

## **General**

A Seminar on “India-China Border Dispute: Way Ahead” was held at CLAWS on 11 August 2010. The panellists comprised of Dr Mohan Guruswamy, Prof Srikanth Kondapalli, Lt Gen BS Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) and Maj Gen Sheru Thapliyal . The session was chaired by Lt Gen BS Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd).

### **Opening Remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd), Director CLAWS**

India and China are two rising powers. There are ‘perceptual differences’ with regard to the border. Both sides patrol up to their perception of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Even though there is low probability of a war between the two, a minor confrontation between the border patrols could result in more violent conflict which in turn could then result in a war. We have with us academic and military luminaries who are going to deliberate upon this complex topic of territorial dispute.

### **Opening Remarks by Chairperson**

There is no difference in perception. Sadly, most people who have written on the area have not visited the area, and people who have visited or served in the area have not written about it. We do not learn from history because what is recorded actually does not happen. The crisis is seen by China as both, a difficulty and an opportunity.

### **Dr Mohan Guruswamy, Chairman, Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)**

“Borders are scratched across the hearts of men, by strangers with a calm, judicious pen and when the borders bleed we watch with dread, the lines of ink across the map turn red.” - Marya Mannes

According to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) official White Paper, 1992, “For more than 700 years the central government of China has continuously exercised sovereignty over Tibet and Tibet has never been an independent state. It is also important to see the other side.” Additionally, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in 1993 stated that “At the time of its invasion by troops of the Peoples Liberation Army of China in 1949, Tibet was an independent state in fact and law. The military invasion constituted an aggression on a sovereign state and a violation of international law.”

In January 1913, following the Chinese Revolution, Mongolia and Tibet signed a treaty at Urga declaring them free and independent. The Dalai returned to Lhasa and the Chinese garrison was forced to leave Tibet and was sent out through Nathu-la. The Dalai Lama proclaimed “We are a small, religious and independent nation” and condemns “the Chinese intention of colonising Tibet under the patron-priest relationship.” Subsequently, by 1918 Lhasa regained control over Chamdo and western Kham, but the eastern Kham and Qinghai was controlled by the warlords.

In 1931 Stalin supported a Soviet republic in Xinjiang under Gen. Sheng Shi Tsai and gave the area to the PRC in 1949. The same year, the PLA “liberated” China and the following year it occupied Chamdo. In 1951 the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) presented the Tibetans with the Seventeen Point Agreement which affirmed China’s sovereignty over Tibet. The agreement was ratified by the authorities in Lhasa.

In 1951 Maj. Relangnao Khating of the IFAS raised the Indian tricolor in Tawang, which though south of the McMahon line, was not being administered by the NEFA government. In 1959 the Dalai Lama fled to India and set up Government-in-exile and continues to be exiled till date.

### The Great Game’s Many Lines

In 1865, WH Johnson incorporated the Aksai Chin into J&K and became the Commissioner of Ladakh but British India had some reservations. Following this, in 1889, Capt. Younghusband met Col. Grombchevsky in Yarkand and Maj. Gen. Sir John Ardagh endorsed the Johnson Line. In 1890, the Chinese occupied Shahidulla. Post-occupation, the Secretary of State, Whitehall stated that “We are inclined to think the wisest course would be to leave them in possession as it is evidently to our advantage that the territory between Karakorum and Kun Lun mountains be held by a friendly power like China.” However, in 1940-41, the Russians in Sinkiang supported Gen. Sheng Shi Tsai and on the other hand, Britain reasserted the Johnson line.

Following are the Eastern Sector Developments

- 1671- Battle of Saraighat- Lachit Barphukan defeated Mughal Army of Raja Ramsingh.
- 1816- Kumaon and Garhwal annexed from Nepal
- 1826- Annexation of Assam from Burma and the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo.
- 1835- Darjeeling annexed from Sikkim.
- 1886- First foray out of Brahmaputra valley and expedition into the Lohit valley.
- 1888- Tibetan troops expelled from Sikkim.
- 1903- Curzon worries about Russian designs. Younghusband mission.

Following are the Eastern Sector Developments II

- 1907- Russia and Britain agreed that it is in their interests to leave Tibet “in that state of isolation from which, till recently, she has shown no intention to depart.”
- 1909- China invaded Tibet. 13th Dalai Lama fled to India and Amban returns to Lhasa.

- 1913- Tibet declared independence. Chinese troops took refuge in India.
- 1913- Simla Conference- McMahon line- Amban initials under protest.
- 1935- At the insistence of Sir Olaf Caroe ICS, McMahon line was notified.
- 1944- JP Mills ICS established British Indian administration in NEFA, except Tawang.
- 1947- Dalai Lama government sent a note to India laying claim to few NEFA districts.
- 1951- Maj. Bob Khating IFAS raised Indian flag at Tawang.

