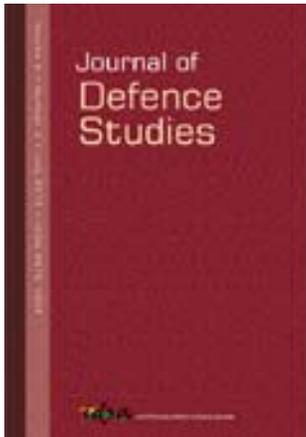


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## A Game of Chess and a Battle of Wits India's Forward Policy Decision in Late 1961

*Johan Skog Jensen\**

*In spring 1962, small numbers of lightly armed Indian troops proactively established presence in the disputed border areas between Chinese Tibet and India, despite intense sabre-rattling in Beijing. What was originally intended as a 'game of chess and a battle of wits' in late 1961, eventually ended in war in October 1962. This article discusses the long-term and short-term factors that can help explain why the Government of India opted for the 'Forward Policy' in late 1961. It furthermore stresses the need to interpret the Forward Policy decision on its own premises and within its own historical context. Finally, it is argued that the Forward Policy experience has had an important impact on subsequent Indian strategic thinking. For that reason, and in light of the new sources available over the last years, a fresh glance at this controversial episode half a century ago would seem to be called for.*

Fifty-one years ago, newly independent India made a policy decision with far-reaching consequences for its relationship to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Up till at least 1958, Prime Minister Nehru had ardently professed the notion that Indians and Chinese were Asian brothers. In late 1961, however, the Government of India opted for a form of military pressure on China—the so-called Forward Policy decision. By the middle

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of 1962, small numbers of lightly armed Indian infantry established several 'forward posts' deep inside unoccupied but disputed border areas. It was the last nail in the coffin of the visionary pan-Asian aspirations of the 1950s. The Chinese were outraged by India's Forward Policy and responded in kind. The policy that had originally been envisioned by some as a 'game of chess and a battle of wits', in fact, developed into what has been termed a 'giants' version of chicken'.<sup>1</sup> By autumn 1962, the situation escalated and ended in a traumatic debacle for Nehruvian China policy and for India. In a wider perspective, the Forward Policy experience has indirectly had a number of repercussions for subsequent Indian China policy, and defence policy in general.

The history of the Forward Policy may be an unfashionable topic to engage at a time when India seeks to recast relations to the great power on its north-eastern borders. To some extent, it has been so ever since the calamitous border war. It is a sensitive topic, not least because it has been argued that New Delhi's Forward Policy constituted the triggering cause of the Chinese attack on India in October 1962. To some, the Forward Policy was proof of an Indian aggression on China.<sup>2</sup> To others, there could be no talk of any 'forward' policy. Rather, the initiatives of 1961 should be interpreted as defensive measures to safeguard the territorial integrity of the young Indian republic. According to the official Indian view, the term 'Forward Policy' is fundamentally mistaken; the policy was a defensive move to stem Chinese aggression and as such, there was nothing 'forward' about it. Yet, despite these reservations, the term 'Forward Policy' was and still is employed in official Indian documents and everyday speech; as the Government of India's recently declassified history of the war states, 'nomenclature, appearing convenient, stuck'.<sup>3</sup> The term is therefore not necessarily used as an a priori judgement of the policy in the sense of Indian expansionism—as would seem to be the official Chinese interpretation of it.

In the voluminous and very often politically charged literature on the 1962 war, the Forward Policy is usually discussed more in terms of the consequences it entailed rather than in terms of what caused it. I will here attempt to add some new perspectives by analysing the formulation of the policy in the decision phase rather than looking at the actual implementation and consequences of the policy. The article will thus discuss the origins and causes of the Forward Policy decision rather than the origins and causes of the 1962 war in totality. Why did India settle for the Forward Policy in the first place? What were the intentions of the decision

makers and on which assumptions were they acting? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to contextualize the controversial Forward Policy decision historically. Some contemporary policy implications of the Forward Policy experience will be rudimentarily highlighted in the end. First, however, the principal features of this new and proactive policy will be outlined.

