PRIME MINISTER NEHRU’S NOTE ON CHINA AND TIBET

Dated 18 November 1950.

The Chinese Government having replied to our last note, we have to consider what further steps we should take in this matter. There is no immediate hurry about sending a reply to the Chinese Government. But we have to send immediate instructions to Shri B.N. Rau as to what he should do in the event of Tibet’s appeal being brought up before the Security Council or the General Assembly.

2. The content of the Chinese reply is much the same as their previous notes, but there does appear to be a toning down and an attempt at some kind of a friendly approach.

3. It is interesting to note that they have not referred specifically to our mission (at) Lhasa or to our trade agents or military escort at Gyangtse etc. We had mentioned these especially in our last note. There is an indirect reference, however, in China’s note. At the end, this note says that “As long as out two sides adhere strictly to the principle of mutual respect for territory, sovereignty, equality and mutual benefit, we are convinced that the friendship between China and India should be developed in a normal way and that problems relating to Sino-Indian diplomatic, commercial and cultural relations with respect to Tibet may be solved properly and to our mutual benefit through normal diplomatic channels.” This clearly refers to our trade agents and others in Tibet. We had expected a demand from them for the withdrawal of these agents etc. The fact that they have not done so has some significance.

4. Stress is laid in China’s note on Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, which we are reminded, we have acknowledged, on Tibet being an integral part of
China's territory and therefore a domestic problem. It is however again repeated that outside influences, have been at play obstructing China's mission in Tibet. In fact, it is stated that liberation of Changtu proves that foreign forces and influences were inciting Tibetan troops to resist. It is again repeated that no foreign intervention will be permitted and that the Chinese army will proceed.

5. All this is much the same as has been said before, but it is said in a somewhat different way and there are repeated reference in the note that no foreign intervention will be permitted and that the Chinese army will proceed.

6. It is true that in one of our messages to the Chinese Government we used "Sovereignty" of China in relation to Tibet. In our last message we used the word "Suzerainty". After receipt of the last China's note, we have pointed out to our Ambassador that "Suzerainty" was the right word and that "sovereignty" had been used by error.

7. It is easy to draft a reply to the Chinese note, pressing our viewpoint and countering some of the arguments raised in the Chinese note. But before we do so we should be clear in our own minds as to what we are aiming at, not only in the immediate future but from a long-term view. It is important that we keep both these viewpoints before us. In all probability China, that is present-day China, is going to be our close neighbour for a long time to come. We are going to have a tremendously long common frontier. It is unlikely, and it would be unwise to expect, that the present Chinese Government will collapse, giving place to another. Therefore, it is important to pursue a policy which will be in keeping with this long-term view.

8. I think it may be taken for granted that China will take possession, in a political sense at least, of the whole of Tibet. There is no likelihood whatever of Tibet being able to resist this or stop it. It is equally unlikely that any foreign
power can prevent it. We cannot do so. If so, what can we do to help in the maintenance of Tibetan autonomy and at the same time avoiding continuous tension and apprehension on our frontiers?

9. The Chinese note has repeated that they wish to Tibetan people to have what they call “regional autonomy and religious freedom.” This autonomy an obviously not be anything like the autonomy verging on independence which Tibet has enjoyed during the last forty years or so. But it is reasonable to assume from the very nature of Tibetan geography, terrain and climate, that a large measure of autonomy is almost inevitable. It may of course be that this autonomous Tibet is controlled by communist elements in Tibet. I imagine however that it is, on the whole, more likely that what will be attempted will be a pro-communist China administration rather than a Communist one.

