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The Himalayan Stalemate

Retracing the India-China Dispute

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Introduction

John Lall, a noted Indian historian, once observed, "Perhaps nowhere else in the world has such a long frontier been unmistakably delineated by nature itself." How then, did India and China defy topographical odds and lock themselves into an impasse that was ultimately tested on the battlefield in October 1962, and has been simmering beneath the surface ever since? The first part of this paper dwells on this question, and attempts to get to the origins of this dispute, without resorting to the polemics that often animate commentaries on this issue.

While we now know that India made some tactical misjudgments in the events leading upto the 1962 war, and the political leadership of the time cannot be absolved of its responsibility, the reality is that "India became," as one Western scholar notes, "the main object of Chinese projection of responsibility for the difficulties that Chinese rule encountered, and in fact, the Chinese themselves created, in Tibet."[1] Indeed, a brief anecdote from a conversation between Nikita Khrushchev and Mao Zedong in October 1959 (six months after the Dalai Lama's exodus to India) supports this interpretation. In response to Mao's frustration at the Soviet Union's rhetoric of neutrality on the Sino-Indian dispute, Khrushchev replied, "If you allow him (Dalai Lama) an opportunity to flee to India, then what has Nehru to do with it? We believe that the events in Tibet are the fault of the Communist Party of China, not Nehru's fault."[2]

In 1976, after the post-war hiatus, India and China resumed their diplomatic interactions. In the second part of this paper, the author presents an analytical survey of the post-1976 phase. The orthodox historiography of this phase portrays India as a relatively intransigent actor, still clinging to the past (pre-1962) and unwilling to truly explore a solution to the dispute. India is also painted as an unimaginative interlocutor, unable to offer proposals or counter-proposals; it is China that is supposed to have steered India toward

a common position. This paper offers a corrective. India was not the only unyielding actor in this dyad; China too, despite its oft-expressed intent for a comprehensive settlement, has been less than enthusiastic in translating its principles toward concrete proposals.

Nevertheless, a modicum of progress has been attained, which is reflected in important bilateral agreements in the 1990s and 2000s. The author gets to the essence of the dispute, attempts to interpret the contemporary negotiating postures of both countries and conjectures why progress might have stalled since the mid-2000s.

A truncated India meets a unified China

In retrospect, certain fundamental structural causes can be identified that framed the context of interactions between the two young nation-states in the 1950s.

Despite having attained a bloody independence in 1947, a truncated India still viewed itself as the inheritor of the legacy of British India's frontiers. While the new Indian leadership was acutely aware of the changed context, its perception of the northern frontiers was naturally based on the institutional memory of a century of frontier-making by British strategists.

It is now historically well-acknowledged that British India's frontier policies had failed to produce a single integrated and well-defined northern boundary separating the Indian subcontinent from Xinjiang and Tibet. The legacy, however, was more nuanced. In the eastern sector, the British had largely attained an ethnically and strategically viable alignment, as manifested in the 1914 trilateral Simla Conference among India, China and Tibet, even if the agreement itself had been repudiated by the Chinese.[3] The underlying rationale for British policy was to carve a buffer around an autonomous 'Outer Tibet' not very dissimilar to the division of Mongolia in 1913 that Russia and China had agreed upon. While this policy of an attempted zonal division of Tibet did not materialise, the fortuitous byproduct of this episode was the delimiting of a border alignment between India and Tibet that mirrors more or less the *de facto* position on the ground today. China's principal concern at the time, however, was not so much the precise boundary between Tibet and India but the borders and the political relationship between Tibet and China proper.[4]

The 'western sector' between Xinjiang and Tibet and Jammu and Kashmir, which was the crux of the boundary dispute with China, was never formally delineated nor successfully resolved by British India. The fluid British frontier approach in this sector was shaped by the geopolitical and geoeconomic goals of the empire, and was never designed to meet the basic requirements of a sovereign nation-state. As Haines writes,

> The expansion of British interests, and thus, the frontier, was not a progression of a boundary line slowly being shifted farther and farther out. The British were concerned not with a border but with access – routes, passes, ease of transport, and availability of fodder for transport animals. The frontier was not a territorial unit with a defined border – routes defined the colonial frontier.[5]

There were almost a dozen attempts by the British to arrive at exactly where the boundaries should lie. Most, however, were exploratory surveys by British Frontier Agents reflecting British expansion in the northwest frontiers rather than a concerted attempt to establish an international border. And they varied with the prevailing geopolitical objectives of British foreign policy, vis-à-vis the perceived threat of Russian expansion. For instance, when Russia threatened Xinjiang, some British strategists advocated an extreme northern Kashmiri border. At other moments, opinion tended to favour a relatively moderate border, with reliance being placed on Chinese control of Xinjiang as a buffer against Russia.[6]

In contrast, in the western Karakorams, British boundary-making was more purposeful – the Anglo-Afghan Agreement of 1893, delimiting the Durand Line across the Hindu Kush mountains, and the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1895, extending the border of Afghanistan north and eastward to include the Wakhan Corridor as a buffer between Russian and British spheres of influence.[7] The only serious, albeit futile, attempts by the British to map the northern border with China (Xinjiang, Tibet) were in 1899 and 1905.[8] The Chinese never responded to the British proposals.

At the transfer of power, no definite boundary line to the east of the Karakoram Pass existed.[9] The only two points accepted by India and China were that the Karakoram Pass and Demchok, the western and eastern

extremities of this sector, were in Indian territory. Opinion differed on how the line traversed between the two points. In effect, an independent India and China were faced with a 'no man's land' in eastern Ladakh, where the contentious plateau of Aksai Chin lay. This situation would have sufficed, had Chinese power remained weak and relatively ambivalent to its southern periphery, as it had during most of the British colonial experience in India.

But across the Himalayas, the restoration of Chinese power in 1949 and its thrust into Tibet in 1951, demonstrated that China's new rulers had a more robust and methodical approach to its southern borders. Indeed, the new Chinese government had given every indication that it would pursue the old objective of uniting Tibet with China.[10]

It is evident that Indian statesmen found it difficult to adjust to the new power equilibrium – path dependence and the institutional memory of previous British India policies vis-à-vis the frontiers and its attendant impulse for a forward presence had to be reconciled with the structural reality of a rejuvenated China, which, after 1951, became India's *de facto* neighbour. The principal dilemma for the Indian side was to somehow reconcile the colonial legacies of British policies that had produced the foundations for a strategically secure northern frontier and special relations with the smaller Himalayan kingdoms, with the post-colonial reality that obliged India to discard the symbols of the very policies that had bequeathed to India these privileges. An element of hypocrisy was unavoidable if an independent but weaker India was going to secure herself against an expanded and stronger China.

The essence of the Indian response was an uneasy combination of realism and accommodation. And in the absence of military modernisation constrained by economic and institutional resources, diplomacy and soft external balancing via an attempt to leverage the superpower rivalry assumed the major burden of advancing India's diplomatic position and preventing conflict. Little effort was expended on internal balancing in the post-1947 phase.

Further, the spillover effects of the Cold War into South Asia, largely via an American decision in the early 1950s to buttress Pakistan as a regional client, reduced India's options of external balancing and made the few that existed unappealing to the foreign policy consensus, among the founding generation of Indian elites that had produced the philosophy of non-alignment. This structural development further reinforced the logic of engaging China,

as India's nationalist consensus eschewed the option of joining the Western alliance system.[11] As Nehru responded at the time, "The United States imagine that by this policy they have completely outflanked India's so-called neutralism and will, thus, bring India to her knees. Whatever the future may hold, this is not going to happen."[12] This backdrop explains much of the Nehru government's early efforts to forge an accommodation with China and the 1954 agreement over Tibet must also be viewed in such a context.

