

# THE BATTLE OF NEFA

## *The Undeclared War*

by

G. S. BHARGAVA



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TO

*The Unknown Warrior  
Who Fought and Fell  
In Defence of Our  
Frontiers  
and  
Freedom*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I AM INDEBTED to S. Mulgaokar and *The Hindustan Times* for both the opportunity and the permission to write this book. It was when I was a Special Correspondent of *The Hindustan Times* that I spent a hectic two-month period in the North East Frontier Agency. I was able to go up to Tuting in the Siang Frontier Division, which lies on the line demarcating the so-called 20-kilometre demilitarised zone. I was one of the two Indian newspapermen who participated in the Independence Day celebrations (Jan. 26) at Towang, following the enemy withdrawal.

*The Hindustan Times* published my articles analysing the NEFA reverses, which formed the basis of this book.

Innumerable friends in the Armed Forces Information Office and the National Defence College, notably Col. Pyara Lal and Lt.-Col. V. Longer, helped me, during my stay in NEFA, understand military matters in perspective. But for their guidance this book could not have been written. I am grateful to them.

Friends at Sapru House who helped me with reference material equally deserve my thanks.

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*New Delhi*  
*September 29, 1963.*

G. S. B.



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" We should strike only when we are positively sure that the enemy's situation, the terrain, the people and other conditions are all favourable to us and unfavourable to the enemy. There will always be opportunities and we should not rashly accept battle."—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" We aim at peace not only in one country but also throughout the world. In order to achieve this object we must wage a life and death war. The sacrifice may be great and the time long but there already lies clearly before us a new world of permanent peace and permanent light."—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" The first stage is one of the enemy's strategic offensive and our strategic defensive. The second stage is one of the enemy's strategic defensive and our preparation for the counter-offensive. The third stage is one of our strategic counter-offensive and the enemy's strategic retreat."—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" A protracted war and a campaign or battle of quick decision are two aspects of the same thing."—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" To defend in order to attack, to retreat in order to advance, to take a flanking position in order to take a frontal position and to zigzag in order to go straight—these are the inevitable phenomena of the process of development of any event or matter. How can military movements be otherwise?"—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" Our strategy is one against ten and our tactic ten against one."

—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" To create illusions deliberately for the enemy and then spring surprise attacks upon him is a means, and an important means, of achieving superiority and seizing the initiative."—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" The second stage may be termed the stage of strategic stalemate. . . . For example, Japan's military and financial power will be greatly consumed by China's guerrilla war, the morale of her troops will decline further, her home population will become more discontented and her international position will become more isolated."—MAO TSE-TUNG

• • •

" Political power grows out of the barrel of the gun."—MAO TSE-TUNG



## CHAPTER I

# THE CHINESE BUILD-UP

WHEN did the Chinese military build-up in Sinkiang and Tibet start? A precise answer to this question is not possible. Between 1950 when the Chinese occupied Tibet and 1957 only "pro-Western" critics of India's Tibet policy talked of concentration of Chinese troops in Tibet and warned the authorities of the possibility of the Roof of the World being a springboard for Chinese aggression against India.

Acharya Kripalani, the most outspoken among the critics, said as early as in 1950 that he would not believe in the *bona fides* of Peking. "This nation (China) that had won its freedom so recently strangled the freedom of a neighbouring nation (Tibet) with whose freedom we are intimately concerned," he declared.

He returned to the charge in 1954 and observed that "in the new map of China other border territories like Nepal, Sikkim, etc. figure. This gives us an idea of the aggressive designs of China. I do not say that because China conquered Tibet we should have gone to war with it. But this does not mean that we should recognise the claim of China on Tibet. We must know that it is an act of aggression against a foreign nation. . . . *A small buffer state on our borders* was deprived of its freedom" [emphasis added].

By implication Acharya Kripalani meant that China in control of Tibet was a threat to our freedom. But his

direct references were to the emotional aspects of the Tibetan question and the expansionist character of Communism. While the mood of India at the time was not receptive to the "cold war arguments" against Communism, the sympathy for Tibet exhausted itself in being felt.

Between 1957 and 1959 when the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa and was given asylum in India, murmurs about Chinese military designs on India grew in volume and frequency. But nobody in a responsible position in India ever made out a case that the huge build-up taking place in Tibet and Sinkiang was for an onslaught against India and not merely for the suppression of the revolt in Tibet. There seemed to be two reasons for it. First, critics of China very often exaggerated the magnitude of the Khampa uprising in Tibet. Western newspaper correspondents in search of headline-hitting "copy" wrote "colour" stories on the subject, which the Communists specialised in spreading. The Communist leader, Mrs. Renu Chakravarti, who would normally take with a pinch of salt anti-Communist reports emanating from Western sources, believed as gospel truth (the phrase should be Marxism-Leninism) a claim by Miss Elizabeth Partridge in the *News Chronicle* of London that she met some Khampa rebels inside Indian territory.<sup>1</sup> (The Prime Minister had to set the record straight by pointing out that Miss Partridge "had not gone anywhere near the border; she had written it from far away.")

But the Prime Minister himself seemed to have accepted the version that the Khampa revolt was serious in nature necessitating large Chinese forces to quell it. Whenever reports of Chinese concentration along the

<sup>1</sup> Lok Sabha debate on March 30, 1959.

Indian border figured in Parliament he explained them away as meant against the Tibetan rebels.

Secondly, the Government apparently disbelieved reports of several Chinese divisions being poised on the Tibetan plateau for aggression against India. Even in August-September 1959, when Peking had almost torn off her mask of friendship for India and the occupation of the Aksai Chin plateau and attacks on Spanggur, Khinzemane and Longju had been made public, the Prime Minister discounted reports of massing of enemy troops on our borders. He said some Chinese might have come chasing the Tibetan refugees.

Between the concluding months of 1959 and September 1962 not a week passed without one newspaper or another reporting massive Chinese build-up near the border. Some of these news items emanating from Gangtok might have been off beam but the Government did not react to even the credible reports.

There was another unseemly aspect to "leakage" of news. Let me illustrate. *The Statesman* and *The Times of India* reported on October 5, 1962, that Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul, the then Chief of General Staff, would command a task force to be specially set up for the defence of NEFA. The Defence authorities were unhappy at the report which was denied. They also tried informally to get at the source of the news. A New Delhi English weekly, *Link*, with which the then Defence Minister, Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon, was associated, also reported almost simultaneously that Lt.-Gen. Kaul would head a new corps to be created with Tezpur as headquarters. Mr. Menon did not bat an eyelid at the premature disclosure of these military plans!

In other words, power-mad politicians played ducks and drakes with Army secrets. They would give out to their

favourite journals news of the goings-on in the Army. This had naturally its reaction. Those in the Army and elsewhere, who did not see eye to eye with Mr. Krishna Menon, also briefed newspapers friendly to them. An item of news ceased to interest policy-makers and stir them to positive action. It came to be looked upon as "a score" by the opposite party in the propaganda battle and the effort would be to avenge it.

The foregoing description of the unhappy state of affairs has relevance in the context of the role of the Intelligence Service in our military debacle in the North-East Frontier Agency. It has been very often said that the Intelligence Service let us down badly. But the truth is that only information which suited the political thinking of the men at the helm of affairs was well received. For instance, if the policy was to pooh-pooh Chinese military threat reports of enemy build-up, military manoeuvres, etc., however plausible, were frowned upon and pigeon-holed. After a few days they found their way to the appropriate newspaper office. When reports based on the unsavoury intelligence appeared in the Press the attitude was to discount them openly and counteract them subterraneously through other newspapers or journals.

Early in October 1962 I had a long chat with an Intelligence officer. The official mood in New Delhi then was to belittle the Chinese strength, rule out a showdown with Peking and think in terms of "positional warfare" or "minor skirmishes." (An Army officer told A. M. Rosenthal of *The New York Times*: "We thought it was a sort of game. They would stick up a post and we would stick up a post and we did not think it would come to much more.")<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times*, November 11, 1962.