10. If world war comes, then all kinds of difficult and intricate problems arise and each one of these problems will be interrelated with others. Even the question of defence of India assumes a different shape and cannot be isolated from other world factors. I think that it is exceedingly unlikely that we may have to face any real military invasion from the Chinese side, whether in peace or in war, in the foreseeable future. I base this conclusion on a consideration of various world factors. In peace, such an invasion would undoubtedly lead to world war. China, though internally big, is in a way amorphous and easily capable of being attacked on its sea coasts and by air. In such a war, China would have its main front in the South and East and it will be fighting for its very existence against powerful enemies. It is inconceivable that it should divert its forces and its strength across the inhospitable terrain of Tibet and undertake a wild adventure across the Himalays. Any such attempt will greatly weaken its capacity to meet its real enemies on other fronts. Thus I rule out any major attack on India by China. I think these considerations should be borne in mind, because there is far too much loose talk about China attacking and overrunning India. If we lose our sense of perspective and world strategy and give way to
unreasoning fears, then any policy that we might have is likely to fail.

11. While there is, in any opinion, practically no chance of a major attack on India by China, there are certainly chances of gradual infiltration across our border and possibly of entering and taking possession of 'disputed territory', if there is no obstruction to this happening. We must therefore take all necessary precautions to prevent this. But, again, we must differentiate between these precautions and those that might be necessary to meet a real attack.

12. If we really feared an attack and had to make full provision for it, this would cost an intolerable burden on us, financial and otherwise, and it would weaken our general defence position. There are limits beyond which we cannot go, at least for some years, and a spreading out of our army on distant frontiers would be bad from every military or strategic point of view.

13. In spite of our desire to settle the points at issue between us and Pakistan, and developing peaceful relations with it, the fact remains that our major possible enemy is Pakistan. This has compelled us to think of our defence mainly in terms of Pakistan's aggression. If we begin to think of, and prepare for, China's aggression in the same way, we would weaken considerably on the Pakistan side. We might well be got in a pincer movement. It is interesting to note that Pakistan is taking a great deal of interest, from this point of view, in developments in Tibet. Indeed it has been discussed in the Pakistan Press that the new danger from Tibet to India might help them to settle the Kashmir problem according to their wishes. Pakistan has absolutely nothing in common with China or Tibet. But if we fall out completely with China, Pakistan will undoubtedly try to take advantage of this, politically or otherwise. The position of India thus will be bad from a defence point of view. We cannot have all the time two possible enemies on either side of India. This danger will not be got over, even if we increase our defence forces or even if other foreign countries help us in arming. The measure of safety that one gets by increasing
the defence apparatus is limited by many factors. But whatever that measure of safety might be, strategically we would be in an unsound position and the burden of this will be very great on us. As it is, we are facing enormous difficulties, financial economic, etc.

14. The idea that communism inevitably means expansion and war, or to put it more precisely, that Chinese communism means inevitably an expansion towards India, is rather naive. It may mean that in certain circumstances. Those circumstances would depend upon many factors, which I need not go into here. The danger really is not from military invasion but from infiltration of men and ideas. The ideas are there already and can only be countered by other ideas. Communism is an important element in the situation. But, by our attaching too great importance to it in this context, we are likely to misjudge the situation from other and more important angles.

15. In a long-term view, India and China are two of the biggest countries of Asia bordering on each other and both with certain expansive tendencies, because of their vitality. If their relations are bad, this will have a serious effect not only on both of them but on Asia as a whole. It would affect our future for a long time. If a position arises in which China and India are inveterately hostile to each other, like France and Germany, then there will be repeated wars bringing destruction to both. The advantage will go to other countries. It is interesting to note that both the UK and USA appear to be anxious to add to the unfriendliness of India and China towards each other. It is also interesting to find that the USSR does not view with favour any friendly relations between India and China. These are long-term reactions which one can fully understand, because India and China at peace with each other would make a vast difference to the whole setup and balance of the world. Much of course depends upon the development of either country and how far communism in China will mould the Chinese people. Even so, these processes are long-range ones and in the long run it is fairly safe to assume that hundreds of millions of people will not change their essential characteristics.
16. These arguments lead to the conclusion that while we should be prepared, to the best of our ability, for all contingencies, the real protection that we should seek is some kind of understanding of China. If we have not got that, then both our present and our future are imperilled and no distant power can save us. I think on the whole that China desires this too for obvious reasons. If this is so, then we should fashion our present policy accordingly.