#### **THE FORWARD POLICY IN BRIEF**

In essence, the Forward Policy consisted of an innovative mixture of diplomatic and military pressure. It represented something qualitatively new in Indian China policy, which had thus far been driven by a diplomatic effort to cultivate pan-Asian friendship. After the Tibetan revolt of March 1959, two mortal border clashes in the autumn of 1959 and failed negotiations in April 1960, diplomatic deadlock and increasing public pressure affected Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and other Indian decision makers. A fresh approach to the border dispute seemed pressing. Through a complex process of foreign and domestic pressure, strategic analysis and political deliberation, a new policy finally took shape from November 1961.<sup>4</sup>

By spring 1962, small groups of Indian soldiers were systematically establishing series of largely symbolic 'forward posts', scattered in unoccupied but disputed border areas. Additionally, the Indian soldiers often filled vacuums close to or surrounding Chinese military positions, and at times even penetrated behind them, thus attempting to frustrate their vital lines of supply and communication. While the Chinese protested vehemently and described this as aggressive unilateralism, it was conceived as a defensive measure by government circles in India. The Minister of Defence, Krishna Menon, refuted the term 'Forward Policy' in itself, given that it was China that had allegedly pushed forward across the international border, that is, the Indian claim line. He saw India's new policy merely as a defensive response to Chinese forward moves in Indian territory.<sup>5</sup> India's civilian intelligence director thought it rather ought to have been called the 'No more surrender policy'.<sup>6</sup> To the understanding of a leading officer, there was 'no reason why we should not play a game of chess and a battle of wits with them, so far as the positioning of posts was concerned. If they advanced in one place, we should advance in another.'<sup>7</sup> In this determined, yet apparently economical fashion, the Chinese advance would be halted and possibly even reversed. At the same time, it

would send firm signals to India's impatient domestic audience. It was, in short, planned to be a sort of bloodless victory.

Later, critics, on the other hand, have denounced the Forward Policy as an inherently self-contradictory moral crusade, or even as an armed satyagraha.<sup>8</sup> By some, it has simply been dismissed as 'reckless' and 'irrational'.<sup>9</sup> The basic premises of the Forward Policy may, in hindsight, seem paradoxical and militarily unsound.<sup>10</sup> But the fact remains that it was adopted in the genuine belief that it would provide an efficient counterweight to Chinese expansion and occupation of what was presumed to be unquestionably Indian territory. The scathing posterior critique generally concentrates on one fundamental assumption on which the entire Forward Policy seems to have been built: the calculation that the Chinese would not respond violently under pressure. To the understanding of a leading officer, 'this defensive step on our part at best might irritate the Chinese but no more'.<sup>11</sup> As will be seen, Nehru and the Indian government not only strongly wished to avoid war, they were also certain that the Chinese would abstain from it—despite the strategic challenge of India's Forward Policy. In other terms, the policy did not seem illogical to the decision makers at that given point in time—despite the harsh criticism of later commentators.

#### THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE

It is imperative to keep in mind the general context in which the early Indian China policy was formulated. The newly independent Government of India was, first and foremost, led by a *Primat der Innenpolitik* in which the social and economic development of post-colonial India was emphasized. When it came to external affairs, India's nemesis Pakistan and the two rival superpowers of the Soviet Union and the United States (US) were the immediate challenges for New Delhi. Indian relations with China were primarily structured by a grand strategic view of India's long-term interests and potential. It would be a relationship that in many respects, expressed the optimism of independence and the desire to cultivate a peaceful and prosperous Asia.