The 1954 Sino-Indian agreement over Tibet was essentially a Chinese *fait accompli* that extracted a *de jure* Indian endorsement of China's sovereignty over Tibet as also India's relinquishment of its special British-era privileges.[13] It has been suggested that the Indian leadership had viewed the 1954 agreement as an implicit tradeoff that resolved the Himalayan borders. China, however, perceived the agreement differently, primarily through its security interests in Tibet, and not to solve boundary questions.[14] But the archival material reveals that Nehru's unwillingness to unilaterally raise the boundary issue at the time was based on an assumption that China might respond by offering to negotiate a fresh boundary, which would have been disadvantageous to India. Nehru instructed his negotiators that if the Chinese raised the boundary issue, "we should express our surprise and point out that this is a settled issue."[15]

For China, however, it was all about Tibet.[16] As the People's Liberation Army (PLA) commanders at the time noted,

> Tibet is located in China's south-west border area, neighboring India, Nepal, and Bhutan, and serving as China's strategic gate in the south-west direction…Both the British and the US imperialists have long cast greedy eyes on Tibet, so Tibet's position in [China's] national defense is extremely important.[17]

India, on the other hand, gave no expression to its revised cartographic policy (i.e. new maps of 1954 showing a settled northern frontier). Alastair Lamb speculates,

> ....had India given practical, and rapid expression to such a new policy between 1947 and 1950, by the setting up of military posts along the new border and creating suitable infrastructure for their logistical support, it

> would not have been possible for the PRC in the early 1950s to construct its own line of communication between Xinjiang and Tibet…without at the very least, attracting attention in New Delhi.[18]

And even though the historical record did not support either side's claims in Aksai Chin, the Chinese, by virtue of their expanded presence in Tibet, would henceforth view Aksai Chin as a strategically located area to maintain access to Tibet. That New Delhi knew little of these remote eastern parts of Ladakh was evident in the subsequent course of events, such as the discovery of the newly constructed Xinjiang-Tibet highway after it was written about in a Chinese magazine in 1957! (China decided to construct the road through Aksai Chin in early 1952.)

India's actions in the sub-Himalayan region were more purposeful. The PLA's march into Tibet brought the security of the northern frontiers into the spotlight, which hitherto had been given little attention. This lent urgency to the Indian government's efforts to extend administrative jurisdiction into the North-East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh). This also included extending jurisdiction over Tawang, after Major Khating's expedition in February 1951. Until then, Tawang, though south of the 1914 line, was considered to be under the *de facto* control of Tibet, which appointed the head Lama of the Tawang monastery. This extension of Indian administrative authority was ***not*** contested by China at the time. The Himalayan states of Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal assumed even greater importance from the Indian security perspective than British-India had ever attributed to these "buffer" states. By October 1950, when the PLA began its advance to Lhasa, they were to become the frontline states and India, acting swiftly, concluded a treaty with Bhutan in August 1949. In December 1950, a treaty was also worked out with Sikkim, whereby it became an Indian protectorate. Nepal remained a close ally.

Thus, by the mid-1950s, both sides seemed to have come to a tacit understanding – India had made a virtue out of a necessity and accepted Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, and China had accepted India's influence in the sub-Himalayan space. While the legality of the borders was yet to be established (in Zhou Enlai's words, "once the conditions are ripe"), this situation by itself was not unstable.

What then reheated the frontiers and led to a gradual but sustained path to military confrontation?

Superimposed on these boundary questions were two significant geopolitical developments. First, China's inability to manage events in Tibet by the mid-to-late 1950s; and second, the tumult of the Cold War, which spilled over into South Asia, manifesting via the Sino-Soviet split, and compounded by perceived Chinese threats from the US and Taiwan on its coastal borders. The failure of China's Tibet policies and its explosion in 1959 produced a chain of events and altered the prism through which either side would henceforth perceive the intentions of the other.[19]

The evolution of India's Tibet policy, according to several scholars, played a part in influencing Chinese perceptions vis-à-vis Indian intentions and was, thus, directly relevant to the Chinese calculus prior to the armed conflict in 1962. After the 1954 agreement, Nehru reportedly hoped that "with the last vestiges of Chinese suspicion against India removed, China might adopt a reasonable attitude and Tibetan autonomy could yet be saved in substance and India's own interests safeguarded." It has been suggested that India's tacit acquiescence of, or limited covert support to, the US policy to arm the Tibetan rebels amplified Chinese threat perceptions, especially after the internal rebellion in Tibet exploded in 1959 and the Dalai Lama's flight to India.[20]

According to Chen Jian, "By early 1959, with many Tibetans increasingly determined to use force to defend what they saw as their basic values and way of life, and with Mao equally determined to resort to force to pursue a definitive resolution of the Tibet issue, the stage had been set for the emergence of a major crisis in Tibet. Even a small spark could ignite a wider conflict." But by late March 1959, the Dalai Lama and his followers had fled to India and "the PLA had effectively and almost completely eliminated the armed resistance in Lhasa…several PLA units moved into southern Tibet, approaching the borders with India." Thus, "in 1959, when the PLA's suppression of the Tibetan rebels allowed Beijing to extend its military and political control to Tibet's entire territory, the combination of this issue and the border disputes led to a severe crisis in Sino-Indian relations."[21]

John Garver notes,

> India became the main object of Chinese projection of responsibility for the difficulties that Chinese rule encountered, and in fact, the Chinese themselves created, in Tibet.[22]

In retrospect, India's own nuanced stance vis-à-vis Tibet, where, while it accepted China's control of the region in the 1954 agreement, yet continued to foster Tibetan autonomy, albeit through peaceful methods, and where Indian dealings with the anti-Chinese Tibetans were supposed to be a "low-cost, low-priority hedge," not meant to interfere with the more important Indian effort to improve ties with China, was perhaps too ambitious, and reinforced Chinese misperceptions.[23]

Even though it was at a tactical level, the Indian forward policy initiated in November 1961 has been attributed as an immediate driver of the conflict. The official Indian history of the war published by the Ministry of Defence in 1992 offers a candid reflection on the events leading upto 1962.[24]

Insofar as the western sector, arguably the *causis belli* of the conflict, is concerned, the authors point out that India's "forward policy", while not entirely without logic, "went too far, got too reckless, and lost its balance in its later stages."[25] It was not without logic: since "a wide corridor of empty space separated the forward Chinese posts from the Indian positions in eastern Ladakh," both sides pushed forward in an effort to show that the remaining area was not empty. The basic assumption behind this forward policy was the belief, especially of the Intelligence Bureau, that the Chinese "were not likely to use force against any of our posts, even if they were in a position to do so."[26]

Nonetheless, the authors note, "In the implementation of the 'forward policy', the Army Headquarters had a direct hand and even issues normally dealt with at the battalion level (move of sections or patrols) were being dictated from New Delhi, based on maps of dubious accuracy."[27] Further, the authors note, "The Aksai Chin highway connected Gartok in Tibet with Yarkand in Xinjiang Province of China. This route was a two-way road capable of taking even the heavier Army vehicles. The total distance was around 1,200 kilometres. This road passed through an extremely hostile terrain, rising from 1, 500 metres in Xinjiang to about 5, 000 metres in the

Aksai Chin area. For the Chinese, Ladakh region formed part of Xinjiang military region, with one Army (possibly the 3rd Army) deployed there. In addition, in order to pacify and 'Hanize' the region, and in the early 1950s itself, the Chinese had disbanded two Armies and settled them on collective farms in Xinjiang that had a predominantly Muslim population with ethnic affinity with the Muslim republics in the Soviet Union. Out of this Army, probably one division was earmarked for Ladakh…By July 1962, the Chinese had inducted a complete division in Ladakh."[28]

Clearly, China too had its own forward policy; but it had a well-defined objective. The policy comprised securing the strategic road through Aksai Chin to maintain all-weather access to Tibet and garrisoning all adjacent areas for protection of that road.

New Delhi's absurd reading of Chinese threat perceptions, in that they would not respond to Indian forward policies, was based on both a lack of appreciation of Chinese interests in eastern Ladakh, and more importantly, a complete misreading of the international situation.

Senior officials in the Indian security establishment had become convinced that a combination of the Sino-Soviet split that had come out into the open in 1959,[29] and China's predominant security concerns on its eastern front with the US and Taiwan, would dissuade Beijing from the use of force. As K Subrahmanyam noted, "The possibility of the Chinese launching a very carefully controlled limited operation, with very limited objectives, appears to have been overlooked altogether." Again, this was due to a belief that in the prevailing nuclear bipolar order, a Himalayan war would automatically escalate to a global conflict and would, thus, deter the Chinese from contemplating any use of force.

