

# Sino-Indian Relations, 1954-1962

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## Introduction

Half a century ago, Sino-Indian relations moved from friendship to war within only five years. In June 1954, the two countries agreed on *panch sheel*, the five principles of coexistence. Sixty-two months later, they shot at each other across their unsettled border in the Himalayas. The attempt to sort out their differences during talks between their two prime ministers, Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai, failed in April 1960. The downfall of Sino-Indian friendship was related to events in Tibet. The land between China proper and India was the source of most misunderstandings, and its unsettled borders the root for the wars in 1959 and 1962. But how did this development come about?

Countless observers at the time and historians in retrospect have tried to trace the story. Partisans from both sides have attempted to show their own country in the best light. Responsibility and guilt have been shunted across the Himalayas in both directions. Even if the archival record is incomplete, original documentation from both sides and from other countries helps to shed some new light on the story. The problems that plagued the Sino-Indian relationship accumulated over the period from 1954 to early 1959. The Tibetan Uprising in the late winter and early spring of 1959 exacerbated the situation. The mutual militarization of India's border with Chinese Tibet logically followed from these developments but also caused armed conflict between India and China in the late summer of 1959. From the fall of that year to the spring of the next, both sides publicly marked their border and territorial claims in anticipation of negotiations. And finally, by April 1960, Zhou travelled to Delhi hoping to find a settlement in talks with Nehru.

The story of the collapse of Sino-Indian friendship unfolded in concentric circles. At its center stood developments in Tibet which remain the source of political and scholarly disputes to this day. In the second circle ranks the relationship between India and China, which had its roots both in the development of their interactions over time as well as in the domestic sources of each country's foreign policy. Finally, there is the wider world, not only the Asian-African movement (or the emerging Third World) of which India and China were prominent members, but also the international system dominated by the Cold War, in which the Sino-Indian relationship was embedded.

The documentary basis for an assessment of the story still is rather limited. Archival documents from India, China, the former Soviet Union and former East Germany help to illuminate several of its aspects. The author is particularly grateful to Chen Jian, who graciously provided Chinese archival documents to this project.

## Sino-Indian Rivalry and the Tibetan Issue

In the late 1940s, newly independent India and emerging Communist China were by far the two largest Third World countries. Apart from sharing a long common border, they both could look back on a long history and rich civilization, and they both envisioned leading roles for themselves in the developing world. As his country emerged from British rule, Prime Minister Jawarlahal Nehru quickly became the natural spokesmen of the Third World. His long association with decolonization, his wide-ranging education and interests, and his skills as a politician and diplomat had brought him respect not only in the emerging Third World but also far beyond. Although scholars have questioned his commitment to pacifism during his leadership of India in the period from 1947 to 1964, he was associated with an independence movement—the Indian National Congress—that continued to emphasize non-violence, democracy, and equality even after reaching formal independence of the country. Indeed, armed conflict played a much smaller role in India's independence struggle than civil disobedience and moral appeals.

The outlook of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on international relations was radically different. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had survived and won a brutal civil war that lasted on and off from 1927 to 1949. The party's supreme leader, Chairman Mao Zedong, summarized himself the CCP's claim to power as early as 1938: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."<sup>1</sup> From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Mao came to claim that the role of leading the Third World naturally would fall to China. In 1946, he argued that the world was divided into two hostile camps—the United States and the Soviet Union—"separated by a vast zone which includes many capitalist, colonial and semi-colonial countries in Europe, Asia and Africa."<sup>2</sup> But by the fall of 1962, he explicitly called for China to lead the Third World against Soviet and American hegemony.<sup>3</sup> Culture and ideology both supported this far-reaching claim. During the last millennium of imperial rule, Chinese monarchs had always asserted the centrality of the Middle Kingdom to the world. In 1962, Mao took up this idea when he called for Chinese leadership of the Third World. Yet, in the late 1940s and the 1950s, Mao's China commanded only a fraction of the international respect enjoyed by Nehru's India.

Apart from radically different positions in international affairs, the two countries faced a difficult territorial issue. Tibet, situated on a high plateau between China proper and India, had long political ties to the former and cultural ties to the latter. On April 29, 1954, Beijing and Delhi signed the "Agreement between India and China on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet Region of China and India."<sup>4</sup> It sanctified Chinese control of Tibet, the withdrawal of Indian troops from it, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Mao Zedong, "Problems of War and Strategy," November 6, 1938, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 219-235.

<sup>2</sup> Mao Zedong, "Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong," August 1946, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 4, 97-101.

<sup>3</sup> "Communication of the Main Points of the 6th All-Country Foreign Affairs Conference," no date, *Jiangsu Sheng Dang'anguan [Jiangsu Provincial Archives]*, 3124, zhang 145, 2-13.

<sup>4</sup> New China News Agency, "Agreement between India and China on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet

handing over of Indian postal and governmental infrastructure there.<sup>5</sup> The two sides, however, failed to agree on the precise demarcation of the Tibetan-Indian border. In the wake of the agreement on Tibet, during a visit by Chinese Premier Zhou to Delhi in late June 1954, the two sides also signed the joint statement on the five principles of peaceful coexistence (*panch sheel*), which included respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.<sup>6</sup>

For the Chinese side, the agreement on Tibet marked a major step towards establishing firm control in Tibet. In late 1949, the newly established Communist government had announced its plans to “liberate” Tibet, although it assured India that it had no plans to use force. But after a short military campaign in October 1950 which occurred in the shadow of the Korean War, Tibetan armed resistance collapsed. In order to gain the appearance of legitimacy, Beijing did not occupy Tibet at once but offered “negotiations.” Under Chinese pressure and clumsy in its own diplomacy, a Tibetan delegation signed the so-called 17-Point Agreement on May 23, 1951, which established Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. Tibet’s precise fate however remained uncertain because the agreement was internally contradictory. It promised respect for Tibetan customs and institutions (including the traditional form of theocratic government) while it announced socio-economic changes in the form of “democratic reforms” and Tibet’s gradual admission to the governmental structure of the PRC.<sup>7</sup>

In the absence of Chinese documentation, it is difficult to judge how Beijing valued the two agreements it had concluded with Delhi in 1954. Certainly, the Indian renunciation of its claims in Tibet and *panch sheel* must have increased the Chinese feeling of having exclusive powers there and of increased security, respectively. Yet, Beijing looked at the agreements probably also in instrumental terms. While India renounced its rights to Tibet, in particular, and committed itself to non-interference in the PRC, in general, the CCP continued to support the Communist Party of India for years.<sup>8</sup> Even Mao realized the obvious contradiction between the five principles of peaceful coexistence and Chinese clandestine support for Communist parties in countries outside of the socialist camp. At the 1957 Moscow Meeting, the Chairman seemingly solved this dilemma by arguing that “support for the communist parties not holding power” with the aim of furthering the

Region of China and India,” April 29, 1954, Harold C. Hinton, ed., *The People's Republic of China, 1949-1979: A Documentary Survey*, vol. 1, 1949-1957 (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1980), 165-166.

<sup>5</sup> “Red China and India Sign a Pact on Tibet Vowing Nonaggression,” *New York Times* [hereafter: *NYT*], April 30, 1954, 1, 4.

<sup>6</sup> “Text of Statement by Chou and Nehru,” *NYT*, June 29, 1954, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Tsering Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows* (New York: Columbia, 1999), 2, 16-71 (for the text of the agreement, see pages: 449-452). Julian Weiss, “The PRC Occupation of Tibet,” *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies* 12/4, 387-388. A. Tom Grunfeld, *Making of Modern Tibet*, rev. ed. (Armonk: Sharpe, 1996), 111-114.

<sup>8</sup> For one of the very few treatments of the subject, see: Sumanta Banerjee, “Mao and the Indian Communist Movement,” *China Report* 31 (1) (1995), 37-66. It is interesting to note that Zhou in November 1959 claimed a Chinese right to influence the Indian masses in the Sino-Indian border conflict, see: “Talk with Zhou Enlai,” November 11, 1959, *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [*Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation*; hereafter *AVPRF*], fond 0100, opis 52, delo 7, papka 442, ll. 145.

“inevitable course” of world revolution was not governed by principles of peaceful coexistence.<sup>9</sup>

Indian politicians in 1954 and observers in retrospect chided Nehru for the agreement with China that curtailed Indian claims and rights in Tibet.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the Indian prime minister himself had thought at length about the complexities of the Tibetan issue and the possibility of Chinese foul play, as his own writings from mid-June of 1954 testify. Obviously he had come to some distressing conclusions, not only about Chinese intentions, but also about Indian impotence. While he asserted that “the Tibetans have our sympathy,” he also called for “a realistic understanding of the situation and of our policy.” He dismissed a strong Indian stand on the Tibet issue, since a “policy of encouraging the Tibetans to oppose Chinese overlordship over Tibet would be raising false hopes in the Tibetans which we cannot fulfil[.]” In fact, he was highly critical of the political institutions there, which he called “backward and feudal”:

Changes are bound to come there to the disadvantage of the small ruling class and the big monasteries. ... I can very well understand these feudal chiefs being annoyed with the new [Chinese] order. We can hardly stand up as defenders of feudalism.

Nehru also feared that a revolt by the old Tibetan “ruling classes” would make things worse than their accommodation to the new order. Tibetans should not rebel against inevitable changes, he argued, otherwise “they will be ruthlessly put down by the Chinese and even their autonomy will go.”

While the Indian prime minister was unwilling to confront the Chinese over Tibet, partially in the hope of maintaining good relations with the PRC, he however realized that this policy might fail in the future. He himself judged the agreement on *panch sheel* “not a permanent guarantee” but as solely “one major step to help us in the present and in the foreseeable future.”

Nehru was anxious about the possibility that a mixture of historical precedent and ideological fervor could develop in China which eventually might lead that country to undermine the basis of peaceful coexistence between the two neighbors. He worried about what he saw as traditional Chinese great power politics married to communism:

Of course, both the Soviet Union and China are expansive. They are expansive for evils other than communism, although communism may be made a tool for the purpose. Chinese expansionism has been evident during various periods of Asian history for a thousand years or so. We are perhaps facing a new period of such expansionism. Let us consider that and fashion our policy to prevent it coming in the way of our interests and the interests that we consider important.