But my friend in the Intelligence Service had grave doubts about the plausibility of such shadow boxing. He told me that if we continued to be complacent and underrated Chinese intentions and strength we would be in for "trouble." According to him, the enemy was massed in strength on the NEFA border and was apparently prepared for a "big fight."

This is not to deny the existence of black sheep in the Intelligence Service as in other walks of life. An officer we met at Tezpur was cut up because he could not play host to the "gentlemen of the Press." He added that he was living happily with his family at Tezpur when the Chinese *unexpectedly* launched the attack and forced him to send his family to Delhi. My friend, Unnikrishnan of *Press Trust of India*, could not help remarking that it did not speak too well of the Intelligence Service that its officers were taken by surprise by the Chinese attack!

Reverting to the Chinese build-up in Tibet, we have it on the authority of Marshal Chen Yi, the Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, that starting from 1949 and 1950 "we began setting up our national defence system." This was perhaps the time when the build-up in Tibet was decided upon.

If Chinese intentions were indications of the military strength being amassed in Tibet, India had an inkling of them during the negotiations for the 1954 treaty on Tibet. In the Chinese draft of the agreement six passes in Ladakh were shown as belonging to the Ari district of Tibet.

Then there was the hint thrown by Mr. Chou En-lai at Bandung in 1955 that "we have common borders with four countries. With some of these countries we have

not yet fixed our border line and we are ready to do so." But India was then so engrossed in cultivating China that both the draft of the agreement and Mr. Chou En-lai's assertion that the Sino-Indian border remained to be delimited (the Prime Minister himself had said so several times) did not strike us as insidious.

Western writers on Tibet had stated that feverish military preparations were going on in Tibet and that they were not merely for consolidating the Chinese conquest of the Roof of the World but for facilitating a possible attack on India. Lowell Thomas Jr. who with his father had visited Tibet before the Chinese invasion reported<sup>3</sup> that "by 1953 telegraph wires connected China with all the important towns in Tibet." "All the Chinese garrisons were linked efficiently by radio telephone," he added.

By 1954, two roads linking Tibet with China had been completed. One of them from Sining in Inner Tibet followed a westerly direction, meeting Tsaidam Swamp in the south and entered Outer Tibet to the north of Nagchu Ka. Here it joined the traditional caravan route and dived to the south of Nagchu Ka to reach Lhasa. The entire 2,160-kilometre long road was motorable by 1955.

The other road from Tatsienlu *via* Kantse and Chamdo to Lhasa had more insidious implications.<sup>4</sup> According to Lowell Thomas Jr., it had been surveyed and laid out by Russian engineers. Its alignment ran far to the south of the old caravan route. That the caravan route was direct and, therefore, shorter, and that the new road traversed relatively even more difficult terrain made the course it had taken very significant for India. It came within 60 kilometres of the NEFA border. After reach-

<sup>3</sup> *The Silent War in Tibet*, Secker & Warburg.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

ing Lhasa it again plunged south to join the main trade route *via* Phari and Yatung right up to our border.

To add to the threat, even before the main highways were completed spur roads were built to strategic points on our border. To quote Lowell Thomas Jr. again, "thus the new roads in Tibet could not be for the purpose of trade, although the Chinese said that trade was their main reason for building them. *The roads had to be for military purpose.* They were not the type that the local traffic of caravans and light vehicles would require. *Instead, they were constructed to take the heaviest trucks which in that part of the world were available only to the armed forces*"<sup>5</sup> [emphasis added].

On April 26, 1960, *The Times of India* disclosed that the Chinese had built a new road in Ladakh, to the west of the Aksai Chin highway. The road entered Indian territory at Haji Langar where the Aksai Chin highway also intruded into our territory. Then it branched off to the west occupying more Indian territory and met Lanak La after passing through the Qara Qash river valley.

From Haji Langar the road ran north-west into Sinkiang, touching Malikshah and Shabidullah. This connected these two places in Sinkiang (now developed into cantonments) with Rudok, a military centre in western Tibet. Between Lanak La and Rudok it ran parallel to the Aksai Chin road.

The Chinese, it was revealed, had also laid a feeder road from Lanak La to the west. This was motorable.

Comparing the new road with the Aksai Chin highway, *The Times of India* report said "the new highway traverses about 200 miles (360 kilometres) of Indian territory and cuts off an area between 8,000 and 10,000 square

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

miles [about 25,000 to 32,000 square kilometres].” The report added that the purpose of the new road was consolidation of the “ present actuality of Chinese aggression.”

There was no doubt that the enemy wanted to consolidate the gains of his aggression in the Aksai Chin plateau. More than that he had also planned to use the communications system for further aggression against India. This fact, sticking out amile, somehow escaped our attention at that time.

For instance, Gartok and Rudok, which had been developed into heavily fortified military centres, were the bases from which enemy patrols probed our border positions. Similar “ border incidents ” caused by enemy probings preceded the occupation of Tibet. Of course, in those days we did not have any defence installations worth the name in that area but first-hand knowledge of the fact must have further fortified the aggressor.

On the NEFA border, running slightly to the north of the McMahon Line was built a road which could carry three-ton vehicles. As engineers would tell us, a road built for three-tonners could take heavier vehicles also, provided the culverts *en route*, if any, were strong enough. The Tibetan plateau not only simplified the task of the road-builder but lent manoeuvrability to the road. A number of feeder roads also were laid.

The direct connection between the development of communications in Tibet and the military and political objectives of the Chinese was brought out by the Shillong correspondent of *The Statesman*. In a despatch published on January 16, 1960, he revealed: “ In many villages along the border as well as in the interior propaganda posts fitted with microphones and radio receiving sets have been installed.

“ Although no actual report of broadcasts being



directed to Indian villages has yet been received here, knowledgeable circles here have no reason to doubt that the Chinese will use any method of indoctrination of people, now that the Khampa rebellion has been 'stamped out.'

"In the Chumbi Valley to the east of Sikkim the Chinese had started using these propaganda media within a few days of their full occupation of the area and the blare of loudspeakers used to reach the Sikkimese homes near the border.

"It is this aspect of the situation and its long-term prospects that appear to the NEFA authorities to be more serious than the threat of physical aggression. It is all the more significant a feature because the people living to the south of the McMahon Line have closer racial, linguistic and religious affinities to those living to the north of the line than to those in the plains of India."

A Shillong report published in *The Times of India* \* said that the Chinese had built an airfield near Narayumtso, which is 79.2 kilometres from Bum La. This seems to be the nearest enemy airfield from the borders of the Kameng Frontier Division in NEFA and Bhutan. The report also said that the airfield had been linked by road with Marmang which is only 27 kilometres from the McMahon Line.

Rima in eastern Tibet is another important military centre. It lies directly to the north of Kibitoo and is perched on a high plateau. The main China-Tibet highway passes through Rima and reaches Tsetang village which is about 14 kilometres or eight miles from the Indian border.

That a section of the military and political leadership in the country was thinking in terms of a Chinese thrust

\* April 1, 1960.

across "the disputed" border was evident from a report in *The Hindustan Times*. Its Diplomatic Correspondent wrote on May 6, 1960: "The danger along the India-China border lies in China's comparatively superior armed strength and the continued fog of dispute over the boundary between us and the Chinese. The Chinese might think of launching upon a gamble without fear of being detected in time or checked effectively. On a conservative estimate the Chinese hold in Tibet, in combat readiness, more than six divisions. A Chinese division usually consists of 15,000 men. Some of their air bases are supposed to be less than two hours' flight to New Delhi. The roads they have built in and to Tibet keep their supply and communications in good order.

"Every Chinese division possesses artillery up to 152 m.m. self-propelled guns, armoured gun regiments, T-34 Russian tanks and transport vehicles. A unconfirmed report mentions short-range field rockets also.