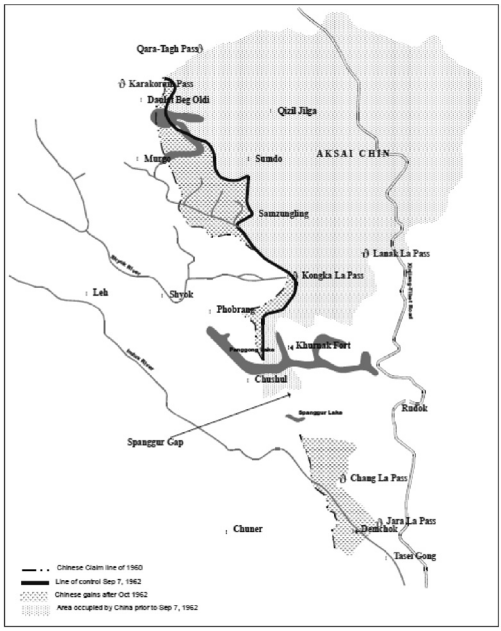
On 23 June 1962, the Chinese Ambassador in Warsaw received an assurance from the US Ambassador that Washington would not support a Nationalist invasion of the mainland. This was publicly confirmed by President Kennedy on 27 June at a press meet. On 14 October, China's Ambassador in Moscow secured guarantees from Khrushchev that in the event of a Sino-Indian war, the Soviet Union would "stand together with China." The Chinese attributed this Soviet support, a reversal of its earlier policy of neutrality in the Sino-Indian dispute, to a Soviet desire for Chinese support in the event of war with the US, given the impending Cuban missile crisis (22 October

1962). Presumably, Moscow had revealed to Beijing that it was planning to make public the deployment of missiles to Cuba.[30]

These two developments had united China's hands to initiate a punitive strike on India.

Retracing the final months before the October War, Klaus Pringsheim notes,

> China appears to have baited an elaborate trap, enabling her to prove later that it was India which had refused to negotiate; Nehru, who had announced the order to oust the Chinese, the Indian press which had bragged of an impending offensive, and Indian troops which had first attacked.[31]



Chinese Gains in the Western Sector in the 1962 war

Source: Mohan Guruswamy and Zorawar Daulet Singh, *India China Relations: The Border Issue and Beyond* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2009), p. 83.

Note: China expanded its Line of Actual Control (LAC) by approximately 2,500 square miles to its claim line of 1960, "eliminating possible launch pads for any offensive against the Aksai Chin highway by eliminating DBO, Chushul and Demchok positions." PB Sinha, AA Athale, and SN Prasad (Chief Editor), *History of The Conflict with China, 1962* (New Delhi: History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1992).

In retrospect, why didn't India agree to an east-west trade-off based on the status-quo position of Indian and Chinese forces?

In 1956, when Zhou Enlai first raised the issue of the eastern sector with Nehru in New Delhi, he said that while China never recognised the McMahon Line, "it is an accomplished fact, we should accept it…So, although the question is still undecided and it is unfair to us, still we feel that there is no better way than to recognise this Line." In a letter dated 23 January 1959, Zhou, while rejecting the legality of the McMahon Line, had offered "to take a more or less realistic attitude" towards it. In April 1960, during his last visit to New Delhi, Zhou had stated, "As China was prepared to accommodate the Indian point of view in the eastern sector, India should accommodate China in the western sector…We hope that the Indian Government will take towards the western sector an attitude similar to that which the Chinese Government had taken towards the eastern sector…an attitude of mutual accommodation."[32]

By the time (late 1950s) Nehru and the Ministry of External Affairs were prepared to contemplate concessions on Aksai Chin (where, in Nehru's famous words, "not a blade of grass grows"), contradictions with China had spiralled out of control and public opinion constrained any effort at yielding ground to the Chinese.[33] The favourable posture of the superpowers toward India on the boundary question also reduced the incentives for India to make concessions after 1959. Chinese efforts to alter the Indian misperception – that China was too isolated and internally weak to respond – via limited military and diplomatic signals, failed to attain the desired goal and only reinforced the Indian view that China would bark, but not bite.

But the main underlying reason that prevented a swap deal was that the Indian side could never get itself to equate the two disputes: the eastern sector, in the Indian perception was a settled frontier. And while minor adjustments were possible in different sectors, India found it difficult to accept that the eastern sector was legally as disputed as Aksai Chin, the latter having been surreptitiously acquired by the Chinese in the 1950s.[34] As Hoffmann writes, "The Indian government was determined not to grant legitimacy to the concept of a Chinese 'line of control' in Ladakh."[35] The inflexibility of this position was sustained by a presumption (based on fear)

that accepting the entire frontier as disputed would open it up for arbitrary Chinese claims across sectors. Further, by early 1960, Nehru had been persuaded that India's case on Aksai Chin was stronger than had previously been acknowledged. This position only reinforced the earlier perception that all sectors could not be viewed as equally disputed.

Finally, one could also speculatively attribute an additional variable on the calculus behind India's stand on Aksai Chin. It can be conjectured that the concurrent dispute with Pakistan on Kashmir, may have played a role in shaping early Indian thinking. Perhaps the Indian government felt that legally accepting Chinese claims on Aksai Chin would have complicated India's ideologically more potent dispute in the sub-Himalayan space with Pakistan over Kashmir. Until the relevant archives are opened, we cannot test this argument.

Border diplomacy since the 1970s

The 1962 war froze both positions on the border and it would take a hiatus of fifteen years for diplomatic relations to be reestablished. In 1976, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi decided to exchange Ambassadors.

In February 1979, on India's initiative, Foreign Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited China. This was the first high-level bilateral visit since Zhou Enlai's visit to India in April 1960. Initially planned for October 1978, it was perhaps fortunate that the visit eventually took place in February 1979, after the 3rd plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party had taken its epochal decisions on reforms and the opening up of China. After a period of fluctuating fortunes, Deng Xiaoping was firmly in command.[36]

From India's perspective, the visit was largely exploratory. Meaningful progress on the boundary question was not expected nor were concrete suggestions to this end possible. For India, the main objective was to ensure the boundary remained a priority and to resist the Chinese view that it could simply be frozen as an intractable problem "left over from history."

The only idea proposed by the Indian side was the option of a partial settlement of the boundary in segments where there was no dispute. This too was put forward fleetingly as a sort of trial balloon. It was quickly abandoned; oddly leaving behind a legacy of confusion regarding the so-called sector-

by-sector approach.[37] There had been no exploratory talks on it through diplomatic channels, either in New Delhi or in Beijing. At India's request, a meeting was arranged between the Indian Foreign Secretary and a Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. The proposal advanced was the possibility of arriving at a partial settlement, particularly in the "Middle Sector"[38] where there was, in the Indian view, negligible divergence between the two sides. It was, however, quickly dismissed by the Chinese Minister, implying that an initiative was in the works on their side and the Indian delegation should patiently wait for the meetings scheduled with their leaders. The conversation was outside the main proceedings of the visit and its agenda, akin to an informal exchange of views.

The package proposal

The proposal was an official one made to Vajpayee without any prior diplomatic feelers.[39] While retaining the usual rhetoric about long-term amity, Deng summarily boiled the boundary question down to a dispute over two areas of unequal importance, in which India actually gained as it was in possession of territory that was larger, inhabited and endowed, in comparison with what China had in the western sector. A comprehensive settlement on the basis of the exchange of claimed territories in the two sectors would settle matters for good, subject to what he described as adjustments "here and there" as necessary through detailed discussions in follow-up action, once the broad sweep of the principle was settled.

Since the Indian side had no prior knowledge of Deng's "package" offer, Vajpayee was compelled to improvise in his reply. He said that since Deng's formula was similar to Zhou Enlai's offer in 1960, it entailed obvious difficulties as the situation on each sector of the long boundary had its own peculiar characteristics, and that it should be possible to deal with areas of little or no difference first and then move on to others where there was greater divergence between the two sides and, therefore, a sector-by-sector approach could be adopted. Deng ruled out a piecemeal approach, using the expression "package solution," to describe his proposal, one that would settle the entirety of the boundary in one go.

