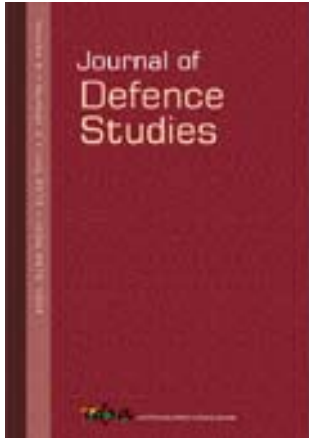


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## Sino-Indian War, 1962 and the Role of Great Powers

**S.K. Bhutani\***

*The easy availability of Indian Government documents allowed early commentators to focus on the policies pursued by India to counter the relentless advance by China in the Western border region, and the prospect of a similar thrust in the Eastern region in 1962. The spotlight settled on the inadequacy of the 'Forward Policy', which was a response to Chinese military pressure on the ground. The availability in recent years of argumentation between the Soviet and the Chinese communist parties on this as well as other issues, has enabled a holistic view to be taken of the geopolitical environment, which determined China's relations with India at the time. This article is a partial attempt to examine this aspect.*

Mao Zedong led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to victory in the civil war and proclaimed the Chinese People's Republic on 1 October 1949. A year or so later, he intervened in another war—between North Korea and South Korea—aided by the United Nations (UN) forces. Just as the war ended and the protracted process of stabilizing the ceasefire and repatriation of prisoners of war came to a close, armed clashes broke out between the Chinese communists and the Guomintang forces on the islands in the Taiwan Straits controlled by the latter—the government led by Guomintang had fled to Taiwan after their defeat on the Chinese Mainland. The clashes initiated by Beijing were in protest of the security arrangements negotiated between Guomintang and the United States (US). The crisis ended after a few months when the US agreed to regular

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\* Ambassador S.K. Bhutani, a distinguished diplomat, served in the Indian Embassy in China, from 1957 to 1962.



consultations with the People's Republic, which it did not recognize. In both cases, India played a conciliatory role. When the crisis in Taiwan Straits erupted again in August–September 1958, India offered its good offices, which were turned down. Mao's objective at this time was to stymie the Soviet Union's search for accommodation with the US. In retrospect, it appears India took insufficient note of Mao's propensity to use force—he had declined to endorse the decisions of the XX Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, relating to the 'cult of personality' and the 'policy of peaceful coexistence'.

Alone among the countries which were subjected to Western colonialism, China seeks to restore the territorial extent and eminence the Manchu Empire enjoyed in its heyday. China believes that Mongolia, Tibet and the seas adjacent to China should revert to Chinese control. The Republic of China, led by Guomindang, had been forced to concede Mongolia's independence as the price for the participation of the Soviet Union in the war against Japan. After gaining power in 1949, Mao and his colleagues repeatedly proposed to the Soviet Union that Mongolia return to China's fold!

#### TIBET

The British, when they ruled India, made none or feeble attempts to alter Tibet's status. The Tibetans, on their part, were content to secure respect for their unique religion-based institutions and maintain distance, if not isolation, from the events in their neighbourhood. Independent India lacked the wherewithal to interfere with Tibet, even if it had wished to do so. The US and the United Kingdom (UK), who were keen to influence India's decision, were informed accordingly. China's agreement in 1951, to respect Tibetan institutions, its way of life and governance, came as relief to the Tibetan government. This relief was short-lived. Mao tried to gently coax (through personal letters) the undisputed leaders of Tibet—the Dalai and the Panchen Lamas—into agreeing to 'reforms' which would lead to China gaining control of the Tibetan institutions, religious and administrative. When they balked at this, Mao temporarily postponed 'reforms' before embarking on them with full force in the summer of 1958. Inevitably, it led to violent protest by the Tibetans—in Tibet and in adjacent Tibetan-inhabited areas of China. The protestors reached Lhasa, capital of Tibet, in February 1959, and demanded reversal of Chinese policies. Mao drew two major conclusions: the protests were aided and

abetted by India and the US; and this provided him an opportunity to subject Tibet to total Chinese control.

