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FAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

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The main emphasis of the work of St Antony's College, Oxford, since its foundation in 1950 has been in the fields of modern history and international affairs. The College organizes a number of regular Seminars at which are read papers produced by its members in the course of their research or by visiting experts from other institutions. The College further sponsors the delivery of lectures in Oxford by scholars of international reputation in their respective fields.

An appreciable volume of contribution to scholarship is thus being produced under the auspices of St Antony's and the present series has been started in order to preserve and present a selection of this work. The series is not, however, confined to this material alone and includes contributions from other places.

Three numbers a year are issued and each number is devoted to a particular topic or a particular part of the world.

THE AKSAI CHIN

By G. F. Hudson

ON OCTOBER 18, 1958, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs addressed an Informal Note to the Chinese Ambassador in New Delhi in which it declared:

The attention of the Government of India has recently been drawn to the fact that a motor road has been constructed by the Government of the People's Republic of China across the eastern part of the Ladakh region of the Jammu and Kashmir State, which is part of India. This road seems to form part of the Chinese road known as the Yehching-Gartok road or Sinkiang-Tibet highway, the completion of which was announced in September 1957 . . . it is a matter of surprise and regret that the Chinese Government should have constructed a road through indisputably Indian territory without first obtaining the permission of the Government of India and without even informing the Government of India. . . . As the Chinese Government are aware, the Government of India are anxious to settle these petty frontier disputes so that the friendly relations between the two countries may not suffer.

The Indian Note added that an Indian military patrol in Ladakh had been missing since the end of August, and asked whether, "since there are now Chinese personnel in this part of Indian territory", the Chinese Government could furnish any information about them. The Chinese Foreign Ministry made no direct reply to the Indian Note, but on November 3 it addressed a Memorandum to the Indian Embassy in Peking which ran as follows:

According to the report of the Chinese local authorities in Sinkiang, Frontier Guards of the Chinese Liberation Army stationed in the south-western part of Sinkiang discovered in succession on September 8 and 12 two groups of Indian armed personnel at Tahun-gliutan and Kegrekirekan on the Sinkiang-Tibet road on Chinese territory. These personnel had clearly intruded into Chinese territory

to conduct unlawful surveying activities within Chinese borders. They were therefore detained by the Chinese Frontier Guards. . . . The Chinese Government requests the Government of India to guarantee that no similar incidents will occur in future.

This diplomatic exchange was the beginning of the dispute between India and China over the legal ownership of some 12,000 square miles which the Indian Government had regarded as "indisputably" Indian territory. Two points about it call for comment. The first is the use of the word "recently" in the Indian Note, which leaves indefinite the period of time between the Indian Government's first discovery of the existence of the road and its protest to Peking. The Indian Government had apparently had its "attention" drawn to the fact that the road had been built and complained that it had not been informed about it by the Chinese Government. There was no suggestion that the Indian Government might have been aware of the building of the road through ordinary administrative channels. Yet, according to a subsequent statement by the Chinese Prime Minister, the road had taken eighteen months to construct and had employed 3,000 labourers. It was an obvious inference that, if such an undertaking could be carried out without any Indian official knowledge of it, the territory concerned, even if formally claimed by India, could not be subject to any actual administration.

The second point to be noted is that the Indian Government in reproaching China for building the road across a salient of Indian territory without Indian permission was unaware that India's title to the area was challenged by China. In a subsequent letter of December 14, 1958, to Mr Chou En-lai, the Chinese Prime Minister, Mr Nehru wrote:

You will remember that when the Sino-Indian Agreement with regard to the Tibet region of China was concluded (in April 1954), various outstanding problems, including some related to our border trade, were considered. . . . No border questions were raised at that time and we were under the impression that there were no border disputes between our respective countries. . . . Subsequently in October 1954 (when Mr Nehru visited China) . . . I briefly mentioned to you that I had seen some maps recently published in China which gave a wrong borderline between the two countries. I presumed that this was by some error and told you at the time that we were not much worried about the matter because our boundaries were quite clear and were not a matter of argument. You were good enough to reply to me that these maps were really reproductions of old pre-liberation maps and that you had not time to revise them.

