

# THE DRAGON IN THE LAND OF SNOWS

A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947

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demonstration, in case it led to civil war.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, many Tibetan officials openly supported the uprising, which they saw as the last chance to oust the Chinese and restore the power of the Dalai Lama. The demonstration had now developed into a national uprising and the Tibetan masses were no longer prepared to listen to what they saw as the Kashag's appeasement policy. Members of the Kashag like Liushar, Surkhang and Shasur who were staying in the Norbulingka found themselves unable to convince the Chinese that they were not involved in the demonstration; and the Chinese refusal to listen to the Kashag further eroded its authority. Unable to appease the Chinese or suppress the uprising, the Kashag had ceased to be an effective body. The Kashag and officials in Norbulingka began to address the question of the Dalai Lama's security.

### The Last Attempts to Win Over the Dalai Lama

The only person who could have exercised any influence over the populace was the Dalai Lama. He felt as if he was 'standing between two volcanoes, each likely to erupt at any moment'.<sup>50</sup> He was dismayed by the uprising, which he saw as suicidal, but the outcome depended on him denouncing or supporting it. The Chinese realised that they had to win him over. Gyatsoling Rinpoche, as one of the debating partners of the Dalai Lama, was still able to move freely in the Norbulingka and that afternoon was summoned to the office of the United Front Department and was given a letter for the Dalai Lama, in which Tan Guansan advised him not to attend the show.<sup>51</sup>

There was no need for Tan to write to the Dalai Lama since it was clear that a decision had been made not to leave the Norbulingka. Perhaps Tan wanted to make it seem that the Chinese were taking the initiative rather than let it appear that the Dalai Lama was being prevented from attending the show by the demonstration. Whatever Tan's motive might have been, his letter initiated a series of private letters. On 11 March, unbeknown to the Kashag and other officials in the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama wrote to Tan Guansan saying that he would have liked to have attended the show but was prevented by 'reactionary' elements in the palace. Ngabo brought the Dalai Lama a second letter, to which he replied by saying that he was 'taking measures to calm things down'.<sup>52</sup> He implied that he was opposed to the uprising and that control was in the hands of a belligerent group of Tibetan officials in the Norbulingka who refused to heed his advice. In his autobiography the Dalai Lama said the letters were written 'to gain time' and to prevent the Chinese from launching an attack on the palace.<sup>53</sup> Whatever the Dalai Lama's motives might have been, the Chinese became convinced that the Tibetan leader was being held under duress in the palace.

These letters were later published by Xinhua as proof that the Dalai Lama had been abducted against his will by 'reactionaries'.

The Dalai Lama wrote in his memoirs that neither he nor the Kashag was able to influence the crowd, which had by now constructed barricades on the roads leading to the palace.<sup>54</sup> By the evening of 10 March there was still no sign of the demonstration in Lhasa waning. The public began to strengthen the barricades on the road leading to the Norbulingka and the remaining Tibetan soldiers were recalled to the palace for guard duty. The next day Tibetan officials flocked to the Norbulingka seeking guidance from the Dalai Lama. 'I did my best to dissuade them from their action,' he was to write later. He told them that he was not compelled to visit the Chinese military camp and that he 'was not in any fear of personal danger from the Chinese and so they must not create a situation which could have [such] serious consequences for the people'.<sup>55</sup>

Barshi recalls that the officials who had gathered in the Norbulingka on the afternoon of 10 March met to discuss the situation. A clear division emerged between those who supported the demonstration and those who felt that it had endangered the Dalai Lama's security. A monk official, Ta Lama Chokteng, made a brief speech advocating that they follow the Dalai Lama's advice. Many officials felt that the Dalai Lama was compelled to advise caution because of his religious position, (which required him to oppose violence at all times) and because of the fear of the Chinese. If the Chinese thought that the Dalai Lama supported the uprising, they would have no option but to adopt military means to gain control of the situation. As long as they believed there was a chance they could win over the Dalai Lama, they would not launch an attack on the Norbulingka.

The Kashag was concerned that the Norbulingka should not become the centre of revolt. On the morning of 12 March, the Kashag summoned those officials who had supported the rebellion and told them that they could not hold any further meetings in the palace; it also warned that their activities would endanger the safety of the Dalai Lama.<sup>56</sup> Barshi remembers that later meetings were held in Shol, a village below the Potala. Here nearly fifty government officials gathered, and it was apparent that they were all in support of the revolt. They decided to dispatch messages to different monasteries and mutual aid societies (*skyid-sdug*) asking them to send representatives. This once again marked the setting up of a new group, which called itself 'the People's Assembly'. Next day thousands of people turned up in Shol, perhaps the largest ever public demonstration in Lhasa. Some of the government officials took charge while speaker after speaker denounced the Chinese and demanded the restoration of Tibet's independence. The crowd renounced the 17-Point Agreement, saying that the Chinese had betrayed the Agreement by undermining the authority of the Dalai Lama. The repudiation of the Agreement was made by the unofficial

body, the People's Assembly; neither the public declaration of independence nor the repudiation of the 17-Point Agreement was made by a member of the Kashag or any other influential figure. As long as the public denunciation was not made at the Norbulingka or by a member of the Kashag, the Tibetan Government could always disassociate itself from the declaration and argue that these declarations were unofficial.