The protest flared into armed resistance when the Chinese officials in Lhasa resorted to force to end it. The resulting flow of refugees, including the Dalai Lama himself, raised a furore in India. Public and official opinion was incensed when India was blamed for the unrest and accused of interference in China's internal affairs. In May 1959, in a message originating from Mao, India was reminded that it faced problems on its western border (with Pakistan, aided by the US) and could not afford to antagonize China.

This led to increased concern on the direction of Chinese policies in the Soviet Union and among its allies in Europe. Mao received representatives of the Soviet Union and other communist-ruled states on 6 May. Mao argued that the storm aroused by the Tibet issue would only expose the Indians as 'reactionaries' and consolidate the unity of the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union. Premier Zhou Enlai accused India of fearing political change in Tibet and therefore seeking to keep Tibet as a 'buffer'. Zhou maintained this was 'the crux' of the dispute. (As late as the 1990s, Chinese scholarly treatises have maintained this version—of Indian responsibility for Tibetan revolt in 1959 and consequent deterioration in Sino-Indian relations.) The concerns of China's communist allies were not assuaged.

Three months later, in late August, first of the many skirmishes on the border between India and China occurred at a place called Longju in Arunachal Pradesh, then known as North-East Frontier Agency or NEFA, located south of the McMahon Line and inhabited by several tribes. With this incident, the issues of unrest in Tibet and activities of the Dalai Lama receded into background and rarely, if at all, found mention in diplomatic exchanges between India and China.

### **Response to Border Skirmishes: *Forward Policy***

After the Longju incident in NEFA in August 1959, which caused casualties among Indian defenders, eastern border stayed relatively quiet for the next three years. The border in Ladakh was undefended and allowed China to move its troops into the area south and west of the border. A clash in the vicinity of Kongka Pass led to death of several Indian guards. Resultant public furore led to the cancellation of visit to China by Dr Radhakrishnan, the Vice-President of India. His visit was

intended to calm fears and create conditions for a dialogue between the leaders of India and China.

In response to Indian protest on the incident, the Chinese Prime Minister suggested disengagement of forces by creating a buffer zone 20 kms wide on either side of the border. He claimed China's 1956 maps represented the boundary. A year later, during talks between officials of the two countries, new maps were introduced; the boundary in the Ladakh area moved further south and west. China insisted that the 1956 and 1960 maps showed identical boundary—independent cartographers saw a difference of 2,000 square miles. To prevent this occupation by default, India decided to deploy small units to patrol west of the 1956 line in Ladakh. Bureaucrats christened the decision taken in November 1961 as '*Forward Policy*'. In actuality, it meant incremental addition to a 'miniscule' military presence in hard-to-patrol-and-provision locations, a presence which was swept off when the Chinese launched their offensive in October 1962.

It was a reactive policy based on until-then-observed fact that the Chinese had not used force when faced with an Indian post. China reversed this policy at the end of April 1962. When the threat of clashes became real in July 1962, V.K. Krishna Menon, India's Defence Minister, sought a meeting with Marshal Chen Yi, China's Foreign Minister—both were in Geneva at that time attending the Conference on Laos. Menon proposed that posts of both sides, where they exist, should not be challenged nor should they resort to firing at each other. Chen Yi referred the suggestion to Beijing, where foreign policy as a whole was being debated. Menon did not get an answer. After he returned to India, the government proposed to send a minister-level envoy to Beijing. The proposal was turned down by China.

To prevent encroachment in the eastern sector, K.S. Thimayya, retired Chief of the Army, suggested in July 1962 that India fight in the Himalayan passes in the event of an attack, passes which were nearly impossible to cross for six months in a year. Should the Chinese make a breakthrough, guerrilla tactics should be used to harass their troops and disrupt lines of communication. When the fighting actually got underway in October–November 1962, it did not turn out that way—the Chinese withdrew before the passes closed.

India's response ('forward policy') has elicited much criticism, some derision too. On the other hand, no viable alternative has been suggested by critics at home and abroad.

#### TALKS ON THE BORDER

The border between China and India had been under discussion since 1954. Prime Minister Nehru, during his only visit to China in 1954, raised it with his counterpart, Zhou Enlai. An incident in 1955-56 in the central section of the boundary led to talks in 1958 which failed to resolve the dispute. The prime ministers discussed the border issue in 1956-57 and engaged in correspondence from late 1958 till they met in April 1960. The revolt in Tibet in 1959, and continuing discontent thereafter, made the negotiations more difficult since China held India responsible for the unrest among Tibetans.

