



# THE NORTH-EASTERN FRONTIER

*A Documentary Study of the  
Internecine Rivalry between  
India, Tibet and China*

VOLUME 2, 1914-54

Parshotam Mehra

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*The North-Eastern Frontier*

A Documentary Study of the Internecine  
Rivalry between India, Tibet and China

Volume I, 1906-14

PARSHOTAM MEHRA

Following Younghusband's expedition to Lhasa in 1904 a series of diplomatic, and some military, confrontations occurred which involved not only Britain, China and a semi-autonomous Tibet, but also Czarist Russia. Beginning with the Anglo-Chinese and Anglo-Russian Conventions of 1906 and 1907 respectively, this volume contains source material on all the major background discussions, and events that led to the Simla Convention of 1914, when the then Government of India sought acceptance of what is known to posterity as the McMahon line—the frontier as sketched out by their plenipotentiary, Sir Henry McMahon. Apart from containing the relevant official documents, including intercepted telegrams, this volume has excerpts from non-official sources such as the private papers of Sir John Jordan and Lord Hardinge, both of whom had important roles to play in the negotiations.

The editor of this work has also provided a 31-page Introduction that presents an essential if panoramic background to the events covered by the documents.

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VOLUME 2  
1914-54

## By the same author

*The Younghusband Expedition, an interpretation*, Asia, 1968

*The McMahon Line and After*, Macmillan, 1974

*Tibetan Polity, 1904-37*, Otto Harrassowitz, 1976

*North-Western Frontier and British India, 1839-42*, Panjab University, 1978

**For Shefali  
who means so much**



## Acknowledgements

It is perhaps not necessary to re-affirm my indebtedness to all those listed in 'Acknowledgements' to the first volume of this documentary study. Here it is pleasant to record my special debt of gratitude to Mr. Girja Kumar, Librarian, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Miss Heera Kapasi of the U. S. Library, Dr. Tilak Raj Sareen of the National Archives and Dr. S. R. Bakshi of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library who were a great help on some geographical names as well as biographical data.

I am equally beholden to Mr. O. P. Gupta of the Panjab University Evening College who has compiled a combined index for the two volumes.

I should add that while the broad plan of the second volume is by no means different from the first, two features may be of interest. One, each section in the table of contents has been given a separate heading; two, the scope of 'Biographical Sketches' has been considerably enlarged.

Volume I covered the period from 1906 to 1914. Volume II deals with the forty years between the 1914 Simla Conference and the Sino-Indian agreement on the 'Tibet region of China', a period of considerable interest to those concerned with the more recent history of India's north-eastern frontiers. Following the British failure at the 1914 Tripartite Conference, efforts were made to woo China and gain acceptance of the Simla conclusions, but by 1919 the exercise had proved abortive. Thereafter, until the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933, Tibet wrested almost complete independence from a China preoccupied with internal problems. The next two decades witnessed major changes: while Chiang Kai-Shek was contending with the Japanese challenge, and the activities of the Panchen Lama undermined the unity of the Tibet region, both China and Tibet made encroachments into India's eastern territories. By the time the British in India felt able to face these realities India was poised to achieve Independence. Soon Communist China--established control over the Tibet region undeterred by the strong *verbal* protests of the government of the new Indian Republic.

The documents in this volume present a fascinating story of a rapidly changing political milieu. Professor Mehra's 34-page Introduction provides a useful survey of the period and knits the documentary material into a coherent narrative. Taken together, both the volumes that comprise *The North-Eastern Frontier* are likely to become authoritative source-books.

Parshotam Mehra, Chairman of the Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh, who has edited these volumes, took his M A. and Ph. D. degrees from the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, having earlier studied at Government College, Lahore. He was Visiting Professor at the University of Bonn in 1972; earlier, he had been a member of the Panjab Education Service and on the teaching faculty of the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun.

# Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
INTRODUCTION	xiii
I JORDAN AND TIBET	1
Selections from his private papers, 1915-19	1
II THE CHAMDO AGREEMENT, AUGUST 1918	5
1. Agreement for the restoration of peaceful relations and the delimitation of a provisional frontier between China and Tibet	5
2. The Rongbatsa truce, October 1918	9
III A TRIPARTITE SETTLEMENT REVIVED	11
IV SIMLA: A POST-MORTEM	15
1. Memorandum on Tibetan question	15
2. China, India and Tibet: memorandum by Eric Teichman	20
3. Memorandum by C. H. Bentinck on the question of arming the Tibetans	24
4. Minute by Lord Curzon	30
V SIR CHARLES BELL IN LHASA, 1920-1	32
Final Report: excerpts	32
VI COLONEL BAILEY IN LHASA, 1924	35
Report, 28 October, 1924: excerpts	35
VII TIBET, 1929	40
1. Invitation to Weir: Lhasa's viewpoint	40
2. Invitation to Weir: New Delhi's reaction	40
VIII TIBET, 1930	41
1. Instructions for Weir's visit to Lhasa, 1930	41
2. Weir in Lhasa, 1930	43
IX BRITISH MEDIATION IN TIBET	47
1. Tripartite basis vanishes, 1932-7	47
2. India Office view	49
3. Chinese viewpoint	50

# CONTENTS

4. Chinese overtures: Lhasa's reaction	52
5. Nanking's stance	54
6. Lhasa's request	56
7. Tibet's attitude to Chinese overtures	56
8. India Office minutes	57
X TIBET IN 1932-3	61
1. Weir's report	61
2. Williamson in Lhasa, 1933: excerpts from report	63
XI TIBET AND CHINA, 1934-5	64
1. Chinese mission to Tibet	64
2. New Delhi on British policy	65
3. Williamson on Huang Mu-sung's mission	67
4. India on Williamson's visit: excerpts	68
5. Williamson's visit: India Office minute	70
XII KINGDON-WARD AND TIBET: 1935-6	71
1. Williamson to India, 28 September, 1935	71
2. India to Williamson, 5 November, 1935	71
3. British mission to Lhasa, 1935 on Kingdon-Ward: excerpts from report	72
XIII LHASA, 1936-7	75
1. Lhasa Mission, 1936-7: excerpts from report	75
2. Lhasa Mission report, 1936, Appendix to Part IV	88
3. New Delhi on Lhasa Mission report: excerpts	88
XIV INDIA RE-DISCOVERS THE McMAHON LINE, 1936	90
1. Assam's control	90
2. New Delhi's viewpoint: excerpts	93
3. India Office minute by J. C. Walton: excerpts	95
4. India Office minute by M. J. Clauson	97
5. India Office minute by J. C. Walton	98
XV EXERCISING CONTROL IN TAWANG	100
1. Assam to India: excerpts	100
2. Lightfoot's report: Assam's recommendations	101
3. Gould to India: Lhasa, 1936	105

४  
CONTENTS

	xi
4. Gould to India: Gangtok, 1938	106
5. Norbhu to Gould: Lhasa, 1938	107
<b>XVI LHASA 1938</b>	
Lhasa Mission Diary for the month of May 1938: excerpts	109
<b>XVII INDIA AND THE MONGOLIAN FRINGE</b>	111
Nepal	112
Sikkim	114
Bhutan	115
Assam tribal areas	117
Tibet	119
The prospect	120
<b>XVIII INDIA, TIBET, AND CHINA, 1942-4</b>	125
<b>XIX NEW DELHI-PEKING: EXCHANGE OF NOTES: 1950</b>	155
<b>XX AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA AND     THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA</b>	165
NOTES	172
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES	177
INDEX	189

## Abbreviations

CMTA	(Kuomintang government's) Committee for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs
Encl.	Enclosure
F O	Foreign Office
Foreign	Foreign and Political (Department) Proceedings, National Archives of India
H E	His (Her) Excellency
HMG	His (Her) Majesty's Government
I O	India Office
IOR	India Office Records
p. (pp.)	page (pages)
Pt.	Part
PRC	People's Republic of China
Proc.	Proceeding/Proceedings

# I

## Jordan and Tibet

### *Selections from his private papers, 1915-19*

#### 1. *Jordan<sup>a</sup> to Langley<sup>b</sup>, 10 June, 1915*

The Chinese have sounded me several times recently about Tibet and the President expressed his anxiety to see the question settled. I have told them that they have nothing to do but to sign the Tripartite agreement, but they always insist that there must be some modification of the frontier line before they can do so.

I wish I could follow their example [viz., of men enlisting in the Army for war service] instead of spinning ropes of sand in China.

#### 2. *Jordan to Alston, 21 December, 1915*

Here I am living once again my old Korean [*sic.*] days. The whole thing is a repetition of my experience there on a much larger scale. We have a President of a Republic who is creating Princes, Dukes and all kinds of nobility and nobody seems to see the Opera Bouffe<sup>c</sup> of it all. It reminds me of a time when the weakling King of Corea created himself an Emperor and sent a message to me on the other side of the Palace Wall to see where he ought to rank in the Imperial hierarchy of the World.