The notion that government officials should not be seen as actively participating in the uprising was not just confined to the members of the Kashag. Even members of institutions established by the Chinese felt that they should not be seen as part of the demonstration. On the third day, the city was taken over by women demonstrators; the influential women of Lhasa were asked to lead the demonstration. One of them, Rinchen Dolma Taring, wrote in her autobiography that the committee members of the Women's Association (which included the Dalai Lama's sister and other leading aristocratic ladies) felt this was not appropriate.<sup>57</sup> In the beginning the Kashag also refused to allow the small Tibetan army to support the protesters, who had appealed to the Kashag for the government's arsenal to be opened and the arms to be distributed to the public. Some of the monasteries around Lhasa had a few weapons of their own, which were distributed among the monks who were guarding the monasteries, but most of the demonstrators remained unarmed.

Three Kashag members, Surkhang, Liushar and Shasur, now sought refuge in the Norbulingka. Of the other two members of the Kashag: Sampho was recovering from the attack earlier in the morning, while Ngabo remained outside the summer palace, which led Tibetans to believe that he was siding with the Chinese. Ngabo's and Sampho's houses were guarded by PLA troops. Ngabo knew that the public saw him as the arch-collaborator and on the second day the demonstrators marched towards his house, but were halted by a strong contingent of PLA troops. In the meantime Ngabo tried to mediate between the officials in Norbulingka and the Chinese; he was, in fact, the only person in a position to do so. Although seen by the public as a collaborator, he remained quite popular among the Tibetan aristocracy and for several days was able to visit the Norbulingka freely, which allowed unrestricted communication between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese.

Within the Norbulingka, the Kashag and the Dalai Lama's advisers were genuinely baffled by the events outside and becoming increasingly isolated as these moved beyond their control. Their main concern was the safety of the Dalai Lama and making sure that they did not lose control of the palace either to the Chinese or to the demonstrators. Their policy of aloofness did not endear them to either side. It left the Tibetan masses leaderless and fending for themselves, while the Chinese continued to believe that the Kashag had instigated the uprising. The city was in chaos, with sounds of

demonstrators mingling with Chinese appeals blaring out of the loud-speakers telling the people not to listen to the rumours of the 'reactionaries'. Although the demonstrators lacked a leader and cohesive organisation, in the midst of the chaos there emerged a collective organisation based on the traditional artisans' guilds and on mutual aid societies, which were urged to send representatives to various *ad hoc* meetings held around Lhasa. Langdun Gyatso, a carpenter from Lhasa, described how the Mutual Aid Society of Masons, Carpenters and Builders held a meeting and joined the uprising as an organised group.<sup>58</sup>

On the third day the crowd marched towards the only two foreign missions in Lhasa, the Indian and Nepalese missions. They called for the Indians and Nepalese to support their demands for an independent Tibet. There was nothing that either country could do. Later Nehru told the Indian Parliament that he had instructed the Indian Consul to 'stick to your business and do not get entangled'.<sup>59</sup> The Chinese fortified their offices and barracks. For several days they did nothing to reclaim the city, clinging to their hopes of winning over the Dalai Lama. It is also likely that, having reported the incident to Beijing, the regional military commission was awaiting further instructions from higher authorities. The Chinese must have calculated that there was no way that the uprising could succeed in ousting them from Tibet – their military supremacy assured them of victory.

In the Norbulingka, the Kashag had reached the decision that they would not be able to hold the palace. At the same time they were under increasing pressure from the public to make a declaration supporting the uprising, which we know the Kashag was reluctant to do. They hoped instead to relieve the pressure by moving the Dalai Lama out of the city. Phala was given the task of organising the move with a cryptic instruction involving the Tibetan proverb 'Snatch the egg without frightening the hen'.<sup>60</sup> There is no doubt that the Kashag recognised the Dalai Lama's importance as the only person who would have any influence over the masses. If the Dalai Lama were to fall into Chinese hands, it would effectively mark the end of Tibetan resistance.

For this reason the Kashag wanted to create political and spatial distance between themselves and the Chinese. Phala says that the original intention was to seek a safe area, a sort of buffer zone, from which they could negotiate with the Chinese.<sup>61</sup> It was clear that if they were to stay in the Norbulingka, they could not remain detached from the events and demands of the public. It is also possible that some officials and members of the Kashag felt that the Dalai Lama might concede to the Chinese.