Change in China's policy—to isolate India from its neighbours—was not conducive to maintaining mutual trust. Bilateral talks at the official level to search for common basis in historical, administrative records produced negative result. Border dispute was, in fact, a misnomer—China's claims ran into thousands of square kilometres. While the Chinese were ready to accept principles and precedents quoted by Burma and Nepal in defining their boundaries with China, the same principles and precedents were rejected in case of India. In case of Sikkim and Bhutan, which maintained treaty relations with India, China declined to accept the treaty relationship.

As mentioned earlier, the Kongka Pass incident in October 1959 prompted Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to propose disengagement of forces on the border. He suggested a 20 km withdrawal from existing positions. Prime Minister Nehru responded within 10 days. He noted: Indian check-posts on the border were manned by civil constabulary carrying personal arms only; a 20 km withdrawal along the McMahon Line was impractical due to mountainous terrain, non-patrolling would serve the purpose; and on the western section of the boundary, there was no agreement on status quo, so Nehru suggested that China withdraw to east of the boundary alignment claimed by India and India would withdraw to the west of the boundary depicted in 1956 Chinese maps. Although two sides did not formally agree on the creation of 'no-patrolling' zone, there was no clash on the border until summer of 1962.

In an effort to break the impasse, the prime ministers of India and China met in New Delhi in April 1960, but this produced no breakthrough on the border issue and the issue was remitted for examination by officials of the two countries. The officials who examined a mass of historical data produced separate reports in 1961, which reinforced the disagreement.

On the ground, patrolling on the border was stopped by the Chinese in late February 1962, to be resumed in late April 1962. Nehru noticed this development and immediately reiterated his opposition to any armed conflict.

### **1962 Policy Disputes in China; Prelude to War**

Nineteen Sixty Two was the fourth year of economic hardship caused by the 'Great Leap Forward'—a plan of accelerated economic growth initiated in 1958. After a meeting of nearly 7,000 cadres in January, addressed by the top leadership, decision was taken not only to modify the economic policy and goals but also to re-examine foreign policy objectives in the prevailing domestic and foreign conditions. Wang Jiaxiang, a Secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP, was asked to formulate the course correction in foreign policy. He widened the scope of his mandate and re-examined the fundamental premises: probability of a world war; relationship between war, peace and revolution; viability of policy of peaceful coexistence; etc. This angered Mao Zedong, who ensured Wang's recommendations were rejected in the Central Committee meetings in August–September 1962. On Sino-Indian border dispute, Wang had suggested 'new methods' to break through the impasse. While the text of his recommendations is not available, one report claims: *Wang suggested that Nehru not be identified as an enemy of the Chinese nation and border disputes be solved through negotiations....*

May 1962 was a difficult month for China. A large number of Chinese illegally crossed the border to enter Hong Kong, causing alarm in the colony. Marshal Chen Yi, the Foreign Minister, addressed Japanese correspondents on 29 May 1962. He referred to announcement of military exercises (none were held according to the US officials) in Taiwan in preparation for 'liberating' the 'Mainland from Communist misrule', which had caused widespread hardship. On China's western frontier, he said there was a large exodus from Xinjiang into the Soviet Union (the issue was resolved through diplomatic intervention.). And he spoke of the possibility of a conflict on the Sino-Indian border in case India would allow itself to be used by the US to aggravate tensions....

At this stage, the Chinese government sought an urgent meeting with the US representative in Warsaw, the designated channel for communication between the two governments. Ambassador Wang Bingnan met his counterpart in June 1962, who assured that the US had no intention of supporting Guomindang in any adventure. This

was publicly confirmed by President Kennedy. The US assurance, says Ambassador Wang in his memoir, facilitated China's decision to go to war with India.<sup>1</sup>

In Geneva, meetings were held between Marshal Chen Yi and V.K. Krishna Menon, the leaders of Chinese and Indian delegations to the Geneva Conference on Laos in the last week of July. Menon sought an easing of tensions on the border. The Chinese delegation sought instructions. If these arrived, they were not communicated to Menon. A telegram sent on 23 July 1962 to the Chinese delegation by Zhou Enlai said: peaceful coexistence between China and India would soon be replaced by 'long-term armed coexistence' (Zhou's message is reproduced in *Zhou Enlai yu Xizang*)!<sup>2</sup> This was three months before the fighting began.

