance Commissariat of the USSR, the Narkomindel, by referring to the Politburo resolution of 19/7, has requested the allocation of 50,000 roubles (15,000 of which should be in foreign currency), the money required for the organization of a special mission to Tibet.

Because of the shortage of the foreign currency, I beg you to reconsider your decision, in terms of postponing the trip to Tibet for one year.¹⁸

¹⁶ AVPRF, f. 100, op. 1, p. 1, d. 3.

¹⁷ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, ll. 67–68.

¹⁸ APRF, ibid., l. 87.

The Politburo would take up the question of the Buddhist Mission three times, at its sessions on 4, 11 and 18 October. The persons who submitted the proposal were Litvinov, Karakhan, and Karakhan and Menjinsky, respectively. The final decision by this Bolshevik "senate" said that

it would be expedient to postpone the visit of a delegation to Tibet. If, ultimately, such a visit would become impossible, Comrades Menjinsky and Karakhan should report about it to the Politburo.¹⁹

The reasons officially given to Dorzhiev and Tepkin for the delay of the mission were an outbreak of plague in Outer Mongolia and some serious disturbances in China, which made the passage of caravans through the territories of these countries extremely dangerous.²⁰ However this explanation obviously did not satisfy the Tibetan representatives, and they certainly did not want to wait for a whole year to be able to raise the issue again with the Soviet authorities. Therefore, in the late fall of 1928, Dorzhiev attempted to dispatch to Tibet, secretly from Narkomindel, a group of three Kalmyk monks (*gelongs*): Cherek Ochirov, Arabsal Sanjiev and Badma Amogalanov. The latter pair, being members of the officially approved delegation, arrived in Mongolia via Leningrad, where they had taken part in the annual late summer service in the Buddhist temple, the so-called *Yarnai* (rain retreat) khural.²¹ At Bogdyn Khure in Ulan Bator, they were joined by their countryman, Ochirov. Travelling to Lhasa from the Mongolian capital had until then presented no problem for Buddhist pilgrims, either Mongolian or Russian subjects, who did not require visas or any travel documents. However, this time it was different. As Sanjiev would later recall, the Kalmyks were arrested by the Mongolian authorities for "not having necessary documents to travel to Tibet" and deported to Altan Bulak, on the Soviet-Mongolian border. (It is not clear, however, whether the authorities were Mongolian state security officials or frontier guards). There the

¹⁹ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 709. Minutes of the Politburo session of 18 October 1928.

²⁰ AMB RK, file 940-r, l. 54. Interrogation transcript of Tepkin, 8 July 1931.

²¹ *Yarnai* (dbyar-gnas) is a commitment by the monks to remain within the boundaries of the monastery during the following three (or one and half) months, until the ceremony called Ga-nai, which marks the close of the traditional "rain retreat" of Buddhist monastics.

Kalmyks remained in custody for some time, but they were eventually released, possibly owing to Dorzhiev's intercession. After that the monks returned to Kalmykia. According to Tepkin, Dorzhiev told them shortly before their departure: "Go home for the time being, the difficulties with the mission will be hopefully settled, and you will travel to Lhasa then".²²

An important question suggests itself in connection with the Kalmyk incident in Mongolia: Could the Soviet secret police have somehow learnt of Dorzhiev's double dealing and thereby interfered via their Mongolian counterpart, GVO, to frustrate his mischievous design. If so, this provides a clue to Narkomindel's unexpected opposition to Dorzhiev's project in the latter half of 1928. There is little doubt that the OGPU was already collecting compromising data on Dorzhiev and his close entourage at that time via its numerous agents, including those among the Buddhist clerics.²³ We do not know if the Kalmyks carried with them anything like a letter from Dorzhiev to the Dalai Lama (which could very well be the case), but if they did, this probably fell into the hands of the OGPU after their arrest.

Be that as it may, the incident did not affect seriously Dorzhiev's activities in Russia, and he still believed that the Buddhist mission was only temporarily delayed because of some external impediment. However, the OGPU continued to tighten its control over Buddhists (as well as other religious groups in the country). The secret police was especially concerned about their secret liaison with the major Buddhist hierarchs in Mongolia, China and Tibet. Thus in the same year (1928), a delegation to the Panchen Lama made up of Atsagat lamas dispatched by the ex-Bandida Khambo Lama Tserempilov, Dorzhiev's main opponent at the 1927 Buddhist Council, was halted at the Soviet frontier. Still, one member of the mission somehow managed to sneak across the border and get to the Panchen in Mukden!

²² AMB RK, Ibid., ll. 54, 290. Interrogation transcripts of Tepkin, 8 July 1931, and of Sanjiev, 17 July 1931.

²³ One of the informants could have been the aforementioned Aragva Nasankiev, "representative of the Buddhist clergy in the USSR" at the Buddhist temple in Leningrad. In his letter to the general commissar of state security, N.I. Ezhov, dated 9 May 1937, Nasankiev claimed that he had been engaged as an OGPU secret agent between 1923 and 1935. During that period, "not infrequently", in his own words, he was sent "on special errands" to Kalmykia, Buryatia, Leningrad and elsewhere (AMB RK, file 1121-r, l. 24).

About the same time, approximately at the very end of 1928, Dorzhiev received a letter from a Buryat monk-student in Lhasa, one Demba, who was occasionally employed as translator by the Dalai Lama. In that letter Demba wrote that the Lama "had expressed his wish to see a representative of Russia for maintaining liaison with the Buddhists there, as well as the Soviet Government". Dorzhiev and Tepkin immediately seized the opportunity and petitioned Karakhan to allow them to send some lama to Tibet. Having looked into the matter, however, Chicherin's deputy gave them a negative reply: Narkomindel, he said, found it inexpedient to send someone to Lhasa in the midst of winter and he suggested that the issue be put off until spring of the following year.²⁴

* * *

In the USSR, the end of the 1920s witnessed a surge of public interest in Tibet. This was generated mainly by a series of academic and literary publications. In 1927–1928, for example, the journal of the Association of Soviet Orientalists, "Novyi Vostok", carried a lengthy essay by A. Popov, giving a detailed discussion of the relationship between Tsarist Russia and Tibet. Being based entirely on documents from the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this work was a piece of sound scholarship, although it did not take the story further than 1906.²⁵

Then, in 1929, the Soviet publishing house "Molodaia Gvardiia" (Young Guard) brought out a Russian translation of W. McGovern's "To Lhasa in Disguise". In the preface, the Soviet critic, A. Ivin, pointed out that the author, "despite all his liberalism and the 'honorary title of a Buddhist'", was "a true son of imperialistic Britain", and therefore it would be futile to expect from him a Marxist treatment of economic, political and cultural life in Tibet. Besides, the time he spent in Tibet was too short. Nonetheless, Ivin asserted, his memoir was of considerable interest to Soviet readers, mainly because it was written by an eye-witness. (McGovern's book, according to Ivin, narrated a great deal of facts relating to Tibet's history, religion, politics and everyday life, as well as to Britain's "imperialistic penetration" into the country. Some of these, especially the descrip-

²⁴ AMB RK, Ibid., l. 55.

²⁵ Popov 1927–1928.

tion of his route to Lhasa, might be of "certain interest to a narrow circle of specialists"). Speaking of the more recent developments in Tibet, Ivin referred to the "great peasants' movement" launched at long last by the oppressed Tibetan peasantry. The excessive taxes demanded by the Lhasa Government had stirred up "a powerful insurgent movement" in the land of Po-yul in southern Tibet in August 1928. Lhasa had sent a punitive expedition to the area, but this was defeated by the insurgents. The rebels soon placed the entire province (the state of Pome) under their control and set up their own administrative organs there.²⁶ (Ivin was certainly overdramatizing the story. True, the province of Pome rebelled against the authority of Lhasa, but it was only a tiny state, and the Lhasa Government easily suppressed the rebellion). The book was also supplied with a lengthy afterword by E.S. Batenin, which was a fairly good introduction (from the Marxist standpoint, of course) into the political history of modern Tibet. Then, in 1928, Kozlov published a popular essay on Tibet in the journal "Novyi Mir". In this he gave a very vivid description of the country from geographic, ethnographic, economic and socio-cultural standpoints, despite the fact it remained as inaccessible to European travellers "as the North Pole". Interestingly, Kozlov also noted that Tibet at the present time enjoyed the same fully autonomous status as it had done originally, under its first kings.²⁷ And finally, in 1930, there appeared two more books devoted to the exploration of Tibet by Sven Hedin, still a friend of the Soviets, which were actually the last ones in the long series of his Russian publications.²⁸

Furthermore, in October 1928 the Research Institute for Buddhist Culture (commonly abbreviated as INBUK) was opened in Leningrad under the auspices of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.²⁹ (This was the "Buddhological institute" referred to by Dorzhiev in his speech at the 1927 Buddhist Council in Moscow). The event undoubtedly had some political implications, given the importance attached by

²⁶ Makgovern 1929, pp. 8–9.

²⁷ P.K. Kozlov, "Tibet", *Novyi Mir*, 1928, #2, pp. 256–267.

²⁸ Gedin 1930; Russat 1930. Earlier Soviet publications of Sven Hedin included Gedin 1925, 1926, 1927.

²⁹ Archive of the Oriental Institute, St Petersburg, f. 152, op. 5, d. 5. The Institute for Buddhist Studies (INBUK) was established by the Sovnarkom decree of 13 March 1928, however, its practical work did not start until 1 October.

the Soviet Government to their relations with the Eastern Buddhist countries at that time. The institute research staff included a number of prominent Buddhist scholars under Academician Stcherbatsky. They were divided between four main units focusing on Tibet, China and Japan, India, and Mongolia (headed respectively by A.I. Vostrikov, B.A. Vasiliev, B.V. Semichov, and E.E. Obermiller). There were also two non-Russian consultants on the staff—the Indian Professor, D.D. Kosambi and an ex-lama D. Munkuev (replaced in the same year by G. Jamtsaranov). The INBUK existed for only three years, until 1930, when it merged with the Institute for Oriental Studies and the Asiatic Museum, thereby becoming a part of the newly established academic centre.

Finally, towards the end of 1920s, more plans were made in the USSR to resume scientific exploration of the inhospitable Tibetan Plateau. On 15 November 1927, Kozlov submitted his new proposal for a Tibetan expedition to the joint Commission of the Academy of Sciences and the Russian Geographical Society, presided over by Yu.M. Shokalsky. This was a three year project which again envisaged a thorough exploration of the Yangtze (Mur-usu) river-head area, the “last white spot on the map of Asia”. The expedition cost was estimated at 175,000 roubles.³⁰ Kozlov’s project, though it received approval from such academic experts as S.F. Oldenburg, P.P. Sushkin, and G.E. Grum-Grjimailo, was then blocked by the OGPU and Narkomindel officials for political reasons. Trilisser (head of the Foreign Department of the OGPU) strongly objected to the “odious figure” of the traveller who allegedly had a bad reputation among the Mongols and the Buddhist population generally of the locality where he had worked before. Therefore, he asserted, sending Kozlov to Tibet at the head of a new expedition “would be absolutely inexpedient”.³¹ The head of Narkomindel’s Far-Eastern Department, B.N. Mel’nikov, had his own doubts as well—the Tibetan Government, he believed, under British pressure, had taken measures a few years ago not to allow Kozlov’s party into Tibet. For this reason they moved their “special defensive frontier posts” up north, to the unin-

³⁰ GARF, r-5446, op. 37, d. 11, l. 8, 8ob (Minutes of the meeting of the Commission, dated 15 November 1927). The decision of the commission was then relayed to the Sovnarkom on 2 December, see GARF, f. 8429, f. 4, d. 38, ll. 9–10ob. The first page of the document bears the resolution of the Sovnarkom secretary, N.P. Gorbunov: “NKID and OGPU should be asked for their opinions, 11/XII–27”.

³¹ GARF, f. 8429, op. 4, d. 38, l. 8. Trilisser to Gorbunov, 3 January 1928.

habited Sartyn plain, in particular to the Mur-usu area. (This information obviously came from Chapchaev’s report). Accordingly, Kozlov had little chance of getting to that place, Mel’nikov concluded, even less so to conduct any exploration there. Besides, there was a danger that his party might clash with the Tibetan frontier guards, which fact “the British and the Chinese will surely use against us, and this, under the present condition, is certainly undesirable”.³²

This was a heavy blow for Kozlov, yet he did not give up. The celebrated traveller still hoped to come to Mur-usu, the spot which his great teacher, Nikolai Przhevalsky, had intended to explore in the course of his last expedition before death interrupted his plans in 1888. Four decades later, in early 1929, Kozlov would enthusiastically discuss with Dorzhiev a seemingly fantastic project for a journey to the Changtang by air! The idea itself first occurred to him in Urga in 1925 when he chanced to meet the Soviet pilots participating in the intercontinental Moscow-Peking flight. Upon completion of his expedition in the fall of 1926, Kozlov would make plans for a similar flight, possibly on the “Junkers” planes, across the entire Central Asia, from Mongolia to Tibet. Theoretically, this was quite possible, the “Dobroliot” pilots operating the Verkneudinsk-Urga airline told him, the only problem was to have intermediate filling stations. However the calculations showed that unfortunately such a project would cost no less than one million roubles, an absolutely astronomical sum that the Soviet Government would hardly be able to afford. Three years later Kozlov came up with even a more daring plan—to fly to Tibet on a blimp! No doubt he got the idea from the Norwegian explorer Amundsen, who in 1926 undertook a pioneering flight over the North Pole on a dirigible, an event which had received enthusiastic coverage in the Soviet mass media. Being a very ambition man, Kozlov apparently hoped to follow Amundsen’s example.³³ In his letter to Gorbunov, Kozlov described the great advantages of a dirigible as the expedition transport:

The dirigible won’t need [filling] stations, it can overcome any cor-dons, and won’t be frosted over, even above the mountains of Tibet. The dirigible starting from Urga will follow a course in SW direction,

³² GARF, Ibid., l. 11. Mel’nikov to the head of the Department of Scientific Institutions at the Sovnarkom USSR, Voronin, 21 February 1928.

³³ Kozlov must have learnt of the details of Amundsen’s flight from one of Hedin’s books (Gedin 1926) which he had in his library.

towards Lhasa, and, I'm afraid to say it, in just two days will float on air from the capital of Mongolia to the capital of Tibet. Our friend, Khambo-lama Dorzhiev, is willing to fly with us on the dirigible. An enviable, yet feasible, task, more real than a flight to the North Pole!³⁴

It was to Gorbunov, who had recently returned from a journey to the Pamirs, that Kozlov proposed leading such an unusual expedition. He probably hoped that it would not be too difficult to obtain the government's imprimatur for it. Yet this new project was obviously too far-fetched, and it was eventually abandoned by Kozlov.

Two more Tibet-related projects were produced by Soviet scientists in the late fall of 1927. First, a prominent botanist, the director of the All-Union Institute of Applied Botany and New Cultivated Plants (under the auspices of Sovnarkom), N.I. Vavilov, expressed his keen interest in Tibet's high-altitude agriculture, it being one of the world's most ancient surviving forms. Consequently, he wrote a letter to the Dalai Lama in which he requested the "Most-learned and Glorious Ruler of Tibet" to assist him in obtaining the samples of seeds of cultivated plants from various areas of his country, mainly from the fertile valleys of southern Tibet, the Yarlung and Kichu valleys and those of the rivers flowing into Tsangpo. Vavilov mentioned specifically the seeds of cereals (wheat, barley, buckwheat, oats) and of fruit-trees (apricots, peaches, plums, cherries, apples, pears, walnuts). In return, the scientist said, he would be most happy to send to Tibet the seeds of plants cultivated in the USSR and in many other countries of the world from the richest collections of his institute.³⁵ Vavilov's project, backed up by the Sovnarkom's Department of Scientific Institutions (E. Voronin), was then forwarded for approval to Narkomindel (Karakhan) which, surprisingly, raised no objection to sending a letter and a plant collection to the Dalai Lama by the Botanic Institute.³⁶ The person who was intended to deliver these to Lhasa was apparently Kozlov, who was then pressing authorities for his new Tibetan expedition (although his name is not mentioned in the available correspondence between Vavilov and Sovnarkom).

The head of the Buryat-Mongol Scientific Committee in Verkhneudinsk (Buruchkom), Badzar Baradiin, then made plans for a

Buryat "cultural and scientific" expedition to Tibet.³⁷ Baradiin's project was largely propagandist and envisaged, incidentally, popularizing among the Tibetans some of the latest Western achievements in science, technology, and medicine, "such as could find an application in Tibet". For example, the expedition staff were to engage in sanitary education of Tibetans and also render them medical assistance, especially in vaccination. The Buryats were also to bring with them some agricultural and industrial products, and consumer goods such as samples of seeds for farming, yeast for making dough, typewriters with Tibetan script, etc. Such an expedition undertaken exclusively by the Buryat-Mongol scientific cadre could, according to Baradiin, yield some outstanding results for international Oriental scholarship and could also have "a tremendous political significance for the whole of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics". The realization of such an ambitious project was scheduled to take place in 1932–1933, after a period of extensive preparation. Being included into the Buruchkom's five-year plan of work (1928–1932), Baradiin's project was approved by the Buryat State Planning Committee (Burgosplan), after which it went to the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. However, this brilliant new initiative for "establishing cultural and scientific ties" with Tibet suffered the same fate as Kozlov's and Vavilov's projects, since Tibet, following the Chapchaev mission, had definitely become a "forbidden land" for Russian scholarship.

* * *

The years 1927–1929 were a particularly inauspicious period for Soviet foreign policy. This began with a series of dramatic developments in China—on 12 April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek staged what the Soviets called a "counter-revolutionary" coup, a crackdown on the Chinese Communist Party and the left-wing Kuomintang. Having established a Nationalist government of China in Nanking under the Kuomintang right-wing on 18 April, Chiang Kai-shek then broke with the Soviet Union and ordered that all Soviet diplomatic and trade agencies in the country be closed. As a result, all Soviet political advisors and military instructors had to abandon China in 1927. This was a crushing blow to the broadening revolutionary movement in China, but much of the blame for it should be laid on

³⁴ GARF, f. 5446, op. 37, d. 11, l. 24ob. Kozlov to Gorbunov, 20 January 1929.

³⁵ GARF, r-5446, op. 37, d. 81, ll. 98–99. Vavilov's letter to the Dalai Lama dated 1 November 1927 was signed by Gorbunov (Chairman of the Institute Board).

³⁶ GARF, Ibid., l. 105. Karakhan's reply to Voronin, 16 November 1927.

³⁷ Archive of the Buryat Institute of Social Sciences (BION), f. 7, d. 38. B. Baradiin, "O predstoiaschei nauchnoi ekspeditsii v Tibet", undated.

Comintern's and Stalin's adventurist policy of "sovietization of the Chinese revolution" as conducted via the Soviet chief political advisor, Michail Borodin. Chiang Kai-shek's coup was after all designed to frustrate Borodin's sinister scheme to remove him from his commanding position at the head of the united Kuomintang-CCP forces and put in his place a more easily manipulated figure, some pro-Communist Chinese general.

What made it even more bitter for Moscow was that its trusted ally, Marshal Feng Yu-hsian, went over to Chiang's side shortly after his "Shanghai coup". Through a pact he concluded with the head of the Nationalist government, Feng was allowed to maintain his Kuominchun Army as a separate entity, though under the aegis of Nanking. The Soviet leadership immediately labeled Feng "a counter-revolutionary". It also incited Feng's son, Feng Hon-go, who was then a student of the Sun Yatsen University in Moscow, to write an open letter denouncing his father for betrayal of the revolutionary cause, which was published in "Pravda" in August 1927. Two years later, however (in May 1929), Feng would declare his independence of the Nanking government, forcing Chiang Kai-shek to send a punitive force against him.

Concurrently with these events in China, the British Government, in protest against the continuing Soviet anti-British subversive activities and propaganda, broke off diplomatic relations with the USSR and annulled the 1921 Anglo-Soviet trade agreement, on 27 May 1927. Stalin, of course, blamed it all on "world imperialists" seeking to draw the peaceful Soviet state into war. While addressing the 15th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in December 1927, he pointed to the two factors which were dominating the world's current political situation—"the strengthening of interventionist tendencies in the imperialist camp and the war menace".³⁸

The fear of military intervention by the British forced the Red Army Command and OGPU chiefs to take some defensive measures in 1927–1928. Thus, on 31 January 1928, the Headquarters of the Middle-Asian Military District (SAVO) in Tashkent came up with a plan for military operations against Persia and Afghanistan, in the event of war with these countries. This was elaborated in accordance

³⁸ I.V. Stalin, Politicheskii otchet TsK XV s'ezdu VKPb (Political report of the TsK to the 15th congress of the Communist party), 3 December 1929 in Stalin 1949–1951, p. 287.

with the directive of the RA Headquarters of 2 July 1927 (variant "Z"), which foresaw "an eventuality of complications in the frontier within the SAVO, arising from the renewed activities of the domestic and foreign Basmachi", not excluding the "possibility of war with Persia and Afghanistan, with the absolute backing of England".³⁹ The SAVO top brass regarded the 2,800 km. Soviet border with Persia and Afghanistan as a particularly vulnerable area, since they did not have the military strength to defend it, yet their plan advocated the principle of "active defence" of the Middle Asian frontier at the initial stage of war.

In Middle Asia . . . the Red Army as the bearer of slogans of the liberation of oppressed nations from the age-long yoke, violence, and misrule of a small group of feudal lords, the rich and other exploiters will find a broad field for its activities, through incursion into the frontier districts of Persia and Afghanistan. The objective of its units in this case can be stirring up rebellions of the national groups in these countries, disrupting the indigenous state order and creating other kinds of disturbances in Khorasan and Herat Provinces, which may cause serious problems for the Governments of Persia and Afghanistan.⁴⁰

It should be recalled here that the Soviet Government had by then concluded neutrality and non-aggression pacts with both Afghanistan, on 31 August 1926, and Persia, on 1 October 1927. However, despite these arrangements, Moscow had not the slightest doubt that the imperialist states "fighting against us at the Western border" would try to aggravate the general political situation in the USSR by creating complications at its Eastern frontier and would surely then try to draw into war against the Soviet Union the neighbouring states of Afghanistan and Persia, to be "supported by the British Indian Army".