We know that there was correspondence between the Dalai Lama and Tan Guansan.<sup>62</sup> In the last letter, dated 16 March (the day before he fled) the Dalai Lama wrote: 'I shall make my way in secret to the military Area

Command.<sup>63</sup> Two days earlier, at a meeting of government officials in the Norbulingka the Dalai Lama had reiterated the need to calm the situation. The Dalai Lama's letter to Tan Guansan said that he was able to sway some officials, many of whom could see four days of mass action had not made a dent on the Chinese. They had neither responded by offering compromise nor sought to gain control of Lhasa and may have hoped that the agitation would soon die down.

Phala was given full power by the Kashag to do whatever he thought necessary to arrange the evacuation from the palace. He was assisted by Phuntsog Tashi Takla, the Dalai Lama's brother-in-law. It was decided that the Dalai Lama would be accompanied by his two tutors, his immediate family and members of the Kashag, who were already in the Norbulingka. Phala made two important decisions. First, he dispatched a messenger to summon Athar and Lotse, the two CIA operatives, who were south-east of Lhasa, near Lhuntse Dzong.<sup>64</sup> Second, Phala sent a monk official to the Indian Consulate to inform them that the Dalai Lama might have to seek refuge in India. The Indian Consul, Major Chiba, responded by asking for details of the Tibetans' intentions and enquiring where along the border they intended to enter India. Phala told the Indians that no decision had been reached as to whether the Dalai Lama and his entourage would cross the border or not. He had merely taken the wise precaution of alerting the Indians, since once they left Lhasa, it would not be possible to contact the Indians.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, two days after the Dalai Lama's flight, on 19 March, the Indian foreign secretary sent a telegram to the Consul-General, informing him that the GOI would grant asylum to the Dalai Lama, but the Indian officials were unable to pass the message to the party.<sup>66</sup>

The situation in Lhasa was rapidly deteriorating. For nearly a week, the Chinese had not taken any action to regain control of the city and there was no sign that the uprising would fizzle out. In fact, there was a danger of the revolt spreading into the surrounding area. Already disturbances had occurred in Gyantse and Phari, on the main trade route to India, and news of the revolt was filtering to the outside world. It appears that on the morning of 17 March, the Chinese began to shell some areas to intimidate the Tibetans. In Lhasa there were rumours that the PLA was moving artillery into Lhasa and that it was being aimed at the Potala and the Norbulingka.

### Escape of the Dalai Lama

On the morning of 17 March two shells landed near the Norbulingka. This seems to have led the officials in the Norbulingka to think that the Chinese would make their final move and try to gain control of the city. Both the

Kashag and the Dalai Lama consulted the Nechung oracle, who pronounced that it was no longer safe to remain in the palace. That evening, the Dalai Lama (dressed in the traditional gown of a layman) and his entourage crossed the Kyichu river and headed out of Lhasa. It appears that the Chinese were caught by surprise. No detailed accounts have been published of their position during that evening. Why did they not take preventative measures? Once the Dalai Lama stepped out of the palace, the Chinese could only have prevented the escape by force. But it appears that the Chinese officials were not aware of the flight for at least a day or two.

As mentioned earlier, Phala had summoned Athar and Lotse to Lhasa. When they received Phala's message, Athar and Lotse were worried because it required changes to their plan. Since Phala's refusal to allow them to meet the Dalai Lama, they had been instructed by the CIA to work with the main Khampa resistance movement, Four Rivers, Six Ranges. They had been operating independently of Lhasa for nearly a year, and had had no contact with Tibetan Government officials. In fact they were unaware of events in Lhasa and had been concentrating on building up the Khampa resistance movement. A month before the Lhasa revolt, on 22 February, Athar and Lotse had received the second consignment of arms from the CIA. It consisted of ammunition, automatic rifles and new radio sets. Some of the arms were distributed to a few trusted Khampas and the rest of the supply had been hidden. The arms and other supplies were intended for a group of fifteen newly trained Khampas that were about to be parachuted into Tibet. The CIA instructed Athar and Lotse to look for a safe dropping zone.

Before the final drop was arranged, they were recalled to Lhasa. Athar recalls that when he read the message he was worried because it had taken six days to reach him (Athar and Lotse were under orders never to stay in one area for more than three days, and the messenger from Lhasa had taken some time to locate them). Since Phala had not mentioned on what date they intended to leave Lhasa, Athar had no idea whether the Dalai Lama was still in Lhasa. He immediately radioed the Americans and informed them that he had been recalled to Lhasa by Phala and that the Dalai Lama was planning to leave Lhasa to seek refuge near the Indian border. The CIA instructed him to proceed to Lhasa and to report on the meeting. Taking twenty Khampa troops with him as an escort, he rode towards Lhasa. It is clear that the CIA was not involved in organising the Dalai Lama's escape as alleged by the Chinese and some Western writers.<sup>67</sup> But the news of the Dalai Lama's flight once again renewed American interests. When the CIA received Athar's message, they immediately postponed the dropping of the fifteen Khampas into Tibet, presumably awaiting the outcome of the meeting between Phala and their agents.