While the Indian prime minister deplored the danger of Chinese expansionism in Tibet, he at the same time took the moral high ground in rejecting Indian expansionism there. Independent India had

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<sup>9</sup> Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan, 1956-1966: ZhongSu guanxi huiyulu, 1956-1966* [*Ten Years of Debate, 1956-1966: Recollections of Sino-Soviet Relations*] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1999), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Brown, *Nehru* (New York: Longman, 1999.), 268.

inherited its claims on Tibet from “British interests” which had been established there “in the days of British expansionism.” The maintenance of these rights, Nehru wrote, was “popular with the ruling classes of Tibet,” but would go against the meaning of India’s anti-imperialism.<sup>11</sup>

This mixture of apprehension about, appeasement of, and desire for friendship with China probably drove Nehru to include the PRC among those invited to the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung in April of 1955. The preparatory conference for the Bandung conference, which met in Bogor (Indonesia) in December of 1954, elevated *panch sheel* to the guiding principles of the emerging Afro-Asian movement.<sup>12</sup> On the insistence of Nehru and the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, China was invited as well.<sup>13</sup> The fact that the PRC decided to charter an Indian airplane—the “Kashmir Princess”—for the transportation of its delegation to Bandung expressed the close relationship which Nehru had sought for India and China. Yet, the airplane was blown out of the sky on the way from Hong Kong to Bandung by a bomb planted by the agents working for the *Guomindang* (Chinese Nationalist) government in Taiwan. The target of the bomb, Zhou Enlai, however, had changed his travel plans on short notice and the ill-fated plane flew without him.<sup>14</sup>

The invitation of Communist China to Bandung did not go down well with some African and Asian nations, whose delegates attacked Zhou directly and, thereby, Nehru indirectly.<sup>15</sup> Both leaders, however, parried well. The Chinese premier called for peaceful coexistence among all nations and offered even direct negotiations with the United States over Taiwan, which was the source of an ongoing military crisis in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>16</sup> His Indian counterpart offered mediation in that matter.<sup>17</sup>

Nehru’s hands-off policy toward Tibet did not turn out to be a viable approach toward the subsequent developments north of the Himalayas. He quickly found himself in the quicksand of Sino-Tibetan relations. In the year of the Bandung conference, Beijing decided to set up a Preparatory Committee for the establishment of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The committee was charged with the preparation of both “democratic reforms” and Tibet’s administrative admission to the PRC. This essentially announced the end of traditional Tibetan society and the transfer of real power from the theocratic government under the Dalai Lama to the CCP. In retrospect, it does not come as a surprise that the introduction of “democratic reforms” sparked unrest. When, in early 1956, troops of

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<sup>11</sup> “Prime Minister Secretariat,” June 18, 1954, *Nehru Memorial Museum and Library* [hereafter: *NMML*], Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 4-7.

<sup>12</sup> “Text of Asian Communique,” *NYT*, December 30, 1954, 4.

<sup>13</sup> “Red China Invited to Talks Of Asian-African Powers,” *NYT*, December 30, 1954, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Steve Tsang, “Target Zhou Enlai: The ‘Kashmir Princess’ Incident of 1955,” *The China Quarterly* 139 (1994), 766-782.

<sup>15</sup> “Rebuffs to Reds and Nehru Bring Bandung Discord,” *NYT*, April 19, 1955, 1, 2.

<sup>16</sup> “Chou Makes Plea for Coexistence with all Nations,” *NYT*, April 20, 1955, 1, 8. “Afro-Asians Find it Difficult to Agree,” *NYT*, May 1, 1955, E4.

<sup>17</sup> “Article from the Indian newspaper ‘The National Herald,’” no date, *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bestand: Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten* [Files of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the Political Archive of the Office for Foreign Affairs; hereafter: *PAAA-MfAA*], Sektion China, Microfiche A 6662, 109-127.

the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in a rash act destroyed monasteries in Eastern Tibet where local insurgents had taken refuge, the political situation in all of Tibet deteriorated quickly. The Dalai Lama used a visit to India in late 1956 to pressure Beijing to make concessions—else, or so he threatened, he would stay in exile in India. After negotiations between Zhou Enlai and the Dalai Lama in the Chinese embassy in Delhi, Mao agreed to put off “democratic reforms” for another five years. The Dalai Lama's subsequent return saved China's diplomatic face in the world.<sup>18</sup>

The revolt in Eastern Tibet did not abate. By early 1957, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) controlled only the cities while the insurgents dominated the mountains. The unrest was a sign that China's minority policy towards Tibet had failed. In a misperception of political realities, Beijing even urged the Dalai Lama to use his authority to end the revolt. As Lhasa lacked any influence over the insurgents, the situation quickly spun out of control. Between mid-1958 and March 1959, neither Beijing nor Lhasa had much influence over vast parts of Tibet. Given the sudden prospect of an all-Tibetan uprising against Beijing's rule, the *Guomindang* and agents of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency perceived an opportunity to destabilize the PRC, and started to support the East Tibetan insurgents with logistics and weapons from bases in northern India.<sup>19</sup> Nehru himself, however, had been wary about the possibility of such a development and had requested from his own local officials to undercut these activities as early as 1954.<sup>20</sup>

The deteriorating situation in Tibet naturally had a negative impact on Sino-Indian relations. Yet, it was the Chinese hard-line ideological treatment of the new Yugoslav party program in the spring of 1958 which triggered Indian worries. In a circular of June to high-ranking government officials, Nehru wrote that he was not concerned about the ideological disagreements among “Marxists,” but about the way in which the Soviet Union and China are acting towards other countries:

[It] ... can only be interpreted as interference in the affairs of Yugoslavia. This is particularly strange for China to do. ... For the Chinese People's Government to interfere this way and in language of violence seems to me to be wholly without justification. ... Where do the Five Principles or the Panch Shila [*panch sheel*] come into the picture? In these principles it is said specifically that there will be no internal interference, even ideological. What the Chinese Communist Party is doing in regard to Yugoslavia is clearly ideological interference and in fact something more than that. Therefore, the Five Principles have gone by the board. If the Soviet Union and China can do this in regard to Yugoslavia,

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<sup>18</sup> Shakyas, *Dragon*, 92-163. P.P. Karan, “The Changing Geography of Tibet,” *Asian Profile* 1/1, 41-43. Darwa Norbu, “Strategic Development in Tibet: Implications for Its Neighbors,” *Asian Survey* 19/3, 247. Grunfeld, *Making of Modern Tibet*, 145. Mary Craig, *Tears of Blood: A Cry for Tibet* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999), 71-88. New China News Agency, “Agreement Between India and China on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet Region of China and India,” April 29, 1954, Hinton, *The People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, volume 1, 165-166.

<sup>19</sup> Shakyas, *Dragon*, 162-184. Karan, “Changing Geography,” 40. Craig, *Tears*, 54-55. Grunfeld, *Making of Modern Tibet*, 107-111, 151-158. Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 215-227, 263-282.

<sup>20</sup> “Prime Minister Secretariat,” June 18, 1954, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 4-7.

there is no particular reason to imagine that they cannot or will not do so in the case of India.<sup>21</sup>

The ideological radicalization in China which Nehru hinted at in this circular had already started the year before. It rooted partially in a friendly ideological competition with the Soviet Union but also was the Chinese attempt to break free from Soviet models of modernization. In the spring and summer of 1958, Mao set out to plan and eventually to launch radical economic policies—the Great Leap Forward—which constituted a direct challenge to Soviet leadership in the communist world. This included both a stress on Chinese national greatness—the creation of a siege mentality against alleged foreign aggression—and the militarization of society and economy. In this context, it was no wonder that Chinese foreign policy radicalized, not only in general but also towards the ideologically more liberal Yugoslavia.<sup>22</sup>

What did this mean for India and its relationship to the PRC? At the time, the two were discussing unresolved border issues in the Himalayas. Nehru thus concluded his observations in the June circular:

It seems to me that whatever the internal reasons might be in China, the attitude of the Chinese Government has stiffened somewhat even in regard to India. I am thinking of the long discussions about our frontier with Tibet. ... All this signifies that we have to be particularly careful in the future in what we say and do in regard to China specially.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, in the spring, the PRC had published maps in which it claimed territories which India considered its own. The problem consisted in the lack of an agreed line of demarcation at the eastern sector between Burma and Bhutan and at the western sector between Nepal and Pakistan. In the east, the so-called McMahon line—named after a British colonial official, Henry McMahon—from 1914 followed roughly the Himalayan crest line but often crossed back and forth on both sides. Yet, neither China nor India had ever recognized it as a legal border. The territory between the McMahon line and the Himalayan foothills to the south was administered by India through the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The agency's temporary character suggests that India itself was not totally certain about its own claim to that territory. In the west, both sides claimed a triangular territory—Aksai Chin—which China controlled and through which it had built a strategic road from Xinjiang to Tibet in the 1950s. Despite his knowledge about the disputed territorial situation, Nehru had dropped the issue of border demarcation in both sectors during his negotiations on *panch sheel* with Zhou in 1954.<sup>24</sup> After his Chinese guest had left Delhi, the Indian prime minister even ordered

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<sup>21</sup> “Prime Minister's Secretariat,” June 15, 1958, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #32, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 82-84.

<sup>23</sup> “Prime Minister's Secretariat,” June 15, 1958, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #32, 48.

<sup>24</sup> Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Cape, 1970), 107. Subramanian Swamy, *India's China Perspective* (New Delhi: Konark, 2001), 41-45, 54-67, 85. Liu Xuecheng, *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute* (New York: Lanham, 1994), 19, 26, 47-78, 87. Mira Sinha, “China: the Making and Unmaking of Nehru's Foreign

the withdrawal of Indian maps which showed clear boundary lines.<sup>25</sup>

In a letter to Zhou in December 1958, Nehru referred to the new Chinese maps, pointing out that the two had discussed the border as late as 1956 and had agreed to respect the McMahon line in the eastern sector for the time being, although they both considered it a legacy of British imperialism. In a harsh reply on January 23, 1959, Zhou rejected Nehru's portrayal of the border situation, and denied that there was any implicit border agreement at all.<sup>26</sup>

This surprising turn of events worried Nehru. On the one hand, Tito had visited him in India only a week before; China had been a topic of discussion. The Yugoslav leader claimed that Chinese enmity toward his country primarily had domestic and ideological reasons. Tito believed that China's militarism towards the outside world was largely sabre-rattling, designed for domestic consumption, but also "intended to cause anxiety to other countries."<sup>27</sup> On the other, China was willing to give up claims, forwarded in the early phase of the Great Leap Forward, that it was leading the socialist camp, and professed publicly that the PRC was following, and not leading, the Soviet Union in building communism.<sup>28</sup> In light of these contradictory developments in Chinese external behavior, how was Nehru to judge Chinese intentions?

