



## INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS RECONSIDERED: A REALIST PERSPECTIVE ON INDIA'S BORDER DISPUTE WITH ITS NEIGHBOUR

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### Abstract:

India's relations with Communist China have evolved through various twists and turns. India's lack of realist approach and naiveté about emerging global politics helped China in gaining an upper hand over India in achieving regional dominance particularly displayed through the bilateral disputes over the border determination. While the defeat of 1962 is a distant past, it has continued to wield great influence over India's overall approach towards China. This article, thus, goes for a reappraisal of the border issues which have and still continue to influence Indo-China relations.

**Key words:** India, China, Communism, Peoples' Liberation Army, Border

*Título en Castellano: Las relaciones entre India y China reconsideradas: Una perspectiva realista sobre la disputa fronteriza de la India con su vecino*

### Resumen:

*Las relaciones de la India con la China comunista han evolucionado en medio de diversos contratiempos y vicisitudes. La ausencia de un enfoque realista y la ingenuidad de la India sobre la política mundial emergente ayudaron a China a obtener ventaja sobre la India en la consecución del dominio regional, particularmente visualizado en las disputas bilaterales sobre la delimitación fronteriza. Aunque la derrota de 1962 pertenece al pasado lejano, ha continuado ejerciendo una gran influencia en el acercamiento global de la India hacia China. Este artículo pretende hacer una revalorización de las cuestiones fronterizas que tienen su impacto y siguen influyendo en las relaciones de la India con China.*

**Palabras Clave:** India, China, Comunismo, Ejército de Liberación del Pueblo, Frontera

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## 1. Introduction

China's relations with neighbours (including India) are pre-destined to be controversial and conflictual because of its notions, rather inflexible, about its own frontiers. Critics may call these notions arbitrary and unhistorical. But China prefers to qualify these notions with such phrases (which may sound pretensions to critics) as 'unity of five races', 'impartial' frontiers', 'unification of China's national minorities', 'liberation of Formosa (Taiwan), the Pescadores, Sinkiang (Xinxiang) and Tibet', and, finally, 'historic frontiers'.<sup>2</sup>

China also stresses that the restoration of these frontiers is essential to establish China's international prestige and status.<sup>3</sup> China's assertion of its imagined /claimed/declared frontiers has depended much on the degree of strength or weakness of China's central government. 'During the last millennium of imperial rule', writes Lorenz Luthi, 'Chinese monarchs had always asserted the centrality of the Middle Kingdom to the world.'<sup>4</sup>

Of all the countries on the frontiers, Tibet had the most problematic relations with China. In seventh century A.D., Songtsen Gampo was the kind of Tibet, having brought the whole of Tibet under his sway. Gampo belonged to the ruling Yarlung dynasty of Tibet. From seventh to ninth centuries, rulers of this dynasty so expanded Tibet's frontiers as to add monarchical territories in eastern and northern areas which had occupied subordination to the Chinese rulers of the Tang Dynasty, who dominated China from 618 to 907 A.D. In the seventh century, China and Tibet established political relations. Gampo himself married a Chinese princess. In the period of Yarlung dynasty, Tibet embraced Buddhism as the official religion, and created its own language. Tibet and China remained independent, even in China's imperial era.<sup>5</sup>

Any reconsideration of the present relations between India and China requires one to pay due attention to i) historical documents ii) current ground realities, iii) changing regional and global situations, as also to banish false notions of prestige afflicting some decision makers (In India). It may even be argued that rising complexities in the regional and global contexts make it all the more essential to reappraise the current problems, e.g. the boundary problem, so as to resolve it expeditiously. One can go further and ask whether a balanced appraisal of the above noted factors can point easily to an honourable solution (an option available for decades) and a fresh appraisal may be hardly necessary.

## 2. The Boundary Question

India-China boundary may conveniently be divided into two sectors: western, i.e. between Ladakh/Kashmir and Xinjiang/Tibet; and eastern, i.e. between Arunachal (formerly North Eastern Frontier Agency or NEFA) and Tibet/China. In the western sector, historical documents (as opposed to current ground realities) appear to favour India. India claims a customary or traditional boundary which, dating back to ancient days, received support from, e.g. a 1684 treaty between Ladakh and Tibet. In 1842, representatives of the ruler of Kashmir signed a treaty with representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China, which again confirmed the treaty of 1684. In 1847, moreover, the Chinese government reiterated that the Ladakh-Tibet frontier was so firmly delineated since ancient times that it was not necessary to take any further steps towards refixing this frontier. Therefore, in 1899, the Chinese government did not object to the British government's proposal for a formal demarcation of this frontier, although, in

<sup>2</sup> Kissinger, Henry (2012): *On China*, London, Penguin Books, pp.184-85; Shakya, Tsering (1999): *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947*, London, Pimlico, pp. 2, 3, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Shakya, *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> Luthi, Lorenz 'Sino Indian Relations, 1954—1962', *Eurasia Border Review*, 3 (Special Issue) 2012, China's Post-Revolutionary Borders, 1940s-1960s, p.96.

<sup>5</sup> Goldstein, Melvyn C. (1999): *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet and the Dalai Lama*, Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 1-2.



accordance with its 1847 standpoint, the Chinese government preferred inaction. It is indeed significant that a few years back, i.e. in 1893, China published a map which endorsed the ancient/customary boundary, and this strengthened India's claim to a traditional boundary. It is equally, if not more, significant that the British boundary proposal of 1899 accepted the Kunlun range as the frontier between Ladakh/Kashmir and Xinxiang (Singkiang). This placed the whole of the Aksai Chin plateau inside India. Interestingly, a number of countries throughout the world have been publishing maps delineating this boundary, which is accepted by India as customary and undisputed. From the ancient days to the twentieth century, unofficial Chinese maps have been depicting the same boundary, whereas even official Chinese maps have been recognizing it in the nineteenth and the twentieth century—till the late 1920s. In fact, these maps validate the Indian claim to a traditional boundary in the western as also in the eastern sectors. China's official maps, however, have, since the late 1920s, used the Karakoram range as the frontier in India's western sector. These maps did not incite any protest by the British government. But it is fascinating that the 1930 Report of the Indian Statutory Commission endorsed the Karakoram range as India's western sector frontier with China.<sup>6</sup>

The snow desert of Aksai Chin, which is about 17,000 feet above the sea level, lies between Karakoram and Kunlun Mountains. Human beings cannot live there, plants cannot grow. Still, it can sustain an ancient route through which traders can carry such articles as hemp, jade, salt, silk and wool on yaks from Xinjiang (Sinkiang) to Tibet.<sup>7</sup>

The status of Tibet, thus, is of paramount importance in any discussion on Aksai Chin (as also on NEFA/Arunachal). Since ancient times, including the imperial era as already stated, Tibet has never been a part of China, and Tibetans and Han Chinese (who rule Communist China today) are totally different in terms of language and religion, the two main determinants of cultural identity. To cut a long story short and avoid excursions into many centuries of chequered history of Mongolia, Tibet and China, the Han Chinese themselves were under foreign domination for hundreds of years. For example, Mongols conquered China during 1215-1276, and ruled China till 1368.<sup>8</sup> The question, then, of the Han Chinese ruling the Tibetans was just not relevant. Mongol-Tibetan relationship was basically a Patron-Priest relationship. True, the Ming dynasty of the Han Chinese ruled China from 1368 to 1644. But the Ming rulers did not try to impose sovereign control over Tibetans. On the contrary, they tried to ensure that Tibetans would exercise their customary spiritual sway over Mongols to lessen the aggressive proclivities of Mongols towards the Han Chinese. Ming rulers also used their amicable relations with Tibet as a safeguard against any probable Mongol-Tibet alignment directed against the Han Chinese. The relationship of the Ming rulers with Tibetans was a variant of the Patron-Priest relationship prevalent between Mongols and Tibetans.<sup>9</sup>

From 1644 to 1911, again, the Han Chinese were ruled by foreigners, viz. Manchus of the Qing dynasty. Therefore, the question of Han Chinese domination over Tibetans did not arise. Despite occasional twists and turns, born of inevitable factional or other rivalries in any polity, the dominant template of Mongol-Tibetan and Manchu-Tibetan relations was the customary Patron-Priest relationship. But, in the days of waning authority of the Manchu emperor in Peking, one Manchu warlord, Chao Erh Feng, upset this traditional relationship. In

<sup>6</sup> For data in support of various propositions in this paragraph, see Gopal, Ram (1996): *India-China-Tibet Triangle*, Bombay, Jaico, pp. 202-15. In contrast to the variety of sources used for the preceding paragraph, Lintner seems to be highly selective, so as to put India in a sort of disadvantage vis-à-vis China in the matter of territorial claims: see Lintner, Bertil (2018): *China's India War*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp. 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> Maxwell, Neville (1971): *India's China War*, Bombay, Jaico, pp. 26-7.

<sup>8</sup> Franke, Herbert (1994): *China Under Mongol Rule*, Variorum, Great Britain, Aldershot, section IV, pp. 7-8, section VII, pp. 70, section VIII, pp. 297-302.

<sup>9</sup> W. Smith, Jr., Warren (1997): *Tibetan Nation*, New Delhi Harper Collins, 1997, pp. 93, 101-05.



