

# The Status of Tibet

## British Archives

Secret

Gen 77/50 26th October, 1945

Cabinet (Far-Eastern Civil Planning Unit)

1. The attitude of His Majesty's Government towards the Tibetan question was defined in a memorandum by the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs and for India dated 23rd June, 1943
2. Until the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Tibet acknowledged the suzerainty of the Manchu Emperors and a measure of control from Peking which fluctuated from military occupation to a more nominal link. Since 1911 Tibet has enjoyed de facto independence.
3. His Majesty's Government made repeated attempts after 1911 to bring the Chinese Republic and the Tibetan Government together on the basis that Tibet should be autonomous under the nominal suzerainty of China, but these attempts always broke down on the question of the boundary between China and Tibet, and eventually in 1921. His Majesty's Government presented the Chinese Government with a declaration to that effect that they did not feel justified in withholding any longer their recognition of the status of Tibet as an autonomous State under the suzerainty of China, and that they intended dealing on that basis with Tibet in the future.
4. The Chinese Government have since 1921 attempted to an increasing extent to import some substance into their suzerainty over Tibet, while the Tibetans repudiate any measure of Chinese control. For our part, we have promised the Tibetan Government to support them in maintaining their practical autonomy which is important to the security of India. See [http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded\\_pics/lettertoSoong.pdf](http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/lettertoSoong.pdf) of India and to the tranquility of India's north-eastern frontier. On the other hand, our alliance with China makes it difficult to give effective material support to Tibet, and we have in fact informed the Tibetans that we would be prepared to give them only diplomatic support against China.
5. On August 24th, 1945 however Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek made a statement of policy concerning Tibet which appears to indicate a considerable change in the attitude of the Chinese Government. After declaring China's desire to allow the 'frontier racial groups' to attain independence if capable of doing so, he said: "I solemnly declare that if the Tibetans should at this time express a wish for self-government our Government would, in conformity with our sincere traditions, accord it a very high degree of autonomy. If in the future, they fulfill economic requirements of independence, the nation's Government will, as in the case of Outer Mongolia, help them to attain this status". There would seem to be nothing irreconcilable between this offer of "a very high degree of autonomy" and the attitude of His Majesty's Government. It is clear however, from conversations which took place between British and Chinese representatives in Lhasa in 1944 that with regard to Tibet, there is

a considerable difference between the British and the Chinese conceptions of the word 'autonomy'.

6. In general, two factors governing the Tibetan question are that:
  - Tibet has in practice regarded herself as autonomous and has maintained her autonomy for over 30 years;
  - our attitude has always been to recognize China's suzerainty, but on the understanding that Tibet is regarded as autonomous by China.

Cabinet Office  
5t November, 1945