Things moved on then. In 1935 at the insistence of Sir Olaf Caroe ICS, then Deputy Secretary in the Foreign Department, the McMahon Line was notified. In 1944 JP Mills ICS established British Indian administration in NEFA, but excluding Tawang which continued to be administered by the Lhasa appointed head lama at Tawang despite the fact that it lay well below the McMahon Line. This was largely because Henry Twynam, the Governor of Assam lost his nerve and did not want to provoke the Tibetans. In 1947 the Dalai Lama (the same gentleman who is now in Dharamshala) sent the newly independent India a note laying claim to some districts in NEFA/Arunachal.

The Chinese have based their specific claim on the territory on the premise that Tawang was administered from Lhasa, and the contiguous areas owed allegiance to the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal ruler of Tibet. Then the Chinese must also consider this. Sikkim till into the 19th century a vassal of Tibet and Darjeeling was forcibly taken from it by the British! By extending this logic could they realistically stake a claim for Sikkim and Darjeeling? Of course not. It would be preposterous. History has moved on. The times have changed. For the 21st century to be stable 20th century borders must be stable, whatever be our yearnings.

The point of contention remains: is it Arunachal Pradesh or Lower Tibet? With the tide of time, the Border Issue becomes a Territorial Issue once again. China has laid its claim over Tibet and there has been no history of possession of Arunachal but only random claims in some maps. The population composition of Arunachal is different. It comprises of 65% tribal, 35% immigrants from Assam and Nagaland and very few Tibetans. 36% are Animist, 37% Hindu and 13% Buddhist. The Himalaya are our natural boundary. Can we afford to have China on the Brahmaputra valley? Dropping the guard is not the right policy. There have been gradual Tibetanisation of Himalayan monasteries. There are 124 monasteries and increasing. We need to have strong security arrangements with Nepal and Bhutan. Unfortunately, China is no longer talking about as-is-where-is settlement. Post 2020 scenarios may not be conducive for coercion and a resurgent India.

**Lt Gen BS Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd)**

It is important to ask why China always targets the Eastern border of Bhutan. If the line is moved upwards, then the whole alignment changes. This results in a major chunk of area falling under the Indian jurisdiction. Therefore, China tries to bog down India at the vulnerable point and ensures that India does not move upward from there. During the Wandung Incident, the Indian Air Force was very supportive, which gave a boost to General Krishnaswami Sundarji's confidence.

There was an agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC in the India-China Border Areas (Signed on 07 September 1993 at Beijing).

- Article I- Peaceful resolution, No use of force jointly check alignment.
- Article II- Minimum level of force and agree to reduce forces in stages. .
- Article III- Work out CBM along LAC. Notice of exercises near LAC.
- Article IV- Contingencies or other problems through consultations.
- Article V- Adequate measures to obviate 'Air intrusions'. Air exercises.
- Article VI- Reference to LAC not prejudicing respective position.
- Article VII - Force reduction measures form, method, scale and content.
- Article VIII- Formulating of implementation measures advising JWG.
- Article IX- Agreement effective 'on the date of signature' amendment addition through agreement by both side.

Another important deal was the agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas (Signed on 29 November 1996 at New Delhi)

- Article I- No use of force to disturb Peace and Tranquillity (P&T).
- Article II- Determination to seek solution. Respect LAC.
- Article III- Reduction measures. Ceiling on troops, missiles, artillery, weapons.
- Article IV- Notice of exercises & clarification, level, duration, direction.
- Article V- Air Intrusions. Combat 10 Km others LAC. Sovereign rights.
- Article VI- Opening fire, biodegradation, Blasts 2 km limit. Face to face sit.

- Article VII- Flag meetings, expand telecom links med and high level contacts.
- Article VIII- Crossing of LAC. Exchange of info assistance, natural disasters.
- Article IX- Clarification regarding doubtful situation developing.
- Article X- Speed process of common understanding of LAC alignment.
- Article XI- Detailed measures required 1 to 10 during JWG meetings.
- Article XII- Coming into Force on Ratification. Invalid on six months notice.

**Maj Gen Sheru Thapliyal, SM (Retd), former GOC 3 Infantry Division**

China is aiming to keep the border issue alive in order to keep India permanently unbalanced. In order to arrive at a settlement, both sides should be prepared to address each others' concerns over the boundary issue.