February 1910, his troops, who had earlier earned notoriety by murdering monks and desecrating monasteries, were about to march into Lhasa, when the Dalai Lama fled to India. Chao's troops, however, failed to consolidate administrative authority in Lhasa due to popular resistance and paucity of funds. If they could preserve their physical existence, that was because the Dalai Lama was not yet ready to descend from his Priestly height to order Tibetan troops to fight Chao's troops, thereby completely dismantling the valued Patron-Priest relationship. The Tibetan troops were much superior in numbers (even though deficient in equipment), and they could use their familiarity with the terrain to outwit Chao's troops. In 1911, following the success of the anti-Manchu revolution, the collapse of the Manchu dynasty, and the mutiny of the irregularly paid Chinese troops in Lhasa, the Dalai Lama revised his order, urging upon Tibetan soldiers to attack Chinese troops. The Dalai Lama returned to Tibet in July 1912. All Chinese were expelled from Tibet during 1912.<sup>10</sup>

The Dalai Lama issued a highly significant proclamation in February 1913. He proclaimed that Tibet was an independent state, and that its cooperation with China was sustained by the traditional Patron-Priest relationship embraced by Mongol, Ming and Manchu rulers.<sup>11</sup> Yuan Shikai, who became China's President, following the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty, declared on 12 April 1912 that Tibet was a province of China. The British protested, and Yuan Shikai retreated, but claimed suzerainty over Tibet. The British were interested in promoting the fiction of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet in order to preempt both Russian curiosities about Tibet as also direct Chinese domination over Tibet and sustain Britain's indirect influence upon Tibet. The British, however, wanted negotiations to define the situation. The Chinese agreed, but wanted to exclude Tibetans from any future meeting in London or Peking. The British rejected China's suggestions and decided that the meeting would be held in India, and that Tibet would participate. The tripartite conference began eventually in Simla (now spelled as Shimla) on 13 October 1913. Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, the British representative, was the president of the conference.<sup>12</sup>

Lonchen Shatra represented Tibet in the Simla Conference, and Ivan Chen was China's delegate. "Contrary to later Chinese claims, China was not forced to attend Simla nor did Chen's performance in any way suggest that he was negotiating under duress," writes John Rowland.<sup>13</sup> On 12 October 1912, Russia signed an agreement with Mongolia, establishing a sort of protectorate over Inner Mongolia. As negotiations in Simla went on for six months, and the issue of Tibet's boundary with China (but not with India) remained intractable, McMahon probably hit upon the formula of a virtual division of Tibet into Inner and Outer Tibet—comparable to what happened in Mongolia in 1912.<sup>14</sup> Inner Tibet, bordering China, would remain under China's control. Over Outer Tibet, bordering India, Lhasa would exercise autonomy, as it did throughout history. China could claim suzerainty (but not sovereignty) over the whole of Inner and Outer Tibet. Tibetan rulers retained the authority to collect customary taxes and rents from Inner Tibet by appointing local officers and chiefs.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bell, Charles (2000): *Tibet: Past and Present*, New Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, pp. 109-22, 159-65.

<sup>11</sup> Arpi, Claude (2001): *The Fate of Tibet*, New Delhi, Har Anand, pp. 171-4; Smith, jr., *Tibetan Nation*, pp. 182-8.

<sup>12</sup> Gopal, Ram: *India-China-Tibet Triangle*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>13</sup> Rowland, John (1967): *A History of Sino-Indian Relations: Hostile Co-Existence*, Princeton, Van Nostrand, pp.47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>15</sup> Alastair Lamb was wrong when he argued that Tibet lacked independence and the competence to enter into the Simla Convention with Britain. Tibet declared independence of China in 1913, and China forfeited the claim even to suzerainty over Tibet when China refused to ratify the Simla Convention. China also lost the right to question the legal validity of the McMahon Line as the Tibet-India boundary, Lintner: *China's India War*, op. cit p.47. For interesting details, see Lamb, Alastair (1989): *Tibet, China & India 1914—1950: A History of Imperial Diplomacy*,



The Tibetan representative at the Simla Conference, Lonchen Shatra, presented an enormous mass of documents, which included census data and tax records for many centuries, and provided incontestable evidence of Lhasa's substantial authority over vast territories with Tibetan-speaking inhabitants. Ivan Chen, the Chinese delegate, could submit farcically little evidence in favour of his country's sway over Tibetan territories. The British were amazed by the strength of the evidence furnished by Lonchen Shatra. Their ignorance, however, did not temper the British inclination to play a squalid game with Tibet. Whereas it was totally unfair to divide Tibet into Inner and Outer Tibet, the British manoeuvred to incorporate two-edged provisions in the 1914 Simla Convention. The Convention provided the British pledge not to annex any part of Tibet; the Chinese promise not to transform Tibet into a Chinese province; the bar on the Chinese parliament from having any Tibetan representative; and the stipulation that the geographical-political integrity of Tibet would not suffer from any transgression due to the implementation of this Convention. Yet, a note appended to the Simla Convention appeared to soothe China's vanity by stating that Tibet was a part of Chinese territory. The three plenipotentiaries of Britain, Tibet and China signed the Simla Convention on 27 April 1914, although the claim of the Chinese delegate that, awaiting the Chinese government's approval, he could only initial but not sign the convention, was at best clumsy on account of the pictorial nature of the Chinese language. Eventually, on 29 April 1914, the Chinese government repudiated this Convention.<sup>16</sup> The British were playing the Great Game by the use of Tibet as a pawn. They were afraid less of China, and more of Russia. They suffered from the extraordinary assumption (without much evidence) that Tibet could tilt towards Russia.<sup>17</sup>

China was delaying negotiations in Simla as it put forward inflexible claims on China-Tibet boundary. At one stage, negotiations broke down on this issue, and not on any other issue (e.g. the Tibet-India boundary). Delegates of Tibet and Britain, waiting fruitlessly for the Chinese government's endorsement of a tripartite Simla Convention, had a lot of time to discuss the Tibet-India boundary. In Simla, China did not raise any controversy about this boundary running from the Burma-India-Tibet tri-junction to Bhutan. Tibet enjoyed an equality of status with China and Britain in Simla. McMahon and Lonchen Shatra, the former being the Foreign Secretary of the British Indian government and the latter a Chief Minister of the Tibetan government, did not consider it necessary to discuss these 850 miles long boundaries with Ivan Chen, not to speak of seeking Chen's consent. Britain and Tibet marked this boundary as a thick red line on a map. This line, known afterwards as the McMahon line, lay along the Tibet-India watershed. It signified the advance of the British Indian frontier from the Himalayan foothills to the crest line, denoting an undeclared acquisition of 2000 square miles of Tibetan territory by India.<sup>18</sup> This territory, designated as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) by the British, was named as Arunachal Pradesh in free India. In addition to drawing up the McMahon line, the Simla Conference produced a trade agreement, which conferred upon Britain some extraterritorial authority over trade marts in Tibet as also over communication lines between these marts and the Indian border. The trade agreement of 1914 ensured free access for British traders to all regions of Tibet, restrained Tibet from establishing any commercial monopoly, as

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Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire, Roxford Books. In this context, it is important to note that cautions readers of Lintner's marvellously well-researched book—*China's India War*—steps into ghastly errors in terms of references in end notes, while contrasting the assessments of Leo E. Rose and Alastair Lamb; see Lintner: *China's India War*, *op. cit.* pp. 47-48, 82.

<sup>16</sup> Arpi: *Fate of Tibet*, *op. cit.* pp. 177-83; Smith, Jr.: *Tibetan Nation*, *op. cit.* pp.190-9.

<sup>17</sup> Lintner: *China's India War*, *op. cit.* pp.42-43.

<sup>18</sup> According to the Chinese, British India thus annexed 90,000 square kilometres of China's (i.e. Tibetan) territory. See *The Sino-Indian Boundary Question*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962, pp.10-11.



also from subjecting British merchants to any restriction, and from imposing tariffs or dues without Britain's approval.<sup>19</sup>

Tibet sacrificed vital interests by agreeing in Simla to the division between Inner and Outer Tibet. But China was unhappy with the Tibet-China boundary devised in Simla. Britain passed on an important message (almost a warning) to China. Britain argued that in case China refused to sign the trilateral Simla Convention of 1914, Britain and Tibet would be obliged to convert it into a bilateral Convention. Tibet and Britain signed the (bilateral) Simla Convention on 3 July 1914. They also signed an important Declaration, which obliged Britain and Tibet to adhere to the Simla Convention, whereas it prohibited China from availing of the benefits conferred upon it by the Simla convention, in case China did not sign this Convention. For example, because China did not sign this Convention, it ceased to exercise suzerainty over Tibet, as also to claim Tibet as a part of Chinese territory. China remained a Foreign Power for Tibet and deprived itself of the right to post an Amban (Representative) and three hundred soldiers in Lhasa. Strikingly, eastern Tibet witnessed a war with the Chinese at the time of the Simla conference, in which the Chinese not only retreated and surrendered but also appealed to Britain for mediation to stop the march of Tibetan troops through Yunnan. As late as in August 1918, British mediation established peace between Tibetans and the Chinese, reinforcing Tibet's status as an equal of China in international transactions, which was previously evidenced in the Simla Conference of 1912-14.<sup>20</sup>

What the British unfairly ignored was that China's claim of any authority—even fictional suzerainty—over Tibet had no foundation whatsoever in any treaty. Tibet needed money to safeguard its independence by building and maintaining an army with proper equipment. In 1914, Britain supplied some arms and ammunition to Tibet. These were used to defeat Chinese soldiers in a number of battles from 1914 to 1918. Evidently, Tibet required many more military consignments. It could itself procure funds for this by the development of its mineral wealth. British and Indian engineers could certainly provide necessary technical assistance. British officials, dealing with Tibet at the field level, were in favour of selling arms and ammunition to Tibet, or of permitting Tibet to buy them from other (obviously European) sources. But superior officials in London overruled them. Lhasa required military hardware not merely to ward off probable Chinese military adventures, but also to counteract Chinese intrigues to vitiate law and order inside Tibet, e.g. by provoking enmity between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. British authorities remained shamefully indifferent to the military and economic requirements of Lhasa. They took the squalid step of preempting the establishment of relations between other European powers and Lhasa, which could have enabled Lhasa, e.g. to develop its mineral and military resources. For this purpose, Britain even sustained the façade of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet as provided in the tripartite Simla Convention of 1914, even though the march of time (and China's repudiation) rendered it irrelevant.<sup>21</sup>

There are important Chinese maps of India's Northern Frontier, some predating the Simla Conference. In 1908, the China Inland Mission published in *Atlas of the Chinese Empire*. It contains a map showing the Tibet-India border approximately along the Mc Mahon Line, i.e. the Himalayan crestline.<sup>22</sup> In March 1912, again, the Royal Geographical Society of London published in its *Geographical Journal* a map of Tibet's border with India, which represented

<sup>19</sup> Goldstein, Meloy C. (1989): *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, pp.75-6; Bell: *Tibet: Past and Present*, pp. 155-7.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, Jr.: *Tibetan Nation*, *op. cit.* pp. 200-8. Goldstein: *A History of Modern Tibet*, *op. cit.* pp. 76-7.

<sup>21</sup> Bell: *Tibet: Past and Present*, *op. cit.* pp 158-9, 209-19, 257, 270. Arpi, *Fate of Tibet*, *op. cit.* pp. 189, 194-204.