The Red Army commanders apparently also assumed that Britain would use the hostilities as a pretext for a full-scale invasion in Tibet. The only way to resist such aggression would be sending a Soviet-Mongol force to Lhasa, as was vaguely suggested in the report by an anonymous military analyst (*Warcraft in Tibet*) that was mentioned in Chapter 5. The concluding section of that document, entitled "Evaluation of the Tibetan war theatre", contained an analyses

³⁹ RGVA, f. 25895, op. 1, d. 666, ll. 1–94. The plan was signed by the commander of the SAVO troops Avksentievsky, a member of the RVS Ippo, and Chief of Staff Kondratiev.

⁴⁰ Ibid., l. 83.

of the Changtang terrain in regard to whether it was passable for "European troops", advancing "from the North". The route was generally found to be "satisfactory" up to Lhasa, save for the stretch of road passing through the mountainous Sartyn area. As for the billeting of soldiers in Lhasa, this was even less of a problem,

as the city abounded in three-storeyed roomy stone dwelling-houses; besides, there were numerous monasteries in the vicinity of Lhasa, with empty stone buildings, as well as "dachas" (summer cottages) and palaces of the nobility.

The general resume of the author made on the basis of Bimbaev's intelligence in Tibet was as follows:

Geographically Tibet is a natural fortress, surrounded on all sides by the highest mountain ranges: the Himalayas in the south, the Karakorum in the west, the Kuen Lun in the east, and the Indo-Chinese mountain system in the south-east. It is most difficult to traverse these ranges from the south and the west, yet the British had passed with their military expedition over the Himalayan Range as far back as 1904. The passage across the mountains in the north is much easier. (Though these are uninhabited and barren, it is possible to find there water and fodder for camels at any season). The cornices, cliffs and canyons in the south and in the east are much more steeper than in the north of the plateau. The western part of Tibet is probably the least accessible, as compared to the south and the south-east.

According to our source, the troops concentrated to the north of Tibet could advance in a large mass and would most likely reach the capital unresisted.⁴¹

The "source" (Matsak Bimbaev) estimated the strength of the Tibetan Army as not exceeding 10,000 troops, more realistically their number varied between 7,000 and 8,000. These were mainly infantry, but there were also some cavalry and artillery units. The bulk of the troops (around 7,000) was located in Eastern Tibet (Kham). The Tibetan cavalry, or "the Wild Division", as the Kalmyk named it after the Russian pattern, which numbered about 2,000 men, was stationed in the Horpa area bordering Amdo. The main task of the unit was to defend the south-eastern border of Tibet. There was also, he presumed, a detachment of 200 riders stationed at Gyantse, to the south-west of Lhasa, these being the Panchen Lama's former guard. The training of Tibetan officers took place at the Gyantse

⁴¹ NARK, r-137, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 163-164.

"military school" after the English pattern. This was, in his opinion, very primitive, being restricted mainly to parade-ground drill and shooting practice. The military instructors were all Sikkimese. There was no political education of the rank and file, and the soldiers obviously lacked any "class-consciousness". Their morale he also regarded as very low. "The Tibetan troops", Bimbaev asserted, "are not a regular, European-trained army, but, quite on the contrary: an ill-assorted ethnically (consisting of Khampas, Horpas, Dokpas and others), disorderly, illiterate, hungry, ragged, demoralized crowd, where desertion is not uncommon due to the horrible conditions of maintenance".⁴² Regarding foreign troops in Tibet, Bimbaev stated that there was only one English detachment of 150 men providing escort for the British trade agent at Gyantse.⁴³

The OGPU, for its part, was also making preparations in response to Stalin's preaching of a threat of war. By 1927 this notorious organization had established a huge network of its secret "residencies" (*rezidentury*) all across Europe and Asia, working mainly under cover of official Soviet diplomatic and trade representations. The situation in the Far East Region, which was then rapidly deteriorating due to Japan's expansionist designs, was monitored by a host of the OGPU agents in China. These were stationed in the country's largest cities, Peking, Mukden, Hailar, Harbin, Tientsin, Shanghai, Kalgan, Lanchow, and so on. Some of these gathered intelligence on Tibet and its two major religious centres, those of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa and the Panchen Lama in Peking (Mukden).

In the early half of 1928, the Eastern Department of the OGPU drew up a 23-page long memorandum entitled "The Buddhist Regions". This was primarily intended for Yaroslavsky and his colleagues in the Anti-Religious Commission in view of the forthcoming Buddhist Mission, but it doubtless carried a larger message for other Soviet leaders as well. The Japanese menace looming in the Far East prompted the OGPU analyst, H.S. Petrosian, to give special attention to the Buryat Buddhist-inhabited area in the USSR and the

⁴² Ibid., l. 159-160. This description is very close to what Bailey reported to Delhi in the same year: "The troops in Lhasa drill daily but their uniforms are very ragged and some of them even appear on parade wearing only one boot, and they openly beg for alms in the streets. The state of the police who now number 100 is even worse" (OIOC L/P&S/10/1088. Bailey to the Indian Government, 7 September 1927).

⁴³ Ibid., l. 163.

adjacent Buddhist countries (Outer and Inner Mongolias and Tibet). The major source of anxiety there at the time was Inner Mongolia and Barga, where all anti-Soviet elements tended to rally around the Panchen Lama, apparently plotting against Outer Mongolia (MPR) and the USSR. Therefore, the document focused largely on the exiled incarnation—his entourage, public utterances and activities. There was also a general discussion of the Tibetan situation, the Dalai-Panchen Lamas' conflict, undercover British and other imperialist "intrigues" around these two Buddhist hierarchs, and Soviet efforts to frustrate these and establish friendly relations with the Tibetan Government. We will quote below some of the most important paragraphs from this memorandum:

Tibet

Tibet, being the foremost religious centre of the Buddhist East, is naturally enough connected with the lamaist clergy of Inner and Outer Mongolias, as well as that in our Buddhist regions. The connection is provided primarily by the learned lamas from the upper strata of the monkhood.

Hence the relations between the USSR and Tibet assume paramount importance.

Tibet and England

1. After Tibet's separation from China, the influence of England on Tibet via India has considerably increased. This influence was exerted mainly through the upper segments of the military and the newly born Tibetan bourgeoisie.

Despite the consolidation of the English influence (which went as far as to allow the war minister Tseren Galan to take over the army and police), the majority of the population and the lamaist clergy are against the English.

How strong these sentiments are can be seen from the subsequent struggle of the Dalai Lama with the Anglophilic faction (since 1925), which resulted in the execution of some Anglophiles (such as Badma Zadra), dismantling of the Anglophilic-supervised police, demotion of

the war minister Tseren Galan, and dismissal of the advisors. All this signifies the beginning of the radical breaking away of the Dalai Lama and his supporters from English influence.

Attitude to the USSR

2. At the same time the creation and strengthening of the Mongolian People's Republic demonstrates to the Dalai Lama that the Soviet Union is the only state that does not encroach on Tibet's independence, hence the favourable attitude of the popular masses and of the ruler of Tibet to the USSR and MPR.

Some significant changes in the attitude [of Tibet] to the USSR have been observed of late due to the crushing of the Anglophilic military clique, as was mentioned above.

How sympathetic the Dalai Lama is towards the USSR and MPR can be inferred from his letters addressed to Agvan Dorzhiev, in which he gives his consent to concluding a treaty on arms and gunpowder supply to Tibet and the setting up of mail stations between MPR and Tibet, as well as expressing his satisfaction regarding non-persecution of the Buddhist religion in the USSR.

Considering England's vested interest in Tibet, one should assume that Tibet's growing sympathies for the USSR might rouse the aggressiveness of the English to the point that they would determine on the annexation of Tibet. In this respect their intense work on the Panchen Bogdo with a view to oppose him to the Dalai Lama speaks of some probability of the English planning to annex Tibet.

The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Bogdo

3. The intense work on the Panchen Bogdo by the English and the fact that his influence is still fairly strong in Tibet make the Dalai Lama extremely cautious in relation to the Panchen, [urging] him to conduct correspondence with the latter about his possible return to Tibet.

The Dalai Lama wants to bring the Panchen back to Tibet, to prevent the English from using the Panchen against him (the Dalai Lama).

This point of view is further confirmed by the recent letters from the Dalai Lama to Dorzhiev in which he states that he has no political differences with the Panchen, and that whatever signs of his (the Panchen's) harmful activities there are, they come not from him, but from his retinue.

Panchen Bogdo

1. With the Panchen Bogdo's flight from Tibet and his arrival in China all Buddhist reactionary elements in Inner and Outer Mongolia, Manchuria and to some extent in Buryatia began to rally around him.

All anti-government activities of the lamas in the MPR and Buryatia tend to be linked with the name of the Panchen Bogdo, as he is looked upon as the figure who could unite all these reactionary groups for the struggle with the MPR and the growing Soviet influence in the Buddhist East. To these ends also (i.e. to fight the Red menace) both England and Japan (through Chang Tso-lin) are trying to use the Panchen Bogdo.

Chang Tso-lin, Japan, and the Panchen Bogdo

2. To what extent Japan and Chang Tso-lin are trying, by all means possible, to draw the Panchen Bogdo to their side, can be seen from the high esteem accorded to him in China (viz. the personal guard of honour, special trains, prompt renovation of monasteries, monetary subsidies, etc.), although the same honours virtually make the Panchen Chang Tso-lin's hostage. At the same time the appropriate conditions are being created to draw him into practical political work aimed at countering our influence in the Buddhist East (such as his invitation to the Pan-Asiatic conference to Japan as well as to rallies of the princes in Outer Mongolia, to take a trip to Outer Mongolia, etc.).

The Panchen Bogdo and England

3. Alongside the intense work on the Panchen Bogdo by the Japanese and the Mukden authorities, the English, as indicated in the above

comment on Tibet, also take some considerable interest in him, trying to use him, in view of the defeat of the Anglophile faction in Tibet, to bolster their influence there. The desire of the English to win the Panchen over completely can be further explained by our growing influence in Tibet which naturally makes the English anxious about India.

Hence their attempts to re-install the Panchen Bogdo in Tibet. Hence, also, the great interest in him shown by the English. All the English press trumpets about him (according to our intelligence, an English officer was attached to the Panchen Bogdo to instruct him in the English language and military expertise).

All this clearly shows that a series of intrigues is being devised around the Panchen Bogdo and his name, directed against MPR and the USSR.

The Panchen Bogdo, the princes, the émigré and anti-Soviet groups

4. Along with the plans to use the Panchen Bogdo made by Japan, Chang Tso-lin and England, he (the Panchen) is also staked on by other reactionary elements, especially the lamaist circles in Inner and Outer Mongolia, the emigres, etc. The proof of it is the fact that all anti-government agitation in Outer Mongolia, the rebellion in Kobdo, the anti-Soviet propaganda among the conservative lamaist segment in Buryatia [all] widely use the Banchen Bogdo's name, and it is believed that he will assist in the overthrow of the Mongolian People's Government and Soviet power in Buryatia.

The Panchen Bogdo, the MPR and the USSR

5. In spite of the intensified anti-Soviet activities of all reactionary forces in the Buddhist East, which use the Panchen's declaration that "Every Buddhist must be an enemy of Communism", still, up to the present moment, we do not possess any direct evidence of his personal attitude to the USSR, and to the struggle being waged against us and the MPR.

Our information on this question is extremely contradictory, but there are some facts though, such as his refusal to participate in the Pan-Asiatic conference and the rallies of princes in Outer Mongolia,

refraining from visiting Outer Mongolia (perhaps temporarily) at the invitation of the princes there, his exceptional attention shown to the Soviet representative in China, which make us presume that the Panchen is not an Anglophile. On the contrary, his sympathies are directed towards the USSR, and it is only the conditions in which he is placed that prevent him from expressing straightforwardly his feelings for the USSR.

There are, however, some disturbing moments: for example, lately, as a consequence of the victory of the Chinese reactionaries, the Panchen Bogdo has been making plans (possibly under pressure from his officials) to go to Dolonnor (Inner Mongolia). His trip to Dolonnor, close to the MPR frontier, and the fact that on the frontier, across from Dolonnor, dwell the reactionary princes (Yeguzer Khutuktu and others) and lamas, who had been most active before (during the Sanbeise and Dariganga rebellions), will undoubtedly be used to intensify the struggle with the MPR and, through it, with us as well.

If the information on the Panchen Bogdo's trip to Dolonnor is confirmed (which is hard to say now because of the hostilities in the Kalgan area), this must be regarded as his first and openly hostile act against the MPR and the USSR.⁴⁴

* * *

No doubt the most intriguing piece of evidence in the above document, as far as Soviet-Tibetan relations are concerned, is a reference to the Dalai Lama's "recent" letters to Dorzhiev, speaking of his willingness to conclude two important agreements with the Soviet government, those on arms sale and establishment of the Ulan-Bator-Lhasa *urton* mail link. This information certainly does not fit in well with the previously related story about the setback of the Chapchaev Mission to Lhasa and suggests at least two things: either the Dalai Lama's "proposals" were made in the letter (or letters) Chapchaev brought to Moscow (in which case they must have been his last minute decisions, deviating from his earlier firm stance on Bolshevik Russia), or his offers were no more than Dorzhiev's clever bluff to convince the Soviet leaders that Tibet's Ruler was still interested in his dialogue with Moscow. The truth is difficult to ascertain without seeing these letters, and one also cannot exclude the possibility

⁴⁴ RGASPI, f. 89, op. 4, d. 162, ll. 58-63.

of them being written in a special coded language comprehensible only to Dorzhiev. If, however, the Dalai Lama's belated overtures to the Soviets were real, they were most likely made out of his great fear of the Chinese revolution, at a time when Feng's army was already on the threshold of Tibet. This is suggested by his confidential conversation with the Khenchung in September 1927. At this critical point only Moscow could keep Feng (who was, in fact, not its ally any more at that time!) from intervention in Tibet. As for the Soviet government, it was not clear whether it was going to lay down any conditions for its sale of arms and gun-powder to Tibet, as the British had.

The concluding part of the OGPU Memorandum proposed a series of concrete measures to cope with the military danger in the Far Eastern "Buddhist Region", mapped out for each country accordingly. In Inner Mongolia it was imperative for OGPU agents in Hailar and Kalgan to collect information on the activities of the "reactionary" nobility there (the local princes and *noyons*), as well as on other anti-Soviet groups. They also needed, with the help of the Inner Mongolian People's Party, to organize "insurgent detachments", to be used in the future against anti-Soviet rebels. In Outer Mongolia (MPR) the OGPU's priority was to split up the bulk of the monks and launch a "reform movement" on the Soviet Buryat model. This work was to be assigned to the influential Buryat reformist lamas under Agvan Dorzhiev, who had close connections with the upper monastic circles in the country. As regards Buryatia, OGPU planned to carry on work in that autonomous Soviet republic in order to deepen the schism among the conservative lamas. Their aim was to break them up into smaller factions, "thus nipping in the bud their vain attempts at organizing themselves". At the same time the backing of the reformist segment was to be continued, "considering their relative loyalty to the Soviet power". The administrative pressure on the "lamaist clergy" en masse was to be reduced, "to prevent activation of their anti-Soviet work".⁴⁵

Special attention was given in the paper to the "Pan-Mongolist movement". Originally started long before the revolution by Buryat intellectuals (including Jamtsarano and Rinchino) in their homeland, it became very strong during the 1918-1919 civil war, when plans

⁴⁵ Ibid., ll. 65-69.

were made for uniting the Mongol-inhabited territories in Central Asia into a single national Mongolian state, Greater Mongolia. In 1921, however, the Pan-Mongolist leaders emigrated to Outer-Mongolia, where they were now holding key government positions and actively preaching Mongol unification again. Their ideology and slogans were regarded by Moscow as particularly harmful at that stage, as they provided a basis for bringing together "all reactionary Buddhist forces, with Japan's backing, against us". Therefore the OGPU deemed it necessary to keep a close eye on their activities, especially their contacts with the Buryat lamas, *noyons*, and intelligentsia.⁴⁶

Finally, a number of measures were elaborated by the OGPU to promote Soviet rapprochement with the Lhasa Government, on the one hand, and to reveal the true political leanings of their "opponent", the Panchen Bogdo, on the other. The concluding part of the memorandum read as follows:

Regarding Tibet

1. Conditions should be created for maintaining direct liaison with the Dalai Lama by attaching an unofficial informant to him from the members of the religious delegation, or by dispatching a special agent (as an expert on gun-powder making).
2. It will be necessary to carry out an extensive reconnaissance in Tibet with the help of the reformist delegation there, with a view to ascertaining the attitude of the Dalai Lama and the ruling circles [of Tibet] to England, China, and the USSR, i.e. to ascertain the possibility of normalization of relations between Tibet and the USSR.
3. An OGPU residency should be set up in Lanchow-fu, in the centre of Kansu Province, not far from the border with Tibet, under cover of a trade agency, which would allow us to monitor the situation in Tibet and Inner Mongolia.
4. Conditions should be created for Tibetan youth to be enrolled in the Soviet military and other educational establishments, with the help of Agvan Dorzhiev.

⁴⁶ Ibid., ll. 71-72.

5. We should take the course of bringing Dorzhiev closer to us and using him to improve our relations with Tibet.
6. A link of mail stations should be established between Yum-beise and Lhasa with the cooperation of the MPR. (We've already got the Dalai Lama's proposal to this end).

Regarding the Panchen Bogdo

1. It is necessary to improve intelligence about the Panchen Bogdo and his entourage to ascertain his attitude to the USSR. For this purpose we should use, via Urga, the delegations visiting him, by attaching to these our men who will provide us with all the necessary information on the Panchen Bogdo.
2. It should be ascertained as soon as possible whether the Panchen Bogdo is planning to go to Dolonnor. If so, we should raise before the organs concerned the question of inviting him to Outer Mongolia, and thence bringing him to the USSR, to Leningrad.
3. One of our influential lamas or princes should be attached to the suite of the Panchen Bogdo, via Urga, to gather full intelligence about him.⁴⁷

The Panchen Lama issue no doubt continued to give much headache to the Soviet leaders, who were unable to find any adequate solution to it. One thing was clear, however—he was to be somehow removed from the territory of Inner Mongolia, as this was the only way to thwart the interventionist designs of Chang Tso-lin and the Japanese military. The idea of granting the Panchen asylum in the USSR by installing him in the Buddhist Datsang in Leningrad was perhaps a good one, provided he was indeed a secret Soviet sympathizer, as Moscow wanted to believe. However, he was not, as the OGPU revealed soon enough. A "Note" appended to Petrosian's memorandum, with a reference to some recently obtained intelligence, testified to the "activization of the Panchen Bogdo's anti-Soviet work", namely to his participation in a number of anti-Soviet rallies in Inner Mongolia. There he had spoken of "the necessity of taking measures against the dissemination of the Soviet principles via

⁴⁷ Ibid., ll. 69-70.

Outer Mongolia and also inclined the Mongols in favour of Chang Tso-lin and the Peking government".⁴⁸ As a result, Moscow instantly branded the Panchen Lama "a counter-revolutionary" and an enemy of the MPR and the USSR.

According to E.K. Kolbenev, one of the contributors to the many-volumed "Studies in the History of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service", OGPU closely cooperated with its Mongolian counterpart, GVO, during this period. Not infrequently both secret services resorted to such a keen method of struggle against their adversary as "games of operatives". Thus, in the late 1920s, the OGPU *rezidentura* (local base) in Ulan Bator insinuated an "experienced Mongolian agent" into the Panchen Lama's entourage. The person was a lama, who had been previously employed on a number of occasions by Sukhe-Bator to gather intelligence on Baron Ungern. Having wormed himself into confidence of the Panchen Lama, the Mongol was ultimately placed by him at the head of a "centre which maintained liaison with his (the Panchen's) secret emissaries in Mongolia". As a result, the OGPU was able to regularly receive first-hand intelligence on the Panchen and "carry out a series of operations to undermine and liquidate the Japanese-nurtured organization of the Panchen Bogdo".⁴⁹

This information seems credible enough not so much because it corresponds well to what we already know today about OGPU and its sinister operations worldwide, but mainly because Kolbenev's story is obviously based on some concrete documents from the OGPU top secret files. Unfortunately, Kolbenev does not give us any particular details of these covert operations which were so successfully carried out by the OGPU with the help of their Mongolian lama agent.

* * *

In the spring of the same year, 1928, while making plans for a Buddhist Mission to Tibet, Moscow sent one of its secret agents, Bulat Mukharain, to Lhasa. This was in fact the last contact between the Soviet officials and the Tibetan government. No information about Mukharain's visit has been discovered hitherto in any Soviet sources accessible to scholars, save for the Buryat's character reference,

⁴⁸ RGASPI, *Ibid.*, l. 73.

⁴⁹ [E.K. Kolbenev], "Pervye zarubezhnye partniory", in Primakov 1996-, vol. 2 (1996), l. 266.

drawn up by S.S. Borisov at the very end of 1927. This document is particularly interesting as it sheds some light on Mukharain's earlier work on the Borisov Mission and subsequently as a Soviet "trade agent" in the Kokonor-Tsaidam area.

"He took part in my trip to Tibet in 1923–25", Borisov stated in the paper,

having come to me from the Kozlov expedition which he had left because of a very specific atmosphere of servility that prevailed there. During the journey he was very helpful as a man who easily adapted himself to the peculiar conditions of Mongolian life and as someone who knew how to deal with the Mongols and Tibetans. Owing to this capacity of his, he was often used by us as a scout and go-between with the local authorities, and he negotiated very successfully [with them] the provision of transport (camels, etc.) and foodstuffs, which is an important task during this kind of travels.

He is quite loyal politically. The proof of this is, firstly, the fact that he could not get along with Kozlov and his companions, and then, upon his return from Tibet, while remaining for some time at the Mongolian service, he refrained from any contacts with the Buryat nationalists in Urga (Jamtsarano and others) and did not adopt Mongolian citizenship (which almost all of them did). He did not make up to the Mongols and was regarded by them as a pro-Soviet worker, which was the reason why he was fired from his job as a financial controller, despite the intercession of comrade Amagaev [Comintern's chief representative in Ulan Bator—A.A.].