#### WAR

China launched a general offensive all along the boundary, in the eastern and western sectors, on 20 October 1962. Two days later, it announced it would no longer respect the 'illegal' McMahon Line. Another two days later, Zhou Enlai sent a message to Nehru proposing 'a ceasefire, pull-back from present positions and a meeting of the two Prime Ministers'. It cut no ice with enraged Indian opinion. The offensive was resumed. On 8 November, another offer was made by China—both countries should move their troops back from either side of the McMahon Line; no reference was made to Ladakh.

In mid-November, the comparative lull in military activity was broken by fighting in the Walong area in the extreme east of the boundary, and thereafter at Sela Pass in western section of the eastern boundary. Chushul airfield in Ladakh came under attack. On 21 November, the Chinese declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrawal of their forces from 1 December. The offensive lasted about a month; the after-effects still linger.

#### NEGOTIATIONS

##### **Zhou Enlai's Attempt to Upstage the Colombo Proposals**

The conflict between China and India was seen as a negative development by most countries in Asia and Africa who enjoyed friendly relations with both. Some of them made suggestions individually to end the fighting and engage in discussions. Finally, the leaders of Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon



(Sri Lanka), Indonesia, Ghana and the United Arab Republic (Egypt) met in Colombo in December 1962 and finalized proposals for presentation to China and then to India in their respective capitals. These came to be known as 'Colombo Proposals' and, essentially, recommended restoration of the status quo as existed on 8 September 1962 when the hostilities began, and bilateral negotiations to resolve the border dispute.

India announced her acceptance of the Colombo Proposals on 27 January 1963. Chen Yi, China's Foreign Minister, told the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation on 17 February 1963 that China had accepted the proposals 'in principle', as a 'preliminary basis' for talks between India and China. There was, he said, a great 'discrepancy' between the clarification of the proposals given to India and to China. (This was denied by Sri Lanka in a statement made in its House of Representatives.) He said China was not obliged to accept the Proposals in toto. Since China's reaction was interpreted as a negative development, Zhou Enlai, China's Prime Minister, sent a message to Nehru on 3 March 1963. He maintained that the Colombo Proposals were 'recommendations for further discussions, negotiations and clarifications, when required, for implementation'. Since his personal message sent to Nehru in January had been turned down, he proposed direct negotiations between India and China to relax border tensions and facilitate border settlement. Nehru, in his reply sent two days later, reiterated that China accept the Colombo Proposals first.

The 'personal' message had been sent in January 1963 before the Colombo powers had presented their proposals to either country. It was sent through the intermediary of P.K. Banerjee, the Indian Charge d'Affaires. P.K. Banerjee notes in his memoir:<sup>3</sup>

(Zhou) suggested two steps for Mr. Nehru's consideration:

1. for the next three months, Mr. Nehru and he would stop making negative statements about each other's country although this may not stop others from making statements of a counter-productive nature.
2. Mr. Nehru and he should meet as soon as possible with only a small entourage, away from the press and publicity, in an agreed place, in order to exchange ideas for an agreed and joint action to defuse the current situation. This meeting in total privacy should last no longer than two days. After this meeting, which would further ensure in every way the strengthening of the ceasefire

line, the two governments would draw up a programme where they could jointly cooperate in areas like trade, science, culture and technology. What was needed was a climate of trust and understanding. When the climate for mutual trust had been created, then the border disputes would be discussed, on a sector-to-sector basis, by the two countries.

The oral message was transcribed by the Charge d'Affaires and presented to Nehru, who enquired if the message had been seen by anyone else. On receiving a negative reply, he 'struck a match, held the paper to the flame and burnt it over a large crystal ash-tray'. Nehru noted that 'from the Indian side it would take more than a quarter of a century to return to any substantive negotiation, provided the Chinese refrained from another attack on India', says the Charge d'Affaires in his memoir.

The Chinese Prime Minister's message in March coincided with conclusion of agreement between China and Pakistan on the delimitation of border between China and Pak-occupied section of Jammu and Kashmir state.