In his reply of January 3, 1959, the Chinese Prime Minister tried to turn the tables by declaring that the area through which the Sinkiang-Tibet highway had been built had "always been under Chinese jurisdiction", yet "recently" the Indian Government had claimed that it was Indian territory. He went on to say:

It is true that the border question was not raised in 1954 when negotiations were being held between the Chinese and Indian sides for the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India. This was because conditions were not yet ripe for its settlement and the Chinese side, on its part, had had no time to study the question.

Mr Chou was undoubtedly somewhat disingenuous in pleading that the Chinese Government had not raised the question of the Sino-Indian frontier in 1954 because it had had no time to study the matter. It had had enough time to organize and carry out the invasion and subjugation of Tibet and to negotiate with India a treaty by which the latter had renounced all extra-territorial rights in Tibet previously acquired by the British Raj – a treaty which India might not have been so willing to conclude if she had known that it was to be only the preliminary to claims on 50,000 square miles of what was supposed to be undisputed Indian territory. The Chinese must have been aware of what India claimed to be the alignment of the frontier because it had been clearly shown in Indian official maps; on the other hand, no published Chinese official map before the establishment of the Communist régime had shown the alignment which has now been claimed by China, and Chou En-Lai in 1954, as already mentioned, had explained maps of date subsequent to 1949 – which through the Communist take-over of private publishing firms all acquired an official character – not by declaring that they represented what the Chinese Government held to be the frontier, but by the plea that they reproduced pre-Communist (unofficial) maps which there had been no time to revise. The Indian Government was, therefore, entitled to suppose in 1958 that China did not dispute the frontier in its main lines, though there had already been disputes from 1954 over relatively small areas to the south of passes leading from Tibet into Kumaon and Spiti. The first challenge to the Indian alignment of the frontier in Ladakh was the occupation of Khurnak by Chinese troops in the early summer of 1958. A Note Verbale to the Chinese Embassy in Delhi on July 2 protested that the place was within Indian territory and that the Indian Government "would not like to believe that unilateral action has been

taken by the People's Republic of China, with whom their relations are of the friendliest, to enforce alleged territorial claims in the region". The Chinese did not deign to make any reply to this protest and continued to occupy Khurnak.

In countering the Indian protest of October 18 of the same year about the construction of the Sinkiang-Tibet highway across an area of what was claimed to be Indian territory, the Chinese did not admit that they had advanced into the area, but maintained that they had "always" held and administered it. In the ensuing controversy it was common ground to both sides that the frontier had never been defined by treaty, but was a traditional and customary one; the difference between them was in their location of the traditional line. Apart from military occupation of the disputed areas, claims could only be supported by appeal to historical evidence showing the exercise of jurisdiction or recognition of the boundary in times past. After exchanges of diplomatic Notes had failed to bring any agreement, and Peking had disclosed that it claimed not only north-eastern Ladakh but also nearly the whole of the territory of the Indian North-east Frontier Agency, the two Governments decided to set up a joint commission of officials to study all available materials relating to the history of the frontier. The officials met and conferred successively in Peking, Delhi and Rangoon during the summer and autumn of 1960; the Report they submitted consisted of two separate reports in which each side presented evidence in support of its case and criticized the evidence adduced by the other. No progress was made towards an agreed solution, and the boundary question remained in a condition of complete deadlock.

With regard to the area through which the Sinkiang-Tibet highway had been built, the main evidence produced by India consisted of revenue and assessment records of Kashmir showing that Ladakhis had been taxed for use of the area – which was one of seasonal, not permanent, habitation – for at least three-quarters of a century before 1950. The territory in question is known as the Aksai Chin or Soda Plains and lies at an elevation of 15,000 to 16,000 feet above sea-level; it cannot be used for agriculture, but provides a certain amount of summer pasture for sheep, goats and yaks. It is buttressed to the north by the Kuen Lun mountains whose peaks rise into the zone of perpetual snow and whose northern slopes descend to the lowlands of the Tarim basin. To the west are spurs of the even higher Karakoram range, and to the east and south-east a nameless range with a crest at about 20,000 feet dividing the streams flowing westward into the Amtogor and Sarig Jilganang lakes from those flowing eastward into the Leighten and