Our trade representative and *polpred* comrade Nikiforov also spoke very positively of his later work. His trip to Ordos, Kansu and Upper Mongolia in 1926–1927, undertaken on Nikiforov's commission, was quite successful, and he acted on that occasion entirely on his own. He is a sensible person in general and sufficiently literate, and can be of great help in the specific Mongolo-Tibetan conditions.

Being very sociable, he easily strikes "friendly contacts" and can impress the Mongols and Tibetans with his knowledge of the Asiatic etiquette, mode of life, and language. He has an excellent command of the Mongolian language (including its various dialects), and can speak some Tibetan (though poorly).

The [only] negative feature of [Mukharain's] character is that he likes to pose as a *noion* (a big man, a boss), but this "minus" can certainly become a "plus" in a certain situation.

In case of an important commission, he should be given proper and detailed instructions.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ AVPRF, f. 0111 (*Referentura po Mongolii*), op. 8, portfel' 52, papka 122, l. 105. Letter from Borisov to Bak in the Eastern Department of the OGPU, dated 31 December 1927.

The document was forwarded by Borisov to one of the senior officials in the Eastern Department of the OGPU, B.A. Bak (the person who, incidentally, would later interview Arashi Chapchaev). The "important commission" vaguely referred to in it, was most likely a visit to Lhasa—either on the Buddhist Mission then under consideration or as a solo agent disguised, for example, as "an expert on gun-powder making", as suggested by the above quoted Tibet agenda in the OGPU Memorandum. The only evidence of Mukharain's mission is provided by British sources, namely by the reports of Bailey's successor, Lt. Colonel J.L.R. Weir.

According to this intelligence officer, a Soviet agent appeared in Lhasa some time in the latter half of 1928. His name was Po-lo-te (apparently Mukharain's Tibetanized first name Bulat, which means "Sword" in Russian), but he was also reported to be called Kuhi-tsi-ta by the Buryats⁵¹ and "Buryat Noyon" by the Tibetans. His other nickname was "Fat Mongolian". The person was a big broad man, 6 foot tall, with a marked partiality for European foodstuffs, especially whisky, biscuits, and tinned fish, thus betraying a European education. The rumours said he was a "high Mongolian official in the service of the Bolsheviks" (which was perhaps his official legend). He brought with him a large amount of gold and several bales of silk brocade of considerable value. This brocade impressed the Tibetans with its high quality and richness. He was also in possession of some 10 rifles, about which he was reticent. Of Po-lo-te's political objectives, Weir knew very little:

The avowed reason for Po-lo-te's presence in Lhasa is to encourage friendship between Tibet and Bolshevik Russia. He has a Mongolian assistant named Tsul-trim who lives in the Drepung Monastery near Lhasa which is largely patronized by Mongolian and Buryat lamas. Po-lo-te is also said to have come to Tibet to advise Tibetans on the development of their country. He is said to receive frequent visitors from Tibetan officials and to be sending spies to India but it is possible his information on India is chiefly gathered from traders returning from India to Lhasa.⁵²

⁵¹ "Kuhi-tsi-ta", if this is a corrupted Buryat word, can have several meanings. First, it can mean a "pale-faced man from Chita". Then, there is a Xuhasha (Kusochi) village near Tsugol Datsang, in which case the name or rather nickname can be translated as "a man from Xuhasha".

⁵² OIOC, L/P&S/11/277. Weir's confidential report to the Indian Government, 6 November 1929.

Khan Sahib Faizullah, head of the Ladakhi traders in Lhasa, and a British informant, stated that Po-lo-te had been entrusted by Dorzhiev with a letter and a present for the Dalai Lama. It was also reported in April 1929 that he made presents of mules and gold to the Dalai Lama and frequently went to his summer palace. The Dalai Lama appeared to take a liking to the Buryat and received him in a private audience.

Mukharain had stayed in Lhasa until 21 February 1930, when, according to the British, he departed for Russia by the well-established route via India and China. "Though the "Fat Mongolian" has left Lhasa", Weir reported to Delhi shortly after his departure, "there are still two persons believed to be Bolshevik agents residing at the Drepung Monastery as monks. This monastery is the one where inmates appear to have been the principal object of the "Fat Mongolian's" attention while he was in "Lhasa".⁵³

Despite all this intriguing evidence, the ultimate purpose of Mukharain's mission remains obscure. It could be that his visit was primarily designed to allay the Dalai Lama's apprehensions regarding the Soviet anti-religious policy ("persecution of Buddhism") and, considering his previous journey to Ordos, Kokonor and Tsaidam, one might infer that he was also commissioned to reconnoiter the Tibetan trade market, as well as to conduct some political reconnaissance in Tibet. The agencies behind the project were apparently OGPU and the Soviet trade representative in Ulan Bator. To what extent the Narkomindel was involved in it is difficult to ascertain, but it seems unlikely that the Buryat had been given any concrete political assignments. (If this was the case, the program of Mukharain's visit would have been surely placed before the Politburo for approval, and the event would then have been mentioned in the Politburo records).

An important point needs to be made in this connection. By the time Mukharain left for Tibet, Chicherin, though still formally posing as foreign minister, did not in fact fully control Soviet foreign relations. Since mid-1927, he had attempted several times to resign, but Stalin insisted that he remain in office. Still, there was some profound lack of understanding and cooperation between the General Secretary of the Bolshevik Party, quickly rising to ascendancy in these

⁵³ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1088. Weir to the Indian Government, 25 May 1930.

years, and the head of Narkomindel, one of Lenin's "Old Guards". The reason was that Chicherin's pragmatic and sober-minded diplomacy, with its emphasis on Russia's national interests rather than on those of the international "World Revolution", was clearly at odds with the adventurist political course as pursued by Stalin and the Comintern leaders. The Narkom was particularly annoyed by the OGPU's and Comintern's rude interference in foreign affairs, which seriously damaged his subtle diplomatic schemes. While Chicherin clearly favoured "secret diplomacy" as the main tool to win Lhasa over, the Comintern hot-heads thought it was high time to speed up the "revolutionizing" of Central Asia, particularly of Amdo and Tibet, by using the Mongolian People's Republic as their springboard.⁵⁴ What made the matter even worse was a dramatic split within the Narkomindel itself between Chicherin's followers and those of his deputy and long-term rival, M.M. Litvinov, a Stalin supporter. It is known that Chicherin openly criticized Stalin and he even sent him an ultimatum from Berlin, where he had gone in mid-1928 for medical treatment, stating straightforwardly that he would not return as long as Litvinov remained in the Narkomindel. But this had no effect, as the ambitious General Secretary took little heed of either Chicherin's criticism or advice.⁵⁵

In Chicherin's absence from Narkomindel in 1928–1930, Tibetan matters were dealt with mainly by three persons: L.M. Karakhan, B.N. Mel'nikov and S.S. Borisov, the latter two being in charge of the Far-Eastern Department. Although still on the Bolsheviks' political agenda, by this time Tibet was certainly not a priority issue any more. The program of Soviet-Tibetan rapprochement, as originally elaborated by the Narkom in the early 1920s, had by 1929 certainly lost much of its driving force and hence had to be largely curtailed. The only person among the Soviet leaders (albeit those of the second rank), who seemed to have retained his keen interest in Tibet was Nikiforov, then holding the post of chairman of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) in Middle Asia. As an expert in economics, Nikiforov believed that the only way to draw Tibet to the Soviet

⁵⁴ Comintern's chief representative in Mongolia, M.I. Amagacy, speaking at the session of its Eastern Department on 14 December 1927 emphasized the role of MPR as a "springboard for promoting the revolutionary work in the greater part of Central Asia, especially in Amdo and Tibet, still untouched by the revolutionary influence of Comintern" (RGASPI, f. 495, op. 154, d. 283, l. 60).

⁵⁵ Sokolov 1994, pp. 3–18.

side would be by promoting mutually beneficial trade and economic relations between the two countries. For this reason he made plans for a "scientific and commercial expedition" to Tibet in mid-1929. The venture was to pursue two main goals: first, it was to search for roads between Western China and Lhasa, passable by motor-cars, carry out a geographical and geological survey of the least explored areas in western Tibet, and, as a side task, to "map the possible airways" to the country. Its other important goal was to explore the raw materials, mainly wool, markets in the north-west and central parts of Tibet. The latter task also included setting up trading stations, "if not on the Tibetan territory, than at least in the adjacent areas, such as Kokonor and Tsaidam".⁵⁶ In the draft of his expedition project Nikiforov wrote:

Our relations with Tibet had rested until now exclusively on sporadic incursions in the country, which allowed us to shed some light on the Tibetan internal and external situation at a given moment, but this was not sufficient for establishing permanent contacts with Tibet and consolidating our influence there.

Politically Tibet is absolutely helpless, and, having found itself within the triangle of such powerful states as the USSR, Britain and China, the country, like a wood chip in the ocean, is being tossed from one wave to another; by using as far as it can the clash of interests of these powers, Tibet is seeking to retain its inner equilibrium and the appearance of independence.

Its attempts to resist the political advance of England in 1903 ended in the capture of Lhasa by the English and the conclusion of a humiliating agreement with England in 1904. Though England failed to obtain [the right of] open doors to Tibet for itself, it still regularly penetrates there through her Indian trade agents and thereby exercises her political influence in Tibet.⁵⁷

Speaking of Soviet "actual connections" with Tibet, Nikiforov outlined their two main forms, viz. religious and scientific expeditions. The former had hitherto been of little political advantage, as there was no-one to "direct the activities of the pilgrims". The expeditions of Soviet agents, Borisov and Chapchaev, who penetrated into Tibet with pilgrims' caravans, did not and could not in fact yield any tangible results because they were primarily reconnaissance missions. As

⁵⁶ RGASPI, f. 144, op. 1, d. 42, l. 5ob (Section: Expedition Tasks).

⁵⁷ RGASPI, ibid., l. 2. Nikiforov's draft of memorandum concerning a scientific and commercial expedition to Tibet, 1 June 1929.

for scientific expeditions, he also assessed these rather negatively, since their leaders (Przhevalsky, Tsybikov and Kozlov) did not pay enough attention to the country's economic development. Therefore, Nikiforov concluded, our knowledge of roads to Tibet remained very poor. ("We don't know whether motor-cars can run across the Tibetan plateau or filling stations can be set up there"). Still, the weakest aspect of Tibet's scientific exploration was economics. In this connection, considering the rapid growth of Soviet industry (one will have to remember at this point that in 1929, under its first Five-year plan, Moscow embarked on "laying down the foundations of socialist economics" in the country), the largely unexplored territories of Sinkiang and Kansu Provinces, and, of course, Tibet were of great interest. Hence Nikiforov made it clear that

the only appropriate and realistic connection we could have with Tibet is through the establishment of trade relations with the Tibetan market, unofficially at first, i.e. it is necessary to begin the penetration with our commodities there via a private company of merchants. Stemming from what the Dalai Lama told our agent, Chapchaev, it can be presumed that our trade operations in Tibet will be regarded favourably by the Tibetan government.... Therefore we, in the course of our commercial penetration in Tibet, will come across difficulties not from the Tibetan side but rather from that of England and China. Under these circumstances, we will have to resort in our trade operations to combined legal and semi-legal methods, such as giving bribes etc., and even putting official pressure if need be, all this only with respect to Western China.⁵⁸

Regarding the question of who would trade with the Tibetans, Nikiforov proposed employing Soviet and Mongolian Buddhist pilgrims alike as trade agents in Lhasa. In his estimation, Tibet was visited annually by about 10,000 Buddhists coming from the USSR and Mongolia. Some of them stayed in Tibet permanently, others for many years, but the bulk of pilgrims only came for a short time in order to worship at the Buddhist shrines, and after that they returned home. These people could be conveniently used in the capacity of salesmen and purveyors, as well as propagandists among the Tibetans, and this "could serve as a powerful instrument of our influence in

⁵⁸ Ibid., II. 7-8.

Tibet". Nikiforov considered that continuing to send political agents to Lhasa as done previously was now practically useless.

What could the Soviet Union import from Tibet? The answer to this question was suggested by Chapchaev:

Various types of raw materials—wool, yaks' hides and hair, the best samples of gold from the Indian national bank, the exchange rate of which in Lhasa varies between 49 and 52 Mexican dollar for 1 *lan*, Tibetan lambskins and a large quantity of furs of such animals as marmots, tigers, wolves, foxes, leopards, wild cats, and lynxes. It should be noted that all kinds of furs could be purchased in Tibet at lower prices than in Mongolia. The approximate costs for furs in Tibet are these: foxes of good sort can be bought for no more than 5 rbls each, a tiger will cost no more than 25 rbls, a leopard—20-22 rbls, a wolf—5 rbls, a lynx—17-20 rbls, etc.⁵⁹

In regard to Soviet exports to Tibet, Nikiforov named among the "commodities most valued by the Tibetans" such items as gold and silver bullion, dressed leather, brocade, silk, pocket watches, penknives, many-coloured stones, and, of course, Russian weapons—rifles, revolvers, and Brownings, with ammunition.⁶⁰

On 22 September, Nikiforov submitted a memorandum to the Politburo entitled "On the Tibetan Question." This called on the Soviet leaders for a more active Tibetan policy. Geographically, the focus in this memorandum was on two key areas in Central Asia—Kansu Province of China and Tibet, which, in Nikiforov's opinion, should be given a high priority by the Soviet government.

At present Kansu is open to our commercial and political initiatives which, though illegal at the moment, will become semi-legal and legal in the future.... Having gained a footing in Kansu, we can relatively easily spread our regular influence from there to Tibet as well, towards its raw materials' markets where we must take root economically, by all means possible.

Tibet, which should be given our most earnest attention, is inter alia a point where our adversaries are most unlikely to show us any considerable resistance.

Nikiforov would further define the existent spheres of influence in Tibet:

⁵⁹ Ibid., I. 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., I. 11.

British influence, through its colonial traders (those from Sikkim and Kashgar), is exercised exclusively in the southern part of Tibet, in Tsang Province, where the capital city of the country, Lhasa, is situated. In the northern and eastern areas, bordering on China, there is no British influence whatsoever; these areas are entirely under the influence of Chinese capital.⁶¹

Thus, Nikiforov's memorandum implied, it was here that the Soviet Union, unchecked by the competing British power, should establish its economic and political supremacy. "I believe it is high time for us to abandon our policy of maintaining a "balance of power" in Tibet, and proceed to a more active policy, the more so that the balance had already been upset by England a long time ago". The goal of that policy, apart from forging a link with China via Kansu Province, must be "to secure such a position in Central Asia, from which we could easily monitor the colonial activity of England, and from which we could penetrate, with the help of our Buryat lamas, into the English territories adjoining Tibet".⁶²

* * *

Nikiforov's proposals, which looked so alluring on paper, did not, however, arouse much interest in Stalin, who was preoccupied at that time with domestic problems—his risky collectivisation project. This was launched shortly after the 15th Congress of the party in 1927, but the critical point was the year 1929, known in Soviet historiography as the Year of Great Change. This marked the transition to so-called "solid collectivisation" when millions of individual farmers across the country were forcefully hustled into the state-run collective farms or *kolkhozes*. The vast majority of Buryats living in rural areas were hit hard by this savage policy, and many of them took up arms against Bolshevik "collectivisors". By that time the Buddhist reform movement in Buryatia had practically come to an end, and with it ended the frictions between the reformist and conservative clergy. Both factions now fell under the category of an "exploiter class", and found themselves in the same boat, having to fight desperately for survival. The fact that many lamas actively par-

⁶¹ APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 739, l. 90. Nikiforov, Memorandum on the Tibetan question, submitted to the Politburo (ll. 89–91).

⁶² Ibid., ll. 89, 91.

ticipated in anti-Soviet rebellions in 1930–1931 served as a pretext for their severe persecution. Among those arrested in those years "for counter-revolutionary insurgent activities" were the heads of the Buryat and Kalmyk Buddhist churches, Danzha Munkuzhapov and Sharab Tepkin.

The Bandida-Khambo Lama was arrested on 20 December 1930, accused of "setting up a counter-revolutionary lamaist centre, with a view to overthrowing Soviet rule by means of an armed revolt and replacing it with the rule of the Banchen Bogdo". He was sentenced to 10 years hard labour.⁶³ The following year the OGPU arrested Tepkin, who was accused of high treason and sentenced to be shot (his death sentence, however, was later commuted to 10 years hard labour, the maximum term of punishment in the USSR at that time).⁶⁴ The circumstances of Tepkin's arrest deserve to be recounted here in more detail, as they provide us with important evidence indicating that the Moscow-Lhasa dialogue had definitely come to a standstill by then.

The Buddhist Mission did not depart for Tibet in the spring of 1929, as was expected by Dorzhiev and Tepkin. It was delayed by the Soviet authorities again and then postponed to a later date on several occasions, under various pretexts, before being finally rescinded. But both men continued to persistently press Narkomindel for permission to send at least one person to the Dalai Lama as a spokesman for the Russian Buddhists. The Soviet foreign department had evaded the issue for quite a long time, but then, at the end of February 1931, according to Tepkin, Dorzhiev was suddenly summoned to Moscow. There, in early March 1931, he was received by the deputy head of Narkomindel's Eastern Department, Borisov, who told him that it would be desirable to send a messenger to Tibet at that time, as the Soviet government had long been out of contact with that country. Borisov then asked Dorzhiev to name someone who could be entrusted with this important commission, making it clear to him that the person should be absolutely reliable, "as we must be firmly convinced that he would return and not stay there". Dorzhiev replied

⁶³ AMB RB, file 2217, vol. 1.

⁶⁴ AMB RK, file 940-r, ll. 428 ff. Tepkin was arrested on 18 June 1931. The decision to commute his death sentence was passed by the Collegium of the OGPU of the Low Volga Region on 2 December 1931 (l. 498).

that the best man for the job was Sharab Tepkin. To this Borisov reacted by saying that "they would think it over and let him know of their decision in a short while".⁶⁵

This is a very confusing piece of evidence as it seems most unlikely that the Narkomindel really wanted to send a Buddhist spokesman to Lhasa in the midst of the crackdown on Buddhists in Buryatia and Kalmykia. But why then did Borisov make his proposal to Dorzhiev? Could it be that, already knowing from the OGPU about Dorzhiev's "treacherous designs", he simply wanted to frustrate these with the help of the Soviet secret police? The events that followed seem only to prove this conjecture. Dorzhiev and Tepkin had waited for a reply from the Narkomindel for a month or so, but as it was not forthcoming they went to Moscow again in May. This time the Tibetan diplomats were received by a minor official of the Eastern Department, V.N. Koroliov, a replacement for Borisov, who was ill. The question of dispatching a Buddhist delegate to the Dalai Lama, he told his visitors, would have to be postponed until Borisov's recovery, as only Borisov could handle it. (Which was not true, as we know). So it was decided that Dorzhiev and Tepkin would wait for a new call from the Narkomindel.

Before leaving for Kalmykia, Tepkin handed his Narkomindel mandate over to Koroliov, asking for its extension, as it had expired. Koroliov took the paper from him and said he would report the matter to Karakhan. So Tepkin returned to his homeland for a time, but the arrests of the Kalmyk clergy he witnessed there made him so frightened that he hurried back to Moscow. Here an even greater shock awaited Tepkin when Koroliov, whom he contacted at once at the Narkomindel, told him point-blank that Karakhan "did not find it necessary to prolong his mandate any more".⁶⁶ And shortly after that, on 18 June 1931, Tepkin was arrested by the OGPU at his residence at the Tsanit Choira "Buddhist Academy".

The arrest of the Head Lama of Kalmyk Buddhists and deputy head of the Tibetan Legation in the USSR, a monk known personally to the Dalai Lama, could mean only one thing, namely that the Soviets had finally given up on their Tibetan schemes. Further proof of this was the arrest of a group of Buddhists on the Soviet-Mongolian border in the following year, the mission secretly dispatched by

⁶⁵ Ibid., I. 57. Tepkin's interrogation transcript of 8 July 1931.

⁶⁶ Ibid., II. 57-58.

Dorzhiev to Lhasa. (There will be more of this mission below). This event clearly indicates that Moscow was trying to cut short all connections between the Kalmyk and Buryat Buddhists with Lhasa.

As for Dorzhiev himself, though still posing formally as a Tibetan plenipotentiary, he had actually become a "persona non grata" with the Soviets by then. Moscow was seriously annoyed by his public activities, especially his touring of the Buryat monasteries in 1930-1931. Dorzhiev not only conducted worship therein but also made some speeches before the Buryats in which he spoke rather critically of the regime, something which the Soviet officials classed as "attempts to incite the masses against the Soviet power". It was primarily for this reason that in early 1931 Dorzhiev was summoned to the Narkomindel, where Borisov, according to Tepkin, put it plainly to him that "we are building socialism in the USSR, which gives rise to a violent class struggle. So I advise you not to interfere in our internal affairs and stop all your agitation to avoid any undesired consequences".⁶⁷ Moreover, Narkomindel took measures to restrict Dorzhiev's freedom of movement. In the words of Dorji Jamtsaranov (secretary of the Tibetan Legation, who had accompanied Dorzhiev to Moscow in March 1931), "at the Narkomindel, it was pointed out to Dorzhiev that he exceeded the limits set for diplomatic workers by antagonizing the Buryat population against the Soviets, and therefore should take permanent residence in Leningrad".⁶⁸

Dorzhiev, of course, had to obey. However, being exiled in his summer cottage in Olgino (a suburb of Leningrad to the north of Staraya Derevnia), he persisted in working for the preservation of the ailing Buddhist tradition in Russia. He continued to liaise secretly with the monks in Buryatia and Kalmykia, and his "Tibet-Mongolian Legation" offered asylum to many a lama fleeing persecution in those years. Dorzhiev also forwarded a number of petitions and "notes of protest" to the TsIK and Sovnarkom, to Kalinin and Smidovich. He protested, for example, against the closure of the Kalmyks' foremost religious school, the Tsanid Choira, some 20 versts away from

⁶⁷ Ibid., I. 57.