In retrospect, it could be conjectured that an opportunity for establishing a principle, if not the essence of a solution, was lost. The

"package solution" could have been retained by the Indian side, thereby forming the basis for further negotiations. For instance, India could have left open a channel for further communication, claiming Deng's idea needed further study, that it would need to be fleshed out and could be supplemented in due course by rival or parallel ideas. This could have been a valuable baseline reference, given the waning of the "package" idea, in ensuing Chinese rhetoric, especially in recent years. However, the surprise of the offer, and perhaps an acute sensitivity to domestic politics, circumscribed the Indian response.

During the same visit, Vajpayee also held talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua. On the boundary question, Huang proposed, and the Indian side accepted, the following formula or 3-point agreement:

- Recognising its importance, the two sides would undertake the efforts necessary for early solution of the dispute;
- While the process was underway, both sides would ensure that peace and tranquillity was maintained in the border areas; and
- There should be no impediment to the development of bilateral relations in various fields.

Subsequent diplomacy has developed under the aegis of this formula. Even the important agreements reached in the 1990s and the 2000s can be seen to have emanated from the principles derived from the 1979 3-point agreement.

The formulation was one within which it was possible to stress the primacy of a solution to the boundary problem without necessarily making it a precondition or obstacle with regard to the broader development of relations: thus, reconciling the strongly held views of both sides.

Huang Hua's return visit to New Delhi, the first by a Chinese Foreign Minister to India, took place in June 1981. On India's initiative, an annual dialogue at the level of Vice Ministers was established. The Chinese delegation was led by a Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Chinese practice of having a Vice Minister lead the talks has not varied, indeed to the present day. India was represented by the Secretary (East Asia), assisted by the Ambassador to China. This was only changed in 1999, when the National Security Adviser took over to lead the talks.

When the first round of talks commenced in Beijing in December 1981, both sides faced the awkward task of defining a procedure and a methodology. The Indian delegation put forward three alternatives:

- Review of the historical evidence, technical matters and geographical features of the boundary regions;
- Implementation of the Colombo proposals of 1962 as a starting point for full territorial review, the contribution of impartial third parties through the diplomatic modalities of a special conference providing a dependable and neutral formula; and
- An exercise to locate and define the alignment of the LAC.

The aforementioned potential frameworks can be characterised as proceeding from a maximalist position (i.e. Chinese withdrawal from Aksai Chin as a precondition to negotiations), to the pre-October 1962 LAC, reversing Chinese territorial profits during the war, to identifying the actual status quo positions on the ground at the time.

While the first option had been India's pre-1962 posture, and thus, outdated, the other two were eminently reasonable and demonstrated a flexible Indian position. The Chinese, however, rejected all three, casting doubt on their seriousness to pursue a solution. This is because options 2 and 3 provided the Chinese an easy and logical passage to a "package" settlement. The proposal to locate the LAC, even with the rider that this would be without prejudice to the formal claims of the two sides, was an unusually bold one for the Indians to advance, as it would have inevitably led to settlement along the status quo. By reviving the Colombo proposals, India was actually paring down its territorial claims.[40]

In elaborating the sectoral examination of the full length of the boundary, the Indian negotiator in the boundary group probed the Chinese position beyond the concept of the simple swap proposed between the eastern and western sectors. His Chinese counterpart was adamant in keeping both Sikkim and the sector west of the Karakoram Pass (where territory has been ceded to China by Pakistan) out of the ambit of the discussions. About the middle sector, the Chinese side was studiously non-committal; but actually refused altogether to concede that sectors other than the western, middle and eastern were intrinsic to the subject

at hand. This seemed indicative of some considerable intransigence on the Chinese side.

While the duality symbolised by the package and sector-by-sector approaches issues from the confrontation between the two ideas, imagined in commentaries public and official, the exchanges on them at the first session of the talks sharply illustrated the utility of the sectoral approach.

It is worth noting here that the orthodox historiography on this phase of talks has generally attributed to India's unyielding position as the principle obstacle in arriving at a mutually acceptable framework. The record, however, is more nuanced. The Chinese, despite their oft-repeated preference for a "package" framework, were unwilling to extend their principles to its logical conclusions, as demonstrated in the example above. That the dominant narrative has failed to reflect the substance of the Chinese position can be attributed to China's better handling of public diplomacy, unlike India's, that chose discretion over the management of domestic and international public opinion.

Eight rounds of talks were held between 1981 and 1988. In the first round, in December 1981, India, unwilling to accept China's "package" framework, proposed a sector-wise examination of the dispute. In the fourth round of border talks, in October 1983, China accepted India's insistence to discuss the dispute on a sectoral basis. A Chinese official at the time stated,

> ....it is in favour of a comprehensive settlement, but does not oppose separate discussions on the east, middle and west sectors of the boundary, if this may lead to overall settlement.[41]

India's approach was based on the logic of addressing the dispute in a sequential manner, flowing from easier areas to more disputed ones; ironically, a famous Chinese diplomatic principle. India assumed that since the eastern sector was relatively solvable, it could be addressed first. This would then create a positive atmosphere for discussions on the western sector.[42] However, it should not be presumed that India was seeking a partial settlement of select sectors of the boundary. The Chinese side probably rejected this principle of sequencing as it would have implied that the eastern sector is easier to solve than the western sector, thus undermining their bargaining position.

Indeed, in the sixth round in November 1985, Chinese negotiators pressed claims in the eastern sector south of the McMahon Line. In an interview to Indian journalists in June 1986, China's Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Liu Shuqing, said that "the eastern sector is the biggest dispute and key to the overall situation."[43] The official Chinese statement after the seventh round in July 1986 stated, "The Indian side noted a hardening of the Chinese stand; the Chinese pointed out that India was demanding only one side to make concessions."[44] Tensions in the eastern sector during 1986-87 overshadowed the final rounds of talks. Meanwhile, India extended full statehood to Arunachal Pradesh in December 1986. In 1988, Vice-Premier Wu Xueqian's comments to Indian journalists elaborated on Zhou's line and Deng Xiaoping's offer, but this time, clearly signalling India's requirement to make concessions in the eastern sector.

It would appear that the Chinese strategy had shifted from its stance in the early 1980s (and its stand from April 1960 when Zhou Enlai stated in New Delhi that "there exists a relatively bigger dispute" on the western sector) as Beijing began to emphasise the eastern sector as the larger part of the boundary dispute.

First, retrospectively, this may have been driven by a strategic need to equate the dispute in the two sectors, something New Delhi could not reconcile itself to (a predicament it had already faced in the 1950s). It has been suggested that since New Delhi had rejected the Chinese offer of an east-west swap twice before, Beijing was compelled to harden its position in the eastern sector to persuade New Delhi to commence negotiations, as well as to ensure that Beijing could bargain on an equal footing. Second, it has been suggested that from Beijing's perspective, given Indian reluctance for a "package" settlement, bargaining logic dictated that if concessions in one sector were not to be linked to gains in another, then it made sense to simply push for the maximum claims in all the sectors.[45] Third, it has been argued that the emergence of a favourable global situation, after Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's statements in New Delhi in December 1986 taking a neutral stance on the India-China dispute and a new Soviet policy in general to normalise its relations with China, reduced China's incentives to make concessions vis-à-vis India.

Clearly, there was a perceptual gap between India and China on the essence of an east-west swap. The popular Indian position may be stated as follows: it is

argued that by accepting a swap, India would be making a major concession by 'the legal surrender' of a part of Aksai Chin, which it believes, rightfully belongs to it. China, on the other hand, would gain *de jure* recognition of territory under its control in the western sector, which includes territory acquired through use of force in 1962, while giving up nothing, except an unjustifiable claim to Arunachal Pradesh. The underlying reason for this Indian position is that the eastern sector has already been delimited (in the 1914 agreement) even if its formal demarcation has yet to occur through a bilateral process with China. The western sector, on the other hand, was ***never*** defined in a treaty with China, and therefore, is technically more disputed.