Tsoggar lakes. This north-south range may for convenience be called the Lanak divide; it is claimed by India to be the eastern boundary of Indian territory in this sector, and the part of the Aksai Chin lying within it may be distinguished as the West Aksai Chin from the more easterly part beyond the watershed. The significance of these mountain barriers lies in the fact that the West Aksai Chin is relatively accessible only from the south-west, that is to say, from the permanently inhabited part of Ladakh, whose people can move up their flocks in summer from lower to higher ground without too much difficulty. The Ladakhis thus utilized by *transhumance* the pastures of the Chang Chenmo valley and of Gunto Lumpa and Skydpo Lungpa in the West Aksai Chin; it was dangerous to go too far or stay too long, for, as the *Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh* of 1890 explained, "occasionally great loss is caused by an early fall of snow, for the grass which, though nourishing, is at all times scanty, becomes quickly covered up and the animals die of starvation before they can be brought over the Marsenik into milder regions". But these conditions made the West Aksai Chin even more dangerous for herdsmen from the north or east, who had to cross high mountain ranges to enter it, and it was thus in effect reserved by nature for the Ladakhis.

The West Aksai Chin had two other economic uses for human beings; it provided salt from its saline lakes and it was traversed by trade routes which linked Khotan to the north with Ladakh and Tibet to the south. The salt was an objective for the Ladakhis because Ladakh proper, drained by fast-flowing rivers of the Indus basin, had no saline deposits comparable to the inland drainage area of the Aksai Chin; on the other hand, both East Turkestan and Tibet, being wholly or largely inland drainage areas, had no need to go far afield for salt. The trade routes were less closely connected with Ladakh; they might be used by merchants from either north or south. In the eighteenth century and earlier they were used by Central Asian merchants who frequented the trade fairs at Gartok in western Tibet. But in the nineteenth century, at any rate after the Dogra conquest of Ladakh, trade across the Kuen Lun mountains seems to have been almost entirely in the hands of Indian and Kashmiri merchants, who had British backing in their efforts to extend Indian commerce into East Turkestan. In the confusion which followed on the revolt of Yakub Beğ against Chinese rule there – the revolt continued from 1864 to 1878 – the trade routes were infested with Kirghiz brigands, and the Kashmir State Government, under British paramountcy from 1846, established police outposts in the northern Aksai Chin to protect merchants against them;

this protection was finally extended as far as Shahidulla, well to the north of the Kuen Lun range, where a small garrison was maintained for several years.

There is a minority of Turki place-names in the Aksai Chin, and these probably record the old trading connections with the north, going back perhaps to the days of the medieval Uigur Empire, or at any rate to the Chagatai and Uzbek periods in East Turkestan. The Chinese side on the Commission of 1960 tried to use these place-names as evidence for their contention of ethnic occupation of the West Aksai Chin by Sinkiang people – Uigurs and Kirghiz – in recent times, but the argument recoiled on themselves, for the great majority of place-names in the area are unquestionably Ladakhi. The Chinese were unable to produce any evidence to prove that the normal seasonal use of the West Aksai Chin was Turki rather than Ladakhi, and the Indian Report quite justly comments:

The Indian side were surprised to find that the Chinese case contained numerous assertions which were unsupported by documentary evidence. . . . In the Western Sector it was claimed that the Kirghiz and Uighur people of Sinkiang had been going to the Aksai Chin and Lingzi Tang areas since the eighteenth century for salt-mining, pasturing and trading and this was said to establish that the area had throughout been part of Sinkiang. But not a single document either from the archives of the Sinkiang administration or from contemporary records and accounts was produced to establish the prevalence of this practice. On the other hand, the Indian side produced both historical evidence, such as accounts of travellers, and official records and local gazetteers to show that it was the people of Ladakh who had been going for salt-mining, hunting and pasturing as of right into these very areas.