Nehru's early vision of Sino-Indian relations was based on a notion of idealism in the sense that it was a symbol and a continuation of a magnificent common past. The idea of India and China as unique civilizational states and the conception of Asia as a family of nations were also central components in the desire to forge a strong friendship with

Beijing. But Sino-Indian cordiality was also considered to be in India's interests from a realist point of view. This was not least a function of their massive size and pivotal position in Asia. Friendly cooperation between the two giants was seen as important in order to secure a peaceful and stable Asia in which they both could focus on their pressing domestic challenges. Last but not least, Nehru thought it crucial to include and integrate the revolutionary Chinese government as far as possible in international society in order to discourage what he perceived to be a natural Chinese inclination for unilateralism. The motivations underlying early Indian China policy were thus complex, but consistently illustrated the sense of long-term importance Nehru attached to the relationship. In fact, Nehru himself defined idealism as the 'realism of tomorrow' and added that 'the realist, looks at the tip of his nose and sees little beyond; the result is that he is stumbling all the time'.<sup>12</sup> In short, the prime minister's sense of time extended beyond his own present.

The fairly relaxed atmosphere that characterized Sino-Indian relations in the mid-1950s would begin to change from early 1958 onwards. It was in the western sector that a potential territorial conflict with China first became evident to New Delhi. In September 1957, an official Chinese publication announced that a motor road running from Xinjiang straight through Aksai Chin to Tibet was nearly completed.<sup>13</sup> The Indian government was informed about the road by its embassy in Beijing.<sup>14</sup> When Indian military patrols were sent out to Aksai Chin on a reconnaissance mission in the following summer of 1958, they not only confirmed the information but one patrol was actually captured by Chinese troops.<sup>15</sup> In parallel, bureaucratic-level negotiations with Beijing on the minor territorial question of Bara Hoti in March and April 1958 turned out to be considerably tougher than the Indian side had expected.<sup>16</sup> Combined with a high level of Chinese military activity in Tibet, the year 1958 and the developing events on the ground thus seemed to point in a different direction than the laudatory political rhetoric of the two governments. There was no doubt any more that the question of borders had to be explicitly discussed at the highest level so that the whole issue could be sorted out.

When Nehru finally sat down in December 1958 and wrote a frank letter to Zhou Enlai on the subject of borders, the vision of an Asian renaissance built upon Sino-Indian friendship remained India's ambition.<sup>17</sup> But at the same time, the geopolitical developments in Tibet and on the frontiers meant that India–China relations constituted, more and

more, an uneasy marriage. It consisted of two separate and increasingly incompatible tendencies that seemed to pull in opposite directions, yet still without breaking Nehru's much-celebrated diplomatic edifice. On the one hand, there were passionate slogans of *Hindi–Chini bhai-bhai*,<sup>18</sup> and on the other, there was a Chinese motor road in the middle of Aksai Chin and a brewing revolt in Tibet; Curzon's geopolitical buffer was gone with the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1950–1, and Nehru's alternative psychological buffer of Sino-Indian friendship now seemed to be under pressure. But there was still room for an uneasy marriage within the broad church of Indian China policy in 1958. The cracks were barely visible to Nehru himself. Officially, Indians and Chinese were still brothers. China continued to be a pivotal long-term priority for Nehruvian India.

Indian China policy in the period 1947–58, thus, reflected both the challenges facing an underdeveloped post-colonial state as well as the ambitions and dreams its leaders harboured for the long run. As the architect of India's foreign policy, Nehru considered Sino-Indian friendship as crucial not only for the future of India as a developing country but also, strategically, for peace and stability in Asia: 'I think the future of Asia and to some extent the world depends upon this.'<sup>19</sup> Indian China policy was an expression of diplomatic grand strategy and came to embody a vision and a time aspect that was not only meant to cater to India's immediate day-to-day interests. It was designed to provide a fertile foundation for a comprehensive bilateral relationship of potential world importance.<sup>20</sup> In parallel, however, India–China relations were increasingly challenged by the momentous geopolitical developments in the wake of the Chinese Revolution of 1949. Indian China policy soon had to confront factors like the Chinese military takeover of Tibet in 1950–1, as well as the nebulous state of India's long frontiers with what had, by 1954, been acknowledged by India as the 'Tibet region of China'.<sup>21</sup>