### **The Tibetan Uprising, 1959**

Even after his return from India to Tibet in 1956, the Dalai Lama continued to worry about the ongoing unrest in eastern Tibet, and the fact that the PLA had gone on full alert by early 1959. But the uprising in Lhasa in March of 1959 that eventually triggered the Chinese suppression of unrest in East Tibet was unrelated. In the context of protracted religious celebrations, the Dalai Lama's entourage had announced, on March 9, his first ever visit to the PLA headquarters in Lhasa. The pronouncement sparked spontaneous rumours in the streets of Lhasa that the PLA wanted to kidnap him. Popular demonstrations the next day developed into an uprising that turned against Chinese cadres and institutions. The revolt surprised not only the Chinese but also both the traditional Tibetan elites and even the Dalai Lama. Events quickly reached an impasse. It seemed that the Dalai Lama might have been the only person who could pacify the situation, but he hesitated. Then, on March 12, a self-proclaimed "People's Assembly" denounced the 17-Point Agreement from the early 1950s and declared Tibetan independence. Chinese party and military representatives barricaded themselves in anticipation of violence; until March 17, Chinese troops did not engage in military activities apart from occasional gun fire. The landing of two stray artillery shells near the Potala Palace, the Dalai Lama's residence, that day, however, convinced the Tibetan leader's entourage that

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Policy," *China Report* 15/2, 60.

<sup>25</sup> Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 242, 246.

<sup>26</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 246. See also: Zhou Enlai, "Letter to Nehru," January 23, 1959, Hinton, *The People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*: volume 2, 807-808.

<sup>27</sup> "A brief note," no date, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File#40, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 118-119.



he was not safe there. His quick escape in disguise remained undiscovered for some days.<sup>29</sup>

Mao from the very outset saw Tibet just as any other minority region in China, which was to be uplifted from feudal backwardness into socialist progress with the help of Chinese Communism. In 1952 he claimed that problems in Tibet were an issue of a “minority of bad elements” to be solved quickly. Chinese cadres on the scene had not much more understanding of the conditions in Tibet because they had little contact with the population. Also revealing was Mao’s attitude to the impending suppression of the revolt in Tibet in early 1959. He remarked on a telegram from the army headquarters in Lhasa that the revolt provided a great opportunity to “instigate the masses and toughen the troops.” The suppression of the Tibetan revolt apparently was designed as a campaign to tap into the perceived disaffection of the Tibetan lower classes for the purpose of sparking a socialist revolution, and as a training ground for the PLA.<sup>30</sup>

According to Wu Lengxi, who was a notetaker for many of the CCP Politburo meetings, the Chinese leaders maintained that the actual revolt started on March 10 with the killing of one Tibetan official and the injury of another. Mao that day sent several telegrams from Wuhan, where he was on an inspection tour, to Beijing with instructions to “adopt a defensive position” and “to consider what to do if the Dalai Lama runs away.” A week later, on March 17, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping in the Politburo urged the implementation of “democratic reforms,” while Zhou accused the Indian, British, and American governments of exploiting émigré Tibetans in India as tools for the revolt. The meeting also decided to sidetrack the Dalai Lama politically: “It is best to keep him in Lhasa, if he does not do this, if he actually goes, this also does not matter.” The Dalai Lama actually had fled his palace that very day. An alleged assault by a “Tibetan clique of armed rebels” on the army headquarters in Lhasa on March 19 triggered a “counterattack.” Four days later, the Potala Palace was taken, and the establishment of a Military Control Committee for Tibet was announced. Fighting continued for some months in inaccessible regions where Beijing previously had not had stationed troops.<sup>31</sup>

Archival documentation, however, suggests that the central leadership initially took decisions without really knowing what was going on Tibet. On a request from Beijing, the public security office in Tibet finally sent a report on March 20 late in the evening, at a time when the “counterattack” against the “clique of armed rebels” was progressing. The report described a rebellion that was “comprehensive,” particularly outside of Lhasa. The public security office was preparing for a long conflict.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Shakyas, *Dragon*, 185-202.

<sup>30</sup> Mao Zedong, “On the Policies for Our Work in Tibet – Directive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” April 6, 1952, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 5, 74. Norbu, *China’s Tibet Policy*, 214. Mao Zedong, “Remarks on Telegram on the Rebel Movements in the Tibet Military Region,” January 22, 1959, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedongwengao [Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts after the Foundation of the PRC; hereafter: JYMW]*, vol. 8 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1993), 12. Also: *JYMW*, vol. 8, 46, 47-48.

<sup>31</sup> Wu Lengxi, *Yi Mao zhuxi: Wo qinshen jingli de ruogan zhongda lishi shijian pianduan [Remembering Chairman Mao: A Part of a Series of Important Historical Events I Personally Experienced]* (Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe, 1995), 119-120. Wu, *Shinian*, 192-194. Shakyas, *Dragon*, 203.

<sup>32</sup> “Han reports on the clique of the Panchen Lama and the Rikaze situation,” March 20, 1959, *Waijiaobu kaifang dang’an guan [Foreign Ministry Public Archive; hereafter: WJBDAG]*, 105-00652-01, 2-4

Events in Lhasa and decisions in Beijing repeatedly influenced the Dalai Lama's decision on what to do next. Fleeing south to what he believed a safer part of Tibet, he proceeded even further when he heard about the fall of the Potala Palace. From March 25 to April 1, a CCP Politburo abrogated the 17-Point Agreement of 1951 with the explanation that "the upper strata [in Tibet] had terminated the treaty with the central government," but resolved to maintain the propaganda claim that "a Tibetan clique of armed rebels had kidnapped the Dalai." At the same time, Beijing transferred titular power to the Panchen Lama, the second-highest religious authority in Tibet. Mao further decided not to mention publicly India, which he internally accused of masterminding the revolt; China "could still settle scores later." Zhou's public March 28 announcement that the rebellion had finished off the 17-Point Agreement and all traditional governmental structures in Tibet reached the Dalai Lama in southern Tibet. He went into exile to India two days later.<sup>33</sup>

The sudden eruption of the Tibetan uprising, so soon after Zhou harsh note on the border on January 23, raised concerns in India. On March 22, Nehru rejected Zhou's two month old missive while claiming that the border had been well established in terms of geography, watershed principle, tradition and treaties.<sup>34</sup> His reply to Zhou could have not come at a more inopportune moment.

Even before his flight to India, the Dalai Lama wrote a letter on March 26 to Nehru explaining the crisis in his country that had occurred since March 10 and announcing his departure from his country to India.<sup>35</sup> First personal contacts between his officials and India representatives occurred on April 3 in India itself.<sup>36</sup> On April 5, Nehru received the Dalai Lama's letter and replied within 24 hours welcoming him.<sup>37</sup> A week later, Nehru decided to provide the Dalai Lama and his entourage of "120" with "suitable accommodation," but excluded armed Tibetans from "seeking asylum."<sup>38</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup>, India allowed the Dalai Lama to make a short and pre-approved statement without giving details on the situation in Tibet and his flight to India.<sup>39</sup> By late April, the Indian government had decided to keep the Dalai Lama's presence in India and its own relationship with him on a low level.<sup>40</sup> Obviously, India was willing to provide asylum but prevent Tibetan exiles from using Indian territory for political activities that might damage Sino-Indian relations.

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<sup>33</sup> Shakya, *Dragon*, 204, 207. Wu, *Shinian*, 194-195. Also: Wu, *Yi Mao zhuxi*, 121. *JYMW*, vol. 8, 182-183. PRC State Council, "Directive on the Revolt in Tibet," March 28, 1959, Hinton, *People's Republic of China*, vol. 2, 809.

<sup>34</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 246. Wu, *Shinian*, 209.

<sup>35</sup> "Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India," March 26, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 9.

<sup>36</sup> "Summary of Discussion with Senior Tibetan Officers at Lumla on the 3rd April, 1959," no date, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 10-12. See also: "Resume of Discussion with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama on the Morning of the 6th April, 1959," no date, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 21-23.

<sup>37</sup> "[Message received for His Holiness the Dalai Lama from the Prime Minister of India]," no date, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 24.

<sup>38</sup> "[Note]," April 12, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> "My dear Menon," April 14, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 34.

<sup>40</sup> "Message to be conveyed by Shri P.N. Menon on behalf of the Prime Minister to the Dalai Lama," April 29, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #6, 41-42.

For most of April, Nehru managed to walk a fine line between dealing with the Dalai Lama and keeping relations with China unscathed. In the second half of April, Mao however gave up his self-professed “restraint” toward Nehru’s alleged anti-Chinese attitude,<sup>41</sup> and ordered the publication of propaganda on the prime minister’s supposed role in the Tibetan uprising and his alleged cooperation with the British imperialists.<sup>42</sup> In his ideologically distorted world of contradictions, Mao still emphasized his desire for a “struggle for unity” with India, and saw the polemics he was launching as an “effort to safeguard Sino-Indian friendship.”<sup>43</sup> The idea was to prove Nehru’s alleged mistakes in India’s relationship with the PRC and magnanimously offering him forgiveness if he accepted Chinese positions with regard to the latest events in Tibet. Ultimately, Mao required from Nehru self-humiliation in the eyes of world public opinion, particularly in the Afro-Asian world. Thus he tried to paint Nehru as a traitor of the just aspirations of the Indian people and placed him on par with those counterrevolutionaries who had led the Hungarian uprising against Soviet rule in 1956.<sup>44</sup> In this context, he accused India of resuming British expansionist policies towards Tibet.<sup>45</sup>

The Indian side tried to match the Chinese propaganda campaign with its own diplomatic campaign. According to the diary of the Indian ambassador to the Soviet Union, K.P.S. Menon, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev supported India’s decision to grant the Dalai Lama political asylum, and characterized Indian concerns for Tibet in humanitarian and defensive terms: “Surely ... India was the last country in the world to have expansionist ambitions.”<sup>46</sup>

Yet, the PRC foreign ministry understood Indian diplomatic moves and public statements in terms of attempting to shape Soviet and international opinion. As India was a British-style deliberative democracy, the Chinese embassy in Delhi followed the public parliamentary debates in which Nehru had to deal with sometimes hostile and heated questions.<sup>47</sup> The very fact that the Dalai Lama with his entourage lived in Indian exile offered the Chinese embassy in Delhi already sufficient opportunity to link Nehru’s government with the “Tibetan counter-revolutionaries.”<sup>48</sup>

With the exacerbation of Sino-Indian relations over the Tibetan uprising, the unresolved border issue moved into focus, both in the eastern sector (NEFA) and in the western sector (Aksai Chin). The Chinese suppression of the Tibetan revolt militarized the border between Tibet and India.