17. We cannot save Tibet, as we should have liked to do, and our very attempts to save it might well bring greater trouble to it. It would be unfair to Tibet for us to bring this trouble upon her without having the capacity to help her effectively. It may be possible, however, that we might be able to help Tibet to retain a large measure of her autonomy. That would be good for Tibet and good for India. As far as I can see, this can only be done on the diplomatic level and by avoidance of making the present tension between India and China worse.

18. What then should be our instructions to B.N. Rau? From the messages he has sent us, it appears that no member of the Security Council shows any inclination to sponsor Tibet’s appeal and that there is little likelihood of the matter being considered by the Council. We have said that (we) are not going to sponsor this appeal, but if it comes up we shall state our viewpoint. This viewpoint cannot be one of full support of the Tibetan appeal, because that goes far and claims full independence. We may say that whatever might have been acknowledged in the past about China’s sovereignty or suzerainty, recent events have deprived China of the right to claim that. There may be some moral basis for this argument. But it will not take us or Tibet very far. It will only hasten the downfall of Tibet. No outsider will be able to help her, and China, suspicious and apprehensive of these tactics, will make sure of much speedier and fuller possession of Tibet than she might otherwise have done. We shall thus not only fail in our endeavour but at the same time have really a hostile China on our doorstep.
19. I think that in no event should we sponsor Tibet’s appeal. I would personally think that it would be a good thing if that appeal is not heard in the Security Council or the General Assembly. If it is considered there, there is bound to be a great deal of bitter speaking and accusation, which will worsen the situation as regards Tibet, as well as the possibility of widespread war, without helping it in the least. It must be remembered that neither the UK nor the USA, nor indeed any other power is particularly interested in Tibet or the future of that country. What they are interested in is embarrassing China. Our interest, on the other hand, is Tibet, and if we cannot serve that interest, we fail.

20. Therefore, it will be better not to discuss Tibet’s appeal in the U.N. Suppose, however, that it comes up for discussion, in spite of our not wishing this, what then? I would suggest that our representative should state our case as moderately as possible and ask the Security Council or the Assembly to give expression to their desire that the Sino-Tibetan question should be settled peacefully and that Tibet’s autonomy should be respected and maintained. Any particular reference to an article of the Charter of the UN might tie us up in difficulties and lead to certain consequences later, which may prove highly embarrassing for us. Or a resolution of the UN might just be a dead letter, which also will be bad.

21. If my general argument is approved, then we can frame our reply to China’s note accordingly.

18 November, 1950

J. Nehru.

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The Northern Boundary of India

The crucial fact in the Sino-Indian border problem is that, whatever the vagaries and ambiguities of earlier maps, from 1954 the Survey of India was showing a precise and clearly delineated northern boundary. It follows the watershed as well as the highest ranges in the areas - the Kuen Lun and the Himalaya mountains. The boundary of Kashmir with Sinkiang and Tibet (the western sector) is about 1,100 miles of which the frontier of Ladakh (a part of Kashmir) forms nearly two-thirds. At least from the tenth century, important points on the present alignment were recognized as the traditional limits of Ladakh on the one hand and Tibet on the other. This whole area of the Aksai Chin plateau and the Lingsi Tang plains was administered by the Governments of Ladakh and Kashmir and utilized for grazing by the people of Ladakh. A regular sequence of official records, stretching over many years, provides testimony on such matters as revenue assessment, police jurisdiction, public works' projects, census returns, control of trade routes and survey and mapping operations. Throughout this century, officials of the Kashmir Government and Indian traders and hunting parties have been moving freely in this area. In contrast, the Chinese authorities (and their supporters elsewhere) have been unable to produce any evidence that the Chinese were ever, before 1954, at any time in these areas; and indeed the southern limits of Sinkiang reached up to the Kuen Lun mountains only towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The boundary between Tibet and the states of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (the middle sector) lies along the major watersheds: and its delimitation by tradition secured confirmation by the recognition, in the treaty of 1954 between India and the People's Republic of China, of six border passes. The frontier between Sikkim and Tibet is a watershed defined in the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 and partially demarcated five years later on the ground. The northern frontier of Bhutan also lies along the highest Himalayan
ranges in this area.