<sup>22</sup> *Atlas of the Northern Frontier of India*, New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1960, no page number, Map no.3.



roughly the McMahon Lines, i.e. the Himalayan watershed.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in 1917, Tibet's map, published from Shanghai in *New Atlas and Commercial Gazetteer of China* (even used by the Chinese Government), reconfirmed the validity of the so-called McMahon Line or the Himalayan crestline as the Tibet-China border.<sup>24</sup> 'When Charles Bell, the British Officer in Sikkim who later took up the post as Britain's envoy to Lhasa, wrote his classic, *Tibet: Past and Present* in 1924, the accompanying fold out map shows the Indo-Tibetan border at the heights of the Himalayas, or roughly along the McMahon Line'.<sup>25</sup>

In 1944 and 1945, however, Britain tried to help Tibet in a substantial manner by way of revision of the 1914 settlement. Although the Sela Pass was located on the watershed (i.e. the McMahon Line), Tibet agreed in 1914 to cede some areas of Tawang lying north of this Pass. Britain wanted to streamline this border in 1944 and 1945. Furthermore, Britain agreed then to permit territories under its control (lying to the south of the Sela pass) to forward religious donations to monasteries in Tibet. But Tibet committed the cardinal error of postponing the consideration of the British proposal to amend the McMahon line and the Simla settlement. Evidently, Tibet lacked the minimum of experience and skill to conduct international diplomacy, and carry forward what the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, said in 1921, and the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, reiterated as late as 1943. Both of them clearly affirmed that Tibet enjoyed autonomy, and that Chinese suzerainty over Tibet was nominal. Actually, during the Second World War, when Chiang Kai Shek put pressure upon Tibet and threatened the use of force to make Tibet agree to the movement of war supplies from India through Tibet to China, Tibet refused to yield. Thus, Tibet offered a convincing demonstration of its independence at a crucial junction of world history.<sup>26</sup>

During 1945-50, i. e. from the end of the Second World War to the Chinese invasion of Tibet, three countries could have taken appropriate measures to strengthen Tibet's independence, and enable Tibet to resist and expel Chinese aggressors. These countries were: India, Britain and the United States. All of them failed dismally to initiate such measures—singly or collectively—although from time to time they took some encouraging steps. For example, at the non-official Asian Relations Conference of March-April 1947, India invited Tibetan representatives to New Delhi. Chiang Kai Shek's China protested. India did not yield. As representatives of a separate and independent country, Tibetans occupied a distinct table, and flew their national flag.<sup>27</sup>

Tibet did not have the diplomatic maturity to compensate for its military weakness. It should have capitalized the stamp of independence engraved by the Simla Convention. But it dreamt of recovering territories lost to India (under Britain) during the preceding century and a half (e.g. Sikkim, NEFA). Therefore, it rejected the Simla Convention. India, again, did not uphold the idea of Tibet's independence enshrined in the Simla Convention, but it coveted the benefits (e.g. on trade) accruing to Britain from this Convention. India nursed the mission of joint India-China anti-imperialist endeavours in Asia. If this meant surrendering to China's imperial rule over Tibet, India did not mind.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, no page no., Map No. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, no page no., Map no.6.

<sup>25</sup> Lintner, *China's India War*, p. 49.

<sup>26</sup> Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, pp. 94, 106-13, 121-2, 136-8, 391-7, 406-26; Smith, Jr., *Tibetan Nation*, pp. 228-40, 243-5, 247-8. In the words of Tsering Shakya, 'Tibet has, from the earliest times up to now, been an independent country whose political administration had never been taken over by any Foreign Country, and Tibet also defended her own territories from Foreign invasions and always remained a religious nation', Shakya: *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, op. cit. p.27.

<sup>27</sup> Arpi: *Fate of Tibet*, op. cit. pp. 226-31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237-39, 247; Goldstein: *A History of Modern Tibet*, op. cit. pp. 564-74.



Tibet annoyed India as it delayed the grant of recognition to India as Britain's successor state, eventually doing so as late as June 1948. In January 1949, members of a Tibetan trade mission had valuable discussions with their counterparts in India. India agreed to send its experts to Tibet for surveying Tibet's mineral resources, as also for assistance towards the founding of cottage and small-scale industries. In May 1949, India agreed to supply to Tibet hard currency worth US \$250,000 in order to enable Tibet to procure American gold for backing up its paper currency. In July 1949, Tibet took the bold step of driving out all Chinese working in Tibetan schools and hospitals, as also those serving the Chinese Mission. India too appeared to match Tibet's initiative by acceding to Tibet's request for freezing the bank accounts of the Chinese in India. This enhanced the significance of the sale of some arms and ammunition to Tibet by India in 1947-48. So, this was the moment when India should have embarked upon strenuous efforts to secure international recognition of Tibet's independence. The Indian diplomatic establishment probably failed to realize that, in the absence of such recognition, the gains of June 1948, when Tibet renounced its claim over certain territories, where British India established its domination, could be challenged in future. If at any stage Tibet was deprived of its independence, and subjected to Chinese sway, China would naturally advance its claims to some former Tibetan territories, e.g. NEFA (Arunachal).<sup>29</sup>

It was not expected that the Indian diplomatic establishment would be able to override the acute lack of realism in Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the Prime Minister as also the External Affairs Minister. On 22 March 1949, for example, Jawaharlal affirmed that India did not have hostile relations with any country in the world. It is unpardonable that he ignored the conflict with Pakistan. Soon Jawaharlal confirmed that his lack of realism (and the attendant apathy to vital national interests) were not only chronic but probably incurable, when, on 10 September 1949, he wrote to a Cabinet colleague what was rather unbelievable: he observed that the probability that China would register its presence on the Indian border as the result of a successful invasion of Tibet, did not stir any fear in him. Obviously, he rated as high the prospect of amicable relations with China, although, in September-October 1949, available evidence pointed darkly to a contrary situation. For, the rulers of Communist China clearly proclaimed that they wanted to liberate Tibet, and that, in order to achieve the goal of a socialist world, they also wanted to liberate India. They compared Jawaharlal to Chiang Kai Shek and called Jawaharlal an imperialist hireling. Moreover, Chinese rulers thought of securing the assistance of the Communist Party of India for emancipating India from the stranglehold of imperialists. Communist China emerged on 1 October 1949. Soon afterwards, India accorded a formal diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC). India did not have the moral strength to inform China simultaneously that Tibet was an independent (or at any rate a quasi-independent) country. As the successor state to British India, free India should not have hesitated to do so. PRC, however, did not suffer from any comparable vacillation. As early as August 1950, it informed the Indian Ambassador to China that the liberation of Tibet remained a holy duty for it. From June 1948, when India acquired from Tibet the recognition as the successor to British India, to August 1950, there was adequate time for India to help Tibet in securing from Britain and America abundant arms, ammunition and training, and thus raising such a powerful army that could forestall or overwhelm any Chinese military offensive. For Britain and America, too, it would have been a welcome opportunity to dispose of a part of the enormous surplus of weapons accumulated after the Second World War. This was a matter of vital interest for India, not as much for Britain or the United States. Far from doing the aforesaid things, India remained strikingly indifferent. India did not even endorse Tibet's plea for admission to the United Nations. In 1949, India organized a conference which opposed Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. India did not bother about Tibet, which was about to come under

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<sup>29</sup> Goldstein: *A History of Modern Tibet*, op. cit. pp. 605-6; Arpi: *Fate of Tibet*, op. cit. pp. 240-44.



Chinese imperial rule. Strikingly, China denounced the New Delhi conference on Indonesia as another instance of Jawaharlal behaving as an agent of British-American imperialism.<sup>30</sup>

Whereas the full-scale invasion of Tibet by China commenced in October 1950, before this invasion, Tibetans had parleys with Britain, America and India about how to counteract an imminent Chinese assault. Britain logically argued that its past obligations towards Tibet were now to be discharged by India, and that Britain should not do anything to hurt Indian sensibilities on this matter. India supplied an insignificant quantity of arms to Tibet in 1950. But, at the same time, it requested Tibet not to ask for such supplies, because that would provoke China. Britain and America were ready to supply arms to Tibet, which could use them to sustain a guerrilla warfare against China by taking advantage of the terrain. But India refused even to grant the passage for these arms to Tibet through India. Tibetans argued that in 1950 India did not require more than 75 soldiers to guard the trade marts in Tibet and logically the entire Indian border with Tibet, whereas in case of China occupying Tibet, India would have to use hundreds of thousands of soldiers to protect its border with Tibet. This argument was unassailable. But India was not convinced. India attached far more importance to building cordial relations with China (which was still a matter of wild imagination) than to its own security (which was integrally linked to the status of Tibet as an independent country). India went to an incredible extreme after China launched a full-scale assault upon Tibet in October 1950. India was afraid that China might take an adverse view of India if it perceived a conspiracy by great powers to hinder Chinese occupation of Tibet. Therefore, India advised the United States to do nothing (and even say nothing) that had the potential to generate this perception in China. India thus transformed its policy of nonalignment into a sort of undeclared alignment with China for vanquishing Tibet. This was servile surrender by India to China's imperialist machinations in Tibet. In 1950, the Western powers, led by the United States, staged a military intervention to defend South Korea against aggression by Communist North Korea. The potential enslavement of Tibet by Communist China was thrown by the Western powers as well as India into the dust heap of history.<sup>31</sup>

Prime Minister Jawaharlal desecrated all canons of realism and ethics, while he appeared to wipe out Tibet from his consciousness and shaped a China policy for which he allowed his imagination to run riot, and his thoughts to banish logic. Instead of formulating a foreign policy for India, Jawaharlal seemed to follow a policy for the world, and establish cordial relations between India and China, between other countries and China, and ensure world peace by forestalling a world war. K. M. Panikkar was India's Ambassador to China. Although China looked upon India's unsolicited advice as an instance of imperialist manoeuvres, Jawaharlal persisted in transmitting such advice through Panikkar. In his cable of 19 October 1950, for example, Jawaharlal informed Panikkar that, in such transmission of advice to China, he did not worry about the status of Tibet and Tibet-China relations. What disturbed Jawaharlal was the probable impact of continuing Chinese invasion of Tibet upon the United Nations. In his cable, Jawaharlal gave a free play to his ignorance of history and to misanthropy. For, he recommended that on its policy towards Tibet, China should take a lesson from the policy that India followed towards Goa and Pondicherry: India aimed at minimizing international reverberations by waiting for an opportune time to occupy Goa and Pondicherry. According to

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, Jr.: *Tibetan Nation*, *op. cit.* pp. 265-70; Goldstein: *A History of Modern Tibet*, *op. cit.* pp. 619-37; Shakya: *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, *op. cit.* pp.54-57.