While there were obvious breaks with the British Indian legacy at the diplomatic and rhetorical level, the geopolitical dimension of early India–China relations revealed significant continuity with the colonial past. There was no geopolitical *tabula rasa*, despite the euphoria of independence. The territorial parameters within which the new relationship was shaped were inherited from the Raj. In practical terms, India came to defend nineteenth century colonial frontiers in the Himalayas, while China reconquered its erstwhile imperial possession after a century of humiliation. Independent India inherited the geopolitical legacy of the Great Game,

but refused to continue playing it by the rules of Curzonian realpolitik. To Nehru, Sino-Indian friendship was still too important to be derailed by 'petty issues' like the desolate Himalayan borders. It is within this inherently unstable combination of pan-Asian optimism and post-Great Game geopolitics that the contextual origins and the root causes of the 1961 Forward Policy decision can be found.

### THE RISE OF THE BORDER DISPUTE

The increasingly delicate Sino-Indian equation, quite strikingly, lost its balance during the course of 1959. The bilateral relationship changed in a manner so sudden and unexpected to Nehru that the year has aptly been called the *annus horribilis* of Indian China policy.<sup>22</sup> It is within the period from the Tibetan revolt of 1959 up to the failure of diplomacy in 1960–1 that the proximate causes of the Forward Policy decision can be identified. First, the Tibetan revolt in March 1959 led to militarization on both sides of the previously neglected frontiers. The Dalai Lama's flight over the McMahon Line and the pro-Tibetan attitude of Indian public opinion seem to have triggered a much deeper suspicion of India in Beijing than New Delhi realized. The combination of growing Chinese assumptions of ulterior Indian motives in Tibet, high military activity on the frontier and undefined borders finally led to confrontations. The fatal border clashes of August and October 1959, together with China's explicit and categorical rejection of Indian border claims in September, changed the atmosphere of the bilateral relationship fundamentally.

Most importantly, the external Chinese pressure triggered a severe domestic reaction in India. After the first clash in August at Longju, Nehru broke the lid of confidentiality and, for the first time, informed the Parliament of the ongoing border dispute with China. Public reaction was intense. What had originally been portrayed in terms of 'petty issues' now became symbols infused with nationalist passion. By continuously issuing white papers, the government exacerbated the public pressure and undermined its own diplomatic room for manoeuvre. Public opinion turned out to be a new but powerful factor in Indian China policy—a development that contradicts the widely held view that early Indian foreign policy was exclusively the domain of governmental elites.<sup>23</sup> For the first time, Nehru was no longer serenely in charge of Indian China policy. The combination of external and internal pressure on the prime minister furthermore contributed to his growing personal conviction in early 1960

that India's territorial claims, including Aksai Chin, were historically and legally 'foolproof'.

Partly as a result of the new and uncompromising attitude to Aksai Chin, and partly as a result of massive public pressure, the highly controversial talks with Zhou Enlai in April 1960 were almost bound to fail—which they thoroughly did. Dialogue came to an end as both countries fortified their diplomatic trenches and refused to contemplate compromise solutions. India would not barter territories, that is, swap sovereignty in Aksai Chin for Chinese acceptance of Indian sovereignty in the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Neither would China give India the cosmetic benefit of a 'shadow' sovereignty over Aksai Chin. When China, at the next turn, presented an even more forward claim line after the Zhou–Nehru talks in 1960, the climate for negotiations deteriorated further. By the time of the failed diplomatic probe to Beijing in July 1961, a third solution, short of war but more compelling than traditional diplomacy, seemed to be called for.