The Chang Chenmo valley and West Aksai Chin were for revenue purposes part of the *ilaqa* of Tanktse in the Ladakh Tahsil of Kashmir, and the Indian side produced assessment records and maps to show this. Ladakh villagers were assessed for taxation not only for their local land but also in respect of summer pastures which they used. If the Chinese had also sought to levy dues on them for use of these grazing grounds as being within Chinese territory, they would have complained of double taxation, and the question of jurisdiction would necessarily have been raised. But there is no trace of any challenge to Indian-Kashmiri jurisdiction in the region claimed to belong to Ladakh during the period of British rule in India. The Ladakh Tehsil Assessment Report of 1909

stated that "there have been no boundary disputes on the Lhasa (Tibet) frontier, and the existing boundary seems to be well understood by subjects of both the State and the Lhasa Governments". Nothing here is said about the frontier with Sinkiang, to which the Chinese now claim that the Aksai Chin always belonged, but it certainly would have been mentioned if there had been boundary disputes in that quarter. In fact, there were none, because there was no contact; the broad Kuen Lun range served as a barrier, which was not crossed either way except by infrequent trading parties.

As already mentioned, Chinese control of East Turkestan - dating from the destruction of the Kalnuik Empire by the Manchus in 1759 - was interrupted by a revolt of the inhabitants from 1864 to 1878; after the reconquest the territory was in 1884 constituted a regular Chinese province, which it had not been before, under the name of Sinkiang. Even then, however, it was some years before Chinese administration reached as far south as the Kuen Lun. It was only in 1890 that the Chinese built a fort at Suket, where in 1892 a British traveller, Lord Dunmore, saw a notice declaring that "anyone passing the frontier without reporting himself at the fort will be imprisoned". Later in the same year the Chinese set up a pillar 64 miles south of Suket, which fact was duly reported by Kashmir to the Government of India. There is no evidence that under the Ch'ing dynasty China ever attempted to come further south than this. In other words, they accepted the Kuen Lun range as the frontier, and both Kashmir and the Government of India were equally willing to accept it, because they had no wish to exercise jurisdiction north of the range if the Chinese could assure protection for caravans there, and indeed brigandage appears to have ceased entirely on the Leh-Khotan trade routes after 1890. The fact, however, that Kashmir had for a while controlled an area even north of the Kuen Lun left its traces in cartography; thus Philips' Commercial Atlas of China of 1948 still showed the Kashmir frontier at Shahidulla.

As evidence of their jurisdiction over the Aksai Chin the Chinese referred in the Commission to the case of the explorer Deasy, who in 1898 was forbidden by the Amban of Yutien (Keriya) to travel to Rudok by way of Pulo. This route, however, lay across the East Aksai Chin outside the Indian alignment of the frontier; the Chinese authorities, therefore, had a perfect right to prevent Deasy from using it, but this proved nothing with regard to the territory west of the Lanak watershed which alone is claimed by India.

Indian ownership of the West Aksai Chin was acknowledged in a Chinese map prepared by Hung Ta-chen (previously Minister in St

Petersburg), which was officially communicated to a British representative in 1893, and also in successive editions of the *Postal Atlas of China* from 1917 to 1933. With regard to Hung's map, the Chinese Commission Report declares that it was

only an imitation of a Tsarist Russian map with names of places in Chinese, which could not be regarded as a Chinese map. After its publication Chinese officials one after another pointed out to the government that it was incorrect and blamed Hung Chun for it. It was for this erroneous map that Hung Chun was dismissed.

The Indian side replied that, if the map was afterwards considered erroneous, the Chinese Government should have so informed the British, but no such communication was ever received. In any case, it should be noted that the mistakes were attributed to copying, not a British, but a Russian map, and in view of Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia in the late nineteenth century it is hard to believe that Russian map-makers would have gone out of their way to assign to Britain territory which they knew to be under the jurisdiction of China.

On the *Postal Atlas of China* of 1917 the Chinese declared:

the Chinese Government in its note dated April 3, 1960, already pointed out that this map was drawn arbitrarily by French and British imperialist elements who then controlled China's postal office, without the consent of the Chinese authorities. It did not represent the view of the Chinese people, but only that of the imperialist elements, this is self-evident.

To this the Indian delegation replied:

The Chinese Government could not disown these maps as having been published by "imperialist elements" who were in charge of the postal department. At no time had the Chinese Government lost control of the administration; it had throughout exercised overall sovereign powers, and as it had not withdrawn these maps, repudiated them, or even suggested that the precise alignment shown on them was not binding on them, they should be regarded as authoritative expressions of the governmental viewpoint regarding the alignment. The Indian Government would have promptly protested if the alignment now claimed by the Chinese side had been published and therefore had come to their notice.