⁶⁸ This information comes from the letter of the KGB (Leningrad branch) to the Soviet Cultural Foundation concerning Agvan Dorzhiev and other residents of the Buddhist temple in Leningrad persecuted in 1930s, dated 14 February 1990. In the possession of the author.

Elista, the vandalizing of the most valuable collections of Buddhist religious literature and art (confiscated from the closed Buryat datsangs by the state). Surprisingly, as late as 1933, the year when the 13th Dalai Lama died, he even raised again the unresolved *khovarak* issue with the Soviet authorities. "At the present time", Dorzhiev wrote to Kalinin,

the Dalai Lama keeps enquiring of the persons who arrive in Tibet about the state of affairs [in the USSR]. As the Supreme Head of the Buddhist Church he cannot be indifferent to the fate of Soviet Buddhists. Therefore their deprivation of the right to satisfy their spiritual needs, due to the absence of properly educated monks, cannot but affect detrimentally the friendly relations between Tibet and the USSR.⁶⁹

Neither of Dorzhiev's petitions, however, were heeded by Soviet leaders.

In 1932 Dorzhiev made yet another attempt to get in touch with Lhasa by sending a small mission there. This consisted of six monks: three from the Egitui Datsang in Buryatia and three from Kalmyk khuruls. According to its leader, Geshe-lama Arigunov, they were to deliver to the Dalai Lama a sealed box containing some valuable items belonging to Dorzhiev. However, the party was arrested while crossing the Mongolian border and could not complete its journey.⁷⁰ Despite this failure, Dorzhiev somehow managed to maintain contacts with both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. Thus his right-hand man, Dorji Jamtsaranov, claimed that in early 1934, a Kalmyk nun had arrived in Leningrad bringing Dorzhiev a letter from the Panchen. This woman had visited Lhasa and on her return journey to Russia via China she stopped briefly to worship the exiled Lama.⁷¹ One can probably infer from this that Dorzhiev was still trying to reconcile the two Tibetan leaders.

In late December 1933, regular worship in the Buddhist temple in Leningrad came to a halt. The last big service conducted there was the one in memory of the recently deceased Dalai Lama, its chief patron. And the following year Dorzhiev was suddenly arrested in Moscow. He was released after 20 days though, as the OGPU

⁶⁹ GARF, f. 5263, op. 1, d. 131, l. 8. Dorzhiev's letter to Kalinin, with copies for Smidovich, the chairman of the Special Commission on Religion, and the Narkomindel, dated 31 October 1933.

⁷⁰ AMB RB, file 2768, p. 55. Interrogation transcript of lama Arigunov (copy).

⁷¹ Archive of the Federal Security Service, St Petersburg, file P-63020, p. 219 (Interrogation transcript of Dorji Jamtsaranov, 16 June 1935).

failed to bring any concrete charges against him. It could be that his release was arranged again, as in 1918, by the Narkomindel. The records of this department, then run by M.M. Litvinov (who replaced Chicherin in 1930), have a curious little document, Dorzhiev's character reference. This was drawn up in early 1934, possibly in connection with his arrest. It spoke quite positively of Dorzhiev's political work to effect a Russo-Tibetan alliance in 1890s-1904, and it also praised his personal qualities:

A man of great acumen and of absolutely exceptional energy and persistence, Agvan Dorzhiev had enjoyed formerly (before the revolution) enormous influence among the Buryats and Kalmyks, some of which, it should be noted here, still remain among their most backward segment. During the revolution Dorzhiev headed the reform movement of the Buryat and Kalmyk lamahood, trying to retain in this way the influence of the latter on the masses. At the same time he was seeking to remain in his position of the Tibetan "plenipotentiary", though he had already lost his former political authority in Tibet, despite all his efforts to maintain liaison with the Dalai Lama and the upper layer of the Tibetan lamahood.⁷²

But time was running out for Dorzhiev and his followers as Stalin's reign of terror took hold across Russia. In May 1935, the first wave of arrests hit the lamas in Leningrad. (This was the time of the frenzied witch-hunt for the "enemies of the people" following the assassination of the popular Leningrad party leader, Sergei Kirov). Eight of them, labelled as "socially dangerous elements", were sentenced to between three and five years hard labour in the penal camps. One of the lamas was the extra-member of the Borisov Mission, Dashi Banzaraksheev, who in 1932 was invited by Dorzhiev for the daily performance of the protective *sahiusan* service in the temple. Then, in August of the same year, Dorzhiev's closest associate, who was to have succeeded him as head of the Tibeto-Mongolian Legation, Ganjurba Gegen Danzan Norboev, died of unknown causes in Leningrad.

In March 1936, suffering badly from severe rheumatic pains, Dorzhiev wanted to go to a sanatorium in the Crimea. He notified the Narkomindel of his intention, via its agent in Leningrad, G.I. Veinstein, and he also requested the department for prolongation of his mandate guaranteeing him diplomatic immunity.⁷³ But, as in the

⁷² AVPRF, f. 100, op. 1, papka 1, d. 10, ll. 1-2 (undated).

⁷³ See AVPRF, f. 100, op. 1, papka 1, d. 11, l. 2. The text of the mandate reads

case of Tepkin, his request was denied, which sent a message to the Buryat that was easy to understand. On September 1, 1936, as if anticipating his imminent arrest, the 82-year old Agvan Dorzhiev drew up his will, being simultaneously his political testament designed for the Soviet government. This was written in the form of a letter addressed to his grand-nephew, Sandje D. Dylykov, then a post-graduate researcher at the Institute of the Oriental Studies in Leningrad. His own mission as a Tibetan diplomat in Russia he appraised as follows:

I, Khambo, Agvan Dozhiev, was officially appointed in 1901 as the plenipotentiary of Tibet at the Government of Great Russia by the Tibetan Government and Tibet's Supreme Ruler, the Dalai Lama. After the revolution of 1917 I continued my diplomatic functions at the Government of the Union of Soviet Republics.

My 40-year long political activity was directed towards establishing the best relationship between Tibet and Great Russia—the USSR; however, because of the extreme political tensions which had evolved in the recent years in the Far East and in Europe, and consequently of Tibet's international situation, I was unable to do much for the sake of the actual national independence of the great Tibetan people, taking advantage of the cooperation of the great Soviet Union.

At present, being in the declining years, I cannot think of pursuing further my state or political activities and can only hope that the responsible and rewarding work for the promotion of truly friendly relations between Tibet and the great Soviet Union to secure the independent well-being of the Tibetan people will be entrusted to the next official representative in the USSR.⁷⁴

verbatim: "The bearer of the present certificate, Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev, is under the patronage of N.K.I.D. USSR. Therefore he cannot be either searched or detained without the preliminary notification of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. The N.K.I.D. requests all government establishments and officials of the Soviet Union to render due assistance to the citizen Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev during his travels across the entire territory of the USSR and his sojourn in all Soviet cities. The present sertificate is valid until 31 December 1935". The paper was signed by Litvinov's deputy, B. Stomoniakov, and the head of the 2nd Eastern Department, M. Yushkevich.

⁷⁴ For the full text of Dorzhiev's testament see Andreyev 1992, pp. 76–78. The testament was drawn up in two copies, one for Dylykov, the other for the Narkomindel (AVPRF, f. 100, op. 19, p. 19, d. 26, ll. 9–10). It was signed by Dorzhiev both in Tibetan: *bod gzhung sa'i urusu'i rgyal khab la snod mi mkhan che bIo bzang ngag dbang* (Tibet Government's envoy in the Russian state, a *khenche* official, Lozang Ngawang) and in Russian: Khambo Agvan Dorzhiev.

In the meantime, "until the arrival of an official representative of the Tibetan Government", Dorzhiev found it "his duty before death" to appoint Dylykov (in the absence of Tepkin and Norboev) as his "successor for managing the affairs of the Tibet-Mongolian Legation". To Dylykov, as his close relative, Dorzhiev bequeathed all his personal property, both movable and immovable, in Olgino, Buryat-Mongolia and Kalmykia. At the same time, being very anxious about the future of his dearest creation, the Buddhist Shrine in Leningrad, the Khambo-lama pleaded with the young man to take care of the temple and its furnishings by securing the support of the Narkomindel. Thus Dorzhiev's resignation did not ultimately mean the end to his lofty mission in Russia as there was someone to continue it after his death: Dylykov.

In January 1937, Dorzhiev, accompanied by his attendant, lama Dugar Jimbiev, left Leningrad for Buryatia. There he hoped to spent his last days in a solitary retreat as Buddhist monks do, in his house at the medical school of the Atsagat Datsang, near Verkneudinsk. However his hopes were not to be fulfilled. On 13 November the Buryat was arrested in his home and put into prison in Verkheudinsk. He was accused of high treason (spying for Japan), terrorist and subversive activities, preparation of an armed rebellion, and several more anti-Soviet crimes. Two weeks later, shortly after his one and only interrogation, Dorzhiev was taken to a hospital ward. There, on January 29, 1938, he died. The official cause of death was recorded on his medical certificate as being cardiac arrest.⁷⁵ The Buryat Buddhists, however, believe that the remarkable lama did not die but passed into final Nirvana and was thereby liberated from further suffering and rebirth in this world.

Among the things the NKVD (renamed OGPU) confiscated from Dorzhiev were ten large boxes marked with the word "Joo", i.e. Tibet. These were probably the items designed for sending off to the Buryat's second homeland, as stated in his Political testament. What followed was easy to predict. After Dorzhiev's departure from Leningrad, the scanty group of lamas residing at the Buddhist temple in Staraja Derevnia was arrested by NKVD, all on trumped up charges. With the cessation of the Tibeto-Mongolian Legation, the closure of the deserted Buddhist temple became simply a matter of

⁷⁵ AMB RB, file 2768, ll. 182–185.

time. Still, formalities had to be observed. The legal pretext for the state seizure of the building was provided by the previously mentioned will of Dorzhiev. On 21 March 1938, the nominal head and the only surviving member of the "foreign mission", Dylykov, requested the authorities to put its property, i.e. the temple with two accessory buildings, under the financial control of the state. This step, being a clear proof of Dylykov's political loyalty, apparently saved his life. Hence, on March 27 the Buddhist hostel and Dorzhiev's one-storey wooden house were municipalized, and then on 22 April, a similar resolution was passed directing the fate of the temple itself.

* * *

In spring 1929, while Nikiforov was considering a new strategy of winning Tibet over by means of trade, the government of India began to make plans for a new diplomatic mission to Lhasa under Lieutenant-Colonel J.L.R. Weir (who had taken over from Bailey as PO in Sikkim at the very end of 1928). The British were well aware of the fact that their absence from Lhasa in the past four years had seen a serious destabilization of the Tibetan situation, as was evidenced by the continued efforts of the Chinese and the Bolsheviks to obtain influence in Tibet, as well as the ever growing public discontent in the country due to the Panchen Lama's continuing exile.

The Nanking Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek had already showed its keen interest in the Tibetan question by establishing a special Committee for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs. On the other hand, Moscow sent its mission to Lhasa in 1927, and it also succeeded in subsequently installing its agent there (Bulat Mukharain), who was obviously conducting pro-Soviet agitation. However, Weir's visit had to be postponed for a year at the request of the Tibetan ministers, because of the "uncertainty as to Chinese movements in Northern Tibet". At the same time, the ministers assured Weir in a very friendly manner that they would inform him periodically about Tibetan affairs "as there is no one except the Great British Government to whom Tibet can look for hope and protection and on whom she can rely".⁷⁶

⁷⁶ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1113. Letter from the ministers of Tibet to J.L.R. Weir, 19 July 1929.

In the meantime, early in 1930, Lhasa was visited by an emissary of the Nanking government, a young lady of mixed Chinese and Tibetan parentage, Liu Man-ching. She brought a letter, as well as valuable presents from the Kuomintang leaders, to the Dalai Lama. The letter was said to contain a promise of Chinese support against Bolshevik aggression, if required.⁷⁷ This visit, which created a profound impression in the Tibetan capital, was followed by more contacts of official and non-official character between Nanking and Lhasa. These suggested that the Dalai Lama apparently wanted to improve Sino-Tibetan relations, if only to avert the danger of military confrontation with the Chinese. The British had no doubts that these overtures by Kuomintang China were designed to induce Tibet to return to the Chinese fold. But Tibet's Ruler was also not averse to being on better terms with his other powerful neighbour, British India. As Weir would report to New Delhi on the eve of his mission, on 25 May 1930:

The pendulum would appear to be swinging again in our favour. The recent visit of M. Laden La in connection with the Nepal-Tibet dispute has helped to break down the feeling of aloofness. Tibetan senior officials expect my visit to Lhasa this summer. Opportunity should be taken of this changed attitude to restore and consolidate their former feelings of friendship towards us.⁷⁸

The British Mission stayed in Lhasa for about two months, between 4 August and 1 October 1930. The contemporary political situation in Tibet was described by Weir as one of "precarious equilibrium":

The concentration by the Dalai Lama of all power in his hands is a potential danger. He is growing old, and he places over much reliance on his favourites, Lungshar and Kumpen La, who are viewed with jealousy by Tibetan officials and with hatred by those from whom they have extracted money. On the death of the Dalai Lama a revolution in Lhasa is inevitable, and the first victims will be the two favourites. Power will in all probability be seized by Tsarong Shape who has behind him the support of Drepung and Sera monasteries, the largest monasteries in Lhasa, and after bloodshed a Government will be evolved which will take over the temporal power. Ecclesiastical power will pass to the Ti Rimpoche, who will be elected from one of the chief monasteries, to act as regent during the minority of the new incarnation [of

⁷⁷ OIOC, L/P&S/10/1088. Weir to the Indian government, 21 February 1930.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Weir's Lhasa Mission report, 35 May 1930, p. 82.

the] Dalai Lama. Our policy towards Tibet must continue to be one of sincere friendliness and every effort should be made to bring back the happy relations existing in 1921.⁷⁹

Weir's assurances of friendship made to the Tibetan government created a "favourable atmosphere in Lhasa", and he believed that these must be substantiated with a "handsome gift", preferably a grant, as in 1921, of arms and ammunition, "which would be tangible evidence of our sincerity".

The PO's Final Report of his Lhasa Mission contained a section specially devoted to relations between Tibet and Russia. "Outer Mongolia is completely under Bolshevik influence", Weir wrote in it, "and there is no doubt that Bolshevik ideas are brought by pilgrims from there to Lhasa". The majority of these pilgrims resorted to the Drepung Monastery, the most turbulent of the monasteries in Tibet.

The Dalai Lama is fully aware of the danger of Bolshevik penetration which is a menace to him and to his people, and he employs spies in the monasteries. A reputed Bolshevik agent, who has lately been in Lhasa [Bulat Mukharain—A.A.], has now left. He is reported to have interviewed the Dalai Lama but no signs are apparent of his having met with success. Tibet is a feudal country and until her feudal system breaks down communism cannot take its place. Under the present regime there is little danger of any outbreak of active Bolshevism but the danger of the dissemination of Bolshevik principles is constantly present. The presence of so-called Chinese Red troops at Jyekundo is another factor which must not be overlooked.⁸⁰

Having turned their back on Lhasa at this juncture, the Soviets continued, however, to closely monitor the political developments in and around Tibet via Narkomindel, NKVD (the renamed OGPU) and the Red Army intelligence service (Razvedupr). The death of the 13th Dalai Lama on 16 December 1933 was not unnoticed by their mass media: both "Izvestia" and "Pravda" reported at the end of the year, by referring to the Chinese press, on a decision by the Tibetan government to transfer supreme power in the country to the Panchen Lama. The latter voiced his readiness to return to his homeland, on condition that the Nanking government would provide him with a military escort. The Soviet newspapers also spoke

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 82–83.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 79 (Relations of Tibet with Russia).

of "new intrigues" by the British who had dispatched to Lhasa their "former agent", Sir Charles Bell.⁸¹ And indeed, Bell did travel to Tibet in the summer of 1934 on a private visit, but he was not admitted to Lhasa by the new Tibetan authorities, who perhaps wanted to dissociate themselves in this way from their former British allegiance. (Bell did eventually get permission, but by then he had headed back to India).

At the same time the Tibetan capital was visited by a Chinese delegation which presented China's condolences on the death of the Dalai Lama to the Tibetans. Chiang Kai-shek undoubtedly used this delegation to establish closer ties with Lhasa. And in June 1934 "Izvestia" reported of a plot against the former Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan Army and the "well-known Anglophile", Lungshar, by Tibetan nationalists. The plotters allegedly wanted to bar him from being appointed as premier, and they also sought to "eliminate Chinese influence from Tibet and prevent the return of the Tashi Lama".⁸² The Soviets also reacted to the death of the Panchen Lama in 1937 with a lengthy article giving a thorough analysis of the latter's "counter-revolutionary activities".⁸³

All this suggests that Moscow, despite its alienation from Lhasa, was not altogether indifferent to the turbulent developments there following the Dalai Lama's death. However, the Soviet leaders made no attempts whatsoever to reanimate their dialogue with the new Tibetan ruling clique. They must have felt their contest for Tibet was irrevocably lost to the British and had no particular desire to continue their invisible diplomatic duel with London and Delhi.

The appointment of Litvinov in 1930 as head of Narkomindel inaugurated an era of political rapprochement between the USSR and the major Western powers (Great Britain, France and the USA), which certainly precluded any active policy by Moscow vis-à-vis Tibet. This change of priorities in Soviet foreign policy strongly suggests that the Kremlin had finally abandoned its Tibetan schemes, even if, like Nikiforov's project, they looked highly promising. Besides, after the Japanese militarists had occupied Manchuria in 1931, the

⁸¹ *Izvestia*, 23 and 26 December 1933 (## 310, 312), *Pravda*, 28 December 1933 (# 357).

⁸² *Izvestia*, 8 June 1934, # 132 (Arrest of Anglophiles in Tibet).

⁸³ [Trofimov] 1937.

Soviets had to cope with the looming threat of Japan in the Far East.

As for the Dalai Lama, he did not attempt in his last years, as far as is known, to resume relations with Moscow. In his political testament he spoke bitterly of the "red ideology" which he regarded as being the cause of the complete destruction of the Buddhist religion in Outer Mongolia—and one can certainly add in the Soviet Union as well—by calling it "one of the five forms of degeneration rampant in the present era".⁸⁴

CONCLUSIONS

TIBET BETWEEN BRITAIN AND TWO RUSSIAS

The accessible documents in Russian archives show that the Soviet government, like its Tsarist predecessor, turned its gaze on Tibet mainly for a geopolitical reason, because this remote country was coterminous with imperial British possessions on the Indian subcontinent. This factor assumed ever greater importance in the context of a bitter ideological confrontation between the USSR and Great Britain in the 1920s, essentially a revival of the earlier Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia, the Great Game. In this respect the continuity of Russia's Tibetan policy is evident. Both the Tsarist and Soviet Russian governments sought friendly relations primarily with the Dalai Lama as head of the Tibetan state, and both tried to use the traditional Russian Buddhist connection with Lhasa via the Buryats and Kalmyks for their political ends. Both employed Agvan Dorzhiev as their chief mediator with Tibet's ruler, trying to keep a low profile of their contacts with the latter, so as not to attract the attention of either the Chinese or British. Finally, the Soviets, following the example of the Tsarist Foreign Ministry which set up a Russian consulate in Tashienlu, close to the Tibetan border, created, in 1925, a similar entity in Lanchowfu, to facilitate their liaison with Lhasa and also to be able to monitor the activities of Western powers in the region.

At the same time there are some fundamental differences in the way the Tsarist and Soviet policymakers tackled the awkward question of Tibet. The latter pursued a much more active, purposeful and coherent policy vis-a-vis Tibet than the vacillating and wary Tsarist administrators in the heyday of the so-called Russo-Tibetan rapprochement (1900–1904). Unlike Tsarist diplomats, the Soviets refused to recognize the priority of British interests in Tibet and persistently challenged these through a number of initiatives designed ultimately to make Lhasa break away from its British protectors and ally itself with Soviet Russia, "the genuine friend of all oppressed nations". An important part in this well-devised strategy was assigned to a Soviet satellite, Outer Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic), seen as a bridgehead for extending revolutionary ideology into Inner Asia

⁸⁴ Lhalungpa 1958, pp. 27–30. See also Bell 1987, p. 430.

in general and Tibet in particular. Moreover, the Soviets saw these two lamaist states as destined to share a common fate in the context of impending world revolution and therefore sought to unite them in their far-reaching schemes. Tsarist diplomacy, on the contrary, tended to separate, especially after the 1911 Chinese revolution, the Mongolian and Tibetan questions, seeing Mongolia as a legitimate Russian sphere of interest while recognizing Tibet as lying within the British sphere of interest. At the same time, St Petersburg acknowledged Imperial China's formal suzerainty over both Outer Mongolia and Tibet. Later on, after the collapse of the Chinese Empire, the Tsarist foreign ministry agreed to the British-engineered autonomy of Outer Tibet, albeit again under China's suzerainty, whereas Bolshevik diplomacy resolutely discarded the suzerainty principle as a vestige of great-power imperialism impinging on the rights of weaker Asian peoples for self-determination. During the period when Tibet remained totally isolated from China, the Bolsheviks recognized the country's de facto independent status and dealt with the Lhasa government accordingly. For Tsarist Russia, Tibet, ultimately, proved to be no more than a bargaining chip in its competition with Great Britain, whereas the Soviet Union was determined to use the far-off land as an effective instrument in its ideological total war with the British in the strategically vital Asian heartland of the Buddhist Orient. It was Moscow now that needed Lhasa most, and not vice versa, as had been the situation in the early 20th century when Tibet's sovereign was desperately knocking on Russia's door seeking protection from the "rapacious British". And finally, to promote their interests in Tibet, the Soviets, unlike the Tsarist administration, were betting not just on one person, such as the Dalai Lama, but were also trying to enlist the cooperation of his key ministers as well as the people from various strata of Tibetan society, both high and low, which certainly broadened the receptivity of their social message.