"It is important to recall that two months ago the Nepalese felt perceptibly worried about large-scale Chinese movements along their border with Tibet, especially its north-eastern section. When they invited Peking's attention the reply given to them was that these were normal military exercises. Whatever be the truth, this would indicate considerable Chinese armed strength in close proximity to NEFA."

The Maharajkumar of Sikkim who knows conditions in Tibet at first hand told me of the secrecy in which Chinese military moves are shrouded. Even the commander of the unit is not told where he and his men will be moving next. He is merely told to break camp at night. And he is not expected to convey this informa-

tion to his men until a couple of hours before the time for breaking camp.

As usual, the men have their evening meal before sunset. Then they are told to get ready to move. The marches invariably take place under cover of darkness. The camps are never pitched in the vicinity of towns. Even if the men pass through a village or town no one can breathe a word about it. Perpetual night curfew keeps the inhabitants indoors. No Tibetan house has windows open to the street. So one cannot see through a window and size up the troops on the march. Such secrecy minimises the possibility of information about troop movements leaking out before the actual movement has taken place.

In the following few weeks reports appeared in the Indian newspapers that the ultimate aim of the Chinese was to link Calcutta with the Lhasa-Shigatse road. Emanating from Gangtok and Kalimpong, these might be grave vine stories because they did not specify how such a road link with Calcutta was to be attempted. Of course, penetration of the Sikkim territory at Jelep La would put the enemy on the road to Calcutta. The same reports said that Lhasa was to be linked with China by a railway line.

The Darjeeling correspondent of *The Statesman* gave some details of the projected rail line to Lhasa. He reported on June 2, 1960, that the broad-gauge railway would run *via* Amdo, Tsaidam, Nagchu Ka and Damshung. He added that airfields had been constructed at Damshung, Tingri (at the base of Mount Everest), Nagchu Ka, Shigatse, Gyantse and Tuna. Tuna is said to be only 45 kilometres by air from the Sikkim border.

According to the report, 25 airfields had been built in Tibet. It said Shigatse had been linked by road with

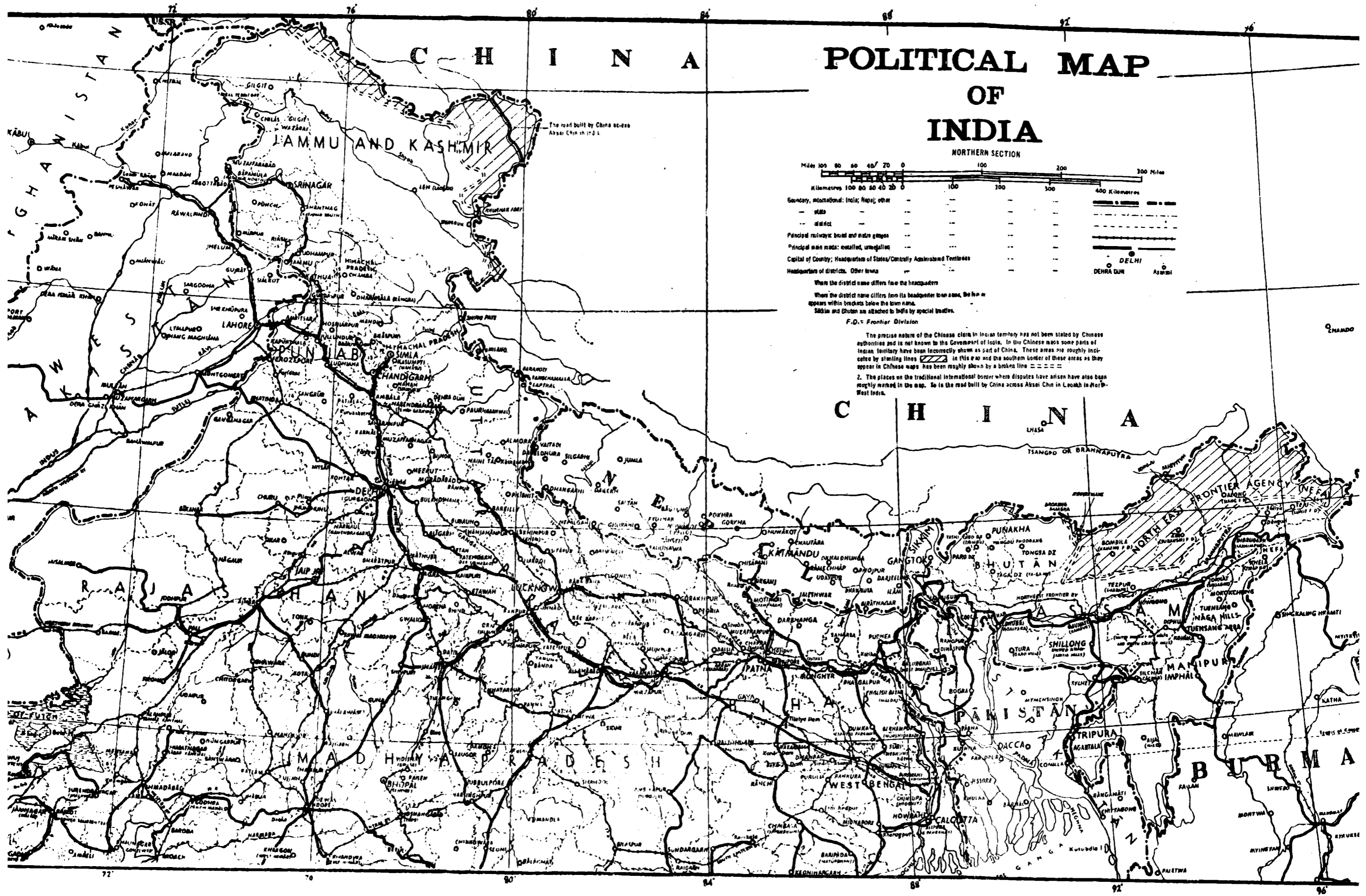
the Bhutan border and that roads had been laid from Lhasa to NEFA border.

The report concluded: "The Chinese have increased their forces in south Tibet, particularly in areas contiguous to NEFA. In each village are quartered 25 to 50 Chinese soldiers."<sup>7</sup>

The *Daily Telegraph* of June 6, 1960, published an article by George Patterson, which said that "eight airfields have been built opposite Nepal and Sikkim in the past year." Presumably the eight were included in the 25 mentioned by *The Statesman* correspondent. Another report was more specific. It said there were three airfields in the Chumbi Valley, between Sikkim and Bhutan. The locations mentioned were Tomo, Phari Dzong and Changothang. It said besides these, there were seven airstrips in the valley.

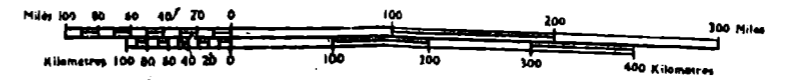
Unless the enemy had relatively primitive aircraft (which was not the case) or was contemplating a massive airborne invasion of India<sup>8</sup> (which did not prove to be) there was no need for such proliferation of airstrips near the border. After all, in a total war they would be vulnerable. But sources in Sikkim insisted, even in January 1963, that this was the case and said that multiplicity of air bases might be to reach supplies and reinforcements right up to the border in the event of the overland route being tampered with by the Tibetans or by India. In other words, according to these sources the Chinese did not leave anything to chance and had meticulously planned their offensive against India on the basis that India might intercept the Aksai Chin

<sup>7</sup> Cf. "In every village (on the Indo-Tibetan border) at least a squad and usually a platoon of Chinese troops was stationed. These forces constantly patrolled and often crossed the borders." Lowell Thomas Jr. in *The Silent War in Tibet*.