In the western sector, Aksai Chin claim lines provide depth to China's western highway. Control of passes including Kongkala, Marsmikla, Jarala and Changla will likely preclude any projected Indian offensive towards Rudok in the areas between Aksai Chin and Demchok. To forestall any Indian offensive, control of Demchok funnel is important. In the eastern sector, China is reluctant to accept the McMahon Line negotiated by Tibet when it was independent between 1911 and 1950.

India needs to evolve a general consensus and keep the whole issue transparent and generate public opinion. Indian media and opposition should act responsibly instead of crying sell out. India should create leverages to bring China to the negotiating table. India should press for demarcation of agreed boundary on maps and their exchange. Joint surveys of agreed boundary in all sectors should be undertaken and the principle of boundary along the highest watershed should be followed by erecting boundary pillars along the boundary.

In order to arrive at a settlement of both sides should be prepared to address each others' concerns over the boundary issue. For India, China's occupation of areas East and West of the Karakoram is a matter of concern. East-West swap must not be seen as a matter of compromise of own stand. Status of Sikkim as an unequivocal part of India should be unequivocally acknowledged by China. The boundary settlement should result in a proper demarcation of the border.

India has to be pragmatic and offer an "out of the box" solution to China. I suggest the following options for resolving the territorial dispute with China:

- In Aksai Chin, boundary to be along McCartney-McDonald Line thus ceding 23000 sq kms to China and retaining 15000 sq kms in lieu Of China foregoing its claims on Arunachal Pradesh.
- Address Chinese concern of depth to their Western Highway. Propose border alignment along McCartney-McDonald alignment of 1899. This is the only boundary proposal ever formally conveyed to Chinese by the British.

Another option could be to concede Chinese claim upto their present claim line in lieu of Chinese foregoing their claims on Arunachal Pradesh and ceding Chumbi Valley to India. This would foreclose the problem of encroachment by Chinese troops and the Chinese giving up their claim on Arunachal Pradesh would formalise our de-facto possession of the state. In addition, gaining control of the Chumbi Valley would prevent any danger to the Siliguri corridor and continuity between Sikkim and Bhutan would be achieved. The bottom line is to arrive at a de jure acceptance of a de facto situation.

### **Prof Srikanth Kondapalli, Centre for East Asian Studies, JNU**

There are numerous mechanisms of border negotiations. India and China have had 15 meetings so far. In June 2003, there was a special representative meeting, however not much progress has been achieved in the negotiations. In 1993-96, both the parties established CBMs in terms of tactical level aspects. Even after the refusal of Chinese Visa to a General, the border meetings have continued. In April 2011, joint mechanism on border meeting was established.

There is no possibility of China attacking India in the near future. This is particularly because China would need to mobilise a minimum of 33 divisions to launch an aggressive assault on India. China has a total of 65 divisions and is in no position to mobilise half of its divisions. There is a rare possibility of a solution to the border dispute at least for another coming decade. No one is aware about the negotiations going behind the door and there is a blanket ban on any information sharing. No viable solution has been put forward. There discussions were commenced in 1963 and then in 1981. Notably, only middle sector maps are shared by India and China.

The other problem that retards any solution to the dispute is the rising nationalism in China. India is considered number 2 in terms of threat perception. There has been hyped up Chinese writing where they refer to the Southern area of McMahan line as south Tibet. If one goes by the Chinese discourse, one can note that till 1986, China always considered the Western Sector as important and lay emphasis on that. However, China started realising the important of the Eastern Sector and has been upgrading its infrastructure in that particular area.

Why is a solution important?

- There is no border trade owing to the dispute
- There is a stalemate on LAC
- No movement except for Tibetan refugees which have now reduced
- River Water Issue

In case the issue is not solved, the only loss would be pertaining to business and trade. India cannot go to the International Border Justice because China is strong in the international organisations. In order to solve the dispute, one needs to have 'an out of the box' solution.

### **Discussion**

- There are differences in the Chinese concerns and the Indian concerns. The Chinese stress more on military strategy and the Indian concerns are mostly political.
- If there is a standoff, can we hold them off? What in our opinion is the Chinese military vulnerability that we can possibly exploit? What is the military's preferred strategy in this regard
- Why has the border issue remained unresolved till now? One of the reasons being, Arunachal Pradesh, which is viewed by China as part of Southern Tibet.
- The 2003 visit to China had been crucial. The Chinese behaviour is a rising concern today. From being 'rising China' to 'assertive China'. Non-confrontational assertiveness defining the aspects of the Chinese behaviour with respect especially with a generational change in leadership.
- The lack of proper infrastructure on the border areas is a major problem for India, making it impossible to mobilise troops at a fast pace.
- Strategic capabilities The Chinese have rightly concentrated on strategic areas whereas we haven't.
- Border problem is a pressure point with the Eastern border being the most important sector. What is needed is to bring them to the negotiating table.