In reality, neither the CIA nor the *émigré* groups in Kalimpong accused

by the Chinese of instigating the revolt were involved in organising either the revolt or the Dalai Lama's flight from Lhasa. The documents captured by the Chinese in Kundeling monastery, on which the Kalimpong allegation was based, show that the People's Assembly only contacted Shakabpa in Kalimpong on 17 March, seven days after the demonstrations started in Lhasa.<sup>68</sup> These documents merely urged them to seek international support rather than launch a revolt. The *émigré* group, with CIA support, was planning a very different strategy. The CIA had advised them to think in terms of a long-term guerrilla war – Athar remembers that the Americans told them that they could never hope to oust the Chinese from Tibet and that the best strategy would be for them to try to disrupt Chinese rule. The CIA was accordingly planning to establish a number of guerrilla cells in various parts of Tibet and was therefore opposed to a nationwide revolt, which they felt would jeopardise their plan.

This plan had been in effect since the winter of 1958, soon after Athar returned from the meeting in Calcutta where Gyalo Dhundup had said that the Americans were going to make arms drops inside Tibet,<sup>69</sup> and therefore advised encouraged a number of Khampas living in India to return, including Lo Nyendrak, an influential and wealthy trader from the Sadhutshang family who had a substantial following among the Khampas. Lo Nyendrak led about a hundred Khampas back into Tibet. They were followed by Baba Lekshe and a young man from Amdo called Jangchub Jinpa, who had been given a 16mm movie camera and told to film the arms drops and the resistance movement. At the time the activities of the main resistance group, Four Rivers, Six Ranges, were above all concentrated in southern Tibet. They were beginning to achieve some success: two arms drops had been made without the Chinese detecting them and increasing numbers of people were able to infiltrate Tibet from India. However, the revolt in Lhasa meant that the CIA had to abort its plan.

The revolt took the leadership of the Four Rivers, Six Ranges by surprise. Gonbo Tashi and the main contingent of Khampa resistance fighters were in the east and did not find out about the Dalai Lama's flight from Lhasa and arrival in India until the beginning of April 1959.<sup>70</sup> It was clear that when the revolt happened, neither the CIA nor the main Tibetan resistance group was prepared.

The revolt was mainly concentrated in Lhasa, where the main task for the Chinese was to disarm the Tibetan army, which numbered about 1,500. In Lhasa the army consisted of the bodyguard regiment and a small Tibetan police unit. There were also a number of soldiers stationed in other areas, notably in Shigatse and Dingri where the Chinese had already taken steps to disarm the Tibetan regiments. In Shigatse, there were about 500 soldiers making up the Panchen Rinpoche's guard. They were disarmed by the PLA without much resistance. The inhabitants of Shigatse – who had always seen

themselves as separate from Lhasa and loyal to the Panchen Rinpoche – remained detached from the uprising in Lhasa, and most of the areas under the influence of Tashilhunpo refused to participate in the revolt. But it must also be pointed out that the Chinese, forewarned by the events in Lhasa, had time to deploy large numbers of troops in Shigatse to prevent the uprising spreading there from the capital.

Similarly, the Chinese had started to disarm small groups of Tibetan soldiers in Dingri, and in Shelkar Dzong the PLA troops surrounded the monastery and demanded that arms stored there by the Tibetan Government be handed over to them. At first the monks resisted, but the Chinese brought in one of the commanders of the Tibetan Government regiment captured in Shigatse and he was able to persuade the monks to hand over the weapons.<sup>71</sup> This was the first time the local people had any inkling of the troubles in Lhasa. In other areas the local people only found out about the events in Lhasa on 20 March when Radio Lhasa stopped broadcasting<sup>72</sup> and PLA troops turned up to arrest leading local officials. Some remote areas in western Tibet remained unaffected by events in Lhasa and were not aware of the Dalai Lama's escape until they heard about it on All India Radio.<sup>73</sup>