The frontier east of Bhutan to the tri-junction of India, Burma and China (the eastern sector) also follows the major watersheds. Tibetan influence in the Tawang area has led to suggestions of 'dual suzerainty'; but such Tibetan jurisdiction was that of the local monastery and ecclesiastical in nature. Otherwise, there is no evidence to justify the Chinese claim to an alignment along the foothills, incorporating about 36,000 square miles of Indian territory in China. There are no documents to prove that the area was at any time under Chinese or Tibetan administration. At one stage in the 1960s the Chinese Government promised to supply the Government of India with information concerning the ways of Tibetan administration of this area; this information has yet to be received. In fact, the alignment on Chinese maps is no more than a line depicting the limit of administration of the Indian state of Assam.

The international alignment in this sector, along the highest watershed ranges, was formalized by the Indian and Tibetan representatives at the Simla Conference of 1914. The McMahon Line, as it was called after the representative of the Government of India, was not defined verbally but was drawn on 'rough compilation' maps in two sheets on the small scale of one inch to eight miles. This boundary was also marked on the map of the draft Convention presented at the Simla Conference and initialled by the Chinese representative. The Chinese Government later repudiated this treaty map because of objections to the boundaries as drawn between Tibet and China. But no objection was raised to the India-Tibet border; and even if China had objected, it would not have mattered, for Tibet was in these years exercising treaty-making powers with the full knowledge and sanction of the Chinese Government. To give but a few illustrations: the Indo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 was formally accepted by the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906; and on 7 August 1913 the Chinese Foreign Office informed the Government of India that its plenipotentiary would
open negotiations for a treaty jointly with the Indian and Tibetan plenipoten-
tiaries and on an equal footing. Even the People’s Government of China have
acknowledged this special status of Tibet, for by the treaty with Nepal in 1956
they explicitly abrogated the treaty between Nepal and Tibet signed a hundred
years earlier.

This traditional boundary of India, along its whole length, as shown by the
official Indian maps of 1954, was known to the People’s Government of China
when, by the treaty of 1954, they explicitly undertook to respect India’s ter-
ritorial integrity. India had no reason to suspect malafides, for the Chinese
were, at this time, no where south or west of the Indian alignment. The intru-
sion of some Tibetan officials and Chinese troops at a few points across the
middle sector in the months after the conclusion of the treaty could be brushed
off as minor disputes. In the eastern sector, the Chinese respected the Indian
boundary alignment. Even in the Thagla sector, which in 1962 they questioned
as not conforming to the McMahon Line, 1953 the Chinese official at Tsona
complained that the customary permission for Tibetans to utilize the pastures
in the Namkha Chu valley had not been given by the Indian authorities at
Tawang. This practice of giving permission to Tibetans to use the pastures
continued till 1959 when, for the first time, the Chinese disputed the alignment.
In the western sector, an Indian patrol to Aksai Chin and Lingzi Tang in 1951
encountered no Chinese. But major incursions began in 1955, when the Chinese
authorities, with full knowledge of where India delineated the limits of her
territory, started levelling a caravan route across the uninhabited plateau of
Aksai Chin and completed it in about two years But they were still not to be
found west of this road; and regular Indian patrols, to Lanak La in 1952, 1954
and 1956, to Qaratag pass via Shamal Lungpa in 1957, to Sarigh Jilganang and
Amtoghar lake and to Qizil Jilga in 1958, and to Lanak La along the Chang
Chenmo valley in June 1959, when they attacked an Indian patrol at Kongka
La, they had moved well beyond the road. A line linking up these furthest posts
by November 1959 would show them in occupation of about 6,000 square miles
of Indian territory. Between November 1959 and October 1962 they occupied another 5,000-6,000 square miles; and in the major assaults that began on 20 October 1962 they occupied another 2,000 square miles.