To win Tibet over to their side Soviet leaders resorted to the same revolutionary diplomacy which had earlier proved successful in Persia and Afghanistan, the other two buffer states separating Russia from British India. In 1922, they made their first overtures to the Dalai Lama through an expedition led by the Red Army cavalry commander, V.A. Khomutnikov, and two years later (in August–October 1924) Lhasa was visited by a fully accredited Soviet mission under S.S. Borisov, a Comintern activist employed by the Narkomindel, or Soviet Foreign Ministry. Borisov offered the Dalai Lama Soviet assist-

ance in the military, commercial and educational spheres, an action apparently designed to encourage Tibet's ruler to renounce the British aid which Moscow believed had been "forced" upon him by Charles Bell. The mission leader also attempted to befriend other leading Tibetans, including the powerful Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army, Tsarong Shape, the man behind the British-supported modernization of Tibet. At the same time the Soviet emissaries tried hard to generate pro-Soviet public opinion in Lhasa, giving particular attention to nurturing a tiny pro-Soviet faction there, one that could potentially lead an anti-imperialist (anti-British) liberation movement in the country. With this end in view the Soviets would further try to link this group with revolutionary forces in southern China, primarily the Kuomintang.

The restoration of full diplomatic relations with Britain in early 1924, however, made the Soviets adopt a more conciliatory attitude toward their rivals in Tibet and even consider a possibility of concluding an agreement with them on Tibet (after the model of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention), albeit on the condition that China would also be made privy to the contract. The basis for such an agreement was to be provided by the principles of national self-determination and federalism which could have finally secured Tibet autonomous status within the Chinese federated republic. In this way Bolshevik diplomats wanted to head off any further British economic and political incursion into Tibet which they believed was designed towards the ultimate annexation of the country.

The active period of Soviet policy in Tibet coincided with the rise of the revolutionary movement in China, which reached its climax in the years 1925–1927. It was on the Chinese revolution that Moscow pinned its main hopes for the final solution of the thorny Tibetan issue—the nation's uncertain status vis-à-vis China. In the meantime the Soviets endeavoured, as best as they could, to make use of dramatic developments in Tibet—the mounting antagonism between the two main political forces in the country, the Anglophilic military clique and the anti-British lamaist clergy, as well as the differences between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, especially after the latter's flight from Tibet to China in late 1923. Moscow also tried to take advantage of the deterioration of Anglo-Tibetan relations at the end of 1926, following the Dalai Lama's crackdown on his "new military" in the spring of 1925 by sending their next (and last) mission to Lhasa, jointly with the Mongolian government, at the end

of 1926. The leader of this mission, the highly placed Kalmyk communist Arashi Chapchaev, was to exert more "positive influence" on the Dalai Lama and his entourage by repeating the earlier Soviet offers to them. At the same time Chapchaev was to encourage Tibet's ruler to conclude a Mongol-Tibetan treaty of friendship, similar to the one that had been signed by Agvan Dorzhiev in Urga in 1913.

Having made their primary objective liberating Tibet from British imperialism, the Bolsheviks showed little interest in modernizing the country for the time being. But this strategy was perfectly in line with their globalist ideology placing social revolution ahead of reformation.

* * *

The main architect of the Kremlin's Tibetan policy was the foreign minister (and concurrently one of Comintern's organizers), Georgii Chicherin. Being a staunch Marxist and an Anglophobe, Chicherin believed that Tibet had already been placed under the British sway by the 1907 Convention, and he therefore exerted strenuous efforts during his tenure as head of Narkomindel in 1918–1930 to snatch the country from the hands of "foreign oppressors" by means of secret diplomacy. The main targets for his overtures were the same 13th Dalai Lama, believed still to be a sympathizer of Russia and head of the "Russophile national faction" in Tibet, and his right-hand, Tsarong Shape.

The Dalai Lama, however, though outwardly friendly, was reluctant to enter into official relations with Moscow. Having earlier allied himself with the British, he largely depended on their aid in carrying out his reforms in Tibet and was therefore disinclined to break with them. Besides, he also relied on British mediation in negotiating a new agreement with Peking, along the lines of the aborted Simla convention, which would guarantee Tibet much coveted de jure independent status. As a result, having found himself again under the cross-fire of competing British and Russian influence, this time the Dalai Lama did not hasten to side with the "Red Russians". Moreover, as the Soviet-sponsored Chinese revolution was drawing close to the Tibetan frontiers, Bolshevism certainly seemed more frightening to him than the Bolshevik-branded British imperialism. After all, there was always the example of the People's Republic of Mongolia to suggest Tibet's fate as a Soviet ally. Thus his concurrent flirtation with the Bolsheviks and their British rivals seems to have been nothing more than "a middle course policy" (to use Ludwig Adamec's term):

balancing the two rivalling powers in order to secure Tibet's independence with their support, a policy which was so skillfully played by other Eastern rulers in the Great Game era, such as the Persian Shahs and Afghan Amirs. In this sense the Dalai Lama's anti-imperialist strategy was by no means unique in the history of Central Asian buffer state politics.

The Soviet-Tibetan dialogue definitely came to a deadlock at the time of Chapchaev's visit to Lhasa in 1927. The stumbling block for further talks was Stalin's repressive religious policy at home. The Dalai Lama was particularly annoyed by Soviet legislation that barred Buddhist novices below the age of 18 from monastic schools, a restriction which threatened to subvert the entire Buddhist *sangha* in Russia. Thus, while talking to the Soviet emissary, the Lama was most emphatic in voicing his great concern about his Buddhist coreligionists in Russia, making it a special point that their persecution should be stopped for the sake of Soviet-Tibetan friendship.

To remedy the situation, a group of Soviet leaders made plans, in 1928, for sending a religious mission to the Dalai Lama, which was to consist of the followers of Dorzhiev's Buddhist "reform movement", loyal to the regime. And in the following year, the former Soviet ambassador to Mongolia, P.M. Nikiforov, called on the Politburo to start trading with Tibet via Kansu Province, as this offered highly promising economic and political opportunities for the USSR. However, the sweeping "forced collectivization" Stalin launched in 1929 also began to count "reactionary" lamaist clergy among its enemies, making impossible any further Moscow-Lhasa dialogue.

Thus, it was primarily uncompromising Bolshevik ideology which predetermined the Kremlin's diplomatic failure in Lhasa. But the Bolshevik "new diplomacy" itself also had some profoundly intrinsic ideological defects. The rabid Anglophobia and dogmatic thinking of Chicherin and other Soviet leaders greatly distorted their perception of Tibetan realities, especially the nature of London's Tibetan policy. The British, despite their considerable activities in the country in the early half of 1920s, which so alarmed Moscow, had no desire to turn Tibet into one of their colonies or protectorates. Their ultimate goal was to make Tibet a strong and friendly buffer, one that would effectively insulate the Indian northern and north-eastern borders from Bolshevik Russia and China. The British fears of Bolshevik principles penetrating into India via Tibet, after all that we know today about Soviet intrigues in Lhasa, seem to have been much more well-grounded than concurrent Soviet concerns that their

adversary was seeking annexation of Tibet. (Incidentally, if Tibet had been annexed by the British in the 1920s, it would have most likely become a sovereign state, after the collapse of the British Empire like other British colonies.)

Realistically speaking, the Soviet leaders, despite their attractive nationalist slogans and challenging "new diplomacy", had little chance of wooing Tibet into their orbit and restoring the happy situation of the early 20th-century. The country, with its primitive pastoral economy and practically no industry—and therefore no proletariat—was clearly not ready to embrace the Marxist doctrine of class struggle. This left little room for Comintern activities in Tibet. Still, the Borisov mission detected some bitter class contradictions jeopardizing the semi-feudal Tibetan society, resulting from the disintegration of the bulk of the "lamaist clergy", the emergence of a new privileged class of "national bourgeoisie", and the extremely oppressed condition of the "broad popular masses". This gave Moscow some vague hope that Tibet might eventually take the road of social revolution, with, of course, a little nudge from the outside. There was however, a major obstacle in the Bolshevik path right from the very start—the great distance separating the two countries. Fully aware of the problem, Chicherin tried hard to solve it. First he attempted to set up a Soviet diplomatic representation in Lhasa and to establish a radio-telegraph link with the Potala, and when these endeavours failed, he sought to create a line of post relay stations (*urtons*) between Ulan Bator and Lhasa. However, the latter project, based in fact on Dorzhiev's ingenious proposal, also remained unrealized. Thus the Soviets had no other choice but to send their secret missions and agents to the Potala with the Lhasa-bound Mongolian caravans to keep alive their dialogue with the Dalai Lama. But this type of liaison, being extremely time consuming, prevented Moscow from keeping pace with the latest political developments in Tibet.

* * *

Summing up the results of the short-lived Soviet-Tibetan rapprochement, it must be admitted that it bore little fruit for either Russians or Tibetans. It appears that its only practical outcome was the education of a handful of young Tibetans in Soviet schools in Verkhneudinsk, Leningrad and Moscow in 1922–1930s. Unfortunately we don't know whether these students were able to apply their knowledge and skills back in Tibet, as did their counterparts who had

attended a British school. What the Soviets ultimately gained from their secret Lhasa missions was abundant intelligence on Tibet and their British rivals there, which at least somewhat compensated for their unsuccessful efforts. At the same time, the very fact that the early Soviet government was dealing with Lhasa directly, without the mediation of either Peking or any other Chinese authorities, and was even prepared to enter into treaty relations with the Dalai Lama's government (thereby acknowledging the treaty making powers of the latter), is of paramount importance to us today. Having finally emerged from the archives, this fact alone indicates unequivocally that, although working towards Tibet's "reunification" with revolutionary China, Soviet Russia recognized Tibet as a de facto sovereign state.

EPILOGUE

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GREAT GAME

Very few people among those who were actively involved in the Bolshevik Tibetan schemes survived the Great Terror of the late 1930s. After his resignation as Soviet foreign minister in 1930, Chicherin lived a solitary life as an old bachelor. Despite suffering badly from diabetes complicated by progressive polyneuritis, he found enough strength for creative work. Having finally completed his book about Mozart, which he had been working on for many years, the ex-Narkom then set out to write a long essay on the history of Christianity. This work was interrupted by his death on 7 July 1936.

Kharahan, Borisov and Mel'nikov fell victims to Stalin's "great purge" of the Narkomindel in 1937, which took away the lives of about 200 of its personnel. They were all sentenced to death and shot, the former two in the same year 1937 and the latter in the following year. By that time the Tibet-Mongolian Legation in Leningrad had already ceased to exist and its head, Agyan Dorjiev, was no more. His assistant, the superintendent of the mission buildings Dorje Jamtsaranov was arrested and shot in Leningrad in 1937. Of other persons who assisted Dorjiev in running the mission, we know only that Badma Ochirov resided in Mongolia in mid-1930s. As for Sharab Tepkin, he survived his sentence, which he served in Akmolensk in Kazakhstan. However, it was not 10 but a full 15 years he served, as he was released only after the war, according to his relatives. He died around 1951 in a little village in the Issyk-kul region of the Kazakhstan Soviet Republic.¹

Nikiforov and Berlin, who were not on the Narkomindel staff at that time, luckily escaped their comrades lot. Nikiforov, after completing his diplomatic career in 1927, occupied several high-ranking posts in succession. Firstly, he worked as head of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) for Central Asia in Tashkent, then as rector

¹ E. Bakaeva, "Luvsan Sharab Tepkin i ego vremia" in *Shambala* (Elista), #5–6, 1997, p. 9.

of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow and as a senior official of the Sovnarkom apparatus, and finally as deputy head of the People's Commissariat for Supplies (Narkomsnab). He retired in 1936 and lived on as a pensioner until his death in 1974. In 1963 Nikiforov published a book of his memoirs from the civil war times entitled "Zapiski premiera DVR" (Memoirs of the premier of the Far Eastern Republic).

Berlin also quit his Narkomindel job in 1927, after he had worked as the Soviet Consul General to the government of South China in Canton (1926), and then as Nikiforov's aid (1st secretary of the Soviet embassy in Ulan Bator). After 1928, Berlin mainly engaged in academic work and teaching at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, the Oriental Institute, and finally, Moscow State University, where he specialized in the modern political history of the Far East. He retired in 1955 and died in 1974.

Chapchaev, the leader of the Narkomindel's last Tibetan mission, was awarded the Order of Red Banner upon his return from Lhasa, in September 1928, and not "promptly shot" for his "diplomatic blunders", as was reported to the Indian government by J.L.R. Weir. Back in Kalmykia, he was co-opted in the regional party committee, however, he very soon fell into disgrace with the Bolshevik party authorities. This happened after the daily "Red Kalmyk" had published his article "Facing our brothers in Asia" in which Chapchaev proposed organizing a people's revolutionary party among the Kalmyks in Sinkiang, after the pattern of the Mongolian PR party. The core of this, he argued, should be made up of the local Kalmyk communists and members of the Komsomol. The idea was immediately interpreted by the Soviet party ideologues as an attempt to oppose the MNRP to the Russian Communist party, with a view to replacing the latter by the former entity. As a result, Chapchaev was relieved of his high post in Kalmykia and demoted to a position as party instructor in Saratov. Later on Chapchaev worked at a factory in Stalingrad and then taught for some time at Saratov State University. In March 1934, after the XVIIth Party Congress, the Central Committee of the VKPb sent him to Kalmykia again, this time as head of the political section at the *sovkhоз* (state farm) Revdolgan (The Wave of Revolution). Chapchaev was assigned the task of raising agricultural production there after it had drastically declined in the years of the forced collectivisation. When addressing the Kalmyk regional congress of Soviets in December of that year, Chapchaev spoke bit-



terly of the party's ruinous agriculture policy, which had severely hit the Kalmyk peasants and forced a large number of them to flee from their *khotons* (settlements) and return to a nomadic life. This criticism earned him the label of a "bourgeois nationalist", which eventually lead to his expulsion from the party and recall, for the third and last time, from Kalmykia. Chapchaev was arrested by the NKVD (renamed OGPU) in November 1936 in Khabarovsk and accused of being a Trotskyite and member of a counterrevolutionary Trotskyist organization. During his interrogations he "revealed" his anti-Soviet contacts in the USSR, Mongolia and Tibet, which included, among others, Amur-Sanan, Amulang and . . . Zambo Khaldinov. Chapchaev was shot on 16 January 1938.²

Matsak Bimbaev, after his return from a Tibetan journey which he cryptically referred to in his memoirs as "a long term business trip", continued his military career. In 1929, having completed the advanced training courses for commanding officers, he was assigned to command a squadron in a Caucasus-based cavalry regiment. However, his active service was interrupted in 1933 when his chiefs sent him to the M.V. Frunze Military Academy in Moscow to complete his higher education.

In 1939, after Japan's invasion of Mongolia, Bimbaev found himself back in that Soviet satellite state, serving as an instructor at the headquarters of the 6th Mongolian Cavalry Division, which was stationed at Tamsak Bulak, on the Manchurian border. In May-August of the year he took part in the heroic fighting on the Khalkin-gol river, an event known to every Soviet school boy. After the end of hostilities, Bimbaev received a new assignment, being placed at the head of a detached reconnaissance battalion of the 156th rifle division, which was then stationed in Simferopol in the Crimea. It was with this unit that he fought his first battles in World War II. Badly wounded, he was sent back to the North Caucasian Military District after recovery. There, in 1942, he joined the newly formed Kalmyk cavalry division. Its assistant commander, incidentally, was a person already known to him, Vasily Khomutnikov. However, this formation did not survive for long. Despite its military victories it was disbanded in early 1943 following the liquidation of the Kalmyk Autonomous Republic and the mass deportation of the Kalmyks by

² Re Chapchaev see Naberukhin 1990.

Stalin in reprisal for their alleged collaboration with fascist Germany. Luckily, Bimbaev and his Kalmyk comrades-in-arms were not persecuted and they continued fighting under various banners of the Soviet Red Army. Thus, with the Warsaw rifle division of the famous 1st Belorussian Front commanded by Marshal Rokossovsky, Bimbaev entered Berlin in early May 1945. Shortly after that he was appointed by the Soviet military administration of Germany (SVAG) as commandant of the town of Falkensee (a suburb of Berlin), an occasion which allowed him to befriend Stalin's son, Vasily, an ace-flier. In 1946 Bimbaev returned home, and two years later he was demobilized, which finally put an end to his long-term military career.

Until 1957 Bimbaev lived with his wife in Piatigorsk in the Northern Caucasus, and in 1957, after the Soviet government had reestablished the Kalmyk Autonomous Region following Stalin's death, he moved to Elista, the capital of Kalmykia. Henceforth Bimbaev would be actively engaged in various public work, especially in the so-called "military-patriotic education" of young Kalmyks. It was there, in Elista, that I interviewed him on his Tibet journey in April 1993. Bimbaev was then 93-year old, almost blind and very taciturn, though still retaining a vivid memory of his past. He passed away quietly in the same year.³

Vasily Khomutnikov, the Kalmyk whose "reconnaissance expedition" to Lhasa in 1922 started the Soviet-Tibetan dialogue, would, like Bimbaev, continue his service in the Red Army cavalry after his return to Russia. Having completed the cavalry commanders' courses in Moscow, he was sent back to Mongolia in 1927. There he worked for two years as an instructor in the Mongolian cavalry regiment at Jargalantu-Khoto. In the 1930s, however, Khomutnikov switched to an administrative career. In 1933 he was elected as head of the Kalmyk regional executive committee and in November 1935 as the 1st chairman of the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of the Kalmyk Autonomous Soviet Social Republic, thus being one of Chapchaev's successors at this key administrative post. As the leader of "the great socialist reconstruction" of Kalmykia, he made a considerable contribution to the modernization of his country, promoting a number of projects in Elista, such as an airfield, a broadcasting station, an air telegraph, a water supply, etc.

³ Re Bimbaev see Bimbaev 1983.

In 1937, undoubtedly the grimmest year in Soviet history, Khomutnikov was elected to the Supreme Soviets USSR as a representative of the Kalmyk republic, but later in the same year he was publicly denounced for his disloyalty, including his active membership in the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party during his stay in Mongolia and connections with the "enemies of the people"—Amur-Sanan, Chapchaev, Tepkin and others. Hence the Kalmyk was relieved of his post at the head of TsIK, expelled from the Communist party and unseated as a member of the Supreme Soviets. After Khomutnikov had appealed to Moscow, personally to Stalin and the minister of interior, Ejhov, in 1938, his case was considered by the Committee for Party Control TsK VKPb at the Kremlin, with the somewhat unexpected result that he was rehabilitated and restored as a party member. In 1941, Khomutnikov volunteered for the Red Army and was charged with the task of building up the Kalmyk cavalry troops. After the disbandment of his cavalry division in 1943, he was attached to the Kuban Cossack cavalry corps and later fought with the 2nd Ukrainian Front as assistant commander of a rifle division. Being badly wounded while fighting in the streets of Budapest during the Soviet liberation of Hungary, he died of gas induced gangrene in early 1945.⁴ Khomutnikov has been remembered in Kalmykia until this day as a national hero. One of the main streets in Elista was renamed after him, and in 1991 the Ministry of Communication USSR commemorated the centenary of his birth by issuing a jubilee envelope bearing his portrait, with an inscription: "The Soviet military leader and statesman, V.A. Khomutnikov, 1891–1945".

There is very little information available about the other participants in Narkomindel's Tibetan missions. We know only that Lundukov and Bakhanov were alive in 1970s, the latter being interviewed then by Prof. Oglaev of Elista State University.

* * *

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, the Soviet leaders, somewhat unexpectedly, had to turn their attention to Tibet once again. This occurred in late 1939, when Nazi Germany tried to enlist Soviet cooperation for its plans to subvert the British Empire in India. It was then—actually a few months after the conclusion of the notorious

⁴ Re Khomutnikov see Bembeyev 1991.

Soviet-Nazi non-aggression pact—that the German Ambassador to Moscow, Count Schulenburg, approached the Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov (who had replaced Litvinov earlier that year) to find out whether the USSR could assist the Germans with their two anti-British schemes, the so-called Amanullah Plan and a Tibet expedition project. The first, elaborated by the German Foreign Ministry jointly with the Abwehr, was largely a revival of Berlin's old expansionist plans vis-à-vis India. The scheme envisaged restoration on the Afghan throne of the deposed ruler of the country, Amanullah Khan, who had resided, since 1929, in Italy. To achieve this aim the Germans intended forming a one to two thousand strong detachment of Amanullah followers in Soviet Turkestan on the Afghan border. They were to be equipped with German arms and trained by German instructors. This force was to cross into Afghanistan, seize Mazar-i-Sharif, and then, with the help of Afghan frontier tribes, launch an attack on Kabul to overthrow the pro-British Amir, Zahir Shah. By putting forward this adventurous plan, one of its authors, W. Hentig (who then headed the Foreign Ministry's Oriental department), also hoped that Soviet cooperation with the Germans in the ventures of this kind would ultimately restrain Hitler from attacking the USSR and thus eliminate the danger of a war on two fronts.⁵

As for the Tibetan scheme, it was conceived by the well-known naturalist and SS-Sturmbannfuhrer, Dr Ernst Schafer, who had recently returned from his third journey on the Tibetan plateau. (His first two travels were undertaken in the company of the American Brooke Dolan in 1930–31 and 1934.) Schafer volunteered to lead yet another expedition to the Forbidden Land, this time through the Soviet territory, in the spring of 1940. This would have to be prepared "in the spirit of Lawrence of Arabia: with a tiny team of German commandos but with a lot of money",^{5a} designed for Indo-Tibetan mountain tribes as well as the Tibetan government, which had hitherto received a large annual subsidy from the British. Schafer did not like the idea of a big military expedition to Tibet, as was strongly advocated by Ribbentrop's proteges, Habicht and Kleist,

⁵ For a detailed account of the Amanullah Plan see Hauner 1981, pp. 159 ff. London, 1961–64. Nos 369, 376.