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<sup>41</sup> Wu, *Shinian*, 198-202. Wu, *Yi Mao zhuxi*, 123-124.

<sup>42</sup> Wu, *Shinian*, 196.

<sup>43</sup> Wu, *Yi Mao zhuxi*, 125-126.

<sup>44</sup> “Reception of the Vice-Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of China Zhang Wentian,” May 4, 1959, *AVPRF*, fond 0100, opis 52, delo 5, papka 442, ll. 10-14. “Speech to the Soviet and other delegations from 11 countries and to the diplomatic envoys stationed in China,” May 6, 1969, Mao Zedong, *JYMW*, vol. 8, 247-249.

<sup>45</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi bian, *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1949-1976* [*A Chronicle of Zhou Enlai’s Life: 1949-1976*; hereafter: *ZELNP2*], vol. 2, 1957-1965 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 224-225. Mao Zedong, “On the Tibet question and the Taiwan Question,” *JYMG*, vol. 8, 65. See also: “Vice-Premier Chen Yi receives the Soviet ambassador in China Yudin,” May 8, 1959, *WJBDAG*, 105-00659-01, 42-43.

<sup>46</sup> Menon, K.P.S., *The Flying Troika: Extracts from a Diary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 235, 236.

<sup>47</sup> “Nehru discussed yesterday in the people’s assembly the Tibet question,” May 9, 1959, *WJBDAG*, 105-00654-01, 1-3.

<sup>48</sup> “The situation of the activities of the Tibetan counterrevolutionary elements since the occurrence of the Tibetan counterrevolution and armed rebellion,” May 26, 1959, *WJBDAG*, 105-00944-01, 44-52.

While the relations between the two countries had remained reasonable in previous years, the Indian-Tibetan borders had been rarely patrolled. The Tibetan government had retained the right to patrol its own borders throughout the 1950s, but did not take the accompanying responsibilities too seriously.<sup>49</sup> Yet, already as early as March 20, 1959, the Chinese foreign ministry submitted an analysis of the territorial problems at the eastern sector, particularly of the territory of NEFA, the Indian governmental structure administering the territory between the McMahon line and the Himalayan foothills. The report included information on the history of the territory since 1954, the strength of Indian military forces there, and demographic and ethnic information on the population.<sup>50</sup> Against the background of the Nehru-Zhou letter exchange at the turn of the year, Beijing obviously had started to think about its own territorial claims. The timing was perfect; only two days later, Nehru sent the letter disputing Zhou's January 23 note.

But on April 25, 1959, at a time when Mao determined to exert greater political pressure on Nehru, he also decided to subject the Sino-Indian borders to a stricter regime in order to prevent "the rebellious elements ... [from] coming and going."<sup>51</sup> Thereafter, the border problems became acute, particularly because Nehru had decided ten days before which factors would guide India's policy towards Tibet. They included, in the following sequence: maintenance of national security, maintenance of friendly relations with China, and deep sympathy for the Tibetan people. Consequently, when the first Chinese border patrols appeared in the Himalayas, Nehru responded by implementing a military forward policy to assert India's sovereignty.<sup>52</sup> Once both Beijing and New Delhi had sent their troops to the contentious Himalayan border, the open territorial questions returned with a vengeance. But Chinese troops stopped their advance roughly at the Himalayan crest line which the PRC had observed since the early 1950s as the *de facto* border.<sup>53</sup>

The Indian embassy in Beijing, however, linked the appearance of the Chinese border guards in the Himalayas to domestic policies. By the spring of 1959, the economic disaster of the ongoing Great Leap Forward had become obvious. While the country was falling into chaos, even the usually well-stocked capital was suffering from lack of food supplies.<sup>54</sup> It was in this context, the Indian embassy concluded, that the Chinese side was using "diversionary tactics" in international affairs, "primarily to wade over internal difficulties."<sup>55</sup> With both sides raising the stakes, the Indian foreign secretary and the Chinese ambassador by late May traded accusations against each other's government over the responsibility for the deteriorating relations, charging each other with violating *panch sheel*.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Wu, *Shinian*, 212.

<sup>50</sup> "Recommendations on the Northeast Frontier Agency currently in operation by India," March 20, 1959, *WJBDAG*, 105-00944-02, 53-60.

<sup>51</sup> Wu, *Yi Mao zhuxi*, 126. Liu, *Sino-Indian Border Dispute*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Liu, *Sino-Indian Border Dispute*, 25-26.

<sup>53</sup> Liu, *Sino-Indian Border Dispute*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 116-123.

<sup>55</sup> "Dear Sir," May 21, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #36, 65-69.

<sup>56</sup> "Ministry of External Affairs," May 23, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #36, 143-144.

## The 1959 Border War and its Consequences

The military conflict at the Sino-Indian border was an extension of the Tibet Question. With both sides sending troops to the non-demarcated border, the chances for violent clashes increased. When Indian troops arrived at the villages of Khinzemane and Longju in the eastern sector, the McMahon line—or what they believed it to be—did not follow any natural and geographical features. New Delhi's agents decided to correct the situation on the spot by pushing the line of control a little bit towards Beijing's sentry posts. The Chinese troops replied with fire on August 7 at Khinzemane, and on August 25 at Longju. The second volley of shots started the Sino-Indian border conflict which lasted on and off into the fall.<sup>57</sup>

The collapse of Sino-Indian friendship was a major blow to Sino-Soviet relations. The outbreak of the border conflict caught the Soviets during their painstaking preparations for Khrushchev's seminal visit to the United States. The Soviet leader recalled in his memoirs that Mao "started the [border] war out of some sick fantasy," with the mistaken idea that he could "dictate to the Soviet Union a foreign policy which contradicted the correct Marxist-Leninist position we held at the time."<sup>58</sup> These *a posteriori* quotes captured well the contemporaneous Soviet view that the start of the Sino-Indian border conflict was not an accidental event, but that the Chinese side deliberately tried to sabotage the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence towards both India and the United States.<sup>59</sup>

Indian and Chinese diplomatic behavior after August 25 greatly influenced Soviet attitudes toward the conflict. The Soviet leadership initially had no clue about the intricacies of the border clashes, and scrambled to get as much information as possible from its own meager sources, including from an interview with a Soviet scientist-artist who happened to be interested in Indology.<sup>60</sup> The Indian ambassador, K.P.S. Menon, informed Khrushchev on August 28 in a personal conversation, and New Delhi directly approached the socialist ambassadors in India some days later.<sup>61</sup> In comparison, Beijing failed to communicate with Moscow until September 6, apart from the little enlightening information which the Soviet Ambassador in India I.A. Benediktov received on August 29 during a social gathering when he "asked" the Chinese Chargé d'Affaires in India for

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<sup>57</sup> Liu, *Sino-Indian Border Dispute*, 26. Zafar Imam, *Ideology and Reality in Soviet Policy in Asia: Indo-Soviet Relations, 1947-1960* (Delhi: Klyani, 1975), 181. Swamy, *India's China Perspective*, 67. Wu, *Shinian*, 208-210.

<sup>58</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 263, 307, 311.

<sup>59</sup> M.Y. Prozumenshikov, "The Sino-Indian Conflict, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1962: New Evidence from the Russian Archives," *CWIHP Bulletin* 8-9 (Winter 1996/97), 251. O. Arne Westad, "The Sino-Soviet Alliance and the United States," in: O. Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1998), 177.

<sup>60</sup> A.A. Brezhnev, *Kitai: Ternisty put k dobrososedstvy: vosponminaniya i razmyshleniya* [*China: the Thorny Path to Good Neighborhood: Reminiscences and Reflections*] (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1998), 69-71.

<sup>61</sup> Imam, *Ideology and Reality*, 181. "Letter by H. Fischer, Trade Representation of the German Democratic Republic in India, to Ambassador Schwab, Vice-Minister in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs," New Delhi, September 5, 1959, *PAAA-MfAA*, 2. AEA/Sektor Indien, Ceylon, Microfiche A 13915, 47-50.

details.<sup>62</sup> This situation was largely due to the fact that China's central leadership itself had no reliable information about the clashes until early September, and then had to ask the military command in Lhasa for more information about what precisely had happened at these small and obscure places.<sup>63</sup> Finally on September 6, the Chinese Foreign Ministry informed the temporary Soviet Chargé d'Affairs in the PRC, S.F. Antonov, about the clashes. Beijing stated—truthfully—that Indian troops had invaded Chinese-held territory, but accused—falsely—New Delhi for intentionally undermining Sino-Soviet relations.<sup>64</sup>

Believing that Beijing had violated the Sino-Soviet Alliance Treaty of 1950 by failing to inform Moscow in good time about international problems, the Kremlin decided to distance itself from the apparently unreliable ally. In the early September days, the CPSU CC was drafting a TASS statement that blamed neither China nor India for the “incident,” but claimed that a “western” media campaign had aimed at splitting the Sino-Indian friendship, at “obstructing” Khrushchev's visit to the United States, and at “escalating the Cold War.”<sup>65</sup> The Soviet use of *diplo-speak*, however, could not fool anybody. As the highly placed Wu Lengxi remembered in his memoirs: “Apparently the Soviet Union accepted the information about the Sino-Indian border conflict provided by the Indian side, believed that China had deliberately manufactured the incident in order to spoil the [impending] meeting between Khrushchev and Eisenhower, and therefore was too impatient to wait before publishing a statement which indicated to Eisenhower that he, Khrushchev, did not agree with the Chinese.”<sup>66</sup>

In early September, the Sino-Indian border conflict moved into the field of propaganda with a series of published notes between Zhou and Nehru. The Chinese premier started the volley with a belated reply to his counterpart's March 22 note on the border problems on September 8 after the CCP Politburo had decided to seek negotiations.<sup>67</sup> Taking an ostensibly reasonable, but firm stand, Zhou stated that Chinese troops in Xinjiang and Tibet were no threat to India and that they would respect not only the “customary” line of control in the western sector but also the McMahon line in

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<sup>62</sup> “Record of Conversation of the Ambassador of the USSR com. I.A. Benediktov with the Chargé d'Affairs of the PRC in India, comr. Fu,” August 29, 1959, *National Security Archive [NSA]*, RADD, 9/7/1959. The original document is stored in *AVPRF*.