It may suffice here to say that it is imperative for Indian opinion to appreciate that China bargaining strategy precludes it from explicitly acknowledging Indian claims on Arunachal Pradesh prior to a comprehensive settlement. Seeking to prematurely do so would be futile, and perhaps only encourage Beijing to reassert its fundamental position to ensure its claims are taken seriously in New Delhi.

At the same time, India needs to maintain a negotiating position to preclude China from making the eastern sector the heart of the dispute. Since China's claims on the eastern sector lack any historical or legal basis, the entire strategy to buttress its own position is based on a negative strategy of undermining the Indian case. This underscores the logic for India to avoid getting entrapped in a narrative that legitimises China's efforts to break the McMahon Line. By maintaining its cartographic claims in the western sector, including areas west of the Karakoram Pass (ceded to China by Pakistan) and on Chinese territorial profits in Ladakh from the 1962 war, India's bargaining posture would match China's consistent positions on the dispute.[46]

Tentative progress

Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit was an important milestone in the path toward diplomatic normalisation, because India's position converged with the Chinese approach that the border dispute should not obstruct normal inter-state interactions.

From 1988 to 2003, an additional 14 Joint Working Group (JWG) meetings were held, which ended up being largely bureaucratic exercises. The JWGs did, however, lay the groundwork for two important confidence-building agreements in 1993 and 1996, which created an array of devices to

maintain peace and security along the LAC, and have, thus, contributed to the stabilisation of the status quo. A strong focus on the LAC emerges from these two agreements. Though a caveat preserving the formal positions of both sides is maintained, for instance, in Article VI of the 1993 treaty, the Line of Actual Control becomes paramount. Article I commits both sides to strict respect of the Line; Article II deals with limited and ceiling force levels on the Line; Articles III and IV provide for consultations for confidence-building measures. The 1996 treaty on confidence-building measures goes further to sanctify the Line of Actual Control and elaborates on the concept of zones adjacent to it for the purpose of reducing forces.[47]

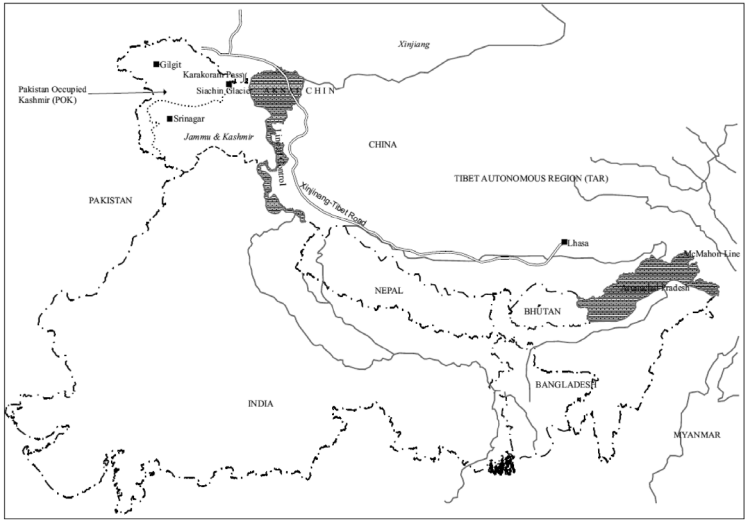
Perhaps the most decisive phase commenced in June 2003, when both countries decided to appoint Special Representatives to lead the border discussions, to identify an agreed framework. (13 rounds of Special Representative-meetings have been held as of May 2010.) This marked a shift on the Indian side, as from this point onward, the Prime Minister's Office took direct charge of a political exploration of the boundary settlement. India also reiterated China's sovereignty over Tibet, a reassurance that China values, since the original 1954 agreement had a validity of only 8 years (it had lapsed in June 1962). India received a *de facto* acceptance of Sikkim as an integral part of India.

This diplomatic process evolved further, and in April 2005, the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles Agreement was signed with both nations envisaging a "political settlement" and not a "technical solution." This was a landmark agreement that substantially bridged and accommodated the positions of both sides. According to Article III of the guiding principles, both states agreed to "mutually acceptable adjustments to their respective positions on the boundary issue, so as to arrive at a package settlement to the boundary question. ***The boundary settlement must be final, covering all sectors of the India-China boundary***" [emphasis added]. Article IV notes that, "The two sides will give due consideration to each other's strategic and reasonable interests." And, importantly, from the Indian perspective, Article VII reads, "In reaching a boundary settlement, the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas." Since the eastern sector (Arunachal Pradesh) is clearly the more populous section of the frontier, by inference the aforementioned clause suggests that a settlement cannot deviate too far from the status quo.

A Chinese analyst recently placed the contemporary phase in a historical perspective:

> Until now, both sides have been holding their cards close to their chests. To arrive at the framework, they will have to show their hand. So this is the most difficult phase and we are, thus, unlikely to see a breakthrough soon.[48]

The next step in this arduous process is exchanging maps indicating their respective perceptions of the entire alignment of the LAC. On the "clarification and confirmation" of the LAC, each side has so far only clarified via an exchange of maps, its line in the middle sector. For the remaining two sectors, there is no mutually agreed upon LAC. At an operational level, this means that there is no mutual agreement on where Indian and Chinese troops have a legal right to be positioned.



Current Status of Dispute: All Sectors

Source: Mohan Guruswamy and Zorawar Daulet Singh, *India China Relations: The Border Issue and Beyond* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2009), pp. 115-6.

India claims that China is illegally occupying over 43,000 sq kms of Jammu and Kashmir, including 5,180 sq kms ceded to Beijing by Islamabad in a 1963 agreement. China disputes India's sovereignty over 90,000 sq kms of its territory, mostly in Arunachal Pradesh.

A distinction may be made between the terms 'frontier' and 'boundary'. A boundary is a clear separation between two sovereign states that can be marked as a line on a map. A frontier is a tract of territory – a zone – separating two sovereign states. In the case of India and China, their frontiers have been defined, for the most part, by nature itself – the Himalayan range. The dispute between India and China is over where their boundary line should run through this Himalayan frontier zone. Yet, because this frontier zone consists of several thousands of square kilometres of territory, a boundary dispute has become a dispute over territory as well.

It is pertinent here to make a point on the 1914 McMahon Line. The distinction between 'delimit' and 'demarcate' is crucial to appreciate the dispute. It was spelt out by Henry McMahon himself in 1935:

> 'Delimitation', I have taken to comprise the determination of a boundary line by treaty or otherwise, and its definition in written, verbal terms; 'Demarcation', to comprise the actual laying down of a boundary line on the ground, and its definition, by boundary pillars or other physical means.[49]

Thus, the former signifies roughly a region, while the latter is a positive and precise statement of the limits of sovereignty. Since the 1914 line has not been officially demarcated, the implication is that there could be legitimate pockets of dispute, albeit minor, even along the McMahon Line, when it is transposed on the ground, thus, creating 'a dispute within a dispute'.

Indeed, the practical implications of this are well understood. A former Indian National Security Adviser notes,

> In the McMahon Line itself, because of modern cartography innovations and what not, there will be changes in it. There may be certain amount of changes with regard to the agreement that we may reach. It is possible that there may be some amount of changes in territory.[50]

The so-called intrusions by either side have, thus, been primarily the result of conflicting interpretations of the McMahon Line alignment on the ground. It appears, particularly in the eastern sector, that each side is presently trying

to ensure it has a clear presence along its version of the LAC, and once this is achieved, both sides will cartographically present their respective LAC to the other side.

Each side has, occasionally, attempted to lay claim to certain portions of the LAC by the most innocuous means, officially described as tell-tale signs, leaving behind scattered evidence like wrappers of cigarettes, biscuits or piles of stones to signal and legitimise its presence. As the Indian Defence Minister notes:

> They have their own perceptions, we have our own perceptions. Sometimes their troops are patrolling in areas that we feel are ours and at times our troops are patrolling in areas they feel are theirs…This is the main problem.[51]

It is, however, unclear whether both sides are equally vigorous in their patrolling. China's improved logistical infrastructure along the frontier has enabled it to increase the intensity of its patrolling; India's relatively inferior infrastructure might have constrained its patrolling capabilities. Further, geography and climate ensure that the entire Sino-Indian border (unlike the Sino-Russian border) can neither be fully manned by either side nor patrolled throughout the year. Thus, in the absence of an undemarcated border, certain disputed pockets can occasionally get intruded upon by a side determined to occupy a spot.