China never indeed formally and openly challenged the Indian alignment of the frontier during the period of the British Raj. But

what of aims and aspirations not for publication? The Chinese delegates on the Commission submitted in evidence two large-scale maps which they held to be authoritative, although they have never been published. One was produced by the Cartographic Bureau of the General Staff of the Chinese Army in 1918, and the other in 1943 by the Bureau of Survey of the Chinese Ministry of National Defence. These certainly showed the West Aksai Chin as within China. The Indian delegation, however, refused to accept them as internationally authoritative on account of their secret character:

The Chinese side admitted after protracted discussion that these maps had never been published, but argued that to set them aside amounted to doubting the *bona fides* of the Chinese side. The Indian side stated that they had no intention of doubting the *bona fides* of the Chinese side, but as secret and unpublished maps had never been exposed to public criticism, or come to the official notice of other governments, they were no proof of the alignment. . . . Governments could show whatever alignments they pleased on unpublished maps.

What these maps do prove, however, is an aspiration in Chinese military quarters from 1918 onwards for effective inclusion of the West Aksai Chin, if possible, within the frontiers of China, and the fact that this aspiration first comes to light in a document of the General Staff indicates that it had a strategic motive. Such a motive is not far to seek. It was one which had not been operative before 1911. Under the Manchu dynasty China had controlled Sinkiang along the line Lanchow-Hami-Urumchi and Tibet along the line Tachienlu-Batang-Lhasa; no need had been felt for lateral communications between the two territories. But in 1911, when the dynasty was overthrown by revolution and China was in disorder, Outer Mongolia and Tibet took the opportunity to drive out the Chinese garrisons and declare themselves independent. The new Chinese Republic regarded itself as the heir to all the conquests made by the Manchus, and its military leaders set about making plans for the reconquest of the seceding countries. For the subjugation of Tibet it was desirable to have more than one line of approach – not only the direct route to Lhasa from Szechwan, but also the route from Khotan into western Tibet which had been followed by Kalmuk invaders at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This latter way went across the West Aksai Chin – the variant by Polu further east being much more difficult – and could only be used either by Indian permission or if the territory were to be internationally

recognized as belonging to China. As a part of India, it formed an awkward salient projecting between Sinkiang and Tibet; to get rid of this salient must be an objective of Chinese policy whenever opportunity might offer.

Although the General Staff map of 1918 was never published, its principles soon began to influence unofficial Chinese maps which had public circulation. One of these was the Peking University Atlas of 1925, of which the Indian Report remarked:

The Chinese side stated that certain maps in the Peking University Atlas of 1925, cited by the Indian side, showed that after 1911 Aksai Chin was a part of China. However, this Atlas clearly showed in the map referred to by the Indian side that China, when at its maximum extent before 1911, under the Ching Empire, had not included the Aksai Chin area. If the area was shown as part of China after 1911, it could only be on the basis of an arbitrary claim with no support in history, for nothing had happened in 1911, or after 1911, to give support to such a claim.

But if nothing had happened in 1911 to support the claim, something, as we have seen, *had* happened to make China desire possession of this inhospitable high plateau. If thirty-two years were to elapse between the General Staff's blue print of 1918 and the crossing of the West Aksai Chin by Chinese troops in 1950, the reason is to be found in the continuing weakness of a China distracted by civil wars and Japanese invasions. The reconquest of Tibet was postponed but not forgotten. At last the conditions for it were fulfilled; by the end of 1949 China was reunited under a strong government resolved to equal and surpass the measure of her past imperial greatness. Meanwhile, two years previously, India had gained independence, but without the unity which had been imposed by the British Raj; the sub-continent was divided between two sovereign states, and nowhere was the heritage so disputed as in Kashmir, where the ruler's accession to India only brought about half the territory of the State under Indian control, the western and north-western areas being seized by Moslem rebels with the support of Pakistan. After more than a year of localized hostilities in Kashmir an armistice was arranged at the beginning of 1949, but many on both sides wanted, or expected, a renewal of the contest. This was the situation in the most northerly borderland of India when the Chinese People's Republic began to threaten the "liberation" of Tibet.