^{5a} Ibid., p. 161.

who in fact were rather incompetent in oriental affairs, and he even resisted the big Tibet project as best as he could.⁶

Schulenburg's diplomatic probing in Moscow seems to have been fairly successful, since Molotov assured him that the Soviet government had no "basic objections" to the German plans. Although he remarked that both Amanullah and Schafer "would surely travel incognito through the Soviet Union".⁷ As a result, on 12 December 1939, the German Foreign Office appointed an official, Dr Peter Kleist ("an expert for Russia"), to conduct further negotiations with Moscow. Kleist arrived in Moscow in mid-December and had a round of confidential talks with Molotov. He invited the Soviets to take part in Schafer's Tibet expedition by providing an escort of NKVD officers, according to the Russian historian Yu.N. Tikhonov.^{7a} Molotov again reacted positively to the German proposals, without, however, giving his final consent, and he asked for more detailed information, particularly about "the basis of the [German] operation and the methods to be applied". The head of German Foreign Office, Ribbentrop, and the chief of Abwehr, Admiral Canaris, were obviously disappointed, yet they continued their efforts (despite the fact that the Amanullah Plan was cancelled by Hitler at the end of December 1939). In February 1940, during his second visit to Moscow, Kleist failed to contact Molotov personally, yet he had an interview with one of Narkomindel's officials who told him amicably that Dr Schafer's SS expedition would "present no difficulties", assuming the undertaking had a "scientific character".^{7b} However, Schafer was unable to travel to Tibet via the Soviet territory either in 1940 or 1941.

According to Tikhonov, the Soviets, from the very beginning, had no real intention of cooperating with the Germans, and they used

⁶ According to Isrun Engelhardt, Schafer seems to have tried carefully to convince the Nazi leaders not to send a large military expedition to Tibet as it might clash with the Tibetan warrior tribesmen, and he even cited the example of Przhevalsky to support his argument. He could not resist the project openly but did it discreetly by raising various objections of technical character.

⁷ Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945, Series D (1937–1945), Vol. VIII. London, 1961–64. Nos 369, 376.

^{7a} Yu.N. Tikhonov, "Abwehr v Afganistane", *Novosti razvedki i kontrrazvedki* (6 (87), 1997), p. 13.

^{7b} Kleist's dispatch to Berlin, 14 February 1940 (This information was provided to me by Dr I. Engelhardt.)

their negotiations with Kleist only "as a blind", in order to find out about Germany's secret designs on Afghanistan and India. Proof of this is the fact that Moscow at once relayed to Kabul the details of the Amanullah Plan. The Soviets also did everything they could to delay the realization of Schafer's expedition project. And indeed, to help Hitler promote his expansionist schemes in Central Asia, given the strategic importance of both Afghanistan and Tibet to the USSR, would certainly have been too reckless a step for such a shrewd political actor as Stalin.

* * *

Having completely withdrawn from Tibetan affairs at the turn of the 30s, the Soviet government showed little interest in Tibet in the early post-war period. While negotiating a bilateral treaty with Kuomintang's Nationalist government in July-August 1945, Moscow was much more concerned about regaining its position in Manchuria, which it had lost in 1931 as a result of Japanese aggression, and the sovereign status of the Mongolian People's Republic, as Chiang Kai-shek strongly opposed Outer Mongolia's independence, hoping to bring the country back into China's fold. The Chinese negotiators, though at first they vehemently argued against the Soviet claims concerning Mongolia, finally had to concede and recognize the MPR as an independent state.

Being actually based on the provisions of the Yalta Agreement, the Soviet-Chinese Treaty of Friendship and Alliance signed in Moscow on August 14, 1945 was generally welcomed by Western powers. The London "Times", for example, hailed the accord as "a major contribution to the security on half of the continent of Asia", and it was particularly pleased with the fact that in the dispute "between Chungking and Yenan", i.e. the Kuomintang and Communists, the treaty "takes the side of Chungking".⁸ The British government, however, had some serious misgivings about the consequences the treaty could have on the Tibetan situation. Thus, on 30 October the War Office (General Staff) produced a report appreciating the "scale and direction of an attack on Tibet by either China or Russia within the next 10 or 15 years". The British military focused mainly on one particular avenue of approach to Tibet by the Red Army—

⁸ Quoted in Ledovskii 1991, p. 314.

via Sinkiang and the adjacent provinces of Kansu and Chinghai, since the Central government of China exercised a rather tenuous control over these areas. (Sinkiang, as a matter of fact, was under Russian influence until 1942). Speaking of potential Soviet objectives in Tibet, the report argued that these could hardly be other than strategic:

There is little in Tibet which could be called an existing military objective in the modern sense apart from the capital, Lhasa, and this only as a main spiritual centre (the residence of the Dalai Lama) and as a point where the ruling nobility is concentrated.

In fact, Tibet can be of little intrinsic value to any conqueror, least of all to Russia with the vast potential resources she already possesses. The value of Tibet could only be the strategic one of bringing Russia to the borders of India over a long distance. Russian interest would therefore lie mainly in securing the communications southwards across Tibet, points in southern Tibet from which communications debouch into India and areas where air fields could ultimately be used offensively against India.⁹

As regards the possibility of Chinese aggression against Tibet, the British top brass believed that this "would provoke international pressure against China, in which we should presumably lead, since we have in the past supported Tibet's autonomy against Chinese desires to convert the territory to a province".

The dramatic developments in Asia taking place in the latter half of the 1940s, such as an outbreak of the civil war in China and collapse of the British Indian Empire, had fatal consequences for Tibet as a de facto sovereign polity. The USSR, having become a global superpower by the end of World War II, naturally could not remain a bystander of these events. It is well known that the Soviet Union, from 1937, actively assisted Chiang Kai-shek in his war against Japan, while at the same time it was also skillfully maneuvering between the two opposing political forces in the country, the ruling Kuomintang government and Mao Tse-tung's Communist Party, seeking to prevent their full-scale military confrontation. However, with the final crush of the Japanese militarists by the USSR in August 1945, the situation radically changed, as Moscow no longer needed to worry about the security of her Far Eastern frontiers. Hence the Soviets

⁹ Public Record Office, WO 208/1957, Appreciation prepared by General Staff Intelligence (a), 30 October 1945.

readily sided with the Chinese Communists (to whom they now wanted to return Manchuria), despite earlier promises to Chiang Kai-shek and their own pledge not to interfere in the internal affairs of China, as recorded in the 1945 Soviet-Chinese treaty.

In early 1949, by which time Chiang Kai-shek had already suffered total defeat in Manchuria, and Lin Biao's Communist troops had occupied Peking and other big cities in north-eastern China, the Soviet foreign minister A.I. Mikoyan led a secret mission to Xibaipo for a round of confidential talks with Mao Tse-tung. In the course of these Mikoyan relayed to the leader of revolutionary China Stalin's opinion concerning the future national policy of the CCP. In particular, the Soviet leader advised Mao "not to do things in a big way", by granting independence to the national minorities of China, as this would substantially reduce the country's territory. It would be wiser, according to Stalin, "to grant them autonomy, and not independence". More specifically, Mikoyan and Mao discussed the questions of the Mongolian People's Republic and the Chinese plans for military occupation of Sinkiang, those being the most vital issues at the time.¹⁰

Half a year later, during Liu Shao-chi's visit to Moscow for more consultations with the Soviet leaders, Stalin made it clear that the CCP should not delay the takeover of Sinkiang because the British might interfere in the situation. He also gave Liu more general advice to the effect that all China's frontier areas (which apparently referred to Sinkiang and Tibet in particular) should be populated with Han Chinese, "in the interests of China's defence". In his letter to Stalin of 6 June 1949, Liu Shao-chi asked for Soviet military assistance in "the liberation of Sinkiang", and he specifically requested them to provide Soviet aircraft to carry troops into the region.¹¹ As a result, Moscow would send an air regiment to China later the same year.

The question of Tibet emerged for the first time, it seems, in the Soviet-Chinese negotiations during Chairman Mao's official visit to Moscow in December 1949–January 1950. On 22 January, in the course of his conversation with Stalin at the Kremlin, Mao warmly thanked the Soviet leader for sending the airforce to the Chinese communists which had enabled them to safely transfer about 10

¹⁰ Ledovskii, op. cit., p. 77.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 106.

thousand troops to Sinkiang. He also asked his host for permission to retain the unit in China "so that it could help deliver food supplies to the troops of Liu Bo-chan, who is making preparations for an attack on Tibet". To this Stalin replied:

It's good that you're getting ready for the attack. Tibetans should be taken in hand. As regards the air regiment, we'll talk to the military and give you a reply.¹²

What kind of reply the Soviets gave the Chinese is unknown, though one can assume it must have been positive, since Mao's request was easy to fulfill. Interestingly, half a year earlier, the same Liu Shao-chi had insisted in his memorandum to Stalin that "the question of Tibet should be solved [only] by political means and not by military force".¹³ Two years later, after Tibet had been finally occupied by the People's Liberation Army, the Chinese Communists asked Moscow for "help in establishing control over Tibet". The request was articulated by Chou En-lai during his conversation with Stalin on 3 September 1952. Ironically, the Chinese premier again emphasized China's peaceful foreign policy towards the nations of South-East Asia (particularly Burma) and Tibet, by saying that "they tried to influence these states by peaceful means, not by sending their troops there", and he then asked for Stalin's opinion. "Tibet is a part of China. Therefore the Chinese troops should be stationed in Tibet", was Stalin's laconic yet firm reply. Chou En-lai promptly agreed to this, by adding that the question of keeping the Chinese troops in Tibet was "indisputable".

Chou En-lai also complained of the difficulty in maintaining communication with Tibet. For liaison with Lhasa, he said, the Chinese would need four-engine transport airplanes equipped with oxygen and anti-icing facilities. The problem with the two-engine planes was that they could not fly further than three-fifths of the distance to Lhasa. To Chou En-lai's request for Moscow to provide China with 20 such four-engine planes, Stalin replied curtly: "We will give you 10 first, and then 10 more". Stalin also made the point that it would be difficult to maintain order in Tibet unless the country was connected by a motor road with inland China. "The Tibetan lamas",

¹² Ibid., p. 136.

¹³ Ibid., p. 89. The Memorandum was submitted to Stalin on 4 July 1949.

he then added, "sell themselves to anybody—the Americans, the English, the Hindoos—anybody who will pay more". Chou agreed, and he emphasised the fact that the Tibetan monks had planned a rebellion earlier that year (between February and April), but that the Chinese people's government had succeeded in "suppressing the rebels". As a result of this conflict, the Dalai Lama's brother had fled the country. Stalin completed the discussion by underlining two main points—that the Chinese should construct a motor road to Tibet and that they should also keep their troops in the country.¹⁴

There is little doubt that Stalin's counselling strongly affected the decision-making by the CCP leaders in the crucial period of 1949–1952. His opinions and recommendations were in most cases readily taken by them as directives for action, and Stalin certainly gave Mao the go-ahead for the military occupation of Tibet started by the PLA in October 1950. (It should be recalled at this point that the above quoted documents make up only a small fraction of the mass of still classified materials, diplomatic and military, relating to Moscow-Peking contacts in these years). Thus, Chicherin's old dream of Tibet reunited with the brotherly family of nations within the "free" and "democratic" Chinese Republic finally came true a decade and half after the Narkom's death. This reunification, however, was achieved not as a result of Soviet diplomatic efforts but by revolutionary methods, which ultimately proved more effective than the Bolsheviks' secret diplomacy.

Moscow enthusiastically hailed the takeover of Tibet by Communist China,¹⁵ and it also welcomed the "Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet" (the so-called "17-point Agreement") concluded between Peking and Lhasa on 23 May 1951. The Soviet daily "Pravda" in its issue of 29 May gave detailed coverage of the historical event. It quoted the Chinese leaders (Chairman Mao Tsetung and Vice-Chairman Chu Teh) and their Tibetan counterparts (the Panchen Lama and the head of the Tibetan delegation to Peking, Kalon Ngabo Ngawang Jigme), who were apparently happy with the final settlement of ancient Sino-Tibetan differences. In subsequent years Soviet propaganda and politically-engaged scholarship would

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 167–168.

¹⁵ See, for example, the articles "Liberation of Tibet, *New Times*, Moscow, #47, 1950, pp. 21–22; "Tibet privetstvuet svoikhi osvoboditelei" (Tibet hails its liberators), *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 9 January 1951.

try hard to justify Red China's absorption of Tibet, by supporting the myth of the country's "peaceful liberation" from Western imperialism. Thus, the historian V.P. Leontiev would assert that the foreign expansion had brought "incalculable sufferings" to the Tibetans: "Tens of thousands of killed and crippled men, hundreds of thousands of those who died of hunger and diseases—such is the outcome of penetration of the foreign capital in Tibet". Leontiev, naturally, put all the blame for these crimes on "imperialist powers" which

by seeking to turn Tibet into their sphere of influence and a military bridgehead, applied various methods of economical, political and military oppression . . . , from all kinds of provocations, diplomatic pressure, direct interference in Tibet's economical life, dispatch of scouts, attracting the Tibetan feudals to their side and seeding strife among the Tibetans and Chinese, up to military incursions on the Tibetan territory. The imperialists weakened the traditional ties of Tibet with other parts of China and isolated her from the outside world. As a result, Tibet turned into a semi-colony of British imperialism, an agrarian and raw material appendage for the imperialist powers. . .¹⁶

According to Leontiev, the Tibetan people encountered their "friend and liberator", the PLA, for the first time as early as 1935. It was then that the Chinese Red Army (the PLA's predecessor), in the course of its victorious Great Campaign, helped the Tibetans create their "first local autonomous Tibetan government" in the city of Gantse (?) and prepared the necessary revolutionary cadre for it. Now, after Tibet's reunification with the PRC, the Tibetans had obtained equal rights with other nations in China, and the Chinese government recognized that the best solution to the question of Tibet's self-determination would be to grant the country "national regional autonomy".

Until the early 1960s, the Soviet Union strongly supported Peking by diplomatic and other means against the Western powers, which denounced Communist China for its unprovoked aggression in Tibet. The atmosphere of the Cold War made the Kremlin leaders believe that the British and American imperialists were secretly plotting to sever Tibet from the rest of China by using the Tibetan opposition, especially the Tibetan refugees in India. Thus, on 12 February 1959,

¹⁶ Leontiev 1958, p. 7.

the Soviet foreign minister A.A. Gromyko reported to the Politburo on the British espionage network in the Kalimpong area, allegedly created by the former head of the British political mission in Tibet, Hugh Richardson. One of the agents was named as Bhikshu Sangha Rakshita, an English Buddhist (member of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order), "holding a private monastery there since the time of WW II".¹⁷ "In Kalimpong and Darjeeling", Gromyko asserted, "there is a large group of Tibetan refugees, who had fled into India after the PLA's coming to Tibet. The reactionary activity of this group, directed against the PRC, is supervised by the Dalai Lama's brother, Gyalo Thondup, and the former finance minister Tsepon Shakabpa". Consequently, the Politburo members resolved to bring this information to the notice of their "Chinese friends".¹⁸

The anti-Chinese uprising in Lhasa and elsewhere in Tibet in March 1959 was likewise perceived by Moscow as an "imperialist provocation"—collusion between the "reactionary" Tibetan administration and imperialist circles abroad, in particular "Chiang Kai-shek's gang". "Tibet", "Pravda" stated, "is an unalienable part of China, and the crushing of the mutinous reactionary ruling clique in Tibet is solely the internal affair of the Chinese people". At the same time the Soviet paper praised the Panchen Lama (the 10th, Kalzan Tsetang), then serving as the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibetan Autonomous Region, who had condemned the actions of the rebels and welcomed the dissolution of the local Tibetan government (Kashag) by the Peking central authorities.¹⁹ It also mentioned briefly the Dalai Lama's flight from Tibet, depicting it as his "abduction" by the Tibetan reactionaries. "Pravda" called the Dalai Lama's declaration upon his arrival in India that he had abandoned Lhasa of his own free will, a "fabrication" by Western media, and it also quoted Chou En-lai as saying that the Chinese hoped that the Dalai Lama would be able to free himself from the hands of the rebels and return to his homeland.²⁰

Shortly after the suppression of the 1959 uprising by the PLA, the Politburo issued special instructions to Soviet diplomatic repre-

sentatives abroad, offering them a "correct" interpretation of the latest developments in Tibet. "The Tibetan events", the document claimed, "relate to the internal affairs of China, therefore any interference in the Tibetan situation, under whatever pretext, is impermissible. The USSR fully supports the measures of her Chinese friends, designed to suppress the uprising and carry out democratic reforms in Tibet".²¹ Later in the same year the Politburo would also issue similar instructions for Soviet delegates to the 14th session of the General Assembly at the UN:

Provocative statements against the PRC are expected at the session in connection with the reactionary revolt in Tibet, intended to damage the international prestige of the PRC and launch hostile propaganda against the entire socialist camp, thereby complicating our relations with the non-socialist countries of Asia. Our delegation should object to any attempts to raise the so-called 'Tibetan question', in whatever form, at the UN Organization, by qualifying these as rude interference in the internal affairs of the PRC, incompatible with the fundamental principles of the UNO, particularly with the article 2, para 7 of the UN Charter. By repulsing hostile declarations concerning this question, [the delegates] should explain the genuine character of the events in Tibet and underline that the Tibetan venture, being undertaken by certain [Western] circles, is an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of socialist states and intensify the international tension.

If the Indian delegation declares that India would like to establish contact with the PRC on the Tibetan question and would ask us to mediate between India and China, it should be given a reply that it would be more appropriate if India established direct contacts with the PRC.

In the event the "Tibetan question" would still be included in the agenda, the Soviet delegation should take part in the debate, by objecting to and voting against any proposals aimed at interference in the internal affairs of China.²²

Moscow also opposed the Dalai Lama's attempt to appeal directly to the UN for help in September 1959. Thus it instructed its permanent representation there to visit the Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjold, and declare to him that "his intention to distribute as a document of the 14th session of the UN the Dalai Lama's telegram on the so-called Tibetan question received from India is

¹⁷ Sangharakshita wrote a book about his life in the area: *Facing Mount Kachenjunga*, Glasgow, 1991.

¹⁸ APRF, f. 3, op. 65, d. 739, ll. 93–96.

¹⁹ *Pravda*, 28 March 1959.

²⁰ *Pravda*, 19 and 22 April 1959.

²¹ APRF, *Ibid.*, l. 99.

²² *Ibid.*, ll. 123–124.

erroneous" because the Dalai Lama is a "private person", and not an "official representative" of his country.²³

Apart from considerable diplomatic support, the Soviets also rendered some assistance to Peking in building transport communications between China and Tibet and in training PLA units in the early half of the 50s. Thus, some time in late 1951 or early 1952, the Soviet military sent a group of aviation experts to Tibet to choose a site for the construction of an airfield near Lhasa and to carry out a preliminary ground survey of the area.²⁴ This was a secret mission, as Moscow certainly wanted to keep as low a profile as possible in its activities in Tibet. After the airfield was built, Soviet pilots flew two test flights to Lhasa in LI-2 cargo and passenger airplanes, the first of which crashed. Then, in the summer of 1954, a group of Soviet instructors, jointly with some high ranking PLA officers, made an inspection visit to Western Tibet from their headquarters in Lanchow.²⁵ The Soviet government also helped the Chinese with the construction of two new trunk highways, both terminating in Lhasa—one from Yuan in Sikang Province and the other from Xining in Chinghai (the assistance again was mainly in the project design stage). In addition, the USSR assisted China in building the Lanchow-Urumchi Railway across Kansu and Sinkiang, with an offshoot to the Soviet Trans-Siberian Railway, thus fulfilling an old promise by Stalin.

The deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s, which lead to a severe ideological confrontation between the two communist states especially in the years of the Cultural Revolution in China, saw the Soviet leaders withdraw their support for Peking over the Tibetan question. By condemning "Mao Tse-tung and his group" for the rude violation of Marxist-Leninist principles, they turned much of their criticism against China's "chauvinistic national policy", consisting of forced assimilation and Sinification of the non-Han Chinese ethnic minorities, the Uigurs, Mongols, Manchus, Tibetans and others. Some of the Soviet critics went as far as to assert that the Peking-created "national autonomies" were in fact purely fictitious

entities: thus, the single Tibetan state was split between the Tibetan Autonomous Region and nine more autonomous areas, adjacent to TAR. Moreover, by setting up the Chinese-run revolutionary councils (*revkoms*) after the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Peking, they argued, actually sought to liquidate the last vestiges of local self-government in Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang and Tibet, which were guaranteed by the Chinese constitution. This was clearly a deviation from Lenin's fundamental principle of self-determination, as well as from Sun Yat-sen's program of national reconstruction. Moscow also blamed the Maoists for the cruel suppression of the Tibetan opposition ("the national-liberation movement of the Tibetan people") and for forcing many thousands of Tibetans into exile to India, Nepal and other countries.²⁶

Sino-Soviet relations remained strained, even after Mao's death in 1976. Surprisingly, in the late 1970s—early 1980s some Soviet high officials voiced their support of Tibet's struggle for independence, hinting that the USSR was willing to render assistance to the Tibetan exiles. However, their statements to that effect were probably intended only to annoy the Chinese. There is no documentary evidence whatever to suggest that the Kremlin was seriously considering the possibility of giving aid to the Tibetans at that time.²⁷ Any active Soviet support—military or diplomatic—for the Tibetan opposition (both in and outside Tibet) was certainly out of question, as this would have launched a new contest with the West (USA and Great Britain) for Tibet and might also have triggered a major schism in the world communist movement by setting the USSR and China at loggerheads. As was the case half a century before, the Soviets were not really interested in an independent Tibetan state which, considering the anti-Communist feelings of Tibetans en masse, would most likely ally itself with the imperialist West again, rather than communist Russia. Besides, Moscow hoped that the CCP would return sooner or later to the road of orthodox Marxism-Leninism and was actually working towards the improvement of its relations with Peking.

It was only towards the end of 1980s, however, that the Soviet "perestroika" ideologues under Gorbachev finally succeeded in re-

²³ Ibid., I. 126.

²⁴ I learned about this fact from one of the participants in the mission, the Chinese language translator M.I. Demidenko, who was, however, reluctant to give any details of this visit.

²⁵ This event was briefly mentioned in Demidenko 1999.

²⁶ See, for example, G. Rahimov, "Trubadury shovinizma" (The troubadours of chauvinism), *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, #116, 20 May, 1969; M. Barnabekov, "Osennie mukhi iz Guanmin Zhibao", *Literaturnaia gazeta*, #45, 7 November 1973.