# POLITICAL MAP OF INDIA

NORTHERN SECTION



- Boundary, international: India; Nepal; etc. ————
  - State ————
  - District ————
  - Principal railways: broad and metre gauges ————
  - Principal main roads: metalled, unmetalled ————
  - Capital of Country; Headquarters of States/Centrally Administered Territories ————
  - Headquarters of districts; Other towns ————
- Where the district name differs from the headquarters ————
- Where the district name differs from its headquarters town name, the town name appears within brackets below the town name.
- Sikkim and Chutia are attached to India by special treaties.
- F.D.: Frontier Division

The precise nature of the Chinese claim in Indian territory has not been stated by Chinese authorities and is not known to the Government of India. In the Chinese maps some parts of Indian territory have been incorrectly shown as part of China. These areas are roughly indicated by stippling lines in this map and the southern border of these areas as they appear in Chinese maps has been roughly shown by a broken line.

2. The places on the traditional international border where disputes have arisen have also been roughly marked in the map. So is the road built by China across Aksai Chin in North-West India.

highway and the other road from Haji Langar to Lanak La.

On June 22, 1960, *Press Trust of India* reported from Khatmandu that a full Chinese division was engaged in putting down a revolt by the Tibetans in the Parkha area on the 2,700-kilometre long Lhasa-Sinkiang highway. Such reports presumably explained the Chinese caution in having a large number of airstrips near the border.

Infiltration of Chinese agents across the border was another aspect of the enemy war preparations. The then Chief of Army Staff, Gen. K. S. Thimayya, said in Darjeeling on June 22, 1960, that several cases of Chinese crossing into India had been detected. A week later a Tezpur report in *The Hindustan Times* put the number of Chinese agents who had infiltrated into India at 5,000.

In November 1960, in a speech delivered in New Delhi George Patterson felt that an attack on Sikkim or Bhutan was imminent. He said: "experts estimated that at least eight divisions of Chinese troops had been massed along Sikkim and Bhutan alone." (Only in May that year reports had put the Chinese strength in the whole of Tibet at six divisions. That meant considerable accretion of strength in the summer months, which was plausible.)

Patterson thought this concentration of military personnel and ammunition along the borders of Sikkim and Bhutan had been going on over the years and the Chinese occupation of Indian territory in Ladakh and NEFA was only a diversionary tactic.

Foreign newspapers had, meanwhile, quoted Sir Edmund Hillary to the effect that he had seen a Chinese

rocket base in October 1960 in the Rowaling area on the Nepal-Tibet border.

In May 1961 *Agence France Presse* reported the existence of two more airfields in Tibet, at Drechen in the Phari Dzong area and Kala in the Vuta valley. It gave the total number of enemy airfields in Tibet as 20, including the latest two. On December 9, 1960, came reports of reinforcements of the Chinese garrison at Maksarba in the Lhasa area and the establishment of new airfields at Chakpori, north of Lhasa, and near Gyamina Mandi adjacent to the Indian border.

Simultaneously, violation of Indian air space became more frequent. "Unidentified" aircraft were sighted over Askote, Joshimath, Badrinath and Kalapani in Uttar Pradesh. Putting two and two together it could be deduced that taking advantage of the airstrips in the vicinity of the international frontier the Chinese were carrying out forays into our air space to map out the strategic border area.

Military correspondents of newspapers started talking of feverish efforts by the Chinese to streamline their military set-up along the border. A report read: "One of the defence measures adopted by India is to post border guards close . . . to the entrance to a pass, but reports are that the Chinese have gone further. Their scheme of operations includes construction of underground bunkers scooped through rocky surfaces. Very much reminiscent of the shelters of last war, the bunkers serve a double objective of defence and offence.

"These bunkers are spacious enough to accommodate between one and three dozen personnel forming a self-contained unit capable of operating on its own. Within the bunkers are provided living amenities, including simple rations and mountain clothing and military where-

withal such as ammunition, machine guns, hand grenades and radio sets. Surface communications between these bunkers and the rear constitute part of the overall Chinese strategic plan for the Himalayan border, and they never seem to have enough of them.

“Not only do the bunkers provide home for the Chinese mountain soldier, they are strategic outposts from where the bunker group can be a master of initiative, being able to attack and withdraw at will. They have not come into being overnight, of course. Built over a long stretch of time, they show how China has been thinking ahead on a long-drawn basis.

“Rocky bunkers are highly effective methods of defending vulnerable points at high altitude, and reports are that India has yet to go some way in building them. A foremost requirement of bunker construction is high explosive, which must be supplied in sufficient quantities and with speed. Experts are needed to use it in accordance with carefully prepared bunker designs. From the purely human angle, self-heating equipment is a most urgent requirement of the mountain guards, which our ordnance factories will have to turn out in sufficient quantity.”

October 1961 saw reports of incursions on land by the Chinese. Shillong as the headquarters of the NEFA Administration became a source of news. On October 25, *The Indian Express* carried a report from its Shillong correspondent to the effect that “Chinese army units in Tibet stationed on the opposite side of the NEFA border are reported to have recently made several incursions into the area. Border attacks on some parts have also been reported. . . . While the Indian frontier guards (in Chinese terminology this means the army but on our side there were only the Assam Riflemen guarding the frontier)



stationed near Khinzemane in the Kameng Frontier Division have successfully repulsed the aggressor at a place only a few kilometres away (from Khinzemane) the Chinese have made fresh incursions into the Siang and Subansiri divisions."

These Chinese "incursions" were mainly in the east across the NEFA border. Establishment of military outposts on Ladakh territory also continued but that was apparently by way of consolidation of the gains of earlier aggression. On the other hand, in NEFA probing and reconnaissance were the stock in trade.

Sikkim had always been a good listening post for developments in Tibet. So Gangtok could first report further accretion to the enemy's military strength or a military manoeuvre or the extension of his lines of communication. After a few days would come news of a fresh "incursion" or an incident in NEFA. This became more or less the pattern. On November 16, a Gangtok report in *The Hindustan Times* said a road had been constructed connecting Gympoa with Tsona Dzong which is about 18 kilometres east of the Bhutanese border and 40 kilometres north of Towang. Like Rima to the farther east, Tsona Dzong is a military headquarters in southern Tibet.

A fortnight later the same reporter quoted "reliable Tibetan sources" to the effect that the number of enemy troops in Tibet was in the neighbourhood of 150,000 or ten divisions. "These sources maintain that half of these are based in the Sinkiang military area and the other half in Tibet under Gen. Chang Ko-hua." Gen. Chang Ko-hua had fought in Korea.

Geographically speaking, this meant that five enemy divisions were poised for "action" in Ladakh and five more for operations against NEFA, Sikkim and Bhutan.

Since the enemy lines of communications stretched from the mainland of China not less than three divisions would be needed to man the lines of communications. That left seven divisions in Sinkiang and Tibet put together. Taking out two more divisions to deal with the restive Tibetans five divisions would be available for attacks on the entire border.

Though our defence forces were far smaller in number an attack by five divisions spread all over the border would have been withstandable. It was then thought that the Chinese wanted to nibble at our territory all along the border. But if instead they pressed forward in a particular area with even three divisions we would have been hopelessly outnumbered. That was what had happened.

*The Statesman* of December 8, 1961, carried a report from its Gangtok correspondent that the Chinese were planning a big military exercise at a place 76 kilometres north-west of Lhasa. "At least three divisions from the Loka Valley Camp and three others from the Lhasa-Chakpori Camp" were to participate in it. That would mean that six divisions were available for combat and not five as deduced in the foregoing hypothetical calculation. "The Chinese air force and paratroopers will take part in the exercise," the report added. "It is also gathered that the Chinese have veteran Korean fighters trained for guerilla warfare in the Himalayan mountains. China will use MIG 17s and jet fighters."

The pace at which communications were being developed in Tibet would make it shortsightedness to key our defence preparedness to the strength of the army of occupation in Tibet. When the rail link to Lhasa materialises, as it soon will, the overall strength of China will impinge on our territorial integrity.

True, Peking has other commitments, in Taiwan especially. But its resources also are almost limitless. In 1961-62 it was estimated that China had 2,216,000 men under arms organised in approximately 115 divisions of infantry; two or three armoured divisions, one or two airborne divisions and cavalry for operations in desert areas.<sup>8</sup>

In 1961, there were 125 million men of military age in China. About 700,000 are called up each year and serve three years in the army.