#### THE FORWARD POLICY DECISION

From having been sceptical about exerting military pressure on China as advocated by some as early as in June 1960, Nehru finally passed oral directives to initiate just that on the evening of 2 November 1961. This fateful decision was based upon the crucial assumptions that India's claims were indeed 'foolproof' and that China would not respond in any large-scale violent manner under pressure. The immediate intentions driving the decision seem to have been anchored in the desire to retaliate and halt the perceived Chinese advance westward, to manifestly show steadfastness before the 1962 general elections and to enhance India's bargaining power in view of future border negotiations with China. The process leading to this remarkable change in attitude was contingent on the domestic as well as the international context of 1961.

Domestic popular pressure sharpened the politically vulnerable Minister of Defence Krishna Menon's inclination for a coercive strategy after the failure of talks in April 1960. Simultaneously, groundbreaking changes took place in the higher echelons of Army Headquarters (HQ). General Thimayya, who had a troubled relationship with Menon, was succeeded by politically far more cooperative officers such as Chief of General Staff B.M. Kaul. Army HQ thus became far more flexible to political demands than it had previously been. Whereas Thimayya had

halted forward moves initiated by the civilian Intelligence Bureau (IB) under B.N. Mullik in Ladakh in 1959, and probably also in 1960, Kaul and Army HQ did not block Menon's and the IB's calls for action in late 1961.<sup>24</sup>

The most significant precondition for the 2 November decision was, nonetheless, the prime minister's increased receptivity to alternative solutions. In view of the new—and enlarged—Chinese claim line of 1960 and military activity in the border areas, the IB convincingly argued that China was intent on expanding further. This apparently authoritative information deepened the government's distrust of China. The IB's ability to confidently propose an alternative and seemingly cost-efficient way out of the deadlock gave it significant influence at the highest level of government.

These aspects of the domestic context put together furnished the fundamental preconditions for the 2 November decision. The international context pulled in the same direction. On the assumption that China faced a difficult strategic situation in the Far East, and on the assumption of Soviet and US sympathy for India vis-à-vis Maoist China, the Indian leadership deemed it safe to exert pressure on China. Nehru, furthermore, reckoned that a Sino-Indian war would necessarily lead to ruin and major global repercussions—and hence that neither India nor China could afford to overreact. Intelligence Bureau Director Mullik's established credo from as early as 1959, that steadfastness and a 'dozen men' would be sufficient to deter a Chinese advance, thus fused with Nehru's grand strategic perspective to form the crucial assumption that China would not respond violently to a new brand of non-violent Indian pressure. The coast was clear for a radically new approach towards China.

#### THE POLICY IN RETROSPECT

Despite its ultimate failure in autumn 1962, the Forward Policy was not without initial merits. Within relatively short time, the perceived Chinese expansion westward seemed to be halted. There was a general impression in public opinion that the tides were turning and that the situation on the frontier was finally going in India's favour.<sup>25</sup> In July, just as China reacted in an unexpectedly strong fashion to India's newly opened forward post in the Galwan Valley, the informed general public could take satisfaction in newspaper reports on 'the unique triumph for audacious Napoleonic planning' which had led to 'a general advance over a wide front of 2,500

square miles'.<sup>26</sup> Menon claimed that one-third of the Chinese-held territory, that is, 4,000 square miles, had been recovered under the new policy.<sup>27</sup> It would thus not only appear that the fundamental assumptions of the Forward Policy were valid, but also that the policy fulfilled the immediate intentions behind the prime minister's decision in November 1961.<sup>28</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, it is now known that the appearance was shallow. In October 1962, the Forward Policy failed spectacularly.