In Lhasa, the Chinese were caught by surprise. The Kashag began to authorise the distribution of arms from the government arsenals on the third day of the uprising. Liushar himself took charge of releasing large numbers of old Enfield rifles from the Potala. However, many civilians remained unarmed. On 20 March, after more than a week of demonstrations in Lhasa, the PLA was ordered to retake the city. Loudspeakers urged the public to disarm; those who surrendered would be treated leniently. For two days there was fierce fighting while the PLA captured the Norbulingka and the Potala, causing many Tibetan casualties. The Chinese got Ngabo to make an appeal, and his voice could be heard through the loudspeakers asking the people to surrender and warning that otherwise the fighting would reduce Lhasa to rubble. On 23 March, the Chinese hoisted the five-star Red flag over the Potala Palace. It was the first time the Chinese had been able to fly the flag over this most historic and sacred building. 'The Chinese national flag, symbol of light and happiness, flutters in the breeze over Lhasa, greeting the rebirth of this ancient city.'<sup>74</sup> Together with the loudspeakers blaring out the announcement that the PLA had captured the Potala and the Norbulingka, this signalled the end of the revolt. Many feared that the Dalai Lama had been captured by the Chinese and that any further resistance was futile. People began to climb onto the rooftops and hoist white flags. Others emerged gradually from their houses with khatas tied to sticks. Some stood in front of their doors with khatas hanging from their raised arms. The PLA soldiers, in groups of four or five, and sometimes accompanied by Tibetan translators, began to search each house. The houses of influential Tibetans like Lhalu, the former Governor of Kham, were targeted and the occupants

were arrested and taken for interrogation. The streets were littered with corpses, some of which had been there for several days and had been mauled by stray dogs. People rushed out to identify the bodies and look for relatives who had failed to return home.

According to Chinese sources, 4,000 people were arrested and 8,000 small arms, 81 light and heavy machine-guns, 27 mortar launchers and ten million rounds of ammunition were captured.<sup>75</sup> This disparity between the number of weapons and prisoners suggests the capture of the Tibetan Government arsenals rather than the detritus of an uprising. It is true that the Tibetan army, which was described by the Chinese as 'rotten to the core, utterly useless in fighting',<sup>76</sup> joined in the revolt and actively fought the PLA. Despite the disparaging Chinese remarks, they were at first able to resist PLA attacks. But they were numerically disadvantaged and they did not possess armoured vehicles and other modern weapons. The Tibetan Government had distributed arms to some people, but the overwhelming number of civilians who took part in the uprising remained unarmed. Langdun Gyatso remembers that 500 people in his Carpenters' and Masons' Association had two rifles and about 25 pistols between them. 'The only thing we could do was to arm ourselves for hand-to-hand combat and so we prepared knives, swords and an assortment of fierce but, as it turned out later, perfectly useless weapons.'<sup>77</sup> On 23 March the Chinese announced the setting up of a special Military Control Committee in the towns and villages which would be responsible for organising local administrative and 'self-defence forces'. It is interesting to note that it was felt that there was no need to set up this committee in Shigatse.<sup>78</sup>

When the Dalai Lama's party reached Rame monastery south-west of Lhasa, they heard the news that the Chinese had launched a full-scale attack on Lhasa. This caused great alarm among the party and they decided to move further south, along the Tsangpo river. Before leaving Rame, the Dalai Lama wrote letters to the two remaining Kalons in Lhasa, Ngabo and Sampho.<sup>79</sup> Another letter was sent to Lobsang Tashi, the former Prime Minister. Since his dismissal in 1952 he had been living quietly in his monastery, and had shown no interest in subsequent political developments. He was appointed as regent in the absence of the Dalai Lama<sup>80</sup> and asked to negotiate with the Chinese. The Dalai Lama also wrote to the Panchen Rinpoche.<sup>81</sup> It is not clear whether these letters ever reached their intended destinations.<sup>82</sup>

The Dalai Lama's escape route was not accessible to vehicles and lay in an area under the control of Khampa resistance fighters, so it was fairly free of PLA incursions. Local people soon learned of the Dalai Lama's escape and flocked to the area to seek blessings from him, presenting an enormous problem for the party in their attempts to keep the escape route secret. Luishar says that he had to ask the Khampas and others to disperse. Far

from providing protection for the Dalai Lama, they presented a major security risk.

The Dalai Lama's party proceeded southwards towards Lhunste Dzong, one of the largest settlements in the area and only sixty miles from the Indian border. Four days after leaving Lhasa, the party reached Chongye Riwodechén, where there was a small monastery whose head lama was the Dalai Lama's senior tutor, Ling Rinpoche. At Chongye the party was also met by resistance fighters of Four Rivers, Six Ranges; among them Athar. Later in the afternoon, Athar met with Phala. He once again asked for a meeting with the Dalai Lama. This time Phala said that he would arrange the meeting as soon as the party had settled at the monastery. Phala went on to ask about the strength of the resistance group and whether they would be able to provide protection for the Dalai Lama. Athar gave details of the activities of Four Rivers, Six Ranges and a glowing account of Gonbo Tashi's exploits. He also informed Phala for the first time that the Americans were supplying weapons and that more people had gone for training abroad. Phala looked elated and said that he would inform the Dalai Lama. Next morning, 22 March, Athar was taken to see the Dalai Lama and he told him of the Americans' willingness to provide aid but added that they needed to know what his intentions were. The Dalai Lama told Athar that at that point, neither he nor the Kashag had reached a decision, but he went on to say that he intended to set up a temporary government based in Lhunste Dzong. Athar radioed the Americans informing them that the party would be setting up a base in Lhunste Dzong.