<sup>31</sup> Goldstein: *A History of Modern Tibet*, *op. cit.* pp. 660-704; Arpi: *Fate of Tibet*, *op. cit.* pp. 299-303; Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, *op. cit.* pp.28-29, 71, 141; Lintner: *China's India War*, *op. cit.* pp.68-70, 74-75.



Jawaharlal, China should try to avoid alienating the United Nations, and, therefore, take over Tibet at a later stage.<sup>32</sup>

India's diplomacy, thus, bordered on the ridiculous. To take another example, on 26 August 1950, India's Ambassador to China, K. M. Panikkar, without any consultation with the headquarters, i.e. the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi, dispatched an aide memoir to the government of China. This aide memoir, contrary to all historical evidence, observed that China enjoyed sovereignty in Tibet, and that Tibet merely enjoyed autonomy.<sup>33</sup> China thus got a gift of transformation of suzerainty into sovereignty. To move diplomacy from ridicule to ignominy, on 1 November 1950, New Delhi tried to reconvert sovereignty into suzerainty. China did not care. China interpreted this Indian move typically as subservience to foreign countries which happened to be antagonistic to China. Ambassador Panikkar failed even to provide a timely information to Prime Minister Jawaharlal about China's military intrusion into Tibet. Jawaharlal received it from the British High Commissioner in New Delhi.<sup>34</sup>

The story of India's diplomatic bungling is endless. China completed the subjugation of Tibet before the end of 1951, posted troops on the border with India, and, in January 1952, China even tried (but failed) to use the Communist Party of Nepal to occupy Nepal. Despite all this and reports of Chinese military movements around Ladakh, Prime Minister Jawaharlal affirmed, on 3 November 1951 and 28 February 1952, that there were no Chinese soldiers in Tibet, that there was no border problem confronting India, and that it was not necessary to delimit the boundary between China (Tibet) and India. Evidently, Jawaharlal preferred wishing away realities to facing ugly realities.<sup>35</sup> This approach of Jawaharlal Nehru could be placed anywhere in the vast gray region between patent falsehood and subtle manoeuvre. Therefore, Bertil Lintner is not really accurate when suggests that Nehru was an 'idealist', and, consequently, Nehru 'failed to understand the mindset of Beijing's new communist rulers', and 'continued to believe in friendship with China.'<sup>36</sup>

In July 1952, China took an initiative for holding an India-China conference, which eventually began in Beijing on 31 December 1953. Indian delegates to this conference received thoroughly inappropriate instructions, which reflected Panikkar's confusions, infecting the entire Ministry of External Affairs and Jawaharlal. Indian delegates were directed to confine negotiations to trade and cultural exchanges. They were not to deal with the border issue or raise any doubt about it. In the event of China referring to this issue, Indians would argue that the border did not require any discussion, because it was settled by geography, history, tradition, treaties, etc. Panikkar even advised that Indians should refuse to carry on negotiations if China wanted to discuss the border. For, Panikkar adopted the extremely twisted view that to consent to a discussion was to admit the necessity of discussion.<sup>37</sup> In this context, observations by Amit Das Gupta are noteworthy. 'Winning the people and developing the border areas was postulated, but not pursued. Instead, in November 1950, Nehru declared the border issue closed... In short, India was not in actual administrative or military control of a border, stretching over 2000 km,

<sup>32</sup> Shourie, Arun (2008): *Are We Deceiving Ourselves Again?* New Delhi, ASA/Rupa, pp. 31-4. In the words of Zhou Enlai, 'The PLA is determined to march westward to liberate the Tibetan people and defend the frontiers of China', see Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, op. cit. p.45.

<sup>33</sup> Lintner was not quite correct when he wrote: 'India officially recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet for the first time through the 1954 Agreement between the Republic of India and the Peoples Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between India and the Tibet Region of China', Bertil Lintner: *China's India War*, op. cit. p.14. Actually, in 1954, there was a reconfirmation of what Panikkar did in 1950.

<sup>34</sup> Arpi: *Fate of Tibet*, op. cit. pp. 359-72.

<sup>35</sup> Rao, P.V.R (1970): *Defence without Dift*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, pp. 8-11.

<sup>36</sup> Lintner: *China's India War*, op. cit. p.14.

<sup>37</sup> Gopal, S. (1979): *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. 2, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.180; Rao, *Defence without Dift*, p.10; Kaul, T. N. (1971): *Diplomacy in Peace and War*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1971, p.99.



but took over British claim lines which had neither been defined in detail nor agreed to in a border treaty, even though the Congress had denounced British imperialist ambitions in India's neighbourhood as unacceptable. An investigation of historical rights in those areas did not take place before making the statement.'<sup>38</sup>

On 29 April 1954, India and China signed an agreement on 'trade and intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India'. The phrases in the title have a significant meaning: relations between India and Tibet have a special and independent character. For example, according to Article of the Agreement, 'Pilgrims of both countries need not carry documents of certification but shall register at the border checkpost of the other party and received a permit for pilgrimage.' There are other provisions in the Agreement which indicate that, like pilgrims, other inhabitants, including traders, of Tibet and India could use official checkpoints to cross the border, and carry on normal business or meet friends and relatives. But it is only the Chinese rulers who created hurdles and then broke the relations between Tibet and India. It is indeed a regrettable chapter of the independent India that her leadership proved so naïve consistently as not to raise the issues even when it directly affected our security, and culture. It is useful remember that the communist China was not at all powerful at that time or till he late 1970s. It was not even a member of the United Nations ... the Nehru government campaigned in the UN to give recognition to the communist China ... Nehru himself informed the Indian Parliament in 1959 that the Western nations laugh at India in the UN on this odd behavior, of supporting an inimical regime harming the Indian interests ... not only Nehru sponsored the case for the communist China, but he also refused to accept a permanent seat in the UN Security Council which was offered to India in the 1950's.'<sup>39</sup>

The simplicity of the agreement's title was highly deceptive. For, by this agreement, India got virtually nothing, and gave away practically everything. It clearly accepted China's sovereignty over Tibet and gave away the rights (inherited from Britain) to operate trade marts as also post and telegraph installations in Tibet. India, moreover, renounced the right to maintain a negligible number of military escorts at trade agencies, and even to post a Political Agent at Lhasa, opting for a Consulate General. China initially refused but subsequently agreed to incorporate the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in the 1954 Agreement, viz. mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. India desired to have this Agreement (briefly known as the Panchsheel Agreement) for 25 years. But, at China's insistence, the duration was fixed at 8 years.<sup>40</sup>

Probably, Jawaharlal's suspicions were aroused when the duration of the Panchsheel Agreement was limited to 8 years. For, in July 1954, the Indian Prime Minister sent a highly confidential (and immensely vital) memorandum to the Central Ministries of Defence, External Affairs and Home, as well as to State Governments in India. This memorandum recommended that India's northern frontier was so definite and firm that it was not necessary to discuss this with anyone. Faithful to his usual illogical mode, Jawaharlal asserted that this recommendation derived its justification from the India-China Agreement of 1954 as also from India's prevalent policy. The Indian Prime Minister's memorandum contained the specific instruction that, along

<sup>38</sup> Das Gupta, Amit (2017): *Serving India: A Political Biography of Subimal Dutt (1903-1992)*, (India's Longest Serving Foreign Secretary), New Delhi, Manohar, p.273.

<sup>39</sup> Sharan, Shankar: 'Dealing with the Communist China', *Dialogue*, vol.19, nº 1 (July-September 2017), pp-75-78.

<sup>40</sup> Maxwell: *India's China War*, *op. cit.* pp. 78-80; Khera, S. S. (1968): *India's Defence Problem*, Bombay, Orient Longman, p. 155; Gopal, S.: *Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 2, *op. cit.* pp.180-1; Desai, B. K. (1966): 'Sino-India Relations', in Karnik V. B. (ed.) (1966): *Chinese Invasion: Background and Signal*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay: p. 132; Shakya: *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, *op. cit.* p.151; Lorenz Luthi: *Sino-Indian Relations, 1954-1962*, *op. cit.* p.96.



the whole of the northern frontier, the government was to set up check posts with special attention to what were looked upon as disputed areas. Jawaharlal's memorandum further insisted that, in border areas, India's administrative machinery should be strengthened, economic development should be promoted, and communication/ intelligence networks should be expanded. In other words, administrative-military measures had to compensate for the diplomatic failure of 1954.<sup>41</sup>

Such measures signified the adoption of a forward policy by India vis-a-vis China. The Survey of India tuned in with the publication of new maps in 1954. The old maps showed the undemarcated McMahon Line by means of a fragmented line. The new maps represented the McMahon Line as a distinct international boundary in the eastern sector. As to the western sector, old maps used a colour wash to depict the boundary, while writing the words 'boundary undefined' at the margin. New maps provided an international boundary, while representing the watershed partly by the Karakoram Line and partly by the Kunlun Line, and placing the Aksai Chin within India. Meanwhile, on 2 February 1951, Indian officials took over Tawang, which was approximately on the Himalayan crest line. Significantly, on 1 February 1951, at the United Nations General Assembly, Burma (Myanmar) and India were the only two non-Communist countries which opposed a United States-sponsored resolution declaring China an aggressor in Korea. China did not contest the Indian takeover of an important Tibetan centre of administration and culture, viz. Tawang, perhaps because China was preoccupied in the Korean War, or because China failed to notice the Indian takeover of Tawang. But it would be totally illogical on the part of India to conclude that China was ready thus to concur with the Indian view of the entire northern frontier with China being unquestionably definite and fixed.<sup>42</sup>

To cut a long story short, Indian leader failed to realize that historical documents were meaningless in the absence of actual possession of territories, and that a forward policy without adequate military preparations might prove to be a trap and pave the way to disaster and humiliation (as in 1962). China won without firing a single shot, when India agreed that China wielded sovereign authority over Tibet. China's victory was further demonstrated when it built the Tibet-Sinkiang (Xinjiang) road across Aksai Chin. The finishing touch was provided in 1962, when Indian soldiers in summer uniform—without the minimum of infantry weapons and even rations – confronted a much more powerful Chinese army. India's defeat was followed by a unilateral declaration of ceasefire by China – thanks largely to unpublicized American intervention in favour of India. India complied with the ceasefire without formally accepting it.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, the disaster of 1962 was avoidable, if Jawaharlal and his advisers could command the minimum of realism and accept an eminently honourable Chinese compromise formula offered in the mid-1950s and as late as April 1960. Undoubtedly, China looked upon boundary arrangements, devised by the British colonial rulers, as imperialist imposition. To China, the McMahon line was not lawful. Yet, China was pragmatic. It was aware that, in the eastern sector

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<sup>41</sup> S. Gopal: *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.* p.181; Khera: *India's Defence Problem*, *op. cit.* p.155; Maxwell: *India's China War*, *op. cit.* p.80. It is indeed amazing that eminent writers like Amit Das Gupta and Bertil Lintner have completely overlooked the Indian Prime Minister's highly significant memorandum of July 1954. This has undoubtedly helped Lintner, for instance, in underplaying India's forward policy and overplaying China's aggressive moves in the context of the 1962 India-China conflict.