<sup>63</sup> Mao Zedong, “Remarks on a Situation Report of the Tibet Military Region on Yaxi'er Invaded by Indian Troops,” September 4, 1959, Mao Zedong, *JYMG*, vol. 8, 503.

<sup>64</sup> No document on the information Beijing provided to Moscow has surfaced. For the contents as reported by participants and historians, see: Wu, *Shinian*, 210. Si Fu, “Shi pengyou haishi diren”, 285. Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 2, *The Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 257. On September 9, the Chinese side also informed the socialist ambassadors, see: “Note: Information by the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Zhang Fuhan, for the Ambassadors of the Socialist Countries on September 9, 1959,” Beijing, September 10, 1959, *AAAA-MfAA*, 2. AEA/Sektor Indien, Ceylon, Microfiche A 13915, 57-58.

<sup>65</sup> “Tass Statement,” *Pravda*, September 10, 1959, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Wu, *Shinian*, 213-214. Li Lianqing, *Lengnuan suiyue: yibosanzhe de ZhongSu guanxi [Years of Changing Temperature: The Twists and Turns of Sino-Soviet Relations]* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi chubanshe, 1998), 294. MacFarquhar, *Origins*, vol. 2, 257-259. Si Fu, “Shi pengyou haishi diren”, 286.

<sup>67</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 255.

the eastern sector, without ever recognizing it.<sup>68</sup> The letter was a masterpiece of Chinese discourse; while offering negotiations and a magnanimous attitude towards the Indian “transgressor,” it did not budge on Chinese maximalist positions. The letter in fact not only claimed Aksai Chin but also the territory of NEFA. In short, Zhou’s missive put the onus on Nehru. In the absence of Chinese documentation it is difficult to pinpoint the Chinese rationale behind the note. But Mao would use a similar tactic in the late summer of 1964 with regard to Soviet far eastern provinces, but internally admitted that his overblown territorial demands vis-à-vis Moscow were designed to achieve a “compromise” settlement in Beijing’s favor.<sup>69</sup>

The letter arrived in Delhi after Nehru had submitted a White Paper on Sino-Indian relations to parliament on September 7. It included documents and information on the deterioration of the relationship since the signing of *panch sheel* in 1954, including the harsh Zhou note of January 23 and the Nehru reply note of March 22.<sup>70</sup> Their publication triggered a public outcry against Nehru’s policy of the last five years toward the PRC; even members of his own party, the National Congress, questioned his wisdom in this matter.<sup>71</sup> Nehru immediately rejected the portrayal of the border situation in Zhou’s letter, calling Chinese claims “cartographic aggression” and Chinese actions in Tibet “imperialism.” At least, he agreed to the principle of peaceful negotiations, but only after the Chinese withdrawal from Indian territories, and expressed willingness to talk only about minor adjustments to the McMahon line, the customary border at the eastern sector.<sup>72</sup>

In a letter in early November, Zhou re-emphasized China’s territorial claims in both sectors but proposed a mutual withdrawal of twenty kilometers behind the McMahon line (sic!) at the eastern sector and the same distance behind the line of actual control at the western sector.<sup>73</sup> Nehru, however, rejected Zhou’s offer as “impracticable,” as this would have left Chinese troops in territory claimed by India at the western sector.<sup>74</sup> Obviously, both sides were not willing to budge. An internal report of the Indian foreign ministry, written by Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt on November 24, complained about the continued Chinese propaganda on India’s alleged collusion with the United States and the United Kingdom with regard to Tibet, the harsh treatment of Indian representatives and citizens there after the 1954 agreement and of Indian prisoners since the summer, and unwarranted Chinese territorial claims at the western and eastern sectors. At the end, he could not but put his fingers in an open wound by questioning Nehru’s wisdom in failing to negotiate a precise border line in 1954. Consequently, he strongly advised the prime minister not to repeat this mistake in the current situation.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “Indians Trespass, Peiping Charges,” *NYT*, September 10, 1959, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 276-277.

<sup>70</sup> “Indian White Paper Details China Rift,” *NYT*, September 8, 1959, 1

<sup>71</sup> “Nehru’s Policies Assailed in India,” *NYT*, September 14, 1959, 3.

<sup>72</sup> For his immediate oral replies, see: “Peiping Replies to India,” *NYT*, September 10, 1959, 34. “Nehru again asks peace with China,” *NYT*, September 11, 1959, 3. For the letter of October 4, 1959, see: “Nehru says China must withdraw,” *NYT*, October 5, 1959, 5.

<sup>73</sup> “Text of Chou’s Note to Nehru on Indian-Chinese Border Dispute,” *NYT*, October 10, 1959, 16.

<sup>74</sup> “Nehru Answers Chou,” *NYT*, November 17, 1959, 34.

<sup>75</sup> “Ministry of External Affairs,” November 24, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #39, 49-52.

With shots fired in the Himalayas and heated letters exchanged, Nehru had to adjust his policy toward India's former friend. The goal was to express both disappointment about the developments of the past half a year and a commitment to saving the remnants of the relationship. Thus, Delhi did not permit its diplomats to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the foundation of the People's Republic on October 1 in Beijing.<sup>76</sup> However, it continued to lobby the United Nations for Beijing's entitlement to represent China.<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, Nehru tried to improve India's negotiation position towards China. On the one hand, this meant that he did not want to deliver more ammunition to the PRC. Thus he did not support the Dalai Lama's efforts to bring the Tibet issue to the United Nations. In fact, he continued to insist that Tibet was legally a part of China. The Tibetan leader, however, pointed out the flaw in Nehru's argument. If Delhi insisted on the McMahon line with regard to its own borders, it implicitly agreed that Tibet was independent when its representatives signed the Simla agreement with Henry McMahon in 1914. Indian insistence on the line as a legal border meant charging the PRC with occupying an independent country since 1950.<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, Nehru started to engage with China's neighbors, of which many had their own border problems with their common giant neighbor. Bhutan, to the west of the territory of NEFA, had no overland traffic links with the outside world as late as mid-1959. Already by the second week of September, the small country's prime minister, Jigme Dorji, agreed with Nehru on road construction projects that would help India defend the small Buddhist kingdom against Communist China.<sup>79</sup> In turn, Bhutan backed India's tough stand towards the PRC.<sup>80</sup> By mid-September, Nepal, to the southeast of Aksai Chin, observed Chinese troops at its border with Tibet,<sup>81</sup> and by the end of the month, the country claimed that they had crossed the border.<sup>82</sup> In late November, Nehru promised to defend Nepal against a Chinese attack.<sup>83</sup>

While securing the defense to the north, in October India tried to engage with Pakistan, its neighbour to the west and east, in talks on the tricky border and water disputes.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the Pakistani government started to investigate Chinese cartographic claims of Kashmir, which it had partially occupied in a war with India in 1947-48.<sup>85</sup> Further to the east, Burma claimed Chinese incursions in early September.<sup>86</sup> A month later, Premier Ne Win and Nehru discussed their border

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<sup>76</sup> "India To Boycott Peiping Festival," *NYT*, September 17, 1959, 12.

<sup>77</sup> "Information no. 2," September 26, 1959, *PAWA-MfAA*, Sektion China, Microfiche A 6628, 17-22.

<sup>78</sup> "Indians dispute the Dalai Lama," *NYT*, September 9, 1959, 5.

<sup>79</sup> "Bhutan planning four roads to India," *NYT*, September 26, 1959, 4.

<sup>80</sup> "Bhutan Backs India," *NYT*, November 19, 1959, 3.

<sup>81</sup> "Chinese Troops Near Nepal," *NYT*, September 19, 1959, 2.

<sup>82</sup> "Chinese incursion reported in Nepal," *NYT*, September 30, 1959, 11.

<sup>83</sup> "Nehru promises to defend Nepal," *NYT*, November 28, 1959, 1.

<sup>84</sup> "India meets Pakistan," *NYT*, October 16, 1959, 3.

<sup>85</sup> "Pakistan Studying Chinese Maps," *NYT*, October 22, 1959, 5.