The Americans congratulated Athar on a successful meeting. Finally the Americans had made official contact with the Dalai Lama and had established a link between their agents and the escape party. This gave them some of the legitimacy that they had been seeking before. However, even at this late stage neither the Dalai Lama nor the Kashag made any direct appeal to the Americans. Nevertheless, the Americans were confident and told Athar to expect further arms drops. The third drop was to be the largest. There were two plane loads, with enough arms for 2,000 people. The plane was standing by in East Pakistan (Bangladesh), waiting for a signal from Athar and Lotse. Athar wanted the supply to be dropped in Tsethang, near the main base of Four Rivers, Six Ranges in Driguthang, which would avoid the problem of transporting such large quantities of arms. But Athar learned that PLA troops were moving rapidly into the area and that other safe zones had also fallen. He radioed the Americans to cancel the drop for the time being.

Athar and Lotse travelled with the Dalai Lama until they reached Lhunste Dzong.<sup>83</sup> The area was totally free of Chinese control and home to many more Khampas and Tibetan soldiers. Overnight, this remote part of Tibet, usually administered by a lowly dzongpon, became the Centre of

Tibetan Government from which the Kashag intended to carry out its plan to conduct negotiations with the Chinese. Meanwhile the Dalai Lama and the Kashag decided to incorporate the Khampa resistance groups into the traditional Tibetan Government structure, awarding Andrug Gonbo Tashi the title of Magchi Dzasag.<sup>84</sup> It was hoped that Four Rivers, Six Ranges and the remaining Tibetan army would form a defence force and that the area would be declared independent of Chinese rule. After reaching Lhunste Dzong, the Dalai Lama and the Kashag issued a proclamation setting up the new temporary Government of Tibet. The Dalai Lama wrote that he felt 'positive' about the future of Tibet.<sup>85</sup>

Next day, Athar and Lotse were summoned by Phala. For the first time they were introduced to the other members of the Kashag and asked whether the Americans would provide political support. Athar told them that the USA had already made two arms drops and that more people were being trained. He also described the strength of the Four Rivers, Six Ranges organisation. The previous night Athar had radioed the Americans and told them about the establishment of the new government and of the intention to resist the Chinese. Athar says that the Americans were delighted with the news and instructed him to congratulate the new government.

The Tibetan Government's intentions suited the CIA's plans. This would provide the CIA with a base and a legal and moral legitimacy for their involvement and would further their plans to establish a network of guerrilla cells in Tibet. Athar was told to look for secure drop zones and advised that, if the Dalai Lama requested it, the Americans were willing to take charge of his security. Athar says this was discussed at the meeting with the Kashag, where he advised them that they should hand over security to the Americans. It is not clear what form this would have taken, but Athar was convinced that, if the Tibetans had requested it, the Americans would have parachuted American soldiers into Tibet.<sup>86</sup> The Kashag told Athar that they would reply after they had discussed it further with the Dalai Lama.

That day a number of officials arrived from Lhasa. They brought news of the fall of Lhasa and descriptions of how the Chinese had destroyed the Potala and Norbulingka, stories that later were found to be untrue. There were also rumours that the Chinese army was marching towards Lhuntse Dzong, which prompted fear and panic among the officials. There was no way that the Khampas or the few Tibetan soldiers would have been able to hold out against the PLA. Already a steady stream of people was crossing the border into India. Later reports arrived saying that the Chinese were trying to cut off the escape route to India. The Dalai Lama had to admit the 'unwelcome truth' that they could no longer remain in Tibetan territory.<sup>87</sup> Athar remembers being woken about midnight by Phala who told him that the Dalai Lama could no longer remain in Lhuntse Dzong as Chinese troops were rapidly advancing towards the area. He was asked to radio the

Americans to tell them about this new development. He was also told to advise the Americans to approach the GOI for asylum for the Dalai Lama and his party. And Athar was asked to select two people to proceed to the border to contact Indian officials. The next morning Jangchub Jinpa and Baba Lekshe were sent to the border while Athar radioed the Americans.

On 28 March, the Chinese issued a statement signed by Zhou Enlai announcing that the rebellion had effectively 'torn up' the 17-Point Agreement and declaring that the 'local government' had been dissolved and that its duties would be taken over by the PCART. It also said that, in the absence of the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Rinpoche would assume the position of the Chairman of PCART and that Ngabo would be appointed Vice-Chairman. More important, the order named eighteen people, including Phala, Surkhang, Shasur and Liushar, as key leaders of the rebellion and dismissed them from the posts they held on PCART. The order declared that they would be punished.<sup>88</sup> All the named persons were in the Dalai Lama's party and faced execution or life imprisonment if they were captured.