<sup>42</sup> Gupta, Karunakar: *The Statesman*, 21 October and 28 November 1978; Maxwell: *India's China War*, *op. cit.* pp. 80-83.

<sup>43</sup> For some interesting details about the 1962 India-China conflict; see Dalvi, J. P. (1969): *Himalayan Blunder*, New Delhi, Orient paperbacks, pp. 45, 53-8, 61-3, 70-1, 74-7, 79-81, 83-4, 219-24, 225-44; Nehru, B. K. (1997): *Nice Guys Finish Second*, New Delhi, Penguin India Viking, pp.267-8,279-82, 287-9, 347-8; Galbraith, John Kenneth (1970): *Ambassador's Journal*, New York, Signet, pp. 376-96, 413-6, 423-5, 427-8; Dixit, J. N. (1998): *Across Borders: Fifty years of India's Foreign Policy*, New Delhi, Picus, p.75.



of India's northern frontier, ground realities favoured India, which established its administrative presence in areas south of the McMahon Line. China was ready to extend recognition to India's authority over these areas. But, in exchange, India had to acknowledge the existence of a border dispute and agree to negotiations and joint surveys for the purpose of a peaceful settlement. China acted upon this formula to deal successfully with the Sino-Burmese boundary problem, which was much more complex than the Sino-Indian boundary problem. For, China exercised some extraterritorial (e.g. mining) privileges inside Burma (Myanmar), and a number of Kuomintang soldiers operated inside Burma since the Second World War. In resolving the boundary issue with Burma, China implicitly applied the McMahon Line, because it marked the watershed. China was prepared to solve similarly the boundary problem with India. During Prime Minister Chou's (Zhou's) discussions with Jawaharlal in 1954 as well as in 1956-57, and by some diplomatic messages from 1958, China suggested this solution (even if implicitly). Obviously, China did not want to face one enemy in the east, America/Formosa (Taiwan), and another enemy in the west, viz. India. Moreover, China felt satisfied that, by 1957-58, it was able to establish its control over what in the past was a no-man's land, and to construct the Tibet-Xinjiang road across Aksai Chin in accord with its geo-political necessities. Similarly, India too succeeded in establishing its authority over NEFA. Therefore, in the late 1950s, India and China were in an ideal position to strike a bargain by allowing each other to retain its strategic advantages in, respectively, the eastern and western sectors of India's northern frontier. Actually, in April 1960, Zhou offered this compromise solution when he came to New Delhi from Rangoon (Yangon) where he signed a boundary accord in consistency with the geographical prescription of the McMahon Line.<sup>44</sup>

Indian decision makers did not share Zhou's pragmatism. They persisted in pursuing a thoughtless forward policy vis-à-vis China, while Defence Minister V. K. Krishna Menon did everything to keep the army weak and demoralized, going to the extent of manufacturing pressure cookers and coffee machines in defence factories.<sup>45</sup> It is advisable in this connection to provide an elaborate analysis of Bertil Lintner's observations. Lintner's research skills are excellent. But he cannot rise above the normal academic views of offering false suggestion and presenting/suppressing facts in such a selective manner as to justify his preconceptions or judgements about essential facts and personalities, e.g. Jawaharlal Nehru, V. K. Krishna Menon, K. S. Thimayya, P. N. Thapar or B. M. Kaul, while dealing with vital circumstances leading to the 1962 India-China conflict. One can start with a small sentence in Lintner's book<sup>46</sup> quoted from B. M. Kaul's book on the 1962 conflict: 'When Menon fell from grace, his many past services to India were forgotten and only his errors remembered.' Remarkably, although rightly, neither Kaul nor Lintner would provide any worthwhile illustration of any past service by Menon benefiting India.

At about the same time that Menon became India's defence minister, one of the most outstanding soldiers in India (and the whole world), General Thimayya, because the COAS. Thimayya and his colleagues in the Navy and the Air Force tried repeatedly to impress upon Menon the urgent need to re-equip and retrain the Indian military, especially in view of the deteriorating situation along the India-China border. But their communications with Menon remained unproductive. Menon concentrated on winning Nehru's heart by permitting the manufacture of such consumer items as coffee machines and pressure cookers in India's

<sup>44</sup> Ranganathan, C. V. and V. C. Khanna (2000), *India and China*, New Delhi Har-Anand, pp. 32-8, 43-5; Gopal, S. (1984): *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol.3, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp. 35-6, 136; Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp.89, 105-6, 124-5, 159-60; Kissinger, Henry: *On China*, op.cit. p.187; P. N. Haksar Papers, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Installments I and II, File nº 24, pp. 40-53

<sup>45</sup> Kaul, B. M. (1971): *The Untold Story*, Bombay, Allied, 1971, p. 207; Dalvi: *Himalayan Blunder*, op. cit. pp. 54-6; Maxwell, *India's China War*, op. cit. pp. 190-1.

<sup>46</sup> Lintner: *China's India War*, op. cit. p.123



defence factories. This enabled Menon to take pride in claiming that production in defence factories was registering an increase. Menon aimed at self-reliance in the production of military equipment. Laudable in the long run, this aim pursued fanatically in the short run and precluding the purchase of some essential weapons from foreign countries, could not but be disastrous in a situation of rising military of rising military confrontation with China. Moreover, Menon appeared to derive a sort of perverse pleasure by treating senior military officers in an unwarrantedly offensive manner in the presence of subordinates. Menon cavalierly turned down important technical recommendations from top-most military officials. Things became so intolerable—personally for the chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force, and collectively for the country in terms of lack of military preparedness—that the three chiefs decided to meet the prime minister, and lodge their complaints against Menon. But Thimayya made the impulsive error of submitting his solitary letter of resignation to Nehru on 1 September 1959. It was easy for Nehru, an astute politician, to outmanoeuvre a professional soldier devoted to the doctrine of civilian supremacy over the military. Nehru deceived Thimayya by telling him he would investigate Thimayya's grievances and persuade Menon to redress those grievances. Thimayya was simpleminded enough to withdraw his letter of resignation. Nehru then proceeded to humiliate Thimayya publicly for raising trivial matters in a moment of crisis at the India—China border. Nehru thus once again deceived the people and Parliament by suppressing the fact that Thimayya's complaints related to deliberate attempts by Menon to ignore the country's essential military needs in spite of a crisis along the India-China border. In the words of J.P. Dalvi:

Mr. Nehru's biographers will have a difficult time explaining his inexplicable descent to ordinary norms of behavior to save a colleague at the expense of jeopardizing the defence of his country. Pettiness and selfishness are not qualities that one would wish to associate with a man of the stature of Mr. Nehru.<sup>47</sup>

Nehru and Menon made matters worse by showering favours on B. M. Kaul (a distant relative of Nehru), a person with no combat experience save for a background in Army Service Corps and public relations. Kaul was so skilled in public relations and manipulating his access to Nehru that, despite unredeemed weaknesses in his military career, he could earn the command of an operational infantry division and then pleased Menon by deploying his men for building homes for soldier's families, although this task was earmarked for civilians of the engineer corps of the military. It was a peculiar situation in which Kaul began to earn influence by pleasing Nehru and Menon, while Menon thought that he would please Nehru by heaping undeserved promotions on Kaul. This set the stage for something unprecedented in the Indian Army, which enjoyed worldwide reputation for high professionalism. Kaul became a Lieutenant General and occupied the post of Quartermaster General (QMG). Menon overruled Thimayya's objection to this appointment. Subsequently, Menon again rejected Thimayya's recommendation, and made Kaul the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), a post that was next in importance to the post of the CoAS. Simultaneously, Kaul added to his clout by ensuring that Lieutenant General Thaper succeeded Thimayya as the CoAS. The claim of Lieutenant General Thorat (a far more distinguished officer than Thapar), as also the recommendation of Thimayya, was ignored.<sup>48</sup>

Menon was a sick person, both mentally as well as physically. Nehru was wrong—morally and politically—in keeping Menon at the helm of the defence ministry during a crucial period. Nehru, thus, could not escape sharing the responsibility with Menon for paving the way

<sup>47</sup> Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder*, *op. cit.* pp. 54-56; Also see, Gopal: *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol.2, pp.130-31; B. M. Kaul (1971): *The Untold Story*, Bombay, Allied, p.207; Maxwell: *India's China War*, *op. cit.* pp.190-91.

<sup>48</sup> Dalvi: *Himalayan Blunder*, *op. cit.* p.60; B. M. Kaul, *The Untold Story*, *op. cit.* pp.184-90, 218-22; Maxwell: *India's China War*, *op. cit.* pp.185-93.



for the 1962 debacle. In acquainting oneself with Menon's style of work and behavior, one should rely, in all fairness upon the assessment of one of Menon's admirers and protégés B. M. Kaul. Kaul wrote:

Menon alienated and antagonized people by sarcasm and unkind remarks. He was quick-tampered, stubborn and always at strife with someone...Menon was skeptical by temperament with many whims and caprices and at times suspected his friends of disloyalty without any reason. It was not easy working with him...He took all sorts of sedatives and other medicines to get over his numerous ailments... Menon often called important secretaries from various Ministries and Generals to make his meetings appear imposing...He would call them on the pretext that some urgent matter needed immediate discussion. When everyone had assembled, however, he would appear board, as if some riff-raff were sitting around him, uninvited, and sometimes dozed off perhaps because of over-work or due to the sedatives he had taken earlier...There was seldom any agenda or minutes of his meetings as he was allergic to both...His routine was hectic, sleeping little at nights, during through many engagements during the day, making up part of his lost sleep...shouting at people, sometimes without reason...He would send for senior Generals and civil servants on Sunday afternoons and at awkward time of other days and nights to discuss what he described as urgent problems, but which were sometimes only trivialities.<sup>49</sup>