<sup>86</sup> "Red Incursion Alleged," *NYT*, September 8, 1959, 5. "Burma, Red China at odds on border," *NYT*, September 14, 1959, 2.



problems with China in Delhi.<sup>87</sup>

In general, Chinese actions at the Himalayan border and the resulting Indian diplomacy led to an erosion of the international image of the PRC over the course of 1959. A meeting of non-aligned Asian countries in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta, not far from Bandung, roundly criticized China's policies. Zhou's promises from 1955 that China was peaceful seemed to have evaporated.<sup>88</sup>

Despite being accused by China of collusion with the other great powers, Nehru sought support from both the United States and the Soviet Union as well. During a visit to India in December, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Nehru discussed how to improve relations between India and Pakistan in the face of the Sino-Indian problems.<sup>89</sup> For the Chinese side, the visit was a welcome opportunity to mock the "peaceful attitude" of the imperialist Eisenhower administration towards the world.<sup>90</sup>

Yet, more important were Nehru's conversations with two delegations from the Soviet Union, the country officially allied with China but increasingly estranged from it as well. Unlike the Indians, the Soviets had attended the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the PRC in Beijing on October 1, 1959, with Khrushchev heading the high-ranking delegation. The visit did not go well, particularly since Khrushchev had just visited the United States where he believed he had resolved some of the Cold War crises in personal talks with Eisenhower. Deeply impressed by his visit to the arch-imperialist, he recounted his experiences in United States to Mao while the two were reviewing the parade given in honor of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the anti-imperialist PRC. The Chairman was insulted. Subsequent discussions on India led to further acrimony. No wonder that the Soviet and Chinese leaders parted in anger.<sup>91</sup>

One of the major goals of the trips to India by a Supreme Soviet delegation headed by Kliment Voroshilov, Frol Kozlov and Yekaterina A. Furtseva in late January of 1960 and by Nikita Khrushchev himself in mid-February was to prevent India from joining an alliance with the United States in the wake of the Sino-Indian border conflict.<sup>92</sup> That required primarily the strengthening of "the authority of Nehru in his policy in the whole Asiatic sphere," or so the Soviets claimed, which indirectly meant support for India's stiff positions towards China with regard to the Himalayan border.<sup>93</sup>

During Khrushchev's own visit to Delhi in mid-February, the discussions on international relations were far-reaching. Nehru supported the Franco-American-British-Soviet summit, scheduled for May in Paris, as a means to lower international tensions.<sup>94</sup> Yet, Khrushchev was cautious with

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<sup>87</sup> "Premier of Burma meets with Nehru," *NYT*, October 10, 1959, 2.

<sup>88</sup> "Asians Criticize Peiping," *NYT*, October 30, 1959, 7.

<sup>89</sup> "Record of a talk between President Eisenhower and Prime Minister on December 10, 1959," December 23, 1959, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #41, 132-134. "Memorandum of a Conversation, New Delhi, December 10, 1959, 11:30 a.m.," *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1958-1960, XV, 521-524.

<sup>90</sup> "Eisenhower visits India," December 31, 1959, *WJBDAG*, 105-00946-02, 3-6.

<sup>91</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 147-149.

<sup>92</sup> "First Information," January 27, 1960, *PAAA-MfAA*, 2. AEA/Sektor Indien, A 13919, 6-8.

<sup>93</sup> "Note," February 16, 1960, *PAAA-MfAA*, 2. AEA/Sektor Indien, A 13919, 9-11.

<sup>94</sup> "Remarks," March 12, 1960, *PAAA-MfAA*, 2. AEA/Sektor Indien, A 13919, 17.

regard to the Sino-Indian border conflict. The Soviet leader expressed puzzlement about the competing territorial claims but also his hope for a quick settlement between his ally and his friend, since the conflict threatened to become a problem of world peace.<sup>95</sup>

Beijing obviously followed the Khrushchev visit to Delhi. In internal reports, the foreign ministry observed with concern the public protestations of Soviet-Indian friendship.<sup>96</sup> No doubt that this must have worried the PRC leaders as Sino-Soviet relations had turned sour earlier that month. At a Warsaw Pact Consultative Committee meeting in Moscow on the 4th, the Chinese observer Kang Sheng had given a speech, which had been pre-published in China and in which he chided Khrushchev both for his peaceful coexistence policy with the U.S. arch imperialist and for his agreement to meet with Eisenhower at the planned four-power summit in Paris. The ideological attack caused a scandal at the banquet when Khrushchev mocked Chinese propaganda claims and radical policies, ending his tirade with the insult that Mao was nothing more than “a pair of worn-out galoshes standing discarded in a corner.”<sup>97</sup>

### **Zhou Enlai's Visit to Delhi, April 1960, and its Consequences**

As early as mid-December of 1959, Zhou had sent a note to Nehru proposing a personal meeting between the two prime ministers for the purpose of discussing the border disputes. The Chinese leader requested to meet on short notice on the 26<sup>th</sup> at a “neutral” location like Burma's Rangoon or in the Chinese capital, where “no activities hostile to Sino-Indian friendship” had occurred. The close timing of the announcement questioned the sincerity of the offer; Zhou's failure to mention Delhi as a possible place to negotiate and his remark about Beijing as a non-hostile location also surmised that the Indian capital was the source of all conflict.<sup>98</sup> Nehru, of course, was unwilling to agree to a meeting on such a short notice and on such conditions.<sup>99</sup> Yet, the Indian prime minister used the same trick when he invited his Chinese counterpart in early February to a political pilgrimage to Delhi for March.<sup>100</sup> Three weeks later—and after the contentious Warsaw Pact meeting that soured Sino-Soviet relations—Zhou accepted but proposed to meet in April in the Indian capital.<sup>101</sup>

This raises the question, why Zhou was willing to travel to a city which he himself had considered inappropriate for talks only two months before. In the absence of direct evidence, this is difficult to assess. However, his decision probably was caused by a mix of political showmanship and sincere willingness to settle the border conflict. His trip to Delhi was supposed both to create good

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<sup>95</sup> “Record of the talk,” February 12, 1960, *NMML*, Subimal Dutt Papers, Subject Files, File #25, 15-16.

<sup>96</sup> “Ideas on Khrushchev's Visit to India,” February 19, 1960, *WJBDAG*, 105-01001-02, 11-13. “Questions with regard to the Nehru-Khrushchev talks on the Sino-Indian border,” February 24, 1959, *WJBDAG*, 109-02087-02, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Sino-Soviet Split, 158-162. Quote in: Wu, *Shinian*, 251.

<sup>98</sup> “Chou asks Nehru to meet Dec. 26,” *NYT*, December 19, 1959, 1.

<sup>99</sup> “Nehru bars talks with Peiping now,” *NYT*, December 22, 1959, 1.

<sup>100</sup> “Text of Nehru's Letter Inviting Chou to New Delhi,” *NYT*, February 16, 1960, 5.

<sup>101</sup> “Chou Going to Delhi To See Nehru on Rift,” *NYT*, February 29, 1960, 1.

will in India and to display China's magnanimity toward the world, particularly after the country's loss of reputation within the third world since the border clashes in 1959. The Chinese leaders used a similar justification three years later when they decided to dispatch a delegation to Moscow in the summer 1963 to discuss the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute. The idea then was to create an impression of Chinese good will and sincerity, although the CCP was not willing to budge on its own ideological positions at all.<sup>102</sup> In contrast, however, in the spring of 1960 China was ready to find a compromise settlement, however. As the political scientist M. Taylor Fravel has suggested, the PRC usually was willing to settle border disputes with neighbors through a compromise when it was internationally isolated and internally weak.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, in 1960, China was suffering from terrible spring famines which had occurred as a result of the misguided economic policies of the Great Leap Forward; the Chinese state itself was in the process of collapse.<sup>104</sup> Internal documentation suggests that the PRC wanted to insist on its claim to Aksai Chin for strategic reasons,<sup>105</sup> but Beijing probably was willing to let the territory of NEFA go, as the Indian side expected.<sup>106</sup> Yet, given that both the PRC and India had etched out maximalist positions in public propaganda and diplomacy over the past half a year, a compromise was a hard goal to obtain.

Over the period of April 20-25, Zhou and Nehru met daily while their ministers and specialists held conversations in parallel or in between summit sessions.<sup>107</sup> The two talks on the first day revealed not only differences in claims but also differences in defining terms. Both sides stressed their maximalist positions as they had during the past six months. Nehru underlined how much India's national security, including the security of its capital Delhi, was affected by Chinese troops in the Himalayas, while Indian troops there hardly threatened most of China or its capital, Beijing.<sup>108</sup> Zhou in turn stressed that China did not recognize the McMahon line at its borders with both India and Burma, and repeated the claim that the customary border at the eastern sector was in the Himalayan foothills.<sup>109</sup>

Talks the following day suffered from a bad start. During Zhou's courtesy call, Vice-President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan bemoaned how China was treating India despite all the help Delhi had provided Beijing in international relations since 1950. On the issue of borders, he repeated India's maximalist positions, arguing that China had occupied all of Xinjiang, to which Beijing had added Aksai Chin, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and Tibet only in 1950. Zhou replied—with irritation—that both had been Chinese for hundreds and thousands of years, respectively. Foreign Minister Chen Yi

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<sup>102</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 239-241.

<sup>103</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>104</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 158-160.

<sup>105</sup> "Request for instructions with regard to Ladakh Questions," March 7, 1960, *WJBDAG*, 102-00014, 02, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 261-262.

<sup>107</sup> All the available Indian documents are in: *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, Files #24-26.

<sup>108</sup> "[First talk]," no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #24, 12.

<sup>109</sup> "Record of talks between PM and Premier Chou held on 20th April, 1960, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence," no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #24, 17-18.

reminded the Indian vice-president of the value of good relations with the PRC: "What are a few thousand square miles of territory compared to the friendship of six hundred million Chinese?" Obviously, the same question could have been also asked about China's friendship with hundreds of millions of Indians. Zhou left the courtesy call in anger.<sup>110</sup>

The negotiations with Nehru in the afternoon were personally less hostile but still uncompromising. After observing that the two sides had aired their disputing versions on the border, Zhou proposed to find a procedure to discuss the issues step by step. With regard to the territory of NEFA at the eastern sector, the Chinese Premier claimed that, while Tibet and the PRC had hardly possessed any actual control in the past, they still had a legal claim—a statement which Nehru disputed immediately. Zhou continued to insist that the PRC would legally recognize neither the McMahon line nor the Simla convention. In turn, the Indian prime minister claimed that India had patrolled Aksai Chin in the 1950s without ever meeting Chinese troops there until late in the decade.<sup>111</sup> In a talk with Indian ambassador R.K. Nehru late that evening, Zhou made a hard case for Aksai Chin based on a history of patrolling since 1950 and on road building that had not been disputed by India.<sup>112</sup>

On the third day, April 22, Zhou strenuously tried to move the discussions towards an agreement. Under the heading of establishing facts and finding common ground, the Chinese Premier explained why China could not accept the McMahon line. In his view, the Tibetan government had no right to sign the Simla convention in 1914, as it was bound by age-old law to get approval from the Chinese government for any such international agreement. Apart from the fact that China had no effectual central government at the time, his explanation implicitly pointed to the crux of the problem. Any legal recognition of the McMahon line would have meant that Tibet had acted as an independent country in 1914, which would have undermined China's historical claim to it and would have marked PRC actions in Tibet since 1950 as aggression or even imperialism. No wonder that Zhou wanted Nehru to stop bringing up Simla at all, but he was willing to solve the problems at the eastern border on the basis of the status quo. While making a concession at the eastern sector, the Chinese prime minister again was unwilling to compromise on Aksai Chin. Implicitly, he had put a deal on the table. Both sides would compromise on the basis of the existing geographic markers which formed one of the principles in international law regarding border settlements. Thereby, the territory of NEFA would go to India, and Aksai Chin to the PRC. But Nehru was not willing to accept the deal.<sup>113</sup>

The talks on April 23 resumed where they had left off the previous day. Nehru opened the conversation by complaining that, the previous evening, the Chinese side's experts had refused to

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<sup>110</sup> "[No title]," no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #26, 86-89. See also: K. Natwar Singh, *My China Diary, 1956-88* (Delhi: Rupa, 2009), 89-91.