Edgar O'Ballance puts the strength of the Chinese standing army at four to four and a half million men<sup>9</sup>—which was the figure at the end of the civil war. He divides the army into two and a half million combatants, over a million transport corps and some 300,000 personnel in the line of communication units.

According to him, at least 10 divisions are either armoured, partly armoured or almost completely mechanised. "There are also five or six heavy artillery divisions and another two or three anti-aircraft regular divisions."

The Chinese Defence Minister, Lin Piao, admitted on February 18, 1960, that the army was 2.5 million strong. In addition to it was the militia, composed of all able-bodied men between the ages of 16 and 60. He put the total number of militiamen at approximately 200 million.

The Chinese air force is equally formidable. As long ago as in 1955 Gen. Twining, Chief of the U.S. Air Force General Staff, said China's air force was the fourth largest in the world. In the words of Edgar O'Ballance, China

<sup>8</sup> *The Communist Bloc and the Western Alliances* published by the Institute for Strategic Studies, London.

<sup>9</sup> *The Red Army of China*, Faber.

has at least 3,000 "fighter interceptors" and several hundred and perhaps up to a thousand light jet bombers and transport aircraft. The bulk of the fighters are MIG 15s. The bombers are mainly Ilyushin 28s.<sup>10</sup>

*Jane's All The World's Aircraft* recorded in 1961 that the Chinese production of MIG 17s had doubled with Russian help. The Russians were also reported to have supplied China with a short-range missile capability and "are said to be teaching them to build long-range submarines."<sup>11</sup>

China possesses no high-grade aviation fuel. Every single drop of it used to come all the way from Russia. The recent Sino-Soviet rift has robbed Peking of essential Russian supplies and technical know-how.

Notwithstanding the cessation of Soviet assistance China is on the threshold of becoming a nuclear Power. This is an unpalatable fact of life which we have to reckon with. It is a different matter if we continue to refuse to develop into a nuclear Power, bending all our energies to the peaceful, domestic uses of atomic energy. But the impact on the mind of the rest of Asia, perhaps Africa, too, of China in possession of the bomb cannot be wished away.

Experts have estimated that Peking will have the bomb by 1964 at the latest. The only saving grace is that thanks to Soviet firmness China may not have in the near future sophisticated aircraft to carry and drop the bombs.

China formally started into nuclear technology in the summer of 1958. In that year an experimental nuclear reactor, built with Russian assistance, was opened near Peking. With a heat output of 5-10 megawatts, it could produce up to 2-5 kilograms of plutonium a year. In

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Current History*, December 1960.

other words, two years' yield of plutonium would be sufficient to make a bomb. And the Chinese "have sacrificed experimental research for the sake of a continuous production of plutonium."<sup>12</sup>

Withdrawal of Russian technicians from China in 1960, coupled with reports that Chinese stationed in Tibet were being taken home in large numbers to reinforce farm labour on the mainland had led to premature forecasts of doom for the aggressor. Even *The Daily Telegraph* which had in the past accused New Delhi of complacency and starry-eyed faith in peaceful co-existence with Peking joined issue with Mr. Averrel Harriman, the U.S. Under-Secretary of State, for his assessment that China was the main threat to peace. The newspaper had concluded that "the east wind has lost some of its force." Has it?

<sup>12</sup> *Survival*, The Institute for Strategic Studies, London, May-June 62.

## CHAPTER II

# MENTAL RESERVATIONS

THAT our defence effort fell far short of the enemy aggression plans goes without saying. But our unpreparedness was of two kinds: physical and mental. In the nature of things, a democratic India given to development effort and confronted with gigantic problems—the Communist insurrection bid of 1948-50, the language quarrels and reorganisation of States, Pakistan's threatening posture on Kashmir, the projection of cold war politics into the domestic sphere and the continuance of the Portuguese possessions on Indian territory were only some of these—could not match China's military potential. The time factor, too, was against us. We had awakened to the possibility of a Chinese threat only in August-September 1959 when Chinese occupation of Indian territory over a year ago was made public for the first time. Even then we thought we could avoid trouble with China by closing our eyes to it.

The mental unpreparedness is more significant because it is at the root of the other shortcomings. Even today, after a major offensive by the Chinese and with the threat of fresh aggression looming large on the horizon, we are finding difficulties in building up our defences. The West is not too ready to let us be strong enough to face China on our own. Pakistani objections come in handy to keep us dependent in defence matters. The Soviet

Union's capacity to help us is limited by ideological and practical considerations.

Still, there are no illusions now about Chinese intentions. The will to resist tyranny is deep-rooted and all-embracing. We are prepared to tighten our belts further, bear privations with a smile and build up our defences. This is the result of a mental change induced by a realisation of the Chinese menace. Neither the realisation nor the change was there before the October 1962 aggression.

A recent protest note to Peking<sup>1</sup> said that "long before the 'liberation' of Tibet some Chinese political journals had been proclaiming the objective of using the 'liberated' territory of Tibet as a base for operations against India." If awareness of such Chinese intentions was there before September 1959 it had never been given tongue to officially nor did it manifest itself in defence preparedness.

For nearly four years after the Chinese occupation of Tibet no incident was reported on the frontiers. The Chinese intrusion into Bara Hoti in June 1955 was the first manifestation of aggressive Chinese military activity in Tibet.

But the tendency persisted to fail to see wood for trees. While the Government took an isolated view of individual incidents, its critics quite unnecessarily introduced larger ideological issues into the picture. For instance, following discussions between the spokesmen of the Governments of India and China on the Chinese attack on Bara Hoti, the Government of India issued a communique saying that Bara Hoti covered about two square miles (2.88 square kilometres) of territory at an altitude

<sup>1</sup> June 10, 1963.

of over 16,000 feet and that it had no strategic or other importance.

The statement declared: "The Indo-Tibetan border is well defined. The question is merely one of fact, namely whether this small area . . . lies north or south of the border pass. It is admitted by both sides that if the area is north of the border pass it would be in Tibet, if it is south it would be in India."

A military mind would not have reacted in such an abstract and academic manner to what was evidently a developing military threat. The small area of Bara Hoti, its inhospitable altitude and even the alleged absence of strategic importance to it are immaterial in the context of the military moves across the border. The possibility of a threat from beyond the Himalayas was the heart of the matter. But it was evaded.

The Chinese announced the marching of their troops into Tibet on October 25, 1950. A brief communique issued in Peking said: "People's Army units have been ordered to advance into Tibet to free three million Tibetans from the imperialist oppression and to *consolidate national defence on the western borders of China*" [emphasis added].

The Government of India reacted to the news two days later through an official press note. It was too early to have looked at the military repercussions of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The Government merely expressed its "concern" at the news and asked the Indian Ambassador in Peking "to convey to the Chinese Government their surprise and regret at the development." Newspaper reports said the Government was "extremely perplexed and disappointed at the Chinese Government's action without a word of explanation in advance."

On October 29, the Prime Minister told *Reuter* in an



interview: "It was not clear what the Chinese Government's real intentions were. There were certain disputed areas in eastern Tibet where China had been given the right to station garrisons under the terms of former agreements." Referring to the Peking regime's fear that the U.S. wanted to undo it, Mr. Nehru said it was "rightly or wrongly very real."

The Prime Minister also touched on reports in the Russian Press that Anglo-American "intrigues" in Tibet were aimed at bringing that country into an anti-Communist bloc or sphere of influence. However unfounded these allegations might be, he wondered whether they might not have influenced the Chinese action. In other words, the Prime Minister thought that either considerations of defence (as the Peking communique claimed) or proddings of cold war should have actuated the Chinese conquest of the Roof of the World.

Subsequent debates within and without Parliament on Tibet followed an identical pattern, omitting, except marginally, the military impact of the action on India's defences. This had resulted in mental reservations, complacency, unpreparedness and weakness.