## ROLE OF GREAT POWERS

### **Soviet Response**

#### *Diplomatic*

The incident at Longju on 25 August 1959, which led to loss of Indian lives, alarmed the Soviet Union. The official news agency, TASS, released a statement on 10 September, despite determined efforts by China to prevent its release. The statement deplored the clash and pointedly referred to commendable development of 'friendly cooperation' between the Soviet Union and India 'in keeping with ideas of peaceful coexistence'. This was a pointed response to allegations of the US-India collusion made by China in May.

The issue of China's approach to India figured in the discussions in late September, when the Soviet leader, N.S. Khrushchev, came to Beijing directly from his visit to the US. Khrushchev informed the Chinese leaders of conversation with the US leaders, which included the issue of divided countries—he drew parallel between divided Germany and China-Taiwan. The ensuing debate was marked by acrimony and sharp words were exchanged between Khrushchev and Chen Yi:

*Chen Yi (China's Foreign Minister): I am upset by your statement that the 'worsening of relations with India was our fault'.*

*Khrushchev (head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union): I am upset by your statement that we are time-servers. We should support Nehru, help him to keep power.*

While China declined to accept responsibility for the Longju incident, it conveyed its willingness to smoothen relations by inviting Dr S. Radhakrishnan, Vice-President of India, who had visited China only two years earlier. As stated earlier, the visit could not take place due to a serious clash causing casualties, mostly Indian, in late October 1959, in Ladakh, on the western section of the Sino-Indian border.

The debate between the two ruling parties continued after the meeting in Beijing in September. On the issue of relations with India, the Chinese claimed to have met six times with the Soviet Ambassador in Beijing, between 10 December 1959 and 30 January 1960, with a view to move the Soviet Union from its stance of 'strict neutrality'. The Soviet leaders were unmoved—they considered Chinese views both factually and politically wrong.

Finally, on 6 February 1960, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union formally sent a note to the Central Committee of the CCP stating that 'one cannot possibly seriously think that a state such as India, which is militarily and economically immeasurably weaker than China, would really launch a military attack on China and commit aggression against it'. The note maintained:

...that China's handling of the question was an expression of narrow nationalist attitude and that when shooting was heard on the Sino-Indian border on the eve of N.S. Khrushchev's trip to the U.S., the whole world considered this to be an event that could hamper the peace-loving activity of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet leaders did not waver from this position (of China seeking to hamper the policy of peaceful coexistence being pursued by them) and publicly criticized Chinese actions against India at ensuing ruling party Congresses in East European communist states.

### ***Soviet Military Aid***

Recognizing India's military weakness in the face of China's aggressive and chauvinistic behaviour, the Soviet Union chose to supply aircraft and helicopters to augment India's air transport capacity. In April 1961, it

sold eight Antonov-12 four-engine turboprop aircraft. For training, 40 Russian pilots, navigators and mechanics accompanied the aircraft (their presence was objected to by some political personalities in India on the pretext of possible espionage!). Next instalment of aircraft included 24 Ilyushin-14 and MI-4 helicopters, which could move men and supplies to an altitude of 17,000 feet. According to Zhang Han-fu, Deputy Foreign Minister of China, India placed orders for 32 Antonov An-12 transport planes, 26 MiG helicopters, 21 MiG jet fighters and 24 Ilyushin IL-14s, between October 1960 and May 1962.

### ***'Wobble'***

The US–Soviet confrontation on the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba led to drastic change in the Soviet stance. In early October 1962, the Soviet Union assented when informed of China's intention to attack India. Later, India was advised to negotiate on the basis of Chinese terms. And, the offer to sell MiG fighter aircraft was withdrawn.

As soon as the Cuban crisis eased, the Soviet Union reversed into the earlier stance—in early November, it assured India of supply of fighter aircraft!

### ***Renewed Political Support***

In mid-November 1962, China declared a unilateral ceasefire and began to withdraw its troops from 1 December 1962. Khrushchev addressed the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR) Supreme Soviet on 12 December. He spoke at length on the armed clashes on the Sino-Indian border. He reiterated the Soviet position of neutrality outlined in the TASS statement issued in September 1959, which had angered China. He welcomed the unilateral declaration of ceasefire and withdrawal of troops from recently occupied territory by China. Then, he added:

It may be asked, how can you call this a reasonable step when it was taken after so many lives had been lost and so much blood shed. Would it not have been better if the sides did not resort to hostilities altogether? Yes, of course, it would have been better. We have said this constantly and repeat it again now...