It can also be argued that incursions on the ***disputed*** segments of the India-China border, perhaps, do have a tactical rationale insofar as they buttress each side's version of the LAC. For instance, China, by repeatedly transgressing into select pockets south of the 1914 line, could hope to undermine the legitimacy of the entire alignment. Thus, Indian negotiators and security managers must carefully note the technical intricacies of Chinese intrusions along the entire frontier, and critically evaluate implications of the same for Chinese border negotiation strategies. Hence, before the "agreed framework" is arrived upon, it should be obvious that India will need to be tactically extremely savvy and vigilant on the northern frontiers, so that political negotiators in New Delhi are provided with adequate cards on the negotiating table.

It is ironic that just as an elite consensus on a package framework was being forged in India, evolving patterns of interactions in the international system intervened to again alter the trajectory of the boundary question.

Geopolitics intervene

Are there other variables driving China's calculus on the border dispute?

There is a general consensus within the Indian security establishment and China watchers that since late 2006, China has decelerated the negotiation process. The evidence cited is a relative diplomatic hardening of the Chinese stance on the eastern sector (that has alternated between asserting the formal Chinese line on Arunachal Pradesh and stressing only on Tawang) accompanied by tactless remarks by Chinese officials, more vigorous Chinese patrolling and higher frequency of recorded intrusions across the LAC, and protest against high-level Indian visits to the eastern sector. While many of these incidents could be rationalised as merely reflecting the technical Chinese bargaining position, they probably served a signalling purpose indicative of a change in posture, thus meriting further attention.

The most important structural development has been India's evolving relationship with the US. The famous July 2005 US-India joint statement legitimising India's nuclear status, and ensuing developments in Indian foreign policy to forge a cooperative agenda with Washington, altered Indian incentives and made engagement with Washington an important component of New Delhi's foreign policy. Such a geopolitical flux has influenced Beijing's India policy. China's threat perceptions vis-à-vis medium and long-term re-alignments on its southern periphery have influenced its approach to the boundary question. Was Beijing signalling its dissatisfaction at a potential trajectory in US-India relations?

According to Kanti Bajpai's perceptive interpretation, the Chinese are probing to

> ....discern whether or not New Delhi is serious about being an autonomous centre of power and following its own course. Or is New Delhi drifting into an anti-China alliance structure, however loosely and informally, with the US and Japan? At the same time, the probe could

be a device to measure very carefully the US and Japanese reactions to Chinese provocations and stances.[52]

Though China's complex interdependence with the West, and in East Asia, has accorded Beijing with a sense of confidence, that there are limits to major realignments in the foreseeable future, the evolution of US grand strategy and its impact on the triangular dynamics would influence how the Himalayan powers perceive each other.

Future of the Dispute: Triangular dynamics and bilateral imperatives

The context and intensity of bargaining on the dispute is unlikely to be dictated exclusively by bilateral equations. Broader geopolitical variables, especially Beijing's and New Delhi's evolving 'partnerships' with Washington, are impacting the timing and incentives for both sides to move forward.

As Zhu Feng of Beijing University recently observed,

> For Beijing, what's the leading strategic pressure? It is always the US. It is always [US] alliance politics [involving] Japan or Australia or South Korea. That's why Chinese experts feel so frustrated [as to] why India [has] now taken a lead in the effort to assume that China is a threat…How to resolve it? China should take a look at India more seriously.[53]

For instance, the Chinese envoy to India was recently elevated to the rank of Vice Minister, indicating a rising profile for India within the Chinese bureaucratic hierarchy.[54]

Thus, triangular dynamics will become important: whether both Beijing and New Delhi choose to reassure each other or remain ambivalent or even seek to buttress their bargaining positions by leveraging their ties with Washington will shape how the dispute is viewed by both sides. For the foreseeable future, Washington will have the most favourable position in this triangle: the US-China and US-India dyads are far more robust than the relatively weak dyad of India-China.

The triangle produces divergent effects in the regional and global systems. At the global level, the India-China dyad might find opportunities for issue-

based coordination, such as recently demonstrated over the climate change issue or over reforms of the financial system, to produce outcomes that constrain adverse US initiatives. As India's National Security Adviser recently remarked,

> The global trend towards multipolarity and a more even distribution of power has been accelerated by the recent global economic crisis… Both the trend towards multipolarity and the financial crisis have actually increased the opportunity and need for India and China to work together on global issues.[55]

At the regional level, however, Indian strategists would find exploiting the triangle a more difficult proposition, given the apparent convergence between US and China on Pakistan, and on India's place in the South Asian sub-system.[56] More recently, after the Obama-Hu joint statement in November 2009 that referred to South Asia as a theatre of common interest, its first institutional manifestation was the "US-China sub-dialogue on South Asia," which was held in Beijing in May 2010.[57]

It is perhaps fair to surmise that US policy is not inclined in pursuing a zero-sum contest with China in South Asia and the rationale in opening a dialogue with Beijing on the subcontinent is to reassure China about US intentions and seek collaboration for US objectives in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Simultaneously, Washington is seeking to reassure India that a Cold War-type condominial relationship with China will not reappear in South Asia. Robert Blake, US diplomat for South Asia, remarked after his bilateral interactions with his Chinese interlocutors, "We understand that the Chinese understand that India can be a very important force for good and for stability in this part of the region. So it is important for all of us to work with India."[58] The US and India too, held their first strategic dialogue at the level of Foreign Ministers in June 2010.

Washington appears to have assumed a more active and leading role in managing the triangular dynamics in South Asia to minimise misperceptions in Beijing and New Delhi that, if left unaddressed, could create regional instability or, alternatively, even produce an adverse realignment if Beijing and New Delhi choose to explore a direct channel to address their geopolitical contradictions.

The Sino-Indian competition on overlapping zones of interest will also affect the boundary question. The principal point to discern is that while India's periphery is part of its ***core*** security interests, for China, it is mainly linked to its (exaggerated) threat perceptions over Tibet and its overland strategic infrastructure (i.e. road and rail links, port development), part of a policy of periphery consolidation, and to exploit potential geoeconomic opportunities in the long-term as Beijing seeks to develop southern and western China.

China's core interests lie primarily in Eastern Asia – Taiwan, industrial development, and the Han heartland, which are several thousand kilometres away from the Indian heartland and the reach of most of India's military capabilities. In other words, China possesses more leverage over India's core interests, without reciprocal Indian pressure on issues that matter most to China.

Thus, discord is occurring in areas vital to India, while cooperation is in non-core areas or on issues where China finds tactical solidarity with India useful. This fundamental dichotomy of Sino-Indian relations – discord at the regional level and collaboration at the global level – is unlikely to disappear in the coming years. From India's grand strategic perspective, since its core interests lie in the subcontinent – territorial integrity, economic development and a secure periphery – it would be inconceivable for these to be traded off for greater cooperation with China at the global or institutional level. And until India is able to construct material capabilities – both to deter China in the Himalayan theatre and a credible nuclear deterrence to ensure overall stability – and demonstrate an economic model that can integrate and reshape its periphery, the dual image of India-China relations will remain a relevant guide to policy-makers and analysts.

Whether India is able to reestablish its influence on its periphery, which, in turn, is dependent on its construction of material capabilities and pan-Indian economic development, and on an astute grand strategy, and whether Beijing is willing to calibrate its interactions with India's neighbours and avoid getting locked in a zero-sum conflict with a resurgent India, will determine the context. Will it be a centrally managed competition or adversarial conflict?

Questions that deserve contemporary analysis are: do the Chinese view the unresolved border as a latent hedge to be preserved until New Delhi's

posture and worldview become more apparent? Will New Delhi view a resolution of the dispute as a confidence-building moment to pursue an autonomous path in the security sphere or a means to break free from the Himalayan security dilemma and pursue a harder alignment with the US? Will the US choose to exploit the contradictions in the India-China equation or maintain a de-hyphenated posture by expanding ties with both countries?