So, in the western sector, the Chinese started the occupation of Indian territory from 1955, had reached certain positions by June 1959, and thereafter constantly pushed forward the 'line of actual control' and claimed that the traditional and customary boundary lay wherever they happened at the moment to be. In 1956 an official map of China delineated the boundary in the western sector incorporating in China about 12,000 square miles of Indian territory; but the map carries a legend that the boundaries as shown on the the map were yet to be revised. However, Zhou informed Nehru in December 1959 that the alignment on this map was the correct delineation. At the talks of the officials in 1960, the Chinese presented a map advancing their claims to take in another 2,000 square miles; and the Chinese Government claimed that the two lines, of 1956 and 1960, were identical. In 1962 they occupied even more territory than the furthest claims on their maps. they would seem in fact to be in search of a new alignment suited to their needs and ambition rather than defending a traditional one.

The Chinese, therefore, are imprecise about their alignments, can produce no evidence even faintly substantiating their demands and base their case solely on occupation of territory which they knew India regarded as hers. But, curiously, efforts have been made by non-Chinese writers to damage the strength of the Indian case on the border while ignoring the hollowness of the Chinese version. Much has recently been sought to be made, for example, of when and in what circumstances the McMahon Line agreement of 1914 was printed in the official collection of treaties published by the Government of India. This may be of interest to nit-pickers of historical research; but it makes no difference to the validity of the agreement. The details about the printing of the agreement of 1914 cannot affect the fact that the Chinese Government have all
along been aware of the treaty and have had the McMahon Line maps in their possession. Indeex Zhou produced one of the original copies in this discussions with the Indian Ambassador in 1959. In an official publication of 1962 of the Chinese Government, 'Select Documents on Sino-Indian Relations', the McMahon Line is shown on a map as the alignment along 'h Himalayan mountains'. So even the Chinese do not regard it as an arbitrary line drawn in 1914 but as the natural frontier along the highest watershed ridge in this area.

Again, frequent reference is made to a number of old maps published by the British Government which do not show a border tallying with the Indian boundary alignment; and more weight is given to this than to the fact that there are several old Chinese maps which depict the boundary as shown by India. But the issue is a broader one than a comparison of nineteenth-century maps. To set aside the considerably and varied evidence of tradition, custom and administration stretching over centuries and look solely at some odd maps of the last hundred years is to miss the wood for some of the nearest shrubs. To assume that nothing mattered in India before the arrival of the British, to revel in the details of policy-making during the raj and to recommened compromise alignments whose sole claim to consideration is that they were suggested by Englishmen is to exhibit intellectual shallowness. The inclination of some British officials at the end of the nineteenth century to relinquish Indian sovereignty over parts of the Aksai Chin plateau does not provide China with traditional rights to this area.

Source : S. Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru, A Biography Vol. 3, (Delhi, 1984), pp. 303 - 306
APPENDIX -3

Treaty between Tibet and Ladakh, 1842

As on this auspicious day, the 2nd of Assuj, Sambhat 1899 (16th or 17th September A.D. 1842), we the officers of the Lhasa Government Kalon of Sokan and Bakshi Shajpoh, Commander of the Forces, and two officers on behalf of the most resplendent Sri Khalsaji Sahib, the asylum of the world King Sher Singhji and Sri Maharaj Sahib Raja-i-Rajagan Raja Sahib Bahadur Raja Gulab Singhji, i.e., the Mukhtar-ud-Daula Diwan Hari Chand and the asylum of vizirs, Vizir Ratnun, in a meeting called together for the promotion of peace and unity, and by professions and vows of friendship, unity and sincerity of heart and by taking oaths like those of Kunjak Sahib, have arranged and agreed that relations of peace, friendship and unity between Sri Khalsaji and Sri Maharaj Sahib, Bahadur Raja Gulab Singhji and the Emperor of China and the Lama Guru of Lhasa will henceforward remain firmly established for ever; and we declare in the presence of the Kunjak Sahib that on no account whatsoever will there be any deviation, difference or departure (from this agreement). We shall neither at present nor in future have anything to do or interfere at all with the boundaries of Ladakh and its surroundings as fixed from ancient times and will allow the annual export of wool, shawls and tea by way of Ladakh according to old established custom.