There may, of course, be people who will say: the People's Republic of China is now withdrawing its troops actually to the line on which this conflict began, would it not have been better not to move from the positions on which these troops stood at one time?

This did not please the Chinese. A few days later, the *People's Daily*, the authoritative voice of the CCP, angrily noted that this marked the first time a communist state had not sided with another communist state against a 'bourgeois' country: 'For a communist the minimum requirement is that he should make a clear distinction between the enemy and ourselves, that he should be ruthless toward the enemy and kind to his own comrades.'

### **The US and British Response**

#### ***Diplomatic***

Soon after the Longju clash in August 1959, President Eisenhower sent a message to Nehru expressing his concern at the use of force by China. In December, he visited New Delhi and received a tumultuous welcome. He conveyed his desire to assist India in military terms, without upsetting Pakistan, a treaty partner, which provided vital base facilities for intelligence operations against the Soviet Union.

The end result of the US efforts was negotiations on issues outstanding between India and Pakistan since the partition of British India in 1947. An agreement on equitable sharing of waters of the Indus Basin was reached under the auspices of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, popularly known as the World Bank. On the issue of Kashmir, Pakistani ambitions did not match Indian reality. To ward off criticism, India drew attention to growing collaboration between China and Pakistan, directed against India.

J.F. Kennedy was elected President of the US in 1961. He committed himself to 'defend freedom wherever it was threatened'.<sup>4</sup> The failure of the invasion of Cuba by irregular forces organized by the US agencies in April 1961, and the building of the 'Berlin Wall' by the Soviet Union in August 1961, led him to focus on Indochina, where the agreements reached at the Geneva Conference in 1954 had failed to ensure peace and political reconciliation, principally due to external interference.

Kennedy agreed to neutralization of Laos at the Geneva Conference in 1962, but he was determined to intervene in Vietnam and prevent reunification of the country under communist auspices. India was Chairman of the International Commission set up by the Geneva Conference in 1954. When Nehru visited the US in late 1961, he came under heavy pressure to support the US policy in Vietnam. Nehru warned against intervention in a nationalist struggle. Within the Commission,

India did concede that North Vietnam had infiltrated its military and political cadres into South Vietnam, in reaction to South Vietnam's refusal to fulfil the provisions relating to national elections. The US used the Commission's finding against North Vietnam to justify direct US intervention. The ensuing conflict caused much devastation in all three Indochina states—Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia—before the US withdrew, leaving communist governments in place in all three countries.

India's relations with North Vietnam were soured and did not recover until 1971, when India raised consular relations to the diplomatic level.

### ***Military Aid and Demand for Political Concessions***

As India's relations with China deteriorated and fighting engulfed the contested boundary in the east and in the west in October–November 1962, India sought military support—first, arms and ammunition and then, an 'air umbrella' to deter China. The 'umbrella' would allow Indian aircraft to engage the Chinese invading force, while the US aircraft would defend Indian cities.

In response, the US and the UK sent military missions plus high-level political missions. The declaration of ceasefire and withdrawal of forces by China left the military experts to only help draw up plans for expansion and reorganization of Indian forces, augmentation of arms and equipment at their disposal, etc. The plans were estimated to cost billions of dollars.

Both countries maintained that they could not be expected to fuel armed confrontation between India and Pakistan and India should seek to settle outstanding issues with its adversary, their ally. The political missions led by Harriman from the US and Duncan Sandys from the UK set out to bring India and Pakistan to the negotiating table to discuss the core issue—Kashmir. The first round of talks between the ministers from India and Pakistan in December 1962 coincided with the commencement of talks between China and Pakistan on the actual alignment of the boundary between China and Pakistan-occupied part of Kashmir. This was a provocation which India chose to ignore. Even after Pakistan and China signed a boundary agreement on 2 March 1963, India continued the talks with Pakistan.