The first Indian reaction to the Chinese invasion of Tibet was one of protest. The Indian Government in a Note to Peking on October 26,

1950, referred to Chinese assurances of intention to settle disputed issues with Tibet by peaceful means and declared the military invasion to be "most surprising and regrettable". The Chinese Reply was sharp and uncompromising; it asserted that Tibet was "entirely a domestic problem of China" and that the Chinese People's Liberation Army "must enter Tibet, liberate the Tibetan people and defend the frontiers of China". It also hinted that the new India was not really an independent state by declaring that the Indian protest had been "affected by foreign influence hostile to China". The Indian Government nevertheless addressed another Note to Peking on November 1, expressing the view that "there is no justification whatever" for military measures against the Tibetans; to this Peking replied with the charge that India was trying to "obstruct the exercise of its sovereign rights in Tibet by the Chinese Government". Indian policy then suddenly went into reverse. Tibet had appealed to the United Nations, but on November 25 the Indian delegate supported the British in opposing the attempt to get the appeal put on to the agenda of the Assembly. Tibet was thus deprived of all international moral and political support and had no choice but to capitulate to superior military force and conclude the Agreement of May 23, 1951, which provided for Chinese military occupation of the whole of Tibet.

The main invasion had been from the east, from Szechwan, but from "the end of 1950", according to the Chinese account, Chinese units also crossed the West Aksai Chin to enter Tibet from Sinkiang. The Chinese Commission Report of 1961, as part of its evidence of continuous occupation and jurisdiction in the West Aksai Chin, stated:

From the end of 1950 to the autumn of 1951 the Chinese People's Liberation Army entered the Ari district of Tibet through the Aksai Chin area along the customary route between Sinkiang and Tibet. Since then large numbers of personnel have entered and goods been sent from Sinkiang through this area. . . . From 1954 to 1955 . . . the administrative departments of China's Sinkiang region also set up a special survey team charged with the surveying of the course to be taken by the Sinkiang-Tibet highway. The footsteps of the members of this survey team covered every place in Aksai Chin and Linghithang. After surveying for a period of about two years they put forward for choice more than ten routes among which some are even to the west of the present Sinkiang-Tibet highway. Finally the Chinese Government completed the construction of the present Sinkiang-Tibet highway from March 1956 to October 1957.

The Chinese delegates naturally did not fail to ask the question how it was that, if India had had effective jurisdiction over the area, the Indian Government "had not the slightest knowledge of such important and large-scale activities of the Chinese personnel and that it was not until the last two years that the Indian side suddenly charged China with 'unlawful incursions' ". The answer to this question, implicit in the Indian evidence, though not directly given by the Indian delegation, is that some Indian authorities, though not necessarily the highest, did know all the time. The Indian officials presented in evidence records of military patrols carried out in the area from 1950 to 1958:

In 1951 an expedition went from Leh to Lingzi Tang and Aksai Chin. In 1952 an army reconnaissance party went up to Lanak La *via* Tanktse, Tsogstsalu, Hot Spring and the Kongka Pass. In August 1954 and August 1956 patrol parties repeated this tour to Lanak La. The national flag planted at Lanak La in 1954 was still found there in 1956. In September 1957 a reconnaissance party went up to the Qara Tagh Pass *via* Tanktse, Tsogstsalu, Hot Spring, Shamal Lungpa and Shinglung. In the summer of 1958 a patrol party went *via* Phobrang, Shamal Lungpa and Nischu to the Sarigh Jilganang and the Amtogor lake regions. The party planted the Indian flag at a point 80° 12' East, 35° 03' North. Another reconnaissance party went at the same time *via* Phobrang, Shamal Lungpa, Shinglung, Qizil Zilga and Palong Karpo to Haji Langar. A third party proceeded to the Qara Tagh Pass *via* Phobrang, Shamal Lungpa, Shamzuling and Qizil Jilga.