In December 1950, the Lok Sabha debated Tibet. The Prime Minister, in his opening statement, reiterated that India's interest in Tibet was cultural and commercial and that India wished to preserve these relations because they did not come in the way of either China or Tibet. Then he voiced India's anxiety that Tibet should maintain the autonomy which it had had for at least the last 40 years.

During the discussion, the present Swatantra Party leader, Mr. N. G. Ranga, who was then a Congress member, spoke incidentally of the possibility of a Chinese threat. He asked whether the Prime Minister could be

“indifferent to the gathering clouds of threats of insecurity to our own safety in our own country.” More directly, he wondered whether the “avalanchic sweep” by “millions of Chinese into Korea” could not be repeated in the case of India “under more or less similar circumstances, under the same pressure of ideological and imperialistic urges.”

The late Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee had almost a premonition of the border conflict. Pointing out that Chinese maps in circulation “even now include portions of Assam, Ladakh and Leh,” he said the Chinese behaviour in Tibet indicated that Peking would “do everything necessary for the purpose of keeping intact what it considers to be China’s border.”

From the Congress benches Mr. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, a former Speaker of the Lok Sabha and now Governor of Bihar, said that “as against the 450 millions of Chinese if we with our 350 million had armed ourselves and were ready for an offensive, if necessary, China would not have ventured on Tibet.” Another Congress member, Mr. Joachim Alva (whose wife was a Deputy Home Minister), attributed the Chinese advance into Tibet to America crossing the 38th parallel. “If the parallel had not been crossed . . . China might not have been in a jittery state and the people in Tibet would not have asked for help,” he added suggesting thereby that “the people in Tibet” (not Tibetans by the way) had invited the Chinese army out of fear of America.

A third Congress member, Mr. Brajeshwar Prasad, was confident that “there will be no war if we ally ourselves with China and Russia.”

The Prime Minister, in his reply, again harped on the right of self-determination of the Tibetan people. He

observed: "Since Tibet is not the same as China it should ultimately be the wishes of the people of Tibet that should prevail. . . . Whether the people of Tibet are strong enough to assert their rights or not is another matter. Whether we are strong enough or any other country is strong enough to see that this is done is also another matter."

To sum up, three mental attitudes are discernible from the foregoing. First comes a vague fear that the Chinese may use Tibet as a springboard for aggression against India. This is not prompted by an understanding of geographical or military factors but by distrust of Communists and knowledge of the expansionist character of the ideology. And here lay the rub. In the mood in which India then was a cold war approach to Communism or capitalism did not register with either the Government or the people. In the same way, repentance that India's millions had not been mobilised, like the Chinese, militarily to thwart the occupation of Tibet was unrealistic. The Chinese had already marched into Tibet and so there was no question of preventing a *fait accompli*.

Secondly, the conquest of Tibet, announced by Peking, was news to India. Though we had a representative in Lhasa we were in the dark about the Chinese moves on the Roof of the World until they had progressed sufficiently. To have forced a military showdown with Peking there and then would have been unthinkable in the context of India's foreign policy and our genuine abhorrence of involvement in the cold war. Nineteen hundred and fifty was not 1962 in the matter of Sino-Soviet relations. Further, in view of the openly expressed Western interest in Tibet, Russia would not

have kept quiet while China was engaged in a fight with India and others over Tibet.

Above all, how could an India led by Jawaharlal Nehru, known for his aversion for extra-territorial rights, have waged war with China in defence of such privileges in Tibet enjoyed by the former British Government of India? It sounds pathetic to hear socialists and other avowed anti-colonialists talk of buffer states in the 20th century.

The anti-Communist approach to the conquest of Tibet had another catch also. In November 1950 El Salvador wanted the United Nations General Assembly to discuss "the invasion of Tibet by foreign forces." During the debate in the First Committee (400th & 404th meeting) on the question of inclusion of the item in the U.N. agenda, the Kuomintang representative, Mr: Liu, maintained that Tibet had been a part of China for 700 years and that "all Chinese, whatever be their party or religion, regarded it as such." At the same time, he described the invasion of Tibet as "one aspect of the Soviet Union's aggression against China," implying that Russia had made "the satellite regime of Peking" undertake the project. Such reasoning naturally weakened a case.

The second approach, also a product of cold war mentality, was a reaction to the first. It consisted of making the United States the villain of the piece in all situations.

As distinct from these two attitudes, the Prime Minister upheld Tibet's right to autonomy but when it came to the *modus operandi* for enabling Lhasa to exercise that right he had no policy. Looking at it from the narrowly nationalist point of view, even if we were not noble or strong enough to go to Tibet's rescue the confrontation with China which the disappearance of Tibet as an auto-

nomous territory had brought about should have set military minds thinking.

The next important occasion when Parliament debated Tibet was in May 1954, following the conclusion of the Sino-Indian Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India. Defending it, Mr. Nehru said it was a recognition of the existing situation there. "In fact, the situation had been recognised by us two or three years ago," he added. He said "historical and practical" considerations necessitated the step.

The Prime Minister laid more stress on the preamble to the agreement which contained the five principles of peaceful co-existence.<sup>2</sup> Some observers have interpreted it as India "writing off" Tibet as an autonomous area in return for a Chinese guarantee of good behaviour *vis-a-vis* India and her smaller Himalayan neighbours.

In a way, it was so. Practical politics demanded that the settled fact of Chinese occupation of Tibet should be recognised. Secondly, in keeping with her professed views on extra-territorial rights India had to surrender them. But New Delhi was too starry-eyed to make it a *quid pro quo* in the real sense of the term. Chinese could have been made to sign on the dotted line of a border agreement for what it was worth in return for complete control over Tibet.<sup>3</sup>

As a corollary to the agreement, India agreed to with-

<sup>2</sup> (1) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. (2) Mutual non-aggression. (3) Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs. (4) Equality and mutual benefit. (5) Peaceful co-existence.

<sup>3</sup> In 1943, Mr. Anthony Eden presented a memorandum to Mr. T. V. Soong recalling Lord Curzon's words in 1921 to the effect that His Majesty's Government "would welcome any amicable arrangement which the Chinese Government might be disposed to make with Tibet whereby the latter recognised Chinese suzerainty in return for an agreed frontier and an undertaking to recognise Tibetan autonomy."

draw completely within six months the military escort stationed at Yatung and Gyantse in Tibet. India also offered to hand over to China the postal, telegraph and public telegraph services together with their equipment.

The military escort at Yatung and Gyantse numbered no more than 300 troops. Their withdrawal therefore made no difference, militarily speaking. Secondly, as Mr. Nehru argued, "what right does India have to keep a part of her Army in Tibet, whether Tibet is independent or a part of China?"

Acharya Kripalani's complaint was that "because China has demolished what is called a buffer state . . . we are intimately concerned in Tibet". He added: "Let us see what the Chinese themselves did in the Korean war. Even the mere approach of a foreign army to the borders of the country made China participate in the Korean war. I refuse to believe that China had sympathy with North Korea. If their borders had not been endangered, they would not have bothered themselves about this Korean business."

The Acharya's arguments are a little disingenuous. It has often been said that that either Communist solidarity or land hunger was at the back of the Chinese entry into the Korean war. Protagonists of the Soviet Union justified Russian intervention in the Hungarian uprising on the ground that a Hungary out of the Soviet orbit would threaten the Russian defence system. It might be plausible in the case of Russia but China which would not mind the continuance of British hold on Hong Kong and had been putting up with U.S. military backing to Formosa and the presence of the U.S. Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Straits could not have been so sensitive about American troops across the 38th parallel in Korea.

Four years earlier, Congress M.P.s like Mr. Joachim

Alva had justified Chinese conquest of Tibet by reference to the American threat to cross the Yalu river. More recently, in 1962 Peking had sought to justify her massive aggression in NEFA on the plea that elements inimical to the Communist regime were getting entrenched across the Tibetan border.