<sup>111</sup> "Brief resume of H.M. talks with Premier Chou En-lai and Marshal Chen Yi of China on 21st April, 1960," no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #26, 77-85.

<sup>112</sup> "[No title]," no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #26, 110-121. See also: Singh, *My China Diary*, 100.

<sup>113</sup> "Record of talks between PM and Premier Chou En Lai held on 22nd April, 1960, from [?] to 1.10 p.m.," no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #24, 40-53.

engage in any discussions regarding Aksai Chin. Obviously, Zhou had ordered his team to stall after Nehru had refused to accept the deal proffered the previous day. In reply to these Indian complaints, the Chinese prime minister used arguments similar to those which Nehru had used all along for the eastern sector, to come to an agreement at the western sector: geographical markers, linguistic place names, treaties, maps, etc. Despite his proposal for a five-point statement on the principles which should govern the solution of the Aksai Chin dispute, the day did not end with any movement toward an agreement.<sup>114</sup>

On April 24, Nehru replied to Zhou's assessment of the situation at the western sector, countering the Chinese narrative of past events that underscored PRC claims with an alternative narrative supporting Indian claims. The host also warned that, after the Indian Supreme Court had recently made a land mark decision on unrelated border issues with Pakistan, any agreement on boundary changes had to pass through the process of a constitutional change in India's parliament. This legal obstacle, however, probably carried little weight with the guest from the Communist neighbor. But Zhou again was willing to break the impasse by proposing principles about troop disengagement and future patrolling.<sup>115</sup>

On the last day of talks, the two leaders negotiated on the text of the joint communiqué to be issued. Zhou was willing to use Nehru's draft as a basis for discussions. But he quickly realized that his host wanted a communiqué that described the talks as a failure—not even a statement of mutual respect for the status quo at the eastern sector was inserted. The Chinese guest also complained that there was no reference to *panch sheel* in the Indian draft, but Nehru firmly replied that any such reference would make the communiqué look insincere after all that had happened in the Himalayas in the past years.<sup>116</sup> Eventually, the joint communiqué ended up to be a short and pessimistic text that announced the lack of agreement and the start of bilateral talks among specialists in June.<sup>117</sup> At the press conference late on April 25, Zhou deplored the failure to reach an agreement, but publicly announced his proposals both for a five-point statement on the principles, which should govern the solution of the Aksai Chin dispute, and for the principles of troop disengagement and future patrolling.<sup>118</sup> Clearly, Zhou tried to impress the public that he had come to find a settlement, which even Indian observers recognized in retrospect.<sup>119</sup> Yet, the Indian Premier subsequently blamed his Chinese counterpart for the failure, publicly calling him a “hard rock.”<sup>120</sup> Archival documentation

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<sup>114</sup> “Record of talks between PM and Premier Chou En Lai held on 23rd April, 1960, from 4.30 p.m. to 7.45 p.m.,” no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #24, 54-68.

<sup>115</sup> “Record of talks between PM and Premier Chou En Lai held on 24th April, 1960, from 10.30 a.m. to 1.45 p.m.,” no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #24, 69-85.

<sup>116</sup> “Record of talks between PM and Premier Chou En Lai held on 24th April, 1960, from 11 a.m. to 2.40 p.m.,” no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #24, 86-103.

<sup>117</sup> “Joint Communiqué,” April 25, 1960, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #25, 57-58.

<sup>118</sup> “Premier Chou En-lai's Press Conference Held on April 25, 1960,” no date, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #25, 59-79.

<sup>119</sup> Singh, *My China Diary*, 110.

<sup>120</sup> “Chou ‘hard rock,’ Nehru declares,” *NYT*, April 27, 1960, 5.

from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, however, suggests the opposite, as shown above. Internally, the Indian side also considered the talks a complete failure; a circular to all embassies asserted that there was virtually no agreement on any of the issues raised. In fairness, however, it did acknowledge that Zhou offered a deal linking the territory of NEFA to Aksai Chin.<sup>121</sup>

This all raises the question of why Nehru was unwilling to go for Zhou's deal? It offered the status quo at the eastern sector which benefitted India and it left Aksai Chin to the PRC which had strategic interests there. The problem rooted in the public propaganda war ongoing since the fall of 1959 in which both sides had made exaggerated claims. In China's case, one might add, this had happened for nationalist and tactical reasons with regard to the eastern sector where its claims were rather weak. The propaganda war, however, had cornered Nehru to a much greater degree than Zhou. Unlike his Chinese counterpart, the Indian prime minister headed a country with vibrant public debate and a rigid constitutional framework, and not one with a tightly controlled monopoly both of information and political power. As the historian Srinath Raghavan concluded, Nehru was convinced that Indian public opinion would not accept any deal in which territories would be exchanged. Also, Delhi considered its case to be strong while it charged Beijing with using dishonesty and military force. Furthermore, the Indian prime minister knew that the Supreme Court decision made relinquishing Aksai Chin virtually impossible in the contemporaneous political climate, as constitutional changes required a two third majority in parliament. And finally, after all the Chinese ideological propaganda in previous years, India's leaders also had lost all trust in their former Chinese friends.<sup>122</sup> Among the four impediments, which Raghavan lists, Nehru might have been able to overcome the first three through a less rigid public stand in 1959 and 1960. To a certain degree, Nehru thus was the victim of his own public statements and actions. The Indian distrust toward China, however, predated the events of 1959.

India and China subsequently came to different conclusions about how to proceed with regard to the disputed borders, particularly since the bilateral meetings among specialists did not lead to any results by the end of 1960.<sup>123</sup> Even if Nehru might have had good reasons not to agree to Zhou's offer of a deal, his subsequent assertive policy was unwise and even dangerous. In 1961, Delhi decided to implement a forward policy at both sectors by resuming border controls and establishing military sentry posts within disputed territories.<sup>124</sup> Beijing was aware of these developments, but did not react beyond the lodging of protest notes initially. By the summer of 1962, the two sides traded fire across the disputed border again. Another border war was in the offing.<sup>125</sup>

How did the PRC proceed? On his return to Beijing, Mao and Zhou agreed to increase the

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<sup>121</sup> "No. 24452-Circular: Head of Mission from Foreign Secretary," April 27, 1960, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #25, 39-41. See also: "No. 2149," April 26, 1960, *NMML*, P.N. Haksar Papers, I and II Installments, Subject Files, File #25, 81-81a.

<sup>122</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 262-263.

<sup>123</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 266.

<sup>124</sup> Maxwell, *India's China War*, 173-256. Liu, *Sino-Indian Border Dispute*, 31-33. Swamy, *India's China Perspective*, 87. MacFarquhar, *Origins*, volume 3, 298-299.

<sup>125</sup> Wu, *Shinian*, 496-497. Xinhua News Agency, *China's Foreign Relations: A Chronology of Events, 1949-1988* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989), 142, 260-261.

Chinese military presence in Aksai Chin.<sup>126</sup> But the PRC soon suffered a major blow in an unrelated field which forced the country into a radical policy change. China's economy was in a state of complete collapse in the spring of 1960. While the sudden Soviet withdrawal of its economic experts from China in the summer did not undermine the Chinese economy, it marked a major shift in the economic orientation of the PRC. The sudden Soviet decision was the result of ideological disputes that had emerged over the abrogation of the Paris Summit following the U-2 incident on May 1. Yet, the PRC used the collapse of Sino-Soviet economic relations as a chance. China decided to reorient its trade away from the socialist towards the non-socialist world. Within a few years, it had established flourishing economic relations with Japan and West Europe, which enabled the country to break its international isolation.<sup>127</sup>

At the same time, the problems at the Sino-Indian border since the summer of 1959 had alerted the PRC to the need to reduce conflict with its immediate neighbors. Already before the trip to Delhi, the PRC approached several of its neighbors. In late January 1960, China had signed a non-aggression treaty and a border agreement with Burma, after Beijing made territorial concessions.<sup>128</sup> On March 21, a Sino-Nepalese border agreement followed. After the signing ceremony in Beijing, Zhou announced the precise date of his visit to Delhi for the talks with Nehru—probably not accidental timing.<sup>129</sup> Within three years, border agreements with Outer Mongolia (1962), North Korea (1962), Pakistan (1963), and Afghanistan (1963) followed.<sup>130</sup> Afterwards, all of China's border disputes except those with the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Bhutan, and India were resolved.<sup>131</sup> In this way, the PRC had been able to break the coalition that Nehru had tried to build up in late 1959 among some of China's southern neighbors within a few years.

Yet, China's opening towards the world and its cooperative behavior toward its neighbors had limits. When Wang Jiaxiang, a Chinese specialist for Soviet foreign policy, called in early 1962 for *sanhe yishao* (three reconciliations and one reduction)—that is the lowering of tensions with the Soviet Union, the United States, and India, as well as the reduction of granting developing aid on the basis of ideological commitments—Mao feared the watering down of the promotion of revolution at home and abroad. In the summer and fall of 1962, Mao denounced *sanhe yishao*, and started to push his new theory of the two camps and the two intermediate zones. Within this outlook, Mao's China claimed to lead the Afro-Asian world.<sup>132</sup>

In the wake of these developments, the second Sino-Indian border war occurred. Implementing his rejection of *sanhe yishao*, Mao ordered an assertive policy to counter Nehru's forward policy. On October 20, 1962, the Chinese armed forces attacked at both sectors and

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<sup>126</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 271.