In the April 1963 round of talks, the Anglo-Americans spelled out their ideas—'shared responsibility' for the Kashmir Valley and guaranteed access to headwaters of the rivers for Pakistan. India and Pakistan both rejected the ideas—India was unwilling to accept dilution of its sovereign

control, Pakistan considered them as surrender of its aspirations and needs.

The Anglo-American initiative fizzled out in the following two months. As for military assistance, both countries promised \$120 million dollars worth of aid in December 1962 and the same amount again in July 1963. Both countries took part in the first and last air defence exercises in July 1963.

Perforce, India returned to the policy advocated by V.K. Krishna Menon before he was eased out of office for mismanaging India's defences: as foreign policy adviser and minister of defence, Menon had advocated reliance on military and political support of the Soviet Union. As Sino-Soviet differences exacerbated, culminating in border clashes in 1969, the support from the Soviet Union increased and led to a treaty relationship in 1971.

A curious aspect of the Anglo-American approach was the attitude of the British representative, Duncan Sandys. He told J.K. Galbraith, the US Ambassador in India, that the argument between India and China was over a few acres of desert in Ladakh, which he would like India to surrender!

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To close out this narration, I may quote from Nehru's speech to the State Information Ministers in late October 1962, after the war broke out: 'We were getting out of touch with reality in the modern world and we were living in an artificial atmosphere of our own creation.'

Were we alone in that? Did Mao get what he wanted?

### **Acknowledgement**

In writing this article, I am indebted to Shruti Pandalai at *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses* (IDSA) for collecting relevant contemporary documents, including those released by Woodrow Wilson Centre as part of its 'Cold War History Project'.

### **NOTES**

1. I have mostly relied on *Ambassador's Journal* written by John Kenneth Galbraith, the US Ambassador to India during 1961–3, to summarize Anglo-American approach to India, especially the border war with China.
2. On the Soviet view of the border dispute and subsequent war, I have taken note of documents (mainly 30 and 49) of the Cold War International

History Project sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars.

3. A number of Chinese histories of the war have been published in the 1990s. An interesting summary is available in the essay on cold and hot wars along the Himalayas in the book by Liu, Xiaoyuan, *Recast All under Heaven*, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.

Mr Liu says:

In the spring of 1962, Wang Jiaxiang, head of the CCP Central Liaison Department, made an effort to change China's situation of facing enemies in all directions. He was especially concerned about the prospect of China's splitting with the Russians and bearing the brunt of American animosities. He proposed that in handling interstate relations, China should avoid falling into a vicious circle of mutual attacks and counter-attacks. Regarding India, Wang suggested that Nehru not be identified as an enemy of the Chinese nation and the border disputes be solved through negotiations. Wang made his proposals at a bad time. Because of the economic difficulties caused by the Great Leap Forward, decline of China's security along the borders, and nervous relationship among CCP's top leaders, a sharp 'turn to the left' in Chinese diplomacy was already underway. Wang's proposals only invited personal attacks (This was at the same time as Zhou Enlai prophesied peaceful coexistence between India and China would soon be replaced by a 'long armed coexistence.')...

Soon after the border war began, in an internal speech Zhou Enlai rejected the opinion that Chinese diplomacy had created enemies in all directions, asserting that the United States remained the main target of China's international struggles. Zhou asserted: 'In this struggle against the Indian reactionaries, we still made the United States the most conspicuous [target].' In other word, at the time, the distinction between the 'partial' struggle against India and the 'overall' struggle against the US no longer existed in Beijing's foreign policy.

4. Based on Chinese documents, Mr Liu discusses the dispute in terms of Chinese concerns about Indian 'interference' in Tibet. He makes no mention of the 'Forward Policy' which preoccupies India's critics. The policy envisaged a fence to keep intruders out; it was not expected to keep a fire-eating dragon at bay. It may help if histories of the war written by Chinese scholars are read and appropriate conclusions drawn.

#### NOTES

1. Kissinger, Henry, *On China*, New York: Penguin Press, 2011, p. 189.
2. See *Zhou Enlai yu Xizang* (Zhou Enlai and Tibet: Zhou Enlai's Writings and Speeches on Tibet), Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue Chubanshe, 1998.



3. Banerjee, P.K., *My Peking Memoirs of the Chinese Invasion of India*, New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1990, pp. 85-86.
4. J.F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address as President of the United States, January 1961.