#### 3. *Jordan to Butler (in India), 11 April, 1916*

Apart from active external influences, the (monarchy) movement has now taken a decidedly anti-Yuan<sup>d</sup> complexion and, of course, in present circumstances, we are not in a position to take an independent line in China. It is very difficult to form any forecast of the future but I think you are fortunate in Burmah having your Pein-ma and other frontier questions settled. The Government of India may yet regret that they did not take my advice and meet the Chinese half-way over the Tibetan question when the opportunity offered. If Tong Shoa-yi<sup>e</sup> and his party came into power at Peking, the settlement of all these questions will become increasingly difficult and the foreign policy of China may be dictated from another capital. That would hardly suit India I imagine.

#### 4. *Jordan to Langley, 16 April, 1916*

I have in fact acted upon the plain assumption that China had to be subordinated and, if necessary, sacrificed to the main object of winning the war but in some respects things have gone further than I anticipated.

#### 5. *Jordan to Langley, 13 June, 1916*

As to Yuan, you will not accept a balanced opinion from me at this moment. I had a great personal liking for the man and feel both his loss and the manner of it acutely . . . to his last day he remained a firm friend of Great Britain. He could not speak a word of English . . . (and yet was) on very friendly terms with Englishmen since his early manhood . . . and that he had learnt to trust and like them (as is illustrated by) . . . the appointment of British advisers, the engagement of British teachers and tutors for his children, by sending three of his sons to school in England, by contributions to British War funds, and in general by his admiration for British ideals.

I could go on reciting acts to the credit of my dead friend . . . He fell in an unequal struggle and to me he was greater in his bitter adversity than he had been even at the height of his power.

#### 6. *Jordan to Macleay, 16 April, 1918*

I have been puzzling over your Tibet telegram and am still uncertain as to the best course to pursue. I see very little hope of securing a settlement and yet I am reluctant to abandon the attempt altogether as question will remain an open sore and may some day prove very serious.

The Chinese here have no interest in it. Szechuan is in absolute confusion from end to end and the Chinese Government are only too pleased to let it have the odium of managing or mismanaging Tibet. We made a huge blunder in not coming to terms with China when Yuan Shih-kai was in power and most friendly disposed towards us. But our advice was then a cry in the wilderness and India went her own way.

#### 7. *Jordan to Langley, 7 May, 1918*

Opium, Tibet and other questions continue to engage such desultory attention as a miserably weak government can spare from absorbing preoccupation with a multiplicity of embarrassing Japanese negotiations. Japanese loans follow each other in rapid succession



and everywhere there is usual outcry that the country is being sold to Japan.

8. *Jordan to Langley, 29 May, 1918*

China is in the melting pot and the country is being practically put up to auction, with only one bidder at the sale. Yuan died two years [ago] and under him the writ of Peking [ran] to the borders of Tibet on the west, and Canton in the south. . . . Now not even a farthing of revenue is received from Szechuan, Yunnan or Canton and all the country south of the Yangtse is a law unto itself. Military autocracy at Peking [was] as efficient then [under Yuan] as inefficient now. The great difference [is] that the latter is supported by foreign money.

9. *Jordan to Langley, 2 August, 1918*

Tibet is still a thorn in the flesh and we can make no headway against the apathy of the Chinese who seem to have lost interest in the question. I am afraid, Teichman's mission will not have improved matters as it seems to have antagonized provincial opinion. However I shall continue to watch for an opportunity. . . (sooner or later there is bound to be a) recrudescence of Chinese activity on the frontier.

Our Foreign Minister went to the seaside six weeks ago and refuses to return! I wish some of us could follow his example.

10. *Jordan to Macleay, 14 August, 1918*

The Foreign Minister, Lu Cheng-hsiang, after spending six weeks at Peitaoho<sup>a</sup> came up for two days and went off for another spell of the seaside! And one is expected to get these people to attend to business in such circumstances.

11. *Jordan to Macleay, 24 October, 1918*

I do not like the turn the Tibetan question has taken and wish Teichman were safely out of Chiamdo. Hewlett<sup>b</sup> who knows Szechuan well, thinks that the whole thing is merely a Chinese device to gain time. Teichman's arguments about the possibility of the Tibetans advancing upon Batang, Litang and Tachienlu, unless he had undertaken to mediate, have not the slightest weight with the Central government who, having lost Szechuan, do not care a brass farthing what happens to these outlying frontier regions.