<sup>127</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 172-180. Lorenz Lüthi, "Chinese Foreign Policy, 1960-79," Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, ed., *The Cold War in East Asia, 1945-1991* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2011), 156-160.

<sup>128</sup> "Red Chinese Sign Pact with Burma," *NYT*, January 29, 1960, 4.

<sup>129</sup> "Red China Reaches Accord With Nepal," *NYT*, March 22, 1960, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Xinhua, *China's Foreign Relations*, 138, 143.

<sup>131</sup> Harold Hinton, "China as an Asian Power," in: Thomas W. Robinson, and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Praxis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 353.

<sup>132</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 212-213, 221-222.

penetrated Indian territory up to 160 kilometers at certain locations. The PRC not only removed the military infrastructure of Nehru's forward policy within a short time, but also inflicted a humiliating defeat on India. After a month of fighting, the PRC called a unilateral ceasefire and proposed a withdrawal behind the actual line of control in both sectors; at the eastern sector the PRC even offered to withdraw behind the "illegal McMahon line" (sic!). The war and the announcement of withdrawal had achieved two of China's major goals. It had permanently undercut India's forward policy. And the withdrawal offer was a show of magnanimity supposed to impress the outside world. Nehru did not help his own country's image within the Afro-Asian world when he sought military aid from the United States and the United Kingdom during the conflict and then refused to agree to China's ceasefire offer.<sup>133</sup>

If events in 1959 had greatly damaged the Chinese reputation, developments in 1962 and afterwards undermined India's claim to leadership in the Third World. India's position within the Afro-Asian movement which it had helped to establish in 1955 progressively suffered.<sup>134</sup> After the Sino-French recognition in early 1964, the Chinese nuclear test in October that year, and the Indian-Pakistani war in 1965, in which Beijing supported Islamabad against Delhi, the Indian government late that year tried to assess the country's position within the world. The unfavorable result of this assessment was worrisome. For years, China had been making inroads in the Afro-Asian movement at the expense of India. Thus, there was "a danger that India might become more and more isolated both in the countries of Asia and Africa as well as in Western Europe. It is, therefore, important for India to think seriously how she can counteract these trends and safeguard her own security, independence and relationship with other countries."<sup>135</sup> Luckily for India, China was in the process of ruining its own reputation by trying to impose its radical anti-American, anti-Soviet and anti-Indian policies onto the Afro-Asian movement. As a result, the movement collapsed in late 1965.<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

The story of the collapse of Sino-Indian relations is multilayered. At its center were primarily the disputed borders between Tibet and India. The Tibetan uprising and its suppression by China turned them into an acute problem in Sino-Indian relations.

Although documentary evidence is still incomplete, some tentative conclusions have emerged. Tibet loomed large in the background on Sino-Indian relations. Nehru himself was aware of pitfalls which this issue had created. He also realized that India's claims to Tibet were grounded in his

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<sup>133</sup> Maxwell, *India's China War*, 173–443. Liu, *Sino-Indian Dispute*, 31–40. Swamy, *India's China Perspective*, 87–91. MacFarquhar, *Origins*, vol. 3, 298–312. Maharaj Chopra, "Himalayan Border War," *Military Review* 43/5, 8–16. Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 304–308. Han Suyin, *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China, 1898-1976* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 293–294. "Text," November 21, 1962, *BSU*, MfS - HA XX 17469, 15–25.

<sup>134</sup> "Information," February 6, 1963, *PAWA-MfAA*, Abteilung Süd-Südostasien/Sektion Indien, Microfiche C 1738/76, 22–33.

<sup>135</sup> "[No title]," no date, *NMML*, T.N. Kaul Papers, I to III Installment, Subject Files, File #15, 63–68.

<sup>136</sup> Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet Split*, 328–239.

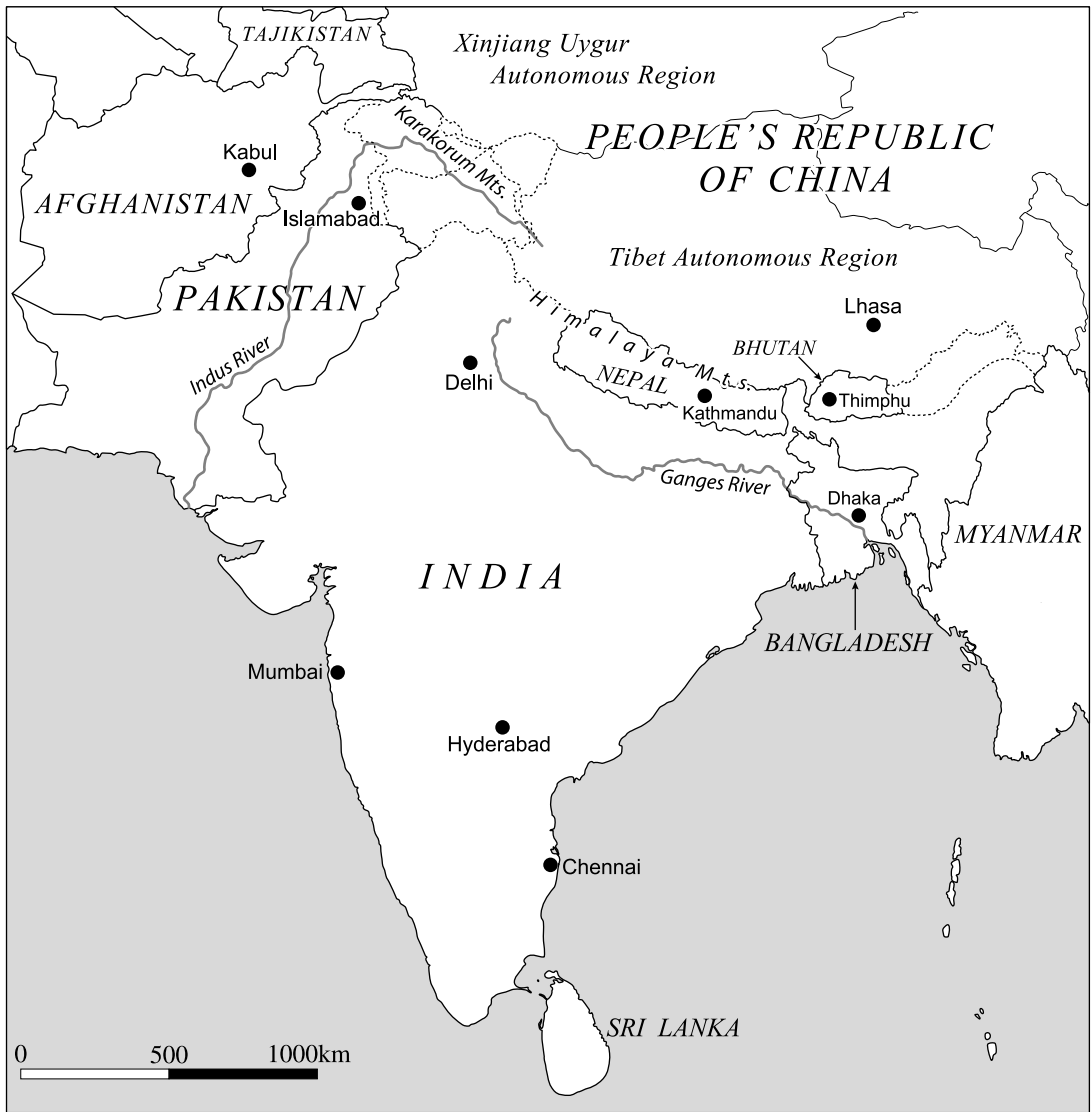


country's colonial past and thus were not appropriate for an anti-imperialist country like his. He displayed little sympathy for the feudal order in Tibet, which he considered backward and abhorrent. Yet, the Indian premier also distrusted Chinese motives in Tibet. Thus he was willing to come to agreements with China on Tibet and on mutual relations in 1954, but not ready to endanger the nascent partnership by raising the unsettled border issues. His invitation of China to the Afro-Asian movement probably rooted in his hope that a show of Indian good will and the integration of the PRC into the outside world might reduce the chances for conflict over Tibet. In the end, this policy failed because it did not address the main issue head-on at a time when relations still were good.

China contributed to the worsening of relations with India as well. Its double-faced policies in Tibet since 1950 laid the basis for mistrust, as Nehru already hinted at four years later. The claims on a territory (NEFA), which the PRC raised in 1958 for the unrelated reason of national mobilization (the Great Leap Forward) and which were not accompanied by actual control, did not help in the situation. The unnecessary ideological Chinese attacks on Nehru personally in the wake of the Tibetan uprising, which was largely unrelated to Indian policies, further undermined the difficult relationship.

In the context of the Chinese suppression of the Tibetan uprising and the militarization of the border, the accumulated shortcomings of the Sino-Indian relationship exploded in military conflict. In its wake, the PRC restated its exaggerated territorial claims for tactical reasons in view of negotiations, while Nehru poured oil on the fire of public indignation in India. It was China, however, that wanted to come to a compromise agreement, but the propaganda war between the two countries and expectations in Indian public opinion made it difficult for the two sides to reach one. With less public pressure, Nehru probably would have been able to agree to the deal offered by Zhou in April of 1960. But once the chances for an agreement had passed, both sides edged toward another war.

Even if the PRC initiated military conflict in 1962, it was India that bore the brunt of the negative fallout in international relations. Thus, in the long view, the Sino-Indian border conflict was more than just a clash over disputed territory but also a competition for leadership in the Afro-Asian movement. The collapse of Sino-Indian friendship paralleled, and maybe even caused, the downfall of India from leadership in the Third World. Ironically, it had been Nehru who had insisted on China's initiation into that circle in 1955. Ten years later, the PRC tried to dominate the movement with anti-Soviet and anti-Indian policies. However, in the end, Beijing not only spectacularly failed in doing so, but in the process also killed the Afro-Asian movement.



For detailed maps of the contested zones, see p.121