It appears that classic inter-state security dilemma issues such as the problems of intentions and reassurance, will be fundamental in shaping the incentives for both sides. Recent US policies of establishing a de-hyphenated posture vis-à-vis Beijing and New Delhi, by reducing ambiguities over US intentions and dual-reassurance within the triangle, might enable New Delhi and Beijing to once again turn their attention to their bilateral dispute.

Ultimately, it is the narrowing of the comprehensive national power asymmetry between China and India that will reshape the Chinese calculus. For instance, the offence-defence military balance on the northern frontiers (especially the air power and airlift capabilities and the range and quality of artillery and missile systems that India deploys), the quality and scale of India's infrastructure development and enhanced logistical networks, will impact the urgency with which the Chinese leadership approaches conflict resolution.[59] At a more strategic level, India's gradual but sustained path toward socio-economic and military modernisation is impelling Beijing to take notice of what has otherwise been viewed as an "asymmetric threat."

Territorial Endgame: A *de jure* settlement around a *de facto* position

As John Lall observed,

> Perhaps nowhere else in the world has such a long frontier been unmistakably delineated by nature itself. The Himalayan crest is the clearest possible determinable dividing line. However, it is equally obvious that the crest line must be established jointly by agreed processes.[60]

Thus, the natural defensive line of northern India, the Himalayan range, has always defined the limits of a solution. And this defensive line is embodied by the 1914 alignment, India's non-negotiable interest. Therefore, from an

Indian perspective, it can never be conceived that its boundary with China is ever formalised on the Brahmaputra plains. Further, the 1914 alignment, aside from its strategic sanctity, also upholds the ethnic and linguistic affinities to peoples south of it, who are distinct from the homogenous Tibetan or Han people. Tawang is then as much a symbol of India's defensive position (as Lamb writes, "thrusting right to the edge of the Brahmaptura valley") as a vital tactical point that holds the key to the defence of the entire sub-Himalayan space.[61] Similarly, from China's perspective, it too is in possession of its non-negotiable interest – the Aksai Chin plateau. Therein lies the essence of an east-west swap.

And what of the role of Tibet? While India's policy of reassurance on Tibet is an important variable in assuaging Chinese insecurity, the assumptions behind the Chinese boundary approach can be challenged. This approach appears to have been based on an attempt to assimilate Tibet, and once such a policy succeeds, hope to bargain from a position of strength on the frontiers with India. Such an approach has yielded little so far – China has neither attained an unequivocal level of Tibetan or international legitimacy; nor has it lowered the threat perception on the Indian side or Beijing's own perceived vulnerability on its southern frontiers. Perhaps a radical approach that attempts to address China's Tibet dilemma and the unresolved border with India via a comprehensive geopolitical dialogue might yield a superior framework.

The boundary question, however, has now been subsumed in a larger geopolitical dynamic, where relative power shifts are impelling both sides to refine their national interests.

To borrow an old cliché, perhaps only 'when the time is ripe' will Beijing and New Delhi turn the chapter on this tumultuous saga.

Notes

1. John W Garver, "China's Decision for War with India in 1962," in Robert S Ross and Alastair Iain Johnston (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 88.
2. "Discussion Between NS Khrushchev and Mao Zedong," *Cold War International History Project (Virtual Archive) – Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 03 October 1959, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034C225-96B6-175C-904C329159CA3F25&sort=Collection&item=The%20Cold%20War%20in%20Asia, accessed on 01 September 2010.
3. The 1914 conference was essentially concerned with China-Tibet issues and "the opportunity was also taken to negotiate the frontier to be established between Tibet and

northeast India." Charles Bell, *Tibet: Past and Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 155.

4. AG Noorani notes, "Every single Chinese document objecting to that (1914) convention confined the objections only to the border between Inner and Outer Tibet. Not once was the Indo-Tibetan border mentioned." See AG Noorani, "Strategic Differences," *Frontline,* Vol. 25, No. 26, 20 December 2008 – 02 January 2009.
5. Chad Haines, "Colonial Routes: Reorienting the Northern Frontier of British India," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Summer 2004, pp. 535-65.
6. For a challenge to the conventional historiography of the Anglo-Russian rivalry and its actual influence on British Indian policies, see Malcolm Yapp, "The Legend of the Great Game [Elie Kedourie Memorial Lecture – 16 May 2000]," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 111, 2001, pp. 179-98. Yapp argues that, "the most important element in the debate about the defence of India, although it was disguised by the character of the debate, was not the external enemy (Russia) but the internal threat (maintaining British control over the Indian polity)." He elsewhere argues, "The external enemy, which served to rationalise or legitimise British actions in the north-western regions, was primarily a device by which the British and British Indian systems could be linked, through which they could discuss the allocation of resources from a common pool to meet a common danger, but a device which in reality concealed quite different purposes." Malcolm Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1980.
7. Haines, n. 5.
8. Interestingly, the 1899 Macartney-MacDonald Line corresponds with the Chinese claim line, which in turn, generally coincides with the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Interestingly, it has been argued that the 1899 line, when plotted on a modern map rather than on one relying on survey knowledge, available at the turn of the 19th century, would leave the eastern portion of Aksai Chin, including the area covering the Xinjiang-Tibet road, to China. See Alastair Lamb, *The Sino-Indian Border in Ladakh* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), pp. 15-6.
9. In the official 1950 India map, Kashmir's boundary to the east of the Karakoram Pass was expressed as "still undefined", while the 1914 McMahon Line was clearly shown as the boundary in the eastern sector.
10. Even the republican regime prior to Mao's People's Republic of China (PRC) held similar views on Tibet. In November 1932, when the Dalai Lama suggested to Chiang Kai-shek that the solution to Sino-Tibetan relations lay in the 1914 Simla Convention, Chiang's reply was: "…keeping in mind the friendly and brotherly relations between Tibet and China, every perplexity…and all matters should be settled between ourselves without the intervention of an outsider. Therefore, to agree to the request for the treaty, with the British government as an intermediary power, to be resumed and concluded would be absolutely impossible as it would be like agreeing to one's own body being dismembered." Quoted in Amar Jasbir Singh, "The Tibetan Problem and China's Foreign Relations," in Surjit Mansingh (ed.), *Indian and Chinese Foreign Policies in Comparative Perspective* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1998), pp. 257-8.
11. The US-Pakistan alliance was formalised in a mutual security agreement in May 1954 with the commitment of US military assistance, in September 1954, when Pakistan joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and in February 1955, when it signed the US-sponsored Baghdad Pact, thereby becoming America's "most allied ally". See Robert J McMahon, "US Policy Toward South Asia and Tibet During the Early Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Summer 2006, pp. 131–44.
12. Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* [Volume 2: 1947-1956] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 185. Indeed, even after the debacle with China in 1962, India turned not to Washington, which sought to link military assistance with resolution of

the Kashmir dispute, but to the Soviet Union, that offered economic and military assistance without prior political commitments by India.