No wonder then that Menon did little to meet India's defence requirements and entrusting the border to the care of the Army (after the Longju Pass and Kongka Pass incidents) did not mean much. For soldiers with expertise in fighting in the plains of Punjab were transferred to NEFA without the necessary training and equipment for mountain warfare. So, in the winter of 1959, panicky politicians in New Delhi ordered, in the words of J.P. Dalvi, 'the deployment of the wrong troops, at the wrong place and at the wrong time'. General Thimayya retired in April 1961. In one of his farewell addresses he commented that he was probably leaving his soldiers as cannon fodder for the Chinese troops.<sup>50</sup>

At its best, it is inexperience sitting in judgement on experience, ignorance on knowledge—ignorance which, never suspecting the existence of what it does not know, is equally careless and supercilious, making light of, if not resenting, all pretensions to have a judgement better worth attending to than its own.<sup>51</sup>

This quote in John Stuart Mill's classic treatise on representative government (written in a different though related context) is applicable to Krishna Menon's activities which paved the way for the humiliation of India's Armed Forces (one of the most respected armed forces in the world) at the hands of China to 1962. Even Menon's favourites, B. M. Kaul and P. N. Thapar, were unable to persuade him to undertake a vigorous programme of re-equipping and re-training the Indian forces for occupying tracts on the border—the McMahon Line, for example—as also for counteracting Chinese soldiers (better equipped and trained than the Indians) who were bound to resist Indian attempts to set up posts in the snowy heights. Moreover, the Indians suffered from a tremendous disadvantage in terms of roads essential to movement of men and supplies in those tracts in the mountains. Since 1950, the Chinese built an impressive infrastructure of road networks, airports, etc., in areas near the border the Aksai Chin or the McMahon Line. Although India decided as early as 1954 that the infrastructure of

<sup>49</sup> Kaul B. M.: *The Untold Story*, op. cit. pp. 206, 208-10, 215-16.

<sup>50</sup> Dalvi: *Himalayan Blunder*, op. cit. pp. 53-58, 61-62; B. M. Kaul: *The Untold Story*, op. cit. pp. 206, 208-10, 215-16.

<sup>51</sup> Shields, Currin V. (ed.) (1958): *John Stuart Mill: Considerations on Representative Government*, New York, Liberal Arts Press, p.73.



roads, etc. should be built in the border areas (of NEFA for instance), practically nothing was done to facilitate the establishment of border posts.<sup>52</sup>

As long as independent-minded and distinguished generals like Thimayya, Thorat or Verma were in positions of authority, they opposed the deployment of ill-trained, ill-equipped forces in numerous penny packets all along the border. They advocated the maintenance of a strong base area from where any large-scale Chinese action could be counteracted. When sycophants and undistinguished generals like B. M. Kaul or P. N. Thapar planted themselves in positions of supreme power (thanks to Krishna Menon), they could not oppose the thoroughly unwise policy of establishing small posts where the Indian soldiers could neither match the Chinese, nor receive help from a faraway base. A person like B. M. Kaul (fortified by the support of Menon and Nehru) could play havoc with well-established lines of military hierarchy and demoralize the military establishment. Add to it the fact that soldiers on the border lacked food, clothes, and even marches, and the reasons behind India's setback in the 1962 conflict with China are clear.<sup>53</sup>

It is not difficult to point to Krishna Menon's far from perfect physical/mental condition as the root of the circumstances leading to the disaster of 1962. But it is high time analysts rise above this Menon mania, and instead ask how much of Menon's sickness infected Prime Minister Nehru. Otherwise, it is nearly impossible to explain the following matters. One, in October 1951, when Chester Bowles came to India as the American ambassador, his first meeting with Nehru did not last more than fifteen minutes, because Nehru was so tired that he went off to sleep. Two, Nehru coveted and occupied the position of India's external affairs minister. Nevertheless, he permitted Menon to function as the de facto external affairs minister. For about a decade, until 1962, Nehru allowed Menon to lead the Indian delegation to the UN (during September-December). In these few months, Menon consistently and regularly undid whatever good work was done by the Indian embassy in the United States. Menon's anti-Americanism assumed pathological proportions at the UN, and at numerous television appearances. In his tirades against America, Menon far surpassed Vyshinsky of the Soviet Union. What Menon did fail to serve the interests of India or the world in any way. Presumably, Menon could indulge in excessive anti-Americanism because he thought he could please Nehru in this fashion. But how could Nehru acquire in Menon's jeopardizing India's vital interests in this fashion? Three, at the UN, Menon ruined India's prestige and international standing with unnecessarily long speeches, which contained nothing new, so much so that various delegations chose to post their lowest level diplomats at the session where Menon delivered a nine-hour-long speech. So much was Menon's hunger for publicity that he would sometimes speak on entirely irrelevant matters ('absolute and arrant nonsense', in the words of B. K. Nehru), while sordidly manoeuvring to receive favourable publicity in the Indian press. Nehru was certainly aware of all this. Why did he not stop it? Four, in reinforcing each other's pro-communism, Menon and Nehru made the weird assumption—and sycophants like Kaul, in the military, and Secretary M. J. Desai in the external affairs ministry, acted upon this assumption—that China would suit India's convenience to play a sort of military chess, and restrict itself to capturing or losing some border posts without opting for large scale conflict.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Dalvi: *Himalayan Blunder*, op. cit. pp.54-55, 62-63, 69; Kaul, T. N.(1979): *Diplomacy in Peace and War*, New Delhi, Vikas, pp.107, 109; Kaul, B. M.: *The Untold Story*, op. cit. p. 284; Rao: *Defence without Drift*, op. cit. p.16; See also, Nehru B.K. (1977): *Nice Guys Finish Second*, New Delhi, Penguin India/Viking, p.344.

<sup>53</sup> Dalvi: *Himalayan Blunder*, op. cit. pp.65-67, 70-71, 79-81, 83-84; B. M. Kaul: *The Untold Story*, op. cit. p.285.

<sup>54</sup> Nehru: *Nice Guys Finish Second*, op. cit. pp. 332, 360-61, 377-79. Also, Dalvi: *Himalayan Blunder*, op. cit. pp.66-77; Frank, Katherine (2001): *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*, London, Harper Collins, pp.141, 265; Kaul: *The Untold Story*, op. cit. pp.284-86, 326-28.



When Lintner talks of 1961 as the starting point of India's forward policy vis-à-vis China, and not 1954, he is at best inaccurate. Even if we overlook this inaccuracy, what we cannot overlook is Lintner's refusal to stress that any forward policy without adequate military preparations to cope with probable repercussions/reactions on the part of the opponent, i.e. China was wrong. India's intelligence machinery, despite inferiority to the Chinese machinery, had warned of immense Chinese military preparations. Therefore, India should have refrained from engaging such could-have-been-deemed provocative stops as forward patrols, especially when, not to speak of necessary arms and training, Indian soldiers did not even have the appropriate dress for mountains. There were controversies as also confusions in New Delhi's top ruling circle on the matter of setting up border posts in late 1950s and the early 1960s. Even a person as clear-sighted and far-sighted as Foreign Secretary Dutt 'agreed to new posts but initially was hesitant about permitting forward patrols'. Afterwards, Dutt 'changed his mind. Discussing new posts in Ladakh with Krishna Menon, he saw India committed to avoid border clashes, but not to abstain from sending forward patrols. Whether decisions about new posts were of rather defensive or offensive nature in some cases is open to doubt'.

Forward Indian patrols did not initially provoke Chinese patrol to fight. Subsequently, however, the Chinese decided to attack Indian posts, which could receive reinforcements in the absence of bases. India, therefore, should have reconsidered its forward policy. After all, setting up small, isolated posts in empty spaces was different from maintaining these posts in places where the Chinese were confrontational. But, as India's Defence Ministry's history of the 1962 conflict put it, India's forward policy 'went too far, got too reckless, and lost its balance', 'Whereas the earlier intention of the forward policy was to prevent any further advance by the Chinese into any empty area, it was now decided to push back the Chinese from posts they had already occupied', as in Arunachal Pradesh from Thag La ridge. 'To push them back was simply not possible, as the Chinese were much stronger along the line of control'... But the Government of India and Army Headquarter continued to believe that the Chinese would not attack. Disaster was inevitable if their faith was belied'.<sup>55</sup> At one point of time 'Dutt had expressed doubts about the Indian claims in the western sector and counseled the prime minister against any steps prone to armed confrontation', but later the doubts 'were over'. Regarding Lonaj, however, he kept to the agreement to send no forward patrols'.<sup>56</sup>

Kissinger and Lintner may be right in stressing the link between China's assault upon India in 1962 and the monumental failure of Mao Dze Dong's Great Leap Forward. This failure put Mao in an expensively inconvenient position in China's internal power struggle. Mao's used China's success against India in the 1962 military operations as a grand diversion from the glaring failures of the Great Leap Forward and the resultant upgradation of Mao's position in the power struggle inside the country.<sup>57</sup> Yet, this was not enough to erase the acute carelessness of India's top ruling circle, especially of Prime Minister Nehru and Defence Minister in pushing the Indian Army (which proved its greatness in the First and Second World Wars) to an unprecedented depth of degradation.

India's 1962 humiliation induced at least two varieties of soul-searching. Since they were interrelated and overlapping, they could be compressed into one query: how to apportion responsibility between the armed services and the political class, especially such top-ranking politicians as the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister. General J. N. Chaudhuri, the Chief of Army Staff, thought it discreet to order an inquiry, devising the terms of inquiry in his habitual, opportunist mode Chaudhuri close Lieutenant General Henderson Books to carry out

<sup>55</sup> Prasad, S. N. Chief Editor, P. B. Sinha, A. A. Athale (1992): *History of the Conflict with China, 1962*, New Delhi, History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1992, pp. XX, XXI.

<sup>56</sup> Das Gupta: *Serving India*, op. cit. pp.348-49, 572; Lintner: *China's India War*, op. cit. pp.121-25.