²⁷ See Wersto 1983, pp. 78–79.

opening dialogue with China's new leadership, who were also intent on the reformation of their country. In this situation the Soviets were naturally compelled to abandon their criticism of Chinese Communists. Moreover, Moscow clearly sided with Peking once again in its interpretation of the developments in Tibet: thus, the anti-Chinese protest demonstrations in Lhasa in March 1989 were described by "Izvestia" merely as a "rebellion of Tibetan separatists".²⁸

The government of the new Russia under Boris Yeltsin showed some concern for Tibet only in the first few years following the "August Putch" of 1991, in the euphoric atmosphere of democratization in the country. It was then that the Tibetan question was examined by the human rights committee at the Russian Parliament, the State Duma. The Russian foreign policy at this early period was profoundly Western-oriented, which reflected Moscow's aspirations for rapid integration with the West, mainly the USA. However, since the mid-1990s, the Russian leaders, having failed in their pro-Western integrationist expectations, have begun to look more and more eagerly eastward, seeking new friends and partners on the Asian continent. They have been especially keen on cultivating closer relations with such important regional actors as China, India and Japan. By initiating, in 1992, a friendly dialogue with the General secretary of the CCP, later to become Chairman of the PRC, Jian Zemin, Yeltsin succeeded eventually in bringing about a Russian-Chinese economic and political rapprochement, something which the both leaders described as an "equal and confidential partnership directed towards a strategic interaction in the 21st century" at their summit meeting in Peking in April 1996. One result of this fresh Moscow-Peking alliance was that the Kremlin "democratic" policymakers had to close their eyes—especially after the beginning of the Chechen war—to the Tibetan problem and such matters as the continued gross violation of human rights in Tibet and the mass transfer of Han Chinese to the region. At the same time they made it clear that Russia continued to regard Tibet as "an inalienable part of China" (the same as Taiwan). The Chinese leaders, for their part, declared that the PRC "welcomes the measures and actions taken by the Russian Federation to protect the integrity of the country, and regards the

²⁸ Izvestia, 7, 8, 10 September 1989.

Chechen problem as an internal affair of Russia".²⁹ This clearly looked like a political bargain between the two Asiatic superpowers.

Yet, despite the Kremlin's pragmatism, new winds were already blowing in the Russia of the 1990s. The revival of Buddhism in Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva made the Buddhists in these areas look for closer contacts with the exiled Tibetan community in Dharamsala (in northern India)—the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan high monks. The 1990s also witnessed a surge of interest in Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism among ethnic Russians, which gave rise to numerous Russian Buddhist communities all across Russia, from St Petersburg to Vladivostok. This phenomenon naturally paved the way for the Dalai Lama's frequent visits to Russia, which began in 1991, when he addressed the Supreme Soviets of the Russian Federation shortly after the "putch". (The Dalai Lama's first meeting with the Soviet Russian leaders, Khrushchev and Bulganin, took place in 1954, at a banquet in Peking, and he visited Moscow for the first time under Brezhnev in 1979). These visits were widely covered in the local Buryat, Kalmyk and Tuvan press and, while being purely religious visits in theory, they were not entirely devoid of some political undertones given the dramatic situation in Tibet. In 1992, while visiting Buryatia, the Dalai Lama consecrated the "suburgan" erected in memory of Agvan Dorjiev, his former incarnation's tutor, on the original site of Dorjiev parents' house in Harashibir, some 50 km north-east of Ulan Ude. And the following year the office of the Dalai Lama's spiritual representation was opened in Moscow under the name of "Tibet's Culture & Information Center".

Indeed, the Dalai Lama became quite a popular figure in Russia in the 1990s. Many of his books were translated into Russian, including his autobiography "Freedom in Exile". His ground-breaking 1909 Nobel prize winners speech is also available in the Russian language.³⁰ The Russian public is generally sympathetic towards the Dalai Lama's incessant efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Tibetan issue through a dialogue with the Peking authorities. At the same time the Dalai Lama himself shows much sympathy for the reviving post-Communist Russia and Russians, especially his Buddhists coreligionists.

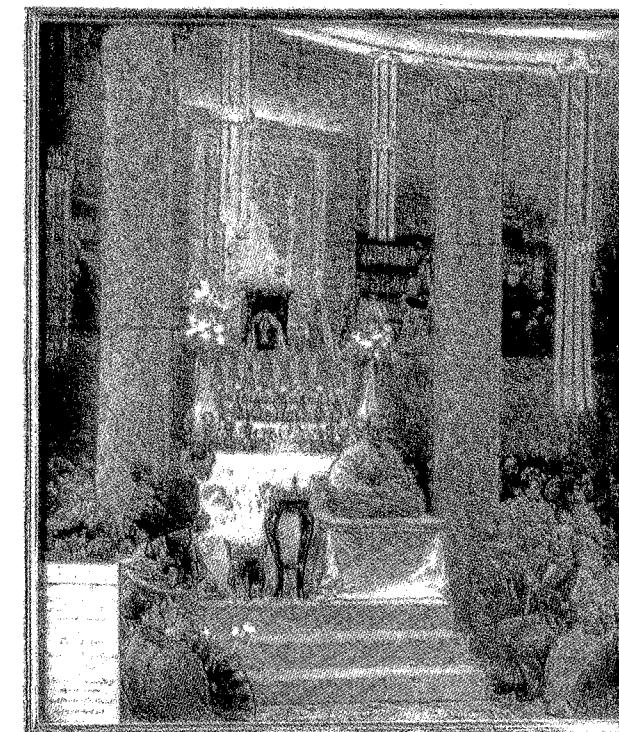
²⁹ See the Joint Russian-Chinese Declaration, signed upon the completion of Yeltsin's 1996 visit to Peking in Russia: MID. 1996. *Diplomaticeskiy Vestnik*, 5, p. 18.

³⁰ Dalai-Lama 1991, 1992.

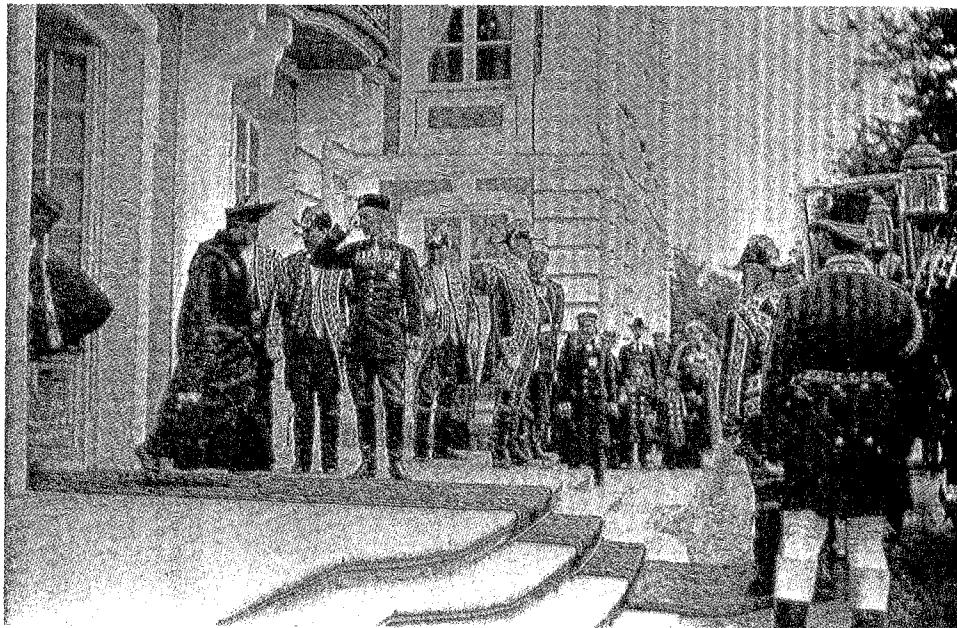
Thus, today's Russia has two definite policies on Tibet, as it used to have in the early 20th century. One is the Russian government's official posture toward the Tibetan issue, which can be briefly formulated as: Tibet is an integral part of the PRC. Hence it is only up to China to handle the Tibetan problem. The other policy is Russia's personal relations with the Dalai Lama as head of the Tibetan Buddhist Church. Being of a purely religious nature, these contacts are maintained exclusively through the Buddhist communities of Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva and seem to have little, if any, effect on the Russian-Chinese dialogue. Considering the new Russia's pragmatic course in international affairs, there is no apparent prospect of this two-track relationship altering in the foreseeable future.



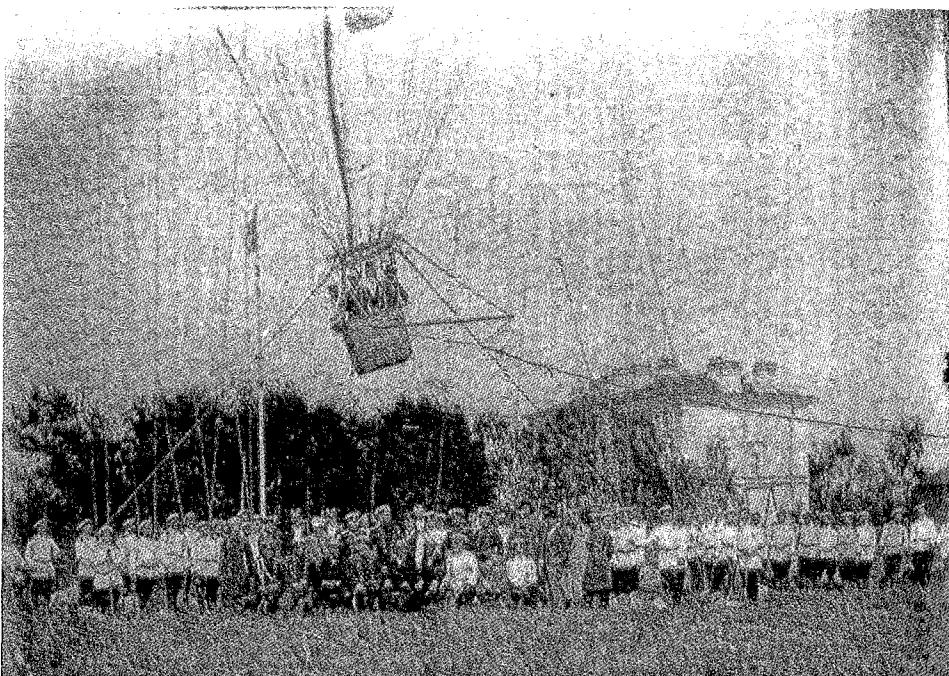
1. Agvan Dorzhiev. C. 1900. P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum.



2. Felix Regamey. Ceremonie bouddhique le 27 juin 1898. Agvan Dorzhiev conducting a lamaist service on the premises of the Guimet Museum, Paris.
From the Collection of the Guimet Museum.



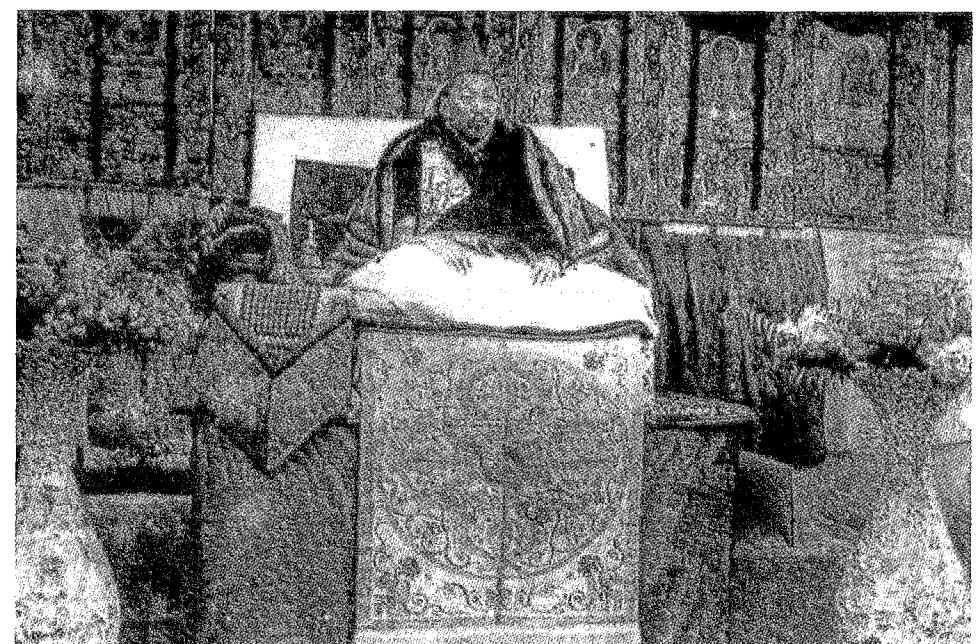
3. Agvan Dorzhiev coming out of the Great Palace in Petershof after his audience with the tsar, 1901. A. Terentiev Collection.



4. The Tibetan Mission being entertained by the Aeronautic Depot officers at the Volkovo Field outside St Petersburg, July 1901. A. Terentiev Collection.



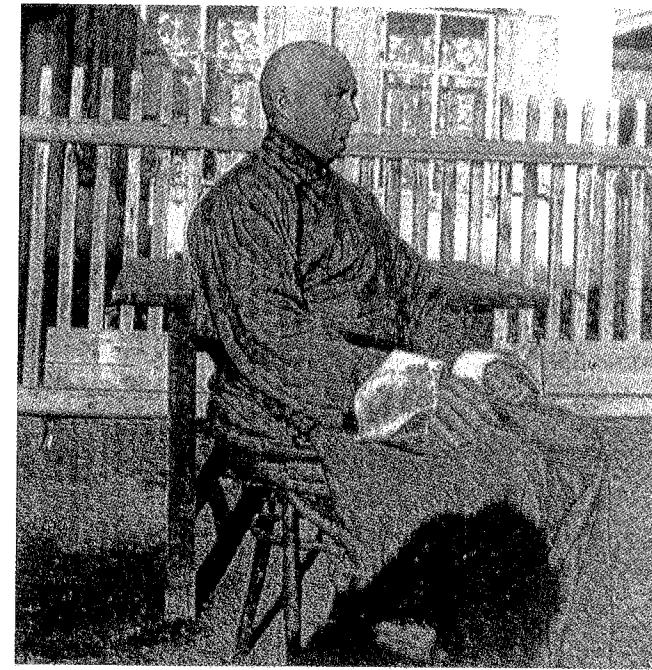
5. A. Dorzhiev with a Buryat attendant, St Petersburg, 1913. The Central State Archive of Cinematographic, Photo and Phonographic Documents (TsGAKFFD), St. Petersburg.



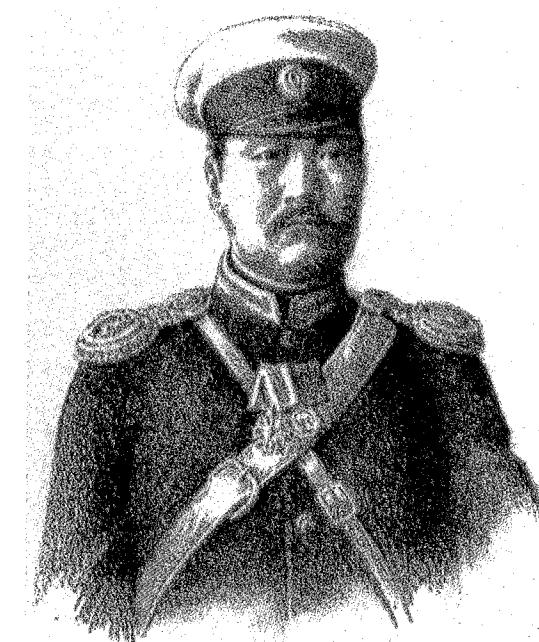
6. The 13th Dalai Lama on the throne.



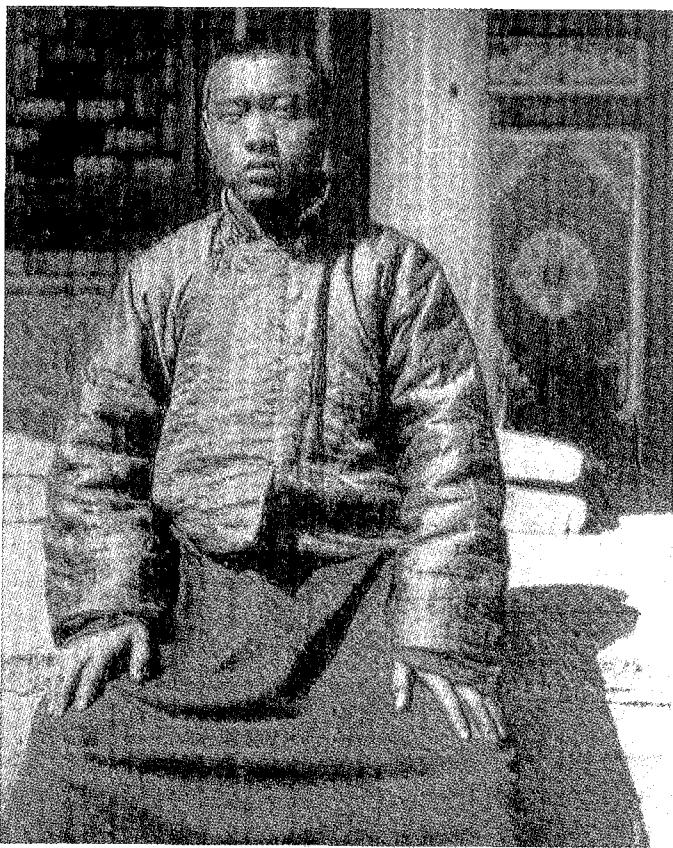
7. "The Dalai Lama in his 13th Incarnation" (en face). Drawing by N.D. Kojhevnikov, Urga, 1905.



8. Theodor Stcherbatsky, the 13th Dalai Lama's first Western tutor, Urga, 1905. A. Terentiev Collection.



9. Naran Ulanov, leader of the secret Kalmyk mission to Tibet, 1904–1905. Drawn by N.V. Yudin. Courtesy of the P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum, St. Petersburg.



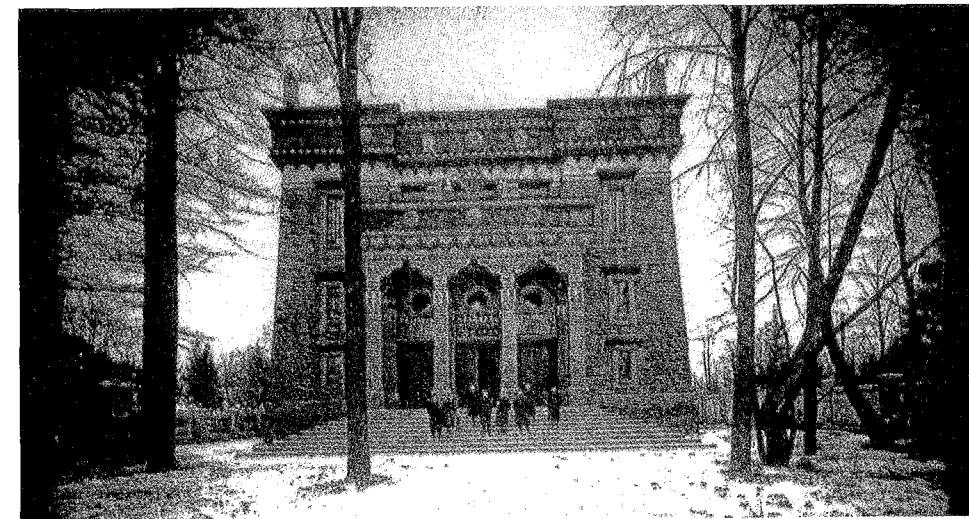
10. Young Chensal Namgang (Tsarong Shape), Kumbum, 1909 (?). Archive of the Russian Geographical Society.



11. Drilling of Tibetan soldiers at Radeng, north of Lhasa. C. 1913-14. P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum.



12. New Tibetan regiments parading in Lhasa, 1915. A. Terentiev Collection.



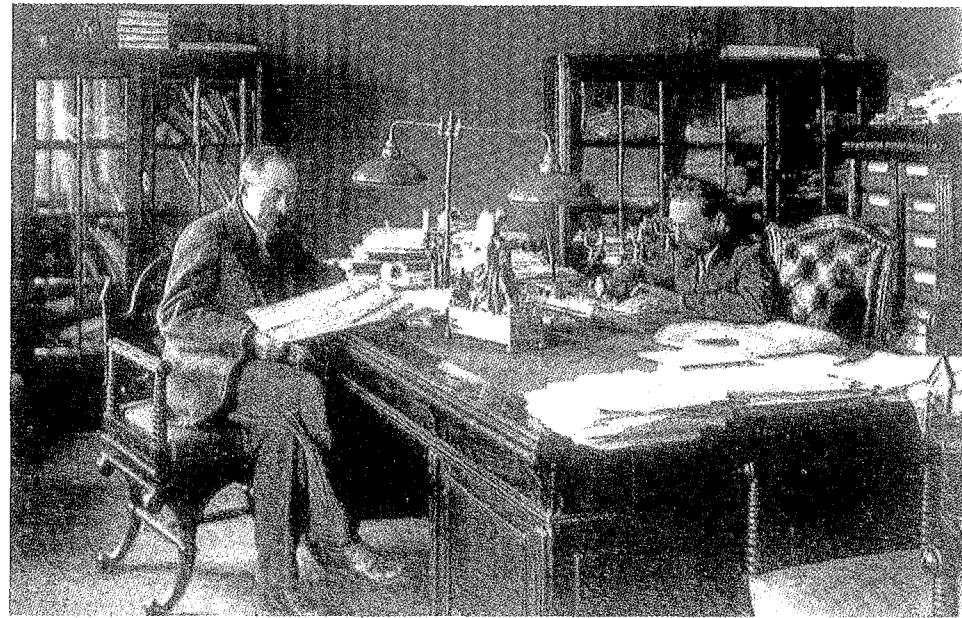
13. The Buddhist temple in Leningrad, the seat of the semi-official Tibetan Legation, 1925. The Central State Archive of Cinematographic, Photo and Phonographic Documents (TsGAKFFD), St Petersburg.