As the Chinese announced that they had gained total control of Lhasa, the Dalai Lama and his party moved near to the Indian border. They were still reluctant to cross as they were uncertain about the Indian reaction. When they reached Mangmang, one of the last Tibetan settlements, they were met by Baba Lekshe and Jangchub Jinpa, who were able to confirm that the Indians were prepared to welcome the party. The Indian officials at the border had already been instructed by their government to expect the Dalai Lama. At about the same time Athar received a radio message confirming that the GOI was prepared to grant asylum. The Tibetan party was totally unprepared and did not have any financial resources to support themselves in India, having brought with them sackloads of virtually worthless Tibetan currency. Athar remembered that he and Lotse were authorised by the CIA to hand over to the party two hundred thousand Indian rupees from their fund. In return Phala handed Athar all the Tibetan money they had brought with them. On 30 March 1959, the Dalai Lama, the political and spiritual leader of Tibet, crossed the border into exile.

As the news of the Dalai Lama's escape to India was broadcast on All India Radio, thousands of people crossed the border. Between April and May 1959 more than 7,000 Tibetans entered India and sought asylum.<sup>89</sup> Athar and Lotse turned round at the border and went back into Tibet. But they found that many people had simply given up and saw no point in fighting: many Tibetan soldiers and Khampa fighters were surrendering their weapons at the border and wanted to settle in India. The PLA rapidly advanced into the region. Andrug Gonbo Tashi and his men heard on All India Radio that the Dalai Lama had escaped. They fought fiercely, but gradually all Tibetan territory fell to the advancing PLA troops. By the



end of April the morale of the remaining Khampa resistance groups had fallen, and they were pushed further towards the Indian border. They knew there was very little chance of securing a safe base inside Tibet. On 28 April Gonbo Tashi crossed the border. This marked the end of the active campaign inside Tibet. However, pockets of resistance in various parts of eastern and central Tibet continued, and it was not until 1960 that the PLA was able to secure complete control of Tibet.

The 1959 revolt marked the end of the attempt to forge a co-existence between Communist China and Buddhist Tibet. The flight of the Dalai Lama symbolised the final demise of Tibet as an autonomous entity within the People's Republic of China. Whatever the weaknesses of the 17-Point Agreement, it did provide scope for the Chinese and Tibetans to work together. As noted earlier, it was felt by the Tibetans that the Agreement gave a measure of protection to their traditional way of life and the Chinese saw it as giving legitimacy to their entry into Tibet. Once the Agreement had been signed, the PLA met little resistance from the Tibetan masses, and the ruling orders had co-operated with them (although the passivity of the masses should not be viewed as either acceptance or – as claimed by the Chinese – a sign that the masses welcomed them).

Once the Chinese had gained control of Tibet, they faced the problem of how to defend it. The external threat to Chinese rule was negligible. In fact, China rapidly secured international recognition of Tibet as a 'region of China'. American interest was no more than a nuisance, since there was very little the USA could do without a direct appeal from the Dalai Lama, which was never made at the time. In the end, internal problems were to cause most trouble for the Chinese. Despite the geographical proximity of Tibet and China, the values and world views of a Communist China and a Buddhist Tibet were oceans apart. The gap between the Tibetans and the Chinese was described by the Tibetans as being as wide as 'earth and sky'. But the Chinese Communists were motivated by the zeal to transform a society which they saw as governed by superstitions and marred by economic backwardness, and they had been realistic enough to adopt a more gradualist policy of reform and to refrain from radical policies which would impair their relationship with the indigenous ruling classes. By offering the ruling order positions and monetary rewards in the new society, the Communists were able within a short period to make new structures to solidify their rule in Tibet.

Despite their achievements, the revolt was a clear indication that the Chinese had failed. Why had the 17-Point Agreement not worked? Once in exile, the Dalai Lama was to denounce the Agreement as a treaty signed under duress, a refutation which fails to explain why the Tibetans had made no protest for nearly ten years. For the failure of the Agreement, we need to look at the treaty itself.

For the Tibetans, the Agreement promised autonomy and that the 'existing status of the Dalai Lama would not be altered'. They thought that 'autonomy' meant independence in all but name. The term 'autonomy' was translated as '*rang-skyong ljongs*', which literally meant 'self-rule'. But for the Chinese 'autonomy' meant that the Tibetans had accepted Beijing as the ultimate authority. A Tibetan official told me that the Chinese cadres would always emphasise that the decision had been approved by the State Council and they would add that Chairman Mao himself had approved it. This was to imply that the decision was reached at the highest level and was irreversible. For the Tibetans, the ultimate authority always resided with the Dalai Lama. Each party saw what they wanted in the Agreement and it was in many ways doomed to fail from the start.