13. The agreement had a validity of eight years, and since relations turned sour, the Chinese would have to wait another five decades to receive a *de jure* reiteration of the 1954 Indian position. This came in the joint declaration in June 2003 in Beijing.
14. On 01 July 1954, Nehru, through a note to the Secretary-General and Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, stated, "All our old maps dealing with the frontier should be carefully examined, and where necessary, withdrawn. New maps should be printed showing our northern and northeastern frontier without any reference to any 'line'. These new maps should also not state that there is any undemarcated territory…Both as flowing from our policy and as a consequence of our Agreement with China, this frontier should be considered a firm and definite one which is not open to discussion with anybody."
15. Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India: A Strategic History of the Nehru Years* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), pp. 238, 240.
16. For instance, speaking to a visiting delegation from Nepal in 1964, Mao reportedly stated that the major problem between India and China was not the McMahon Line but the Tibet question.
17. Chen Jian, "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Summer 2006, pp. 54-101; Steven A Hoffmann, "Rethinking the Linkage Between Tibet and the China-India Border Conflict: A Realist Approach," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Summer 2006, pp. 165-94.
18. Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, *1846-1990* (Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 1991), p. 72.
19. Chen Jian, n. 17.
20. Hoffmann, n. 17. The author quotes two studies – Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002) and J Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York: Public Affairs/Perseus Books Group, 1999). At a CIA-staffed training base in Colorado, Tibetan resistance fighters learned guerrilla warfare and the CIA air-dropped these Tibetan men, arms and equipment into Tibet. By 1959, large pockets of central Tibet came under the rebels' control. But most Tibetans were unwilling or unable to adopt guerrilla tactics, and the CIA, according to Knaus (who retired in 1995), greatly underestimated China's willingness to decimate the Tibetan resistance. Hoffmann, relying on the aforementioned works, notes, "(There are indications) that CIA airplanes flying through Tibetan airspace were allowed to land in India when they ran short of fuel. Landings and takeoffs of CIA flights were made in Pakistan, too, which, as a US ally, did significantly more to cooperate with the CIA's Tibet operations through 1961 or 1962. The stops in India would be treated as emergency landings, although advance preparations would have been made. The Indians did not welcome the arrangement, 'fearing' that 'its discovery would lead to trouble with China.' They 'fussed about it constantly'."
21. Ibid.
22. Garver, n. 1.
23. Hoffmann, n. 17.
24. PB Sinha, AA Athale, and SN Prasad (Chief Editor), *History of The Conflict with China*, *1962* (New Delhi: History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1992).
25. Ibid. See 'Introduction', pp. xix-xxiv.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 339.
28. Ibid., p. 314.

29. The famous Soviet TASS statement of 09 September 1959, taking a neutral position on the India-China dispute, was the first important indication of the Sino-Soviet split and came after a brief skirmish between China and India on a disputed pocket in the eastern sector.
30. Garver, n. 1, pp. 120-1.
31. Klaus H Pringsheim, "China, India, and their Himalayan Border (1961-1963)," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 10, October 1963, pp. 474-95.
32. Quoted in AG Noorani, "Facts of history," *Frontline*, Vol. 20, No. 18, 30 August – 12 September 2003, http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2018/stories/20030912002104800.htm, accessed on 14 September 2003.
33. For instance, on six occasions between August-September 1959, Nehru admitted that Aksai Chin was disputed territory. Two clashes on the frontiers further vitiated the atmosphere and would thereafter shape the strategic interactions between the two. On 21 October 1959, at the Kongka Pass in southern Ladakh, Chinese guards killed nine members of an Indian patrol team and took ten prisoners. The first armed clash with China occurred in the eastern sector at Longju on 25 August 1959.
34. RK Nehru, the Indian Foreign Secretary in the early 1950s, later wrote that "in 1953, our experts had advised us that our claim to Aksai Chin was not too strong." The Prime Minister was "agreeable" to adjustments in "Aksai Chin and one or two other places" being made "as part of a satisfactory overall settlement." See Raghavan, n. 15, p. 240.
35. Steven A Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 81.
36. This author is indebted to former Ambassador Ranjit Sethi, Ministry of External Affairs, for information on the period 1977-85. He was a key member of the Indian team on the boundary talks.
37. The popular notion being that India sought a piecemeal settlement of the border.
38. As against the durable and persistent misconception that the Indian delegation, in fact, attempted a settlement of the 'eastern sector', as part of a 'sector by sector' approach.
39. Deng Xiaoping reiterated his "package" deal to a visiting Indian journalist in June 1980. Most published accounts of this phase of border diplomacy seem to have ignored the fact that Deng's offer was an official one made to an Indian Foreign Minister in 1979.
40. The Colombo Proposal (10-12 December 1962) was an effort by six Afro-Asian countries led by Sri Lanka to seek a compromise on the border conflict that could bring the two Asian powers on the negotiating table. The essence of the proposal was that "there must not be any territorial gain on account of military operations."
41. Keshav Mishra, *Rapprochement Across The Himalayas: Emerging India–China Relations in Post Cold War Period*, *1947–2003* (New Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2004), p. 60.
42. Jerrold F Elkin and Brian Fredericks, "Sino-Indian Border Talks: The View from New Delhi," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 10, October 1983, pp. 1128-39.
43. John W Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 104.
44. Nikhil Chakravarty, "The Chinese Shift," *The Indian Express*, 27 July 1986.
45. Garver, n. 1, p. 106.
46. Interestingly, India recently asked Beijing to "cease" activities in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Vishnu Prakash noted, "The Chinese side is fully aware of India's position and our concerns about Chinese activities in PoK. We hope that the Chinese side will take a long-term view of the India-China relations, and cease such activities in areas illegally occupied by Pakistan." Quoted in "India objects to Chinese activities in PoK," *The Times of India,* 14 October 2009.
47. The 1993 agreement established the concept of 'equal and mutual security'. Translated on the ground, this would imply a mutual understanding on reasonably defined military

requirements for the defence of each side's vital interest. In this context, the interpretation of geographical principles, such as watersheds and valleys on which each side bases its claim, will need to be informed by military defensibility. The 1996 agreement included specific provisions to reduce military presence, which included the withdrawal of offensive weapons. Exercises involving more than one division were to be avoided, all manoeuvres with more than 5,000 soldiers needed to be announced in advance, and combat aircraft were banned within a distance of 10 km, from the LAC, except after prior permission.

48. Pallavi Aiyar, "Another Round of Talks Begins," *The Hindu*, 24 September 2007.
49. Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 23.
50. Sheela Bhatt and Nikhil Lakshman, "Interview with India's National Security Advisor," *Rediff.com*, 18 January 2007, http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/jan/18inter1.htm, accessed on 20 January 2007.
51. Sarikah Atreya, "No Major Problems Along Indo-China Border: Antony," *The Hindu Business Line*, 03 December 2007.
52. Kanti Bajpai, "Strangely at Odds," *The Telegraph*, 09 November 2009.
53. PS Suryanarayana, "India, China 'need New Rationale, New Passion For Ties'," *The Hindu*, 04 February 2010.
54. Ananth Krishnan and Sandeep Dikshit, "China Elevates Rank of Envoy in New Delhi," *The Hindu*, 26 January 2010.
55. Keynote Address by Shiv Shankar Menon, National Security Advisor, at the seminar on "India and China: Public Diplomacy, Building Understanding" at the Indian Council of World Affairs, Sapru House, on 01 April 2010, http://www.icwa.in/pdfs/nsa.pdf, accessed on 02 April 2010.
56. First, as John Garver has persuasively argued, US strategic reinvolvement in South Asia after 9/11, and Washington's increased influence with Islamabad, has helped Beijing's South Asia policy, in that the latter now no longer assumes the dominant burden of supporting Pakistan and has, therefore, found space to increase its engagement with India, in many ways mirroring the US' policy of de-hyphenation in South Asia. Second, the US' historic acquiescence of Chinese nuclear and missile transfers to Pakistan suggests a tacit convergence between Washington and Beijing on Pakistan. Also, see Bruce Riedel, "U.S.-China Relations: Seeking Strategic Convergence in Pakistan," *The Brookings Institution,* Policy Paper 18, 12 January 2010.
57. Ananth Krishnan, "In Talks, China to Press for US Support on Pakistan Nuclear Deal," *The Hindu*, 03 May 2010.
58. "India to have 'Pre-eminent' Role in South Asia: US," *Press Trust of India*, 08 May 2010.
59. China's own logistical development has proceeded apace - China now has a 40,000 kms road network in Tibet, besides rail links like the 1,118 kms connecting Lhasa to Gormo in Qinghai province of Mainland China. See Jonathan Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma Between China and India," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 6, December 2009, pp. 811-40. In contrast, India's infrastructure along the China border lags behind. Pradeep Thakur, "97% of funds for Building Roads Along China Border Unspent: CAG," *The Times of India*, 13 May 2010.
60. Surjit Mansingh (ed.), *Indian and Chinese Foreign Policies in Comparative Perspective* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1998), p. 28.
61. From 2009 to early 2010, the Government of India sent the Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister to visit Tawang, signalling India's vital interests in this frontier town. "PC is 3rd Minister to Visit Tawang after China Claim," *Deccan Chronicle*, 04 April 2010.