The truth about what happened in the Aksai Chin lies latent in these lists of place-names. For seven years Indian military patrols were crossing the tracks of the Chinese in the West Aksai Chin. If they did not actually run into Chinese troops, surveyors or construction gangs, they must have heard all about them from the Ladakhis who traversed the area every year for their grazing and salt-mining. In other words, there was Indian collusion in what the Chinese were doing. On the other hand, it is impossible to read the Indian note of protest of October 18, 1958, with which this study begins, and Mr Nehru's subsequent letter to the Chinese Prime Minister, without being convinced that he was genuinely indignant at what he regarded as a violation of India's frontier only "recently" brought to his attention. The only possible inference is that knowledge of what was going on was kept from Mr Nehru by persons in high position more strongly, or more recklessly, committed than he was to winning the favour of China. Such persons

were to be found among those most directly concerned with the contest with Pakistan in Kashmir, that is to say, in the Kashmir State Government and in the Indian Defence Ministry. For those who anticipated a renewal of hostilities with Pakistan it must have seemed essential to have China, the powerful neighbour of Kashmir to the north, as at least a benevolent neutral, and, if possible, an ally. To bring this about they were ready to go to lengths which Mr Nehru would not have countenanced. Yet he himself gave the impetus to their actions by his abandonment of the cause of Tibet in November 1950. After India had joined in blocking the Tibetan appeal to the United Nations, it was open to a political realist to argue that it would be just as well to go the whole way and win the friendship of the Chinese by giving them positive assistance in their reconquest of Tibet. To turn a blind eye to their military use of the West Aksai Chin would be doing them a real service for which India could hope to be rewarded in future, and the area was so remote that the transaction could be hidden from the eyes of the world. No journalist ever visited these desolate wastes and the British big-game hunters who had once frequented them in quest of wild yaks had long been an extinct species.

What the promoters of this intrigue apparently failed to take into account was the possibility that the Chinese, if permitted the use of the West Aksai Chin, would behave like the cuckoo in the nest and end by claiming the territory as their own. Or, at least, if they recognized the possibility, they must have hoped to avert it by the vigorous military patrolling which was carried on from 1950 to 1958, with such demonstrative acts as the planting of the Indian flag on the Lanak La. If a stranger was allowed to occupy the house, the owner would assert his proprietary right by frequently going in and out. The building of the Chinese motor road, however, transformed the situation. The Chinese could now assemble and supply in the area a much stronger military force than any patrols the Indians could send up along pony tracks from Leh. The patrol which reached the road in September 1958 was taken into custody, and a year later another patrol near the Kongka Pass was attacked by the Chinese and all its members killed or taken prisoner.

When Indian and Chinese representatives met in conference at official level in 1960 to discuss the boundary question, the Chinese had the advantage of the traditional nine points of the law as regards the Aksai Chin, for they were in effective occupation of the territory they claimed. Hence they could afford to disregard the historical evidence presented in support of the Indian case, and the Indian Report complains that "the Chinese side did not really come to grips with this

conclusive evidence proving the exercise of continuous and comprehensive administration". But the Chinese did have an answer to most of the documents cited by the Indians. The men who compiled these revenue assessments, the authors of these books of travel – were they not British, therefore imperialists, all, therefore, in a conspiracy to deprive China of territory which rightfully belonged to her? In order to plead their case the Indians were constantly driven into the position of defending the actions of the British Raj or suggesting that not all Englishmen were necessarily liars, and the Chinese representatives took full tactical advantage of the Indian embarrassment. Finally, the Indians were goaded into pointing out that the peoples of Sinkiang and Tibet were not Chinese. They were severely rebuked in the following passage of the Chinese report:

The Indian side failed to provide any concrete instance to deny the basic historical fact that British imperialism for many years actively carried out a policy of aggression against China's Sinkiang and Tibet region, a fact which is directly related to the Sino-Indian boundary question. But the Indian side tried by every means to defend British imperialism. . . . What was particularly surprising to the Chinese side was that when the Indian side could no longer deny the facts of British imperialist aggression against Sinkiang cited by the Chinese side, it not only tried hard to defend British imperialism, but put forward the assertion of "Chinese imperialism". It is well known that China has for more than a hundred years suffered greatly from imperialist oppression. How could it be said that Britain, whose aggressive nature is well known, was not imperialist, while China, which the whole world knows has long suffered from aggression, was imperialist.

But such altercations had no bearing on the actual situation. Even while the officials of the two governments argued over photostats of old maps, revenue records and books of travel long out of print, Chinese army lorries rumbled through the rocky wilderness along the shores of Lake Amtogor on their way from Khotan to Tibet. They would continue to do so until India had the power to stop them.

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