Both the initial merits and the final failure of the policy have been reflected in posterior history writing. As late as 1971, Director Mullik of the IB warmly advocated Nehru's Forward Policy decision—in which, of course, he played a crucial part himself.<sup>29</sup> According to the Government of India's official history, the 2 November decision was 'fully justified' in view of the vacant areas that 'would have been occupied all the more easily by the Chinese, without firing a shot'.<sup>30</sup> In most other posterior accounts, however, the adoption of the Forward Policy is depicted in the unflattering light of erroneous naivety—a self-contradictory Nehruvian version of the Great Game. The Forward Policy did certainly not ameliorate Nehru's bargaining power with China, as was the original intention. Rather, in the eyes of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 'the border dispute was... transformed by the Indians from a primarily political quarrel to a serious military confrontation'.<sup>31</sup> The government's assumption of Chinese moderation has been denounced as either a civilian lack of understanding of military affairs or as a fit of wishful thinking.<sup>32</sup> As the military capabilities did not match the political ambitions, the policy finally failed.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CONTEMPORARY REPERCUSSIONS

A recurrent topic in the literature of the 1962 war has been the question of guilt, both in terms of national guilt and personal guilt. First, did India's Forward Policy cause the 1962 war? Given, as argued, that the origins and causes of the Sino-Indian conflict have deep historical roots, this would appear not to be the case. These historical roots—the unsettled borders, the Tibetan question and Nehruvian India's and Maoist China's differing political cultures and world views—obviously constitute the fundamental causes of the war. The Forward Policy can be understood as a novel Indian response to some of these historical root problems, and may have triggered the war, but the new policy did not fundamentally cause it.

More specifically, a second question has been as to who fathered the Forward Policy. Several accounts have pointed at the 1961 Chief

of General Staff, Lieutenant General Kaul.<sup>33</sup> While undoubtedly a key driver in the implementation phase, the Forward Policy concept—which preceded 2 November 1961—nevertheless seems to have originated from the IB as far as the available sources reveal. In his own memoirs, Kaul distances himself from the policy decision.<sup>34</sup> Intelligence Bureau Director Mullik, on the other hand, warmly defends the ‘No more surrender policy’, as he termed it.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the IB had by and large adopted its own Forward Policy, in the ‘broad’ sense of the word, already by 1959—but was temporarily stopped by Army HQ under General Thimayya.<sup>36</sup> By late 1961, however, the parameters of Indian China policy had changed substantially. Mullik’s proposal found resonance at the highest level of government and was finally sanctioned by the prime minister himself.

Most importantly, a third question concerns contemporary policy implications: what has the Government of India learnt from the calamitous Forward Policy experience? It can be argued that the impact has been considerable on at least two levels: psychologically and in terms of practical politics. From a psychological point of view, the mere wording ‘Forward Policy’ still has uncomfortable connotations of rash action, pyrrhic victory and, ultimately, defeat. In the historical recollection of India, it is an unsettling topic. To a large extent, it tends to be associated with Maxwell’s scathing and, in Indian eyes, unfair critique or even Chinese propaganda. Nevertheless—while not being a cherished historical memory—the Forward Policy experience does implicitly loom large in the security policy deliberations of Indian decision makers.

It is indirectly possible to distinguish at least three major insights that have informed Indian foreign policy makers in the aftermath. First, the experience of the Forward Policy clearly demonstrated that political ambition must be congruent with military capability. By implication, if India aspires for a greater role in world affairs, it must also face the financial burdens of enhancing its strategic toolbox. Despite having more than 400 million citizens below the poverty line, the Indian government is today prepared to face the costs of its regional and global aspirations by pursuing ambitious defence programmes. New Delhi’s nuclear programme, its emerging naval clout and technological modernization programmes, all demonstrate both will and capacity to live up to the self-image as a rising power in Asia. Since 1962, the organization of intelligence structures and civil–military cooperation within the government decision structure have furthermore been significantly revised.

Military power has, to a much larger extent than during the Nehruvian era, become an integral component of Indian foreign policy making. The experience of the Forward Policy failure indirectly precipitated this development.