It was one thing to have pleaded for vigilance and preparedness on our part and quite another to ask for a military showdown with China there and then. The tragedy was that responsible critics of the Government overstated their case and also tried to over-simplify the gigantic issue of an armed confrontation with China. The Government, on the other hand, scared of cold war postures, sought security in Chinese assurances of civilised behaviour. The Prime Minister made this very clear in his reply to the Lok Sabha debate cited earlier.<sup>4</sup> He declared: "We must realise that this revolution that came in China is the biggest thing that has taken place in the world at present, whether you like it or not. It is entirely up to your own mind and heart, and you may make your own decisions but this is the biggest thing that has taken place since the war. In a period of only a few years a country of the size of China has moved and arisen from slumber, and for the first time in several hundred years of history China now has a strong Central Government. This fact is a very important fact for Asia and the world"

Referring particularly to the five principles embodied in the preamble to the agreement on Tibet the Prime Minister said: "Territorial integrity' and 'sovereignty' mean that there should be no invasion. 'Non-aggression' means the same thing, and 'non-interference' means that there should be no interference in domestic

<sup>4</sup> May 18, 1954.

affairs, because some people are in the habit of interfering in other people's affairs. Now if these basic principles were accepted by every country and if every country were left free to progress as she likes, to follow any national or foreign policy she likes, no one else interfered, then gradually an atmosphere, a climate of peace would be established in the world. This is our policy and we try to act according to this policy."

The harshest criticism that can be made of this "policy" is that it is the fond hope of a man of peace. He has the development of India at heart and that required peace, at home as well as abroad. So why not let sleeping dogs lie, he thought.

Even from the pragmatic point of view there is nothing wrong with this attitude. When the Chinese marched into Tibet India could not have matched military strength with the enemy. In the circumstances he would be a rash leader who would precipitate a crisis in Sino-Indian relations. The Chinese seemed to be content with Tibet the occupation of which was already a settled fact. So why not gain time and build up our defensive strength? My quarrel with India's policy-makers arises here—that they neglected to build up our defensive strength, adequately and with the required speed. In other words, the accusing finger should be pointed not at the author of India's foreign policy but at those who managed her defence.

Persons who are acquainted with the Communist system and the international nature of its operations would have laughed to scorn the Prime Minister's faith in the Chinese not interfering in India's internal affairs through the Communist party unit here. But the Prime Minister is no less shrewd than them. He thought that through a broadly socialist economic policy he could steal



the Communist thunder, while friendliness for Russia and China would keep the Communists at home internationally isolated. That a section of the Communists in India have failed to toe the Peking line though the socialist trend in the economy could not be maintained is a partial vindication of this strategy.

Summing up, four years after the Chinese occupation of Tibet the Prime Minister had reduced Communist threat to India (presumably Chinese induced) to that of subversion and had planned to meet it internally. The fear of a Chinese military attack, which was evident soon after the rape of Tibet, had receded in his mind. He thought he could tackle China without a showdown. His critics, on the other hand, harped on a military confrontation there and then. Between these two stools fell the country.

That the Chinese had preferred the use of force to other methods in solving the "problem of their relations with Tibet" did not bestir India to military preparedness. It was in a way a blessing in disguise that Tibet had been taken over forcibly and not through a manipulated revolution. But we in India failed to notice what was so patently before our eyes.

No doubt, the idea of a buffer state has a bad odour about it. Independent India which has no designs on other's territory need not think in terms of buffer states to cushion off possible aggression. There can also be no objection to the renunciation of extra-territorial rights in Tibet. It has put the country on a high pedestal among the emerging nations, idealistically speaking. And it was no small gain. Coupled with a realistic appraisal of the military situation India's Tibet policy would have been one of principled dynamism. But the

military repercussions of the Chinese occupation were not at all evaluated.

It was in 1959—five years later—that the country was again seized of the Chinese menace in a big way. The uprising in Tibet broke out on March 10, 1959. First reports of the revolt and of firm Chinese action against it appeared in the Indian Press in the third week of March. Their source was Tibetan emigrés in Kalimpong.

The Dalai Lama left Lhasa on March 17, 1959, but not until April 3 did Mr. Nehru confirm it. On that day the Prime Minister told the Lok Sabha that the Dalai Lama had safely reached India and that he and his companions had been given political asylum.

Meanwhile, however, on March 28 itself the *New China News Agency*, giving the Chinese version of the Tibetan uprising, said the Dalai Lama had left Lhasa “under duress.”

On March 23, the Prime Minister made a statement in the Lok Sabha describing the Tibetan upsurge as a clash of wills. He added: “This outbreak of violence in Lhasa itself is a new development. Previously there had been conflicts in various parts of southern Tibet between the Khampas and the Chinese forces. But the Lhasa region had remained quiet.

“The House will appreciate that this is a difficult and delicate situation and we should avoid doing anything which will worsen it. We have no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of China with whom we have friendly relations.”

On March 30, there was an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha by Mr. Mohammed Imam to discuss Press reports that the Chinese troops had fanned out along the Indo-Tibetan border. The Prime Minister categorically

declared that he was "completely unaware" of it. "I have not heard a rumour to that effect, leave out the facts," he said.

He went even further. He suggested that the Press reports were based on intelligence "not from within Tibet but from outside Tibet, whether it is Hong Kong or whether it is any other place." He then added unequivocally: "My information is that there are [is] no massing of troops on the Indian border, so far as I know. How can I discuss it when I do not accept that fact?"

That was the end of the matter. There was no reference to the defence aspect. The possibility of a Chinese threat was not even mooted. The massing of troops also was denied.

Tibet's position inside China, Indo-Tibetan cultural links, the need to preserve Sino-Indian good relations and the rebuttal of a Peking charge that Kalimpong was "the commanding centre of the rebellion" were the salient features of the Prime Minister's pronouncements on this and other occasions and the Parliamentary debates which followed them.

"The preservation of the security and integrity of India" figured only on April 27 when Mr. Nehru made a longish statement in the Lok Sabha on the Tibetan developments. He listed it as the first among three factors which governed India's "broad policy," the other two being "our desire to maintain friendly relations with China and our deep sympathy for the people of Tibet." While it was realised that the latter two factors needed to be reconciled, the relationship between the preservation of the security of the country and the desire for friendly relations with Peking was not spelled out. In other words, the reference to the security of the country

was independent of a conscious or unconscious fear of a threat to it from China.

Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, in the Rajya Sabha, subtly raised the issue. He referred to the Chinese Premier's remark in the Chinese National People's Congress that "the boundary lines between China and certain neighbouring south-eastern countries" remained undetermined and that they could be "reasonably settled through peaceful negotiations." Pandit Kunzru observed: "China's claim to any territory controlled by other countries raises a serious question, but in any case, I venture to think that the time chosen by him (Chou En-lai) with regard to this question was scarcely opportune. I fervently hope that he did not want to make India aware of the existence of a new frontier, the north-east frontier."

Neither the Prime Minister nor any other official spokesman reacted to it. Even if they chose not to be explicit about it, there were also no indications of an awareness of a military threat from China. There was, therefore, no question of preparing to meet it. A kind of myopia prevailed.

This was in spite of the Chinese doublefaced behaviour in Tibet. Though he was not prepared to call it a violation of Panch Sheel, Mr. Nehru described in both the Houses of Parliament how Mr. Chou En-lai had offered to honour the autonomy of Tibet, how he had admitted that the Han race of China was ethnically and otherwise different from the Tibetans and how, in effect, the events unfolding themselves in Tibet were a negation of these assurances. Still, there was not even a hint that more circumspection was necessary in dealing with Peking and that brute force might become the deciding factor in arguments with the Chinese rulers.

Mr. B. Shiva Rao, participating in a Rajya Sabha debate on the Tibet situation,<sup>5</sup> revealed yet another perfidy by Peking. He disclosed that when there was a suggestion for a U.N. debate on Tibet, the leader of the Indian delegation (Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon) "under instructions from the External Affairs Ministry presumably on the basis of reports received from our Ambassador in Peking—Sardar K. M. Panikkar—assured the U.N. Steering Committee that the Chinese forces had halted at Chamdo, about 300 miles from Lhasa, and that they had no intention of moving further." (The Prime Minister also had given a similar indication in the Lok Sabha in 1951.)