For the Tibetan masses, the central issue was the question of the Dalai Lama's power and status, which the Tibetans commonly referred to as '*go-gnas*'. The PCART, for example, was achieved with the compliance of the ruling order but was seen by ordinary men and women as undermining the power of the Dalai Lama. This was for many Tibetans the crux of their resentment. The Dalai Lama was the pivot of Tibetan society. He was the incarnation of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of compassion and the patron deity of Tibet. For ordinary men and women, any tampering with the role of the Dalai Lama and his position as the supreme ruler of the land of snow was unacceptable. The decline in the Dalai Lama's authority was more complex than a mere loss of political power in the Western sense; it was equated with the degeneration of Buddhist Tibet. The Chinese, therefore, were seen not only as political foes but essentially as 'enemies of the faith'. This to some degree provided the ideological basis of the Sino-Tibetan conflict, rather than class or regional differences. The Tibetans' identity as 'the insiders' (*nang pa*), and their identification of others as 'outsiders' (*phyi pa*) overrode internal divisions and gave Tibetans the focus of their ethnicity. The essential weakness of the Chinese was their failure to see the homogeneous nature of Tibetan culture. Tibet was not only a political entity, it was foremost a civilization, covering the whole of the Tibetan-speaking world.

To some extent, the Communists inherited the faults of the Guomindang. Central Tibet under the Dalai Lama's rule was treated as a *de facto* independent state, while the areas the Tibetans called Kham and Amdo had been under nominal Chinese rule, albeit through local warlords who owed nominal allegiance to the Central Government. Since the early part of this century, most of Kham was incorporated into the province of Xikang, and much of Amdo was incorporated into Qinghai. In fact, in the Amdo region, the Lhasa regime never exercised any political authority and the Communists found it easy to regard Kham and Amdo as falling within 'China Proper' and thus subject to the same reforms (which from 1954 onwards



became more radical and assimilationist). The implementation of reforms and the subsequent failure of the Great Leap Forward caused a universal resistance to the reforms, and it was not until after the uprising that the Communists were able to coerce the people into accepting them.

The attacks on religion and on their religious institutions led many Tibetans to an apocalyptic perception of events, which was then confirmed by various supernatural signs. In early 1950, the people of Lhasa were amazed by water dripping from a gilded gutter in the Tsuglakhang. The government appointed a team to investigate this mysterious sign. It was followed by earthquakes and floods which were universally accepted as signs marking the beginning of the degeneration of Buddhism. Later in exile the Dalai Lama was to describe the situation as a product of the past accumulation of bad merit by the Tibetans as a people. The religious community, the monks and lamas, simply wanted the PLA exorcised from Tibet.

So, why did the 1959 revolt occur? It was not only a political act in defence of Tibet's independent status, which had been lost with the signing of the 17-Point Agreement. There was no realistic chance of Tibetans being able to drive the PLA out of the country. What impelled people into action was not any narrow class or regional interest, nor the greater international politics of the Cold War. The revolt was essentially in defence of the value system of the ordinary men and women, to which the Dalai Lama was central. The catalyst for the revolt came from the thousands of refugees from eastern Tibet. The Chinese reforms and their ruthless suppression of the Khampa revolt drove thousands of people to seek protection in central Tibet, thus bringing the area into the theatre of conflict and making other Tibetans distrustful of Chinese promises. The Khampas in turn tried to appeal to Tibetans' shared religious and cultural values for support. In a letter to the Tibetan newspaper, *The Mirror*, one appeal was even addressed to 'tsampa eaters'.<sup>90</sup> *Tsampa* was the staple diet of all Tibetans, transcending class, gender, sect and regionalism, and differentiating them from the Chinese.

After the dismissal of Lukhangwa and Lobsang Tashi, Tibet had lacked a leadership that could stand up to the Chinese. The Dalai Lama was young and inexperienced. His advisers became increasingly insular and their interest had become primarily the safety of the Dalai Lama. When the revolt started, the Tibetan leadership was still trying to appease the Chinese, to the point of being apologetic. No Tibetan leader tried to negotiate with the Chinese when their rule was seriously challenged by the masses. Although the Kashag saw the revolt as leverage on the Chinese, as far as we know they never made any concrete demands. The Kashag and other leaders lingered on in the palace, with no clear idea of how to respond to the revolt. The revolt scattered the Tibetan leadership, whose reaction was to abandon the

country and seek safety in a foreign land. In their defence, they claim that they had neither the freedom nor the power to protest. In the circumstances, the only solution was to rescue 'the most precious jewel', the Dalai Lama, from the faithless Red Chinese.