Should any of the opponents of Sri Khalsaji and Sri Raja Sahib Bahadur at any time enter our territories, we shall not pay any heed to his words or allow him to remain in our country.

We shall offer no hindrance to traders of Ladakh who visit our territories, we shall not even to the extent of hair's breadth act in Contravention of terms that we have agreed to above regarding firm friendship, unity and fixed boundaries of Ladakh and the keeping open of the route for wool shawls and tea. We
call Kunjak Sahib, Kairi Lassi Zoh Mahan & Kushal Choh as witness to this treaty.

Source: H.E. Richardson, Tibet and Its History Oxford University Press, 1962, p.246
Text of Sino-Indian Peace Accord

BEIJING, September 8

The following is the text of the agreement on maintaining peace and tranquility in the border areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) signed by India and China here on Tuesday.

The Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China, (hereinafter referred to as the two sides), have entered into the present agreement in accordance with the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence and with a view to maintaining peace and tranquility in areas along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas.

Article One: The two sides are of the view that the India-China boundary question shall be resolved through peaceful and friendly consultations. Neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other by any means. Pending an ultimate solution to the boundary question between the two countries, the two sides shall strictly respect and observe the Line of Actual Control between the two sides. No activities of either side shall overstep the Line of Actual Control. In case personnel of one side cross the Line of Actual Control, upon being cautioned by the other side, they shall immediately pull back to their own side of LAC. When necessary, the two sides shall jointly check and determine the segments of the LAC where they have different views as to its alignment.

Article Two: Each side will keep its military forces in the areas along the Line of Actual Control to a minimum level compatible with the friendly and good neighbourly relations between the two countries. The two sides agree to
reduce their military forces along the Line of Actual Control in conformity with
the requirements of the principle of mutual and equal security to ceilings to be
mutually agreed. The extent, depth, timing and nature of reduction military
forces shall be carried out by stages in mutually agreed geographical locations
sectorwise within the areas along the Line of Actual Control.

Article Three: Both sides shall work out through consultations effective
confidence building measures in the areas along the Line of Actual Control.
Neither side will undertake specified levels of military exercises in mutually
identified zones. Each side shall give the other prior notification of military
exercises of specified levels near the Line of Actual Control permitted under
this agreement.

Article Four: In case of contingencies or other problems arising in the
areas along the Line of Actual Control, the two sides shall deal with them
through meetings and friendly consultations between border personnel of the
two countries. The form of such meetings and channels of communications
between the border personnel shall be mutually agreed upon by the two sides.

Article Five: The two sides agree to take adequate measures to ensure
that air intrusions across the Line of Actual Control do not take place and shall
undertake mutual consultations should intrusions occur. Both sides shall also
consult on possible restrictions on air exercises in areas to be mutually agreed
near the LAC.

Article Six: The two sides are agreed that references to the Line of Actual
Control in this agreement do not prejudice their respective positions on the
boundary question.

Article Seven: The two sides shall agree through consultations on the
form, method, scale and content of effective verification measures and super-
vision required for the reduction of military forces and the maintenance of
peace and tranquility in the areas along the LAC under this agreement.

Article Eight: Each side of the India-China Joint Working Group on the boundary question shall appoint diplomatic and military experts to formulate, through mutual consultations, implementation measures for the present agreement. The experts shall advise the joint Working Group on the resolution of differences between the two sides on the alignment of the Line of Actual Control and address issues relating to redeployment with a view to reduction of military forces in the areas along the LAC. The experts shall also assist the Joint Working Group in Supervision of the implementation of the agreement, and settlement of differences.

Article Nine: The present agreement shall come into effect as of the date of signature and is subject to amendment and addition by agreement of the two sides - UNI