14. 8th Jebzundamba Khutuktu, head of the Mongolian Buddhists.



15. George Chicherin, Soviet foreign minister (1918-1930), mid-1920s.
Reproduced from: S. Zarnitsky, A. Sergeyev. Chicherin. Moscow, 1975.



16. Narkom G.V. Chicherin (left) and his deputy L.M. Karakhan (right), early 1920s.
Reproduced from: V. Genis. Krasnaia Persia: Bolsheviki v Giliane, 1920-21. Moscow, 2000.



17. V.A. Khomutnikov and B. Kanukov (left to right), 1921. National Archive of the Republic of Kalmykia.



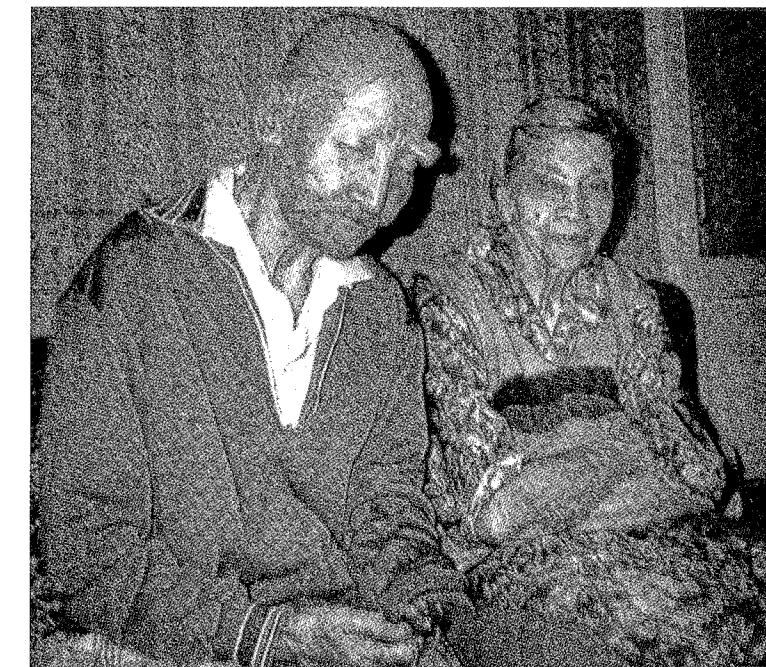
18. S.S. Borisov, leader of the second Soviet mission to Lhasa, 1923-25, late 1930s. Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, Moscow.



19. Arashi Chapchaev, the de facto leader of the 1927 Mongolian Mission to Lhasa. Late 1930s (?).



20. Members of the 1927 Mongolian Mission: 1st row (sitting, left to right) - A.Ya. Klimov (Soviet military advisor at Kalgan), Gomboidchin (the nominal mission leader), B.N. Mel'nikov (Narkomindel's senior official), A. Chapchaev; 2nd row (standing): M.T. Bimbaev, Amulang (?), Ulan-Bator, 1926. The State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow.



21. Matsak T. Bimbaev with wife, Elista, Spring 1993. Photo by A. Andreyev.



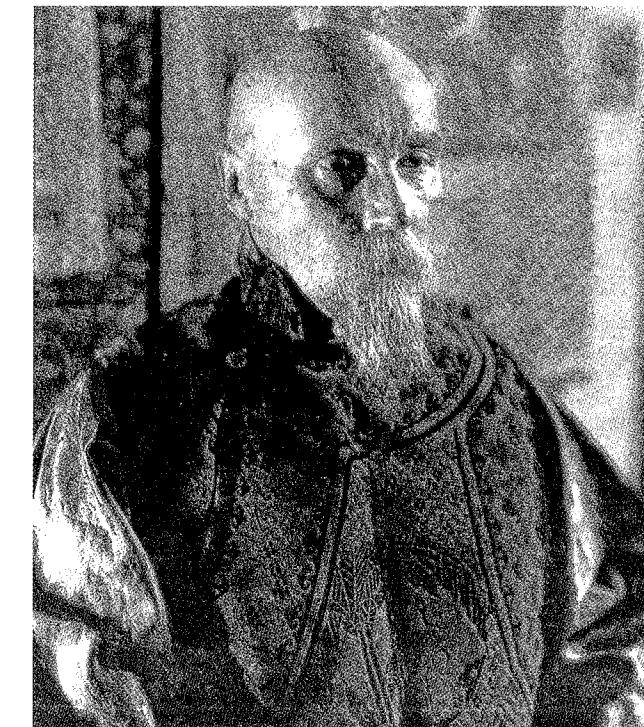
22. Dorzhiev with a group of Oriental scholars on the balcony of the Buddhist temple in Leningrad, 1925: B.Ya. Vladimirtsov, P.I. Vorobiov, I.N. Borozdin, A. Dorzhiev, V.M. Alekseev, Badma Ochirov (left to right). M.V. Ban'kovskia Collection.



23. A. Dorzhiev, mid-1920s. A. Terentiev Collection.



24. Petr Kozlov and Sven Hedin, Urga, November 1923. P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum.



25. Nicholas Roerich, Darjeeling, 1924. Courtesy Roerich Museum, New York.



26. 1st row (standing, left to right): Yu.N. Roerich, E.V. Kozlova-Pushkariova, Ts. Jamtsarano, N.N. Poppe; middle row (sitting): 3rd and 4th from left N.K. Roerich and P.K. Kozlov; bottom row (squatting): Gomboidchin (left, ?), Ulan-Bator, Autumn 1926.
P.K. Kozlov Memorial Museum.



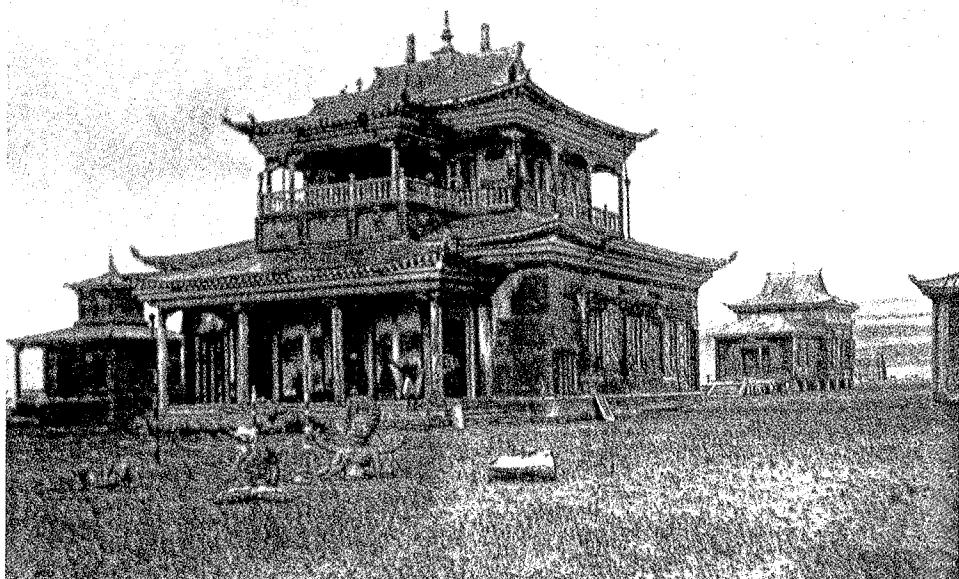
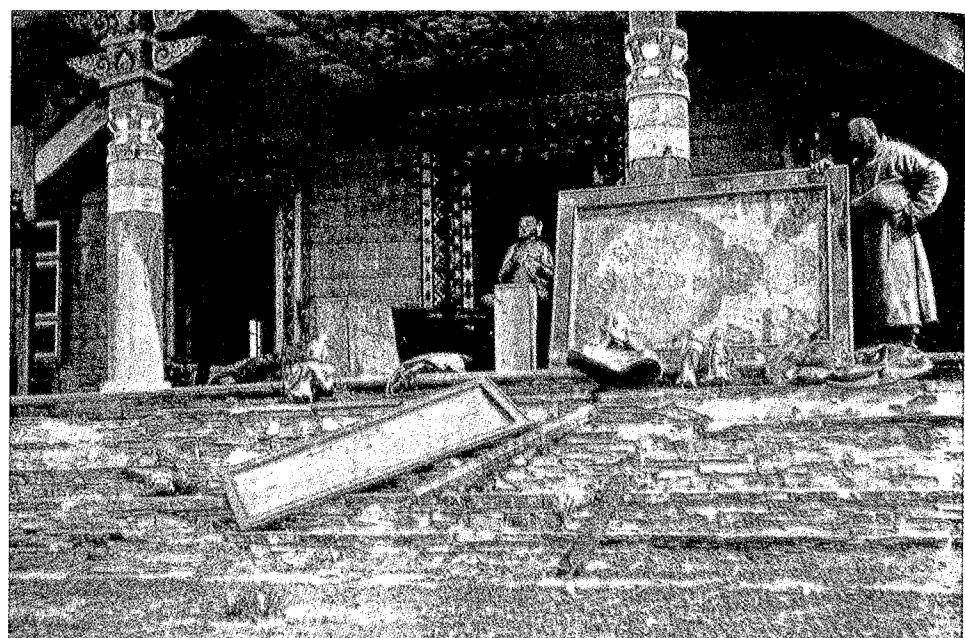
27. The 1st All-Union Buddhist Council in Moscow, January 1927. Sitting in the 2nd row: D. Munkajapov, A. Dorzhiev, and Sh. Tepkin (5th, 6th, and 7th from left). A. Terentiev Collection.



28. A. Dorzhiev, D. Norboev, Sh. Tepkin (left to right), at the entrance to the Buddhist temple in Leningrad, 1931. A. Terentiev Collection.



29. Agyan Dorzhiev, late 1930s (reproduced from his KGB file). Ministry of Security of the Republic of Buryatia, Ulan-Ude.



30. The Buryat datsang vandalism, 1934. The National Archive of the Republic of Buryatia.

GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN TERMS

Buryat, Kalmyk and Mongolian languages

The following words are given in the spelling commonly used in Russian language sources. Their original spelling (Mongolian, Tibetan, or Sanskrit), if different, is given in round brackets.

- aimak (Mong. *aimag*)—in Buryatia: territorial and administrative unit; in Mongolia: the largest territorial division.
Bandida Khambo-lama (from Sanskrit *pandita*: a learned person, and Tibetan *khampo* and “lama”: see Tibetan words below)—title of the head of the Buddhist church in Eastern Siberia (Buryatia).
Bogdo-gegen (Mong. *Bogd gegeen*)—title of the head of the Buddhist church in Khalka Mongolia.
bortsil (Kalm.)—a kind of biscuit.
darkhan-chin-van—Manchu princely title in old Mongolia.
burhan (Mong.)—divine image, usually in the form of a statue.
choijin (from Tib. *chos skyon*)—devinatory (in Buryatia).
choira (Tib. *chos grwa*)—monastic school in Kalmykia.
dalemba (Mong. *daalimba*)—fine cotton fabric.
datsang (Tib. *tra tsang*)—Buddhist monastery in Buryatia.
deel (Mong.)—long-skirted robe.
dugan (Tib. *du khang*)—Buddhist temple.
elchin said (Mong.)—ambassador, a diplomatic rank in the MPR.
emchi lama (Mong. *emch lama*)—lama physician (practicing Tibetan medicine).
gegen (Mong. *gegeen*)—title of the high Buddhist clerics in Mongolia.
gurten (Mong.)—oracle.
jasa (Mong. *jas*)—the coffers of a monastic community in Mongolia and Buryatia.
khubilgan (Mong. *xuvilgaan*)—incarnate lama.
khure (Mong. *xuree*)—Buddhist monastery in Mongolia.
khural (Mong. *xural*)—assembly, meeting, congress.
khurul—Buddhist monastery in Kalmykia.
Khutuktu (Mong. *Xutag*)—title of *khubilgans* of the highest rank in Mongolia.
khuvarak, khovarak (Mong. *xuvrag*)—novice or disciple in a monastic school.
lan (from Chinese *liang*)—a unit of weight, 37.3 gr.
noyon, noion (Mong.)—feudal lord or land-owner.
sahiusan (Mong.)—protective deity, a Dharmapala.
Shajin lama (from “shajin”: religion, faith and “lama”—title of the head of the Buddhist church in Kalmykia).
shara (Mong. *shar*)—Mongolian appellation of the Tibetan cursive script.
shiretu (from Mong. *shiree*: throne)—lama presiding over a Buddhist service, chief lama.
soibun (Mong. *sovpon*, from Tib. *gsol dpon*)—attendant, private secretary.
somon—rural settlement (in Buryatia).
taisha (Mong. *taish*, *taishi*)—title of a feudal landowner.
ulus—in Buryatia and Kalmykia: territorial nomadic unit held by a *noyon*.
urton (Mong. *ortoo*)—mail station; a span of some 30 to 40 km. between two such stations.
zange (Mong. *zangia*)—protective knot.
zaisang (from Chinese *tsai-hsiang*)—minor nobleman.

Tibetan

The following words are given in the spelling used in Russian and British literature and documents.

- amban (*am ban*)—diplomatic representative in Urga and Lhasa of the Manchu Emperor.
 chorten (*mchod rten*)—reliquary.
 chodji (*chos gyu*)—a special service devoted to a “chokyon”.
 Chö-Yön, chokyon (*chos skyon*)—“protector of religion”.
 devashun (*sdeba gshun*)—the central government of Lhasa.
 donir (*dro nyer*)—monk official, spiritual representative of the Dalai Lama outside Tibet.
 gelong (*dge slon*)—the highest clerical degree, the priest that has received the highest ordination.
 Gelugpa (*dge lugs pa*)—leading Tibetan Buddhist sect.
 Geshe (*dge bshes*)—as for gelong.
 getsul (*dge tsul*)—young monk, under-priest, a degree next to the gelong.
 jonpon (*rdzong dpon*)—district administrator.
 Kashag (*bka' shag*)—the senior government body of four officials.
 khadag (*kha btags*)—ceremonial scarf made of fine silk.
 khambo (*mkhan po*)—clerical teacher, principal of a large monastery, abbot.
 khenchung (*khan chung*)—monastic official.
 lama (*bla ma*)—Buddhist priest.
 Lharampa (*lha rams pa*)—a Geshe degree.
 Lonchen (*blon chen*)—chief government minister, the premier.
 lunden (*lun bstan*)—written prophecy.
 manba datsang (*sman ba tra tsang*)—medical school at a monastery.
 pilin (*phyi ling*, from Pers. *firang*)—outsider, foreigner.
 Shape (*zhabs pad*)—title of the members of the Kashag.
 thanka (*thang ka*)—painted divine image, Buddhist icon.
 tshampa—roasted barley.
 tsanniyid (*mtshan nyed*)—lit. “essential characteristic, the sign”, referred to Buddhist philosophy, studied in the Gelugpa schools.
 tsan-shav (*mtshang zhabs*)—scholar-monk whose duty was to give the Dalai Lama practice in philosophical debate.
 tsa trim (*tshul khrims*, from Sanskrit.: *shila*)—moral law, moral precepts.
 tulku (*sprul skus*)—incarnate lama.

Sanskrit

- bhikshu—Buddhist monk.
 pandit (*pandita*)—learned person, scholar (often used to refer to British explorers in Central Asia of Indian extraction).
 sangha—the whole body of the clergy, a Buddhist community.

Russian

- arshin—a unit of length, 0,71 m.
 dragoman—interpreter.
 gramota—deed, charter, official document.
 Zemstvo—elective district council in pre-revolutionary Russia.

- obnovlenchestvo—the reformation (“renewal of faith”) movement in Buryatia and Kalmykia in the 1920s.
 politkom (politkomissar)—political commissar.
 polpred (polnomochnyi predstavitel')—plenipotentiary.
 rabfak (rabochyi fakultet')—workers' faculty.
 stanitsa—in Kalmykia: same as *aimak*.
 torgpred (torgovyi predstavitel')—trade representative.
 triokhlineika—common designation of the 7.62 mm. Mosin magazine rifle.
 upravdeleni—secretary, business manager.
 ustav—regulations, statutes, charter.
 uyezd—district.
 yasak—In 17–20 C. Russia: the tribute generally paid in furs by non-Russian peoples in Siberia and in the Volga region.

Chinese

- du-jun—provincial governor.
 gamin—soldier of the Chinese republican army.

Persian

- safir—ambassador.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMB RB	Arkhiiv Ministerstva Bezopasnosti Respublikii Buriatia, Archive of the Ministry of Security of the Republic of Buryatia, Ulan-Ude.
AMB RK	Arkhiiv Ministerstva Bezopasnosti Respublikii Kalmykii, Archive of the Ministry of Security of the Republic of Kalmykia, Elista.
APRF	Archiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, Moscow.
AVPRI	Arkhiiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii, Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire.
AVPRF	Arkhiiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.
ARAN	Arkhiiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg branch.
Burrevkom	Buriatskyi Revoliutsionnyi Komitet, the Buryat Revolutionary Committee.
CCP	Chinese Communist Party.
Cheka, VChK	Vserossiiskaia Cherezvychainaia Komissiia po Bor'be s Kontrevoliutsiei i Sabotazhem All-Russian Committee Extraordinary for Fighting Counter- revolution and Sabotage.
DVSK	Dal'nevostochnyi Secretariat Kominterna, the Far Eastern Secretariat of the Executive Committee of Comintern.
GARF	Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, the State Archive of the Russian Federation.
Gosplan	Gosudarstvennyi Planovyi Komitet SSSR, The State Planning Committee USSR.
GPU	Gosudarsvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie, the State Political Directorate.
GVO	Gosudarsvennaia Vnutrenniia Ochrana, the State Interior Security, the secret police in the MPR.
KMT	Kuomintang.
KUTV	Kommunisticheskii Universitet Trudiashchikhsia Vostoka, the Communist University of the Labourers of the East.
LJVVIA	Leningradskii Institut Zhiykh Vostochnykh Iazykov, the Leningrad Institute of the Living Oriental Languages.
MNRP	Mongol'skaia Narodno-Revoliutsionnaia Partia, Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party.
MID	Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Montibotdel	Mongolo-Tibetskii Otdel, the Mongol-Tibetan Section (of the Sekvostnar and Comintern's Far Eastern Secretariat).
Montsenkoop	Mongol'skii Tsentral'nyi Kooperativ, the Mongolian Central Cooperative.
NARB	Natsionalnyi Arkhiiv Respublikii Buriatia, the National Archive of the Republic of Buryatia.

Narkom	Narodnyi Komissar, People's Commissar.
Narkomfin	Narodnyi Komissariat Finansov, the People's Commissariat of Finance.
Narkomindel, NKID	Narodnyi Komissariat Inostrannyykh Del, the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs.
Narkomnats	Narodnyi Komissariat Natsional'nosteii, the People's Commissariat of Nationalities.
Narkompros, NKP	Narodnyi Komissariat Prosveshchenia, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment.
Narkomsnab	Narodnyi Komissariat Snabzhenia, People's Commissariat of Supplies.
Narkom Voenmor	Narodnyi Komissar po Voennym i Morskim Delam, People's Commissar of the Army and Navy.
NEP	Novaia Ekonomicheskaia Politika, New Economic Policy.
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. [The secret police, successor of the GPU and OGPU].
OGPU	Ob'edinennoe Gosudarsvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie, the United State Political Directorate. The secret police, created on the basis of the Cheka, in 1923.
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collection and Records (former India Office Library & Records), London.
Orgburo	Organizatsionnoe Biuro, the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.
PLA	People's Liberation Army of the CPR.
Politburo	Politicheskoe Biuro, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.
Pomgol	Komissia Pomostchi Golodaiustchim, The Famine Relief Committee at VTsIK, 1921–1922.
PRO	Public Record Office, London.
RGAE	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki, Russian State Archive of Economy.
RGASPI	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'noi i Politicheskoi Istoriï
RGIA	Russian State Archive of Social and Political History.
RGO, IRGO	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv, Russian State Historical Archive, St Petersburg. Imperatorskoe Russkoe Geograficheskoe Obstchestvo, the Imperial Russian Geographical Society.
RGVA	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv, Russian State Military Archive, Moscow.
RGVIA	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voenno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv, Russian State Archive of Military History, Moscow.
RKPb	Rossiiskaia Kommunisticheskaiia Partia bol'shevikov, the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks.
ROSTA	Rossiiskoe Telegrafnoe Agenstvo, Russian Telegraph Agency.
RVS, Revvoensoviet	Revolutsionnyi Voennyi Sovet, the Revolutionary War (or Military) Council.

RVTP	Rossiisko-Vostochnaia Torgovaia Palata, the Russo-Eastern Chamber of Commerce.
RSFSR	Rossiiskaia Sovetskaia Federativnaia Sotsialisticheskia Respublika, the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic.
SAVO	Sredne-Aziatskii Voennyi Okrug, the Middle Asian Military District.
Sekvostnar	Sektsia Vostochnykh Narodov (Eastern People's Section) at the Siberian Regional Bureau of the RKPb.
Sovnarkom, SNK	Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov, the Council of People's Commissars. The highest govern- mental agency, renamed the Council of Ministers in 1946. St Petersburg.
SPb	Sovet Truda i Oborony, the Labour and Defence Council, an agency within the Sovnarkom.
STO	Sovetskaia Voennaia Administratsia Germanii, The Soviet Military Administration of Germany.
SVAG	Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv, Central State Archive, St Petersburg branch.
TsGA Spb	Tsentral'nyi Ispolnitelnyi Komitet, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR Soviet of People's Deputies.
TsIK	Tsentral'nyi Komitet, the Central Committee.
TsK	

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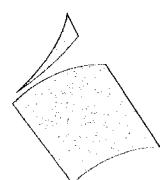
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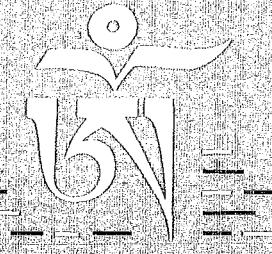
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