Second, the need for what could be called a two-track policy on China has been recognized. Nehru's psychological buffer of friendship with China was not sufficiently protective when the territorial dispute entered the Sino-Indian equation. As the Nehruvian buffer of friendship crumbled in 1959, there was no real Plan B—India held no substantive spare cards. After 1962, such spare cards have been strived for—in the sense of developing a costly, but credible defence vis-à-vis China. While the often stated goal of friendship and cooperation in the 'Asian century' clearly remains the predominant topos of contemporary Indian China policy, there is also another side to the coin. Sino-Indian understanding and economic collaboration are undoubtedly strived for, but this political ambition does no longer constitute a psychological buffer in the sense of substituting material defence. Rather, India today—like China—follows major programmes of armament and military build-up. India also strengthens its strategic bonds to the US, to Japan and to Southeast Asian states like Vietnam and Singapore. There increasingly seems to be a Plan B in the case that Plan A of a peaceful Asian century, in line with *Panchsheel*, should fail. It can be argued that India arms itself primarily in view of a potential future conflict with China, not Pakistan. In that sense, modern Indian China policy can be interpreted as a mixture between Nehru's and Vallabhbhai Patel's recommendations; striving for cooperation and friendship but nevertheless, while preparing for all eventualities. The year 1962 amply demonstrated the costs of not preparing for the seemingly unlikely and unexpected.

Finally, the last major lesson of the Forward Policy experience has been that the border dispute must be approached within a stable and predictable political framework. Unilateral policies of altering the status quo on the ground have been thoroughly discarded in favour of a comprehensive political dialogue on border issues, running since 1988. The border dispute remains an irritant between Beijing and New Delhi, but it nonetheless remains a fundamentally stable and predictable irritant. There is scant reason to believe that the border dispute per se will fuel potential Sino-Indian rivalry in the twenty-first century.<sup>37</sup> It may, however, be conceivable that the border dispute could superficially trigger a future crisis driven by deeper structural causes (for example, regional power

politics and/or global resource rivalry); such speculation must however remain conjectural.

#### **INTERPRETING THE 1962 PRELUDE ON ITS OWN PREMISES**

In sum, it is essential to approach India's Forward Policy decision from a wide and contemporary contextual perspective. Rather than prejudging the policy as 'illogical' based on our posterior knowledge of what would happen in October 1962, it should be interpreted as an historical product—on its own premises. The most important contextual backdrop of the Forward Policy decision was India as a newly independent developing country whose foreign policy was profoundly shaped by one individual. The abrupt turn of the Sino-Indian relationship in the wake of the Tibetan revolt of 1959 was sharper than Nehruvian India's ability to fathom and cope with it. A substantial and costly reorientation of border defence only took place after 1962. The Forward Policy was thus, in many ways, a compromise solution in that it was seen as a form of safe and affordable pressure. The precarious lack of military and logistical capabilities and a threat perception still dominated by Pakistan added to the minimalist logic of the Forward Policy concept.

Finally, the lack of institutional checks and balances in India's foreign policy machinery and intelligence services opened the door to the Forward Policy decision. The prime minister and his closest associates had exceptionally strong policy influence. The civilian IB, directed by Nehru's personal friend Mullik, practically had monopoly in assessing and supplying the intelligence premises on which the Forward Policy decision was made. To some extent, it was possible to speak of an attitudinal Nehru faction, unhindered by differing views and perceptions, as represented earlier by Vallabhbhai Patel and, partially, Army HQ before 1961.<sup>38</sup>

The complex processes leading up to the Forward Policy decision and the humiliating experience of war in 1962 have had a major indirect impact on contemporary Indian foreign policy. If the 1961 Forward Policy decision is approached historically on its own terms, it also has the potential to reveal important nuances on the prelude to the Sino-Indian border war. To that effect, shedding the 'post-1962' perspective would seem fruitful. No decision maker at Teen Murti Bhavan that 2 November evening in 1961 saw the Chinese attack of 1962 coming. Rather than searching for their mistakes, a 'pre-1962' understanding

should be strived for. Adding shades of nuance to the painful past of the border dispute not only has historical significance. It also has clear policy relevance in a time when India and China simultaneously aspire for great power status—while the border dispute remains unresolved.

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