<sup>57</sup> Kissinger: *On China*, op. cit. p.184; Lintner: *China's India War*, op. cit. pp.108-09, 113-14.



an Operations Review—obviously to minimize the scope of analysis of political responsibility for the 1962 debacle. Chaudhuri appointed Brigadier P.S. Bhagat as an aide of Brooks. The terms of reference were (1) training; (2) equipment; (3) system of command; (4) physical fitness of troops; (5) capacity of commanders at all levels to influence the men under their command. The first four of these terms of reference ‘smacked of an inquiry into the sinking of the titanic looking into the management of the shipyard where it was built and the health of the deck crew; only the last term has any immediacy; and there the wording was distinctly odd—commanders do not usually ‘influence’ those they command, they issue orders and expect instant obedience’.<sup>58</sup>

Brooks and Bhagat appeared to be determined to outwit Chaudhuri, nearly ignoring the terms of reference framed by Chaudhuri, and going beyond the boundaries of investigation set by Chaudhuri. Brooks and Bhagat formed it onerous to abide by Chaudhuri’s prescription that the two reviewers could not study how the Army Headquarters (HQ) functioned in 1962. ‘Forbidden that approach, they would, nevertheless, try to discern what happened at Army HQ from documents found at lower levels, although these could not throw any light on any crucial aspect of the story – the political direction given to the Army by the civil authorities’.<sup>59</sup>

An examination of the Brooks—Bhagat Report is essential to underline the following points. Neville Maxwell is not correct in exonerating the Chinese. Bertil Lintner is not right in whitewashing the faults of Jawaharlal Nehru or V. K. Krishna Menon. Y. B. Chavan, who succeeded Krishna Menon as the Defence Minister of India, succeeded too well as a consummate politician when he presented a sanitized version of the Brooks-Bhagat Report, and protected the honour of guilty political leaders as also military officers. Currently, any person interested in reading the Brooks-Bhagat Report can easily do so by the use of internet sources.

In this context, it may not be inappropriate to note B.M. Kaul’s assessment about whether the post of prime minister suited Nehru. Kaul was a relative and one of Nehru’s greatest admirers, and Nehru had in turn showered on Kaul, and thereby enhanced the tendency of Krishna Menon to interfere in military appointments. According to B. M. Kaul, Nehru ‘spent his energies in many extraneous activities. He saw several people he need not have seen and attended to trivial activities which he could have ignored, amidst his profound commitments’. B. M. Kaul adds: ‘It was therefore not infrequent to see him doze off after meals in the middle of an important conversation.’ B. M. Kaul had many occasions to notice this over a long period of time, from 1946 to 1962. As noted earlier, in October 1951, Chester Bowles, a great admirer of Nehru and a consistent friend of India, met the Indian prime minister for the first time. But, as Bowles writes, this meeting ‘lasted no more than fifteen minutes, during which Nehru, to my dismay, appeared to have gone to sleep’.<sup>60</sup> For Nehru to become India’s prime minister ‘did not turn out to be an unqualified success from the point of view of administration’, affirms B. M. Kaul:

Instead of becoming the head of our Government... (Nehru) should have been appointed the head of our State. He struggled through the former role whereas he would have excelled in the latter. He was ideally suited for being our first citizen and would have presented lofty image in the world as our President.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Maxwell, Neville: ‘Henderson Brooks Report: An Introduction’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 April 2001, p.1191. Evidently, ‘Chaudhuri did not wish the inquiry to dig too deep, range too widely, or excoriate those it faulted’, Maxwell: *Henderson Brooks Report, op. cit.* p.1191.

<sup>59</sup> Maxwell: *Henderson Brooks Report, op. cit.* p.1191.

<sup>60</sup> Bowles, Chester (1974): *Mission to India*, Bombay, BI Publication, 1974, p. 105.

<sup>61</sup> Kaul, B. M.: *The Untold Story, op. cit.* p.323. For earlier quotes by Kaul see pp.320-23.



The Brooks-Bhagat Report was presented to General Chaudhuri on 12 May 1963 and submitted to Defence Minister Chavan on 2 July 1963. In the words of R. D. Pradhan, Chavan's Private Secretary, 'During the conduct of the inquiry Chavan was apprehensive that the committee may cast aspersions on the role of the Prime Minister or the Defence Minister. ... His main worry was to find ways to defend the government and at the same time to ensure that the morale of the armed forces was not further adversely affected. For that the repeatedly emphasized in the Parliament that the enquiry was a fact-finding one and to "learn lessons" for the future and it was not a "witch-hunt" to identify and to punish the officers responsible for the debacle. It was a tribute to his sagacity and political maturity that he performed his role to the full satisfaction of the Parliament and also earned the gratitude of the Prime Minister. Some lessons that he learnt are to be found in the statement he presented to the Parliament. But it is also a fact that while doing so, he also suppressed certain critical observations.'<sup>62</sup>

Brooks and Bhagat were extremely cautious in preparing their report, while they did not want to sacrifice the glaring but unpleasant truths. As Claude Arpi writes<sup>63</sup>: 'Contrary to general expectations the report did not directly indict any political leaders. It was done obliquely. On the lack of proper political direction, the committee quoted British India's first Commander in Chief Field Marshal Robert's dictum: "The art of war teaches us not only to rely on the likelihood of the enemy not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; nor on the chance of not attacking but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable."'

Claude Arpi adds: 'There was another observation: "the higher Direction of War and the actual command set-up of the Army were obviously out of touch with reality". In a way, this was an indirect indictment of the political leadership and the manner in which the operations in NEFA had been handled. Chavan found these observations on very harsh judgement on Pandit Nehru's hauling of India's relations with the People's Republic of China and for which many felt at that time that he was so much wedded to the Panchsheel that he refused to believe that China had some other intentions. By accepting that comment publicly, he did not want to cause any more anguish to the Prime Minister who was already shattered by the perfidy of China's leadership in subscribing to the Panchsheel but all the time preparing to attack India. At the same time, he did not want to formally reject this observation because that might further aggravate the morale of the very same senior officers on whom he depended to get the army into shape to face any future aggression. He decided to suppress these observations.' Defence Minister Chavan proved himself to be a politician capable of performing a twin act of cynical dishonesty: he rescued Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (as also Defence Minister Krishna Menon) from an indictment they amply deserved; Chavan also spread some military officers from punishment they were worthy richly.

The disaster of 1962, therefore, was not a surprise. The shock of the disaster probably induced a little pragmatism in India's policy makers. For, they did not snap diplomatic ties with China, although they kept the level of representation at a level lower than that of the Ambassador. On 1 January 1969, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi wisely announced India's decision to negotiate with China without preconditions, and thereby bridge differences with China. Subsequently, when India carried out the merger of Sikkim into the Indian Union, China did not raise any outcry. On 26 January 1976, India nominated the country's Ambassador to China, which followed suit without much delay.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Pradhan, R. D. (2007): *1965 War: The Inside Story, Defence Minister Y. B. Chavan's Diary of the Indo-Pakistan War*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers.

<sup>63</sup> Arpi, Claude: 'The War of 1962: Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report', *Indian Defence Review*, vol.26, nº 1(January- March 2011), p.157.

<sup>64</sup> Chagla, M. C. (1947): *Roses in December*, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, pp.415, 433-4; Dixit: *Across Borders*, op. cit. pp. 131; Ranganathan and Khanna, *India and China*, op. cit. pp. 56-7.



### 3. Indo-China relations beyond the 1962 disaster

In 1977, Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister of India. His government appeared to be interested in improving relations with China. Atal Behari Vajpayee, the External Affairs Minister, declared at a press conference that he wanted to visit China, in case he happened to receive an invitation. Soon China provided an affirmative response. Vajpayee visited China in 1979. Although he could not stay as long as he wanted, because of a sudden invasion of Vietnam by China, the significance of his visit must not be underrated. Vajpayee had detailed discussions with the foreign minister of China, Huang Hua, and with Deng Xiaoping (the successor to Mao Ze Dong). The two countries achieved a consensus, which not only prevails but regulates relationships between the two countries even in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Undoubtedly, the facts that none died of firing by soldiers at the border for about a decade, and that military aid from China to militants in northeast India remained suspended, played an important part in forging this consensus. The lines of consensus were, broadly, that a high level of mutual trust had to be accomplished before any solution of the highly complex border issue could be attempted, that mutually productive engagements in other spheres could create this trust after some time, and that peace and tranquillity had to be preserved at the border for facilitation of a settlement of the border problem. What was of utmost significance was the reiteration by Deng Xiaoping of the 1960 formula of Zhou Enlai, as a realistic basis for this settlement, although ground realities might require some alterations.<sup>65</sup>

The consensus reached in 1979 was acted upon by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi after she returned to power in 1980, as also by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when he came to power in 1984. Trade and cultural exchanges began to grow. The border continued to witness peace and tranquillity. Dialogue on the border went on at short intervals. In 1993, when P.V. Narasimha Rao was the Indian Prime Minister, the two countries signed an “Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas”. In 1996, the two countries signed an “Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas”.<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately, the stranglehold of the Nehru-Menon years upon the mindset of Indian decision makers is so powerful that the only equitable and honourable way of a border settlement cannot be availed of. The Zhou-Deng compromise formula of 1960/1979 has not been acceptable to the Indian foreign policy establishment. In 1982, this formula was formally revived by China. It was feasible for India to agree to the status quo in the western sector of its northern frontier. It was also practicable for China to endorse, correspondingly, the status quo in the eastern sector. This could take care of enormous complexities and puzzles of history and power politics. But India failed to respond positively to the Chinese overture. In course of the 1983 dialogue, India ventilated a diplomatic rigidity, which precluded a realistic resolution of differences on the border. China recommended a comprehensive accord embracing sectoral deals. But India demanded a sectoral approach. China then reworked its strategy, and, in 1985, focussed on the eastern sector, identifying it as the main area of dispute. Moreover, China claimed 90,000 square Kilometers of territory under Indian occupation in this sector.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Dixit, *Across Borders*, op. cit. pp. 130-1; Ranganathan and Khanna, *India and China*, op. cit. pp. 57-8.

<sup>66</sup> “Editorial”, *The Statesman*, 10 September 1993; “A report”, *The Statesman*, 30 November 1996; Ranganathan and Khanna: *India and China*, op. cit. pp. 171-2.

<sup>67</sup> Banerji, Arun Kumar: ‘India-China Relations: Retrospect and Prospect’, in Arun Kumar Bannerji and Purusattam Bhattacharya (eds.) (2001): *People’s Republic of China at Fifty*, New Delhi, Lancer, pp.41-2; Ranganathan and Khanna, *India and China*, op. cit. pp. 58-9, 167.



India, therefore, is now in a soup. It cannot put any pressure on China. Yet India has somehow to take an initiative towards a border settlement. Why?

China has far outstripped India militarily and economically. Instead of unnecessarily going into facts about China's military might, it may be useful in the present context to focus on some palpable military weakness of India. Since the early decades of India's independence, India's political leaders have harped incessantly on self-sufficiency in military production. As of 2012, what is the reality? One simple (though shattering) example of the reality is that India does not produce a single fighter aircraft, viz. MIGs, Jaguars, Merages, or Sukhois. The quality of aircraft built, e.q. at the Ojhar and Kanpur divisions of Hindustan Aeronautics limited is poor.<sup>68</sup> India cannot produce trainer aircraft for newly recruited pilot. What is even more scandalous, India taken years to procure basic trainer aircraft. For example, a series of crashes led to the grounding of HPT-32 aircraft in 2009, while 23 pilots lost their lives. New basic trainer aircraft to be imported from Switzerland, are expected to commence arrival in mid-2013.<sup>69</sup> Evidently, an unholy nerve between some civil-military officials, politicians and arms dealers has defeated the goal of self-sufficiency in defence production. To take our recent exposure, a public sector, enterprise, Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML) in collusion with a British country, Tatra Siprox, has been supplying Tatra trucks to the Indian army for 26 years. The price is exorbitant, and these trucks do not meet the specifications of the army, whereas three Indian manufactures have been prepared to satisfy these specifications and supply such trucks at one-third the cost charged by BEML. Moreover, BEML has taken good care of the middleman, Tatra Siprox, to located in Britain, by arranging payments in Liechtenstein.<sup>70</sup> BEML, again, can take credit for its ability supply to the Indian army Armoured Recovery Vehicles (ARVs) despite revelation that the technology imported from Poland in obsolete, that the prices of spare parts are exorbitant, and that, above all, there ARVs are treated as useless by the army.<sup>71</sup> No wonder that, with such a sad state of military preparations, India cannot have the guts to stand up to any show of force by China in order to defend its vital national interests.

This is why ONGC Videsh was compelled recently to put a stop to drilling operation in an offshore block assigned to it by Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> China went so far as to announce worldwide bidding for the oil block which India tried to explore.<sup>73</sup> China merely talks of rising peacefully. Actually, in the South China Sea, for example, it has asserted its claims in ways that amount to use of force as also threat of use of force by official as also nonofficial agencies.<sup>74</sup> As to the comparative economic strengths of India and China, in 1990, the economies of the two countries had approximately the same size. By the end of 2011, the Chinese economy, like the Chinese defence expenditure, outvalued India's in the ratio of three to one.<sup>75</sup> In India can export goods worth one United States dollar to China, it has to import three times from China. Thus, as of March 2012, India had an annual trade deficit of US\$ 40 billion. Moreover, India depends on China for capital goods. The Reliance group of India has purchased machines for power stations and telecom networks from China even obtaining Chinese loans partially for this purpose. China has surplus capital which it can invest far more profitably in India than in United States government bonds. India apparently may have to depend on Chinese capital for infrastructural

<sup>68</sup> See "Editorial", *The Statesman*, 7 May 2012.

<sup>69</sup> *The Statesman*, 11 May 2012.

<sup>70</sup> See "Editorial", *The Statesman*, 6 June 2012

<sup>71</sup> Sarin, Ritu: *The Indian Express*, 2 June 2012

<sup>72</sup> Raja Mohan, C.: *The Indian Express*, 13 June 2012

<sup>73</sup> Samanta, Pranab Dhal: *The Indian Express*, 17 July 2012

<sup>74</sup> Choong, William: *The Straits Times*, reproduced in *The Statesman*, 10 July 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Fried, Erin: 'China's Response to a Rising India: An Interview with M. Taylor Fravel', The National Bureau of Asian Research, Washington, D. C., 4 October 2011, at <http://nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=177>.



project as also for some manufacturing business.<sup>76</sup> Ratan Tata, the Chairman of India's Tata Group, has gone so far as to plead that India should devise a way to be an economically of China.<sup>77</sup>

If one takes into account all the circumstances examined above in this essay, India has no option but to achieve proximity to China – if necessary, by commanding the resilience to resolve the boundary dispute by a revival of the Zhou-Deng compromise formula. This may also prove to be an insurance against any further India-baiting by China in collusion with Pakistan (which has been going on for decades) – especially after the near-complete withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014, and the subsequent launching of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as a part of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.<sup>78</sup>

Presently China enjoys superiority to India—militarily as well as economically. But this can hardly be regarded as a permanent feature. India can certainly strengthen its confidence by reminding itself of its economic ascendancy on a grand scale of history. For example, at the commencement of the Christian Era, India was the most prosperous country enjoying 32.9 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP), in contrast to Western Europe's 10.8 per cent and China's 26.2 per cent. In 1000 A.D. the figures were, respectively, 28.9 per cent, 8.7 per cent and 22.7 per cent. China surpassed India in 1500 A.D. by registering 25 per cent in contrast to India's 24.5 per cent. In 1600 A.D., China went up to 29.2 per cent, but India declined to 22.7 per cent. In the nineteenth century, due to colonial rule by West European countries, both India and China went down and down, whereas Western Europe could boast of 33.6 per cent of the world GDP in 1870, 33.5 per cent in 1913, but the inevitability of historical change was apparent in 1950, when Western Europe's share of world GDP stood at 97.3 per cent.<sup>79</sup>

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

In the foreseeable future, India cannot probably hope to attain that economic predominance which it commanded in the first fourteen – fifteen hundred years of the Christian era. But it can certainly innovate in the field of consolidating cultural-economic interactions in the east and the west, i.e. in Southeast Asia and Central Asia. After all, it must not be forgotten that in the ancient period, India was the pivot of the Silk Road, which is now glamourized under various designations, e.g. the New Silk Road, One Belt One Road (OBOR), or Euroasia Economic Union (EEU). In ancient times the western route from India to central Asia ran from Pushkalavati, present day Peshawar (formerly Purushpur), Afghanistan's Begram (then Kapisha) to Baekh (earlier Bactria). As to the northern route from India to Central Asia in ancient days, it ran from the Kashmir valley/Gilgit to Yarkand/Kashgarh.<sup>80</sup> As to the new Silk Roads with such names as OBOR or EEU, it has been suggested that India may contemplate, in its own interest, the establishment of loop-lines to these Roads for easier access to the world market.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> "Friend, enemy, rival, investor", *The Economist*, 30 June 2012, at <https://www.economist.com/asia/2012/06/30/friend-enemy-rival-investor>.

<sup>77</sup> *The Statesman*, 19 July 2012.

<sup>78</sup> On June 2018, the Chinese Foreign Minister told the Indian Foreign Minister that 'China, India have far more consensus than differences', see PTI report from Pretoria, *The Statesman*, 6 June 2018. For some significant observations relevant to the OBOR plan, see P.K. Basudeva: 'Dessent Over Belt & Road', *The Statesman*, 22 June 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Kumar, B. B.: 'Silk Road and India: The Historical Perspective', *Dialogue*, vol.19, nº 1 (July-September 2017), p.98.

<sup>80</sup> Kumar, B. B.: *Silk Road and India*, op. cit. p.99.

<sup>81</sup> Sengupta, Anita: 'New Silk Roads and the Indian Alternative', *Dialogue*, vol. 19, nº 1 (July-September 2017), pp.94-95.



China's policies/postures towards India are after offensive. It is time for India to plan a counter-offensive, remembering the earliest example of China's offensive, viz. gross violations of the Panchsheel Agreement of 1954. True to its title -"Trade and Intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India"- this Agreement elaborated the ancient and customary relations between India and Tibet to be not only special but also independent. Therefore, pilgrims were required only to register at respective border checkposts. As to trade and meetings with relatives/friends (especially in border districts), certificates from respective local authorities would suffice. Passports and Visas were not required for Indians and inhabitants of the Tibet region of China.<sup>82</sup> 'Then and now it is only the Chinese rulers who created hurdles and broke the relations altogether between Tibet and India. It is indeed a regrettable chapter of the independent India that her leadership proved so naïve consistently as not to raise the issues even when it directly affected our security, and culture.'<sup>83</sup>

This is a reflection of the deep-seated Chinese mentality. China treats its neighbours as countries to be dominated. China's expansionist mindset -in consistency with its divorce from any concept of nation state- is evident from the fact that its bit of tributaries includes not only India and Japan but a vast region extending up to as far as the Philippines, and including the Indian Ocean as also the South China Seas.<sup>84</sup> Whether at Doklam in 2017, or at Asaphila (in Arunachal Pradesh border) in 2018, China takes offensive measures against India in accordance with the aforesaid mindset, whereas India only reacts although correctly and firmly.<sup>85</sup> It has been suggested that India itself can initiate a counter-offensive against China in relevant international forums. For instance, India can take up the issues of lack of human rights, as also perpetration of atrocities, in Tibet and Hong Kong before appropriate international agencies.<sup>86</sup> It is indeed hard to predict whether such anti-China moves by India will succeed. But these are worth serious attempts.

To reiterate what has already been stated earlier in this essay, this is not a case of Indian idealism versus Chinese pragmatism. Idealism cannot be equated to lack of judgement and foresight. For instance, in the 1950s, as noted previously in this essay, at a time when China was staging atrocities in Tibet and hostile movements along the border with India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru went on pleading that the People's Republic of China (PRC) should be made a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in replacement of Formosa (Taiwan) occupying the seat for China at that moment. When Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister and India's Ambassador to the United States, wrote to Nehru that the State Department of the United States was attempting to propose India as a permanent member of the Security Council, unseating China (Formosa), and ignoring PRC. But Nehru rejected this proposal and persisted in supporting China's permanent membership of the Security Council.<sup>87</sup> The lost opportunity proved to be costly what is confirmed by India's tireless efforts in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries towards procuring a permanent seat for itself in the Security Council.

<sup>82</sup> Sharan, Shankar 'Dealing with the Communist China', *Dialogue*, vol. 19, n° 1 (July-September 2017), pp.75-76.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

<sup>84</sup> Ganguly, Anirban: 'India's Emergence is Responsible, While China's Seems to Disturb and Disrupt', *Dialogue*, vol. 19, n° 1 (July-September 2017), pp.71-72; Anirban has referred to Howard W. French, *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps China's Push for Global Power*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2017, which provides enormous and fascinating details on this crucial issue.

<sup>85</sup> Goswami, Namrata: "Post-Doklam: Assessing the Prospects of Chinese Strategy", *Dialogue*, vol. 19, n° 1 (July-September 2017), pp.46-62; PTI report from Kibithu, Arunachal, *The Statesman*, 9 April 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Saran, Shankar: *Dealing with the Communist China*, *op. cit.* pp. 73-75.

<sup>87</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> instalment of Vajaya Lakshmi Pandit: Papers, Subject 1949-51, File nos. 59 and 60, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.



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