Mr. Shiva Rao went on to say: "It was on that assurance given by the leader of the Indian delegation that the proposal to discuss Tibet in that session was dropped. What happened subsequently? Only a few months later, in the spring of 1951, the Chinese forces resumed their advance towards Lhasa."

But there was a stubborn refusal to read the writing on the Chinese wall. Once our moral superiority was established by a narration of facts highlighting our blind faith in Peking's promises and the continuing perfidy from the other side, we sat back contented.

Chronologically speaking, the next reference, again indirect, to India's security was on May 14, 1959. The Prime Minister told Rangaswami of *The Hindu* at a Press conference that "the presence of the Dalai Lama does involve a certain strain" on the relations between India and China. A pragmatist would either prepare to meet the "strain" or remove the cause of it even if it meant shutting our doors, in the most un-Hindu fashion, on a guest like the Dalai Lama. Ceylon, ruled by a party

<sup>5</sup> May 4, 1959.

which seeks votes on the basis of the Buddhist religious appeal, would not allow the Dalai Lama even to visit the island for fear of offending Peking. U Nu in Burma who made Buddhism the State religion and elevated the monks to the status of *de facto* rulers did not bat an eyelid at the rape of Tibet and the persecution of Buddhists there. If sectarian differences with the Dalai Lama school of Buddhist thought could warrant such indifference to human values on the part of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and U Nu why should India have to behave altruistically to be worthy of being the birth place of the Buddha?

I am not suggesting that the extension of political asylum to the Dalai Lama was responsible for the Chinese aggression. The latter had preceded by not less than four years the upsurge in Tibet. Like the wolf in the fable, Peking would have said that if we did not "interfere" in the internal affairs of China, future Indian generations would have done so!

Between 1959 and 1962 the Communist theme song was that the Dalai Lama had disrupted Sino-Indian relations. The Prime Minister's statement at the Press conference could be interpreted as an admission that after the Tibetan upsurge and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India the relations between New Delhi and Peking could not again be the same as before.

The Communist approach was extremely clever. In the context of the anti-imperialist sentiment running high in Asia identification of the criticism of the Chinese action with Western "imperialist" aims in Tibet touched a responsive chord in many an Asian heart. They held that Tibet legitimately belonged to China and that Peking was right in scotching what they described as American moves to keep the Roof of the World apart.

In other words, the Communists made it a cold war issue and reaped the rich harvest of immobilising non-aligned India.

Significantly, Peking's answer to Indian reaction to the conquest of Tibet was to accuse India of "having been affected by foreign influences hostile to China in Tibet." Prime Minister Nehru, as perhaps millions of our countrymen, was touched to the quick. He expressed surprise at the unwarranted allegation but the Chinese purpose had been served. To most Indians only two courses of action seemed to be open: to oppose the Chinese action tooth and nail and face the consequences there and then or to acquiesce in the Chinese conquest of Tibet and coax Peking into a pleasant mood. Acceptance of the facts of life with preparedness for their repercussions was not considered a worthwhile alternative.

The Communists went about their business with characteristic expertise. When on May 4, 1959, Pandit Kunzru wanted "that the situation arising out of the recent events in Tibet be taken into consideration" Mr. Bhupesh Gupta supported Mr. H. D. Rajah's contention that it was tantamount to interference in Chinese internal affairs. Pandit Kunzru and others had to rebut the argument by pointing out that if discussions on Algeria and Kenya did not amount to interference in French and British internal affairs respectively how a debate on Tibet could be otherwise. The Chair allowed Pandit Kunzru's resolution to be considered.

Mr. Bhupesh Gupta waxed eloquent about Panch Sheel, took upon himself the responsibility of defending it from "people who want this foreign policy to be completely reversed," described the Tibetan uprising as "an armed rebellion by some vested interests, reactionaries, who want to prevent the march of history, social reform

and progress” and linked it with Washington and Taiwan. He went unchallenged when like a Hyde Park orator he quoted from Henrich Harrer’s *Seven Years in Tibet* to establish the prevalence of “backwardness and superstition” in Tibet.

This was a dangerous allusion. In the eyes of modernism there are several customs and rituals associated with Hinduism, which are retrograde. It is one thing for India to do away with such practices and another for “a more progressive nation,” be it China or America, to impose reforms on us.

Secondly, practices like “smearing patients with the spittle of the Lamas” are prevalent in NEFA also. They are peculiar to the particular cult of Buddhism and flow from the people’s blind faith in the “supernatural” powers of the Dalai Lama and the incarnate Lamas. Education will reform the people. But, according to Mr. Bhupesh Gupta’s logic, the Red Army should “civilise” the tribals.

Similarly, Mr. Gupta made much of a Press report that arms had been found in the Tibetan monasteries. At Towang, for instance, we saw an armoury—the Chinese had stripped it of its lethal contents—attached to the monastery built 200 years ago. Because under the old dispensation the monastery was maintaining law and order also in the community it had to be equipped with fire-arms. Pointing to the arsenal at the Towang monastery the Chinese “frontier guards” could have said that American and Kuomintang arms were stacked there to mount an attack on China! And Mr. Gupta would have us believe it!

Nobody asked Mr. Gupta what type of arms and in what quantities were found in the *Gompas* or monasteries. Even assuming for argument’s sake that modern weapons



had reached the Tibetan "rebels" could they have handled them? Were they trained in the use of such lethal equipment? Hundreds of Tibetan refugees working as road labourers in the Kameng Frontier Division were wiped out by the Chinese "frontier guards" when they advanced towards Bomdi La. We had seen whole camps razed to the ground and half-burnt bodies buried in shallow graves. A people, "especially upper strata reactionaries," trained in the use of modern weapons, would not have died like flies.

About the so-called retrograde nature of the Tibetan uprising Mr. Gupta laid it thick by-highlighting the fact that Gen. Chiang Kai-shek, Mr. Christian Herter, the then U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Manzur Qadir, the Pakistan Foreign Minister at the time, and the South Viet Nam Government had all "welcomed" the revolt or expressed sympathy for the Tibetan people. That Mr. Nehru also sympathised with Tibet was left out. What Mr. Gupta was driving at was to give a cold war twist to the Tibetan developments and lull India into complacency in regard to Chinese intentions.

Towards this end, it was necessary to refute Mr. Nehru's opinion that Peking by its intemperate attacks on India, had been adopting the cold war technique. So Mr. Gupta provided China with an alibi. He said: "The Prime Minister has expressed his distress over certain expressions and statements in China. I can understand his position but the feelings of the Chinese people must be understood. Apart from throwing cowdung on Mao Tse-tung's portrait<sup>6</sup> with the police looking on, Chinese Government and its leaders were subjected to

<sup>6</sup> The reference is to an incident during a Socialist party demonstration in Bombay. Mr. Nehru had expressed his sorrow at it. Peking had made several protests on the subject.

an avalanche of insults in some quarters in this country. Secondly, about the enemies of India's foreign policy, expansionists and other things, I would like only to say that I do not understand what is meant by it but I do not think that the Indian Government is meant."

Mr. S. A. Dange, in the Lok Sabha (May 8, 1959), elaborated the point. It is a significant speech because since the 1962 aggression of the Chinese the legend has been that Mr. Dange heads a "nationalist" faction in the Communist party. According to Mr. Dange while the Chinese charge of expansionism did not apply to the Prime Minister it fitted others like Acharya Kripalani. "The speech that was heard here (of Acharya Kripalani) and some other speeches, reflect expansionism or not?" he asked.

But Mr. Dange was fair to Acharya Kripalani as well as to India by implying that the expansionism complained of by Peking was academic and verbal, rather than physical or military. At the conclusion of his speech, he assured the House that "the Chinese guns were not manned by Acharya Kripalani. They would hit well because they aim well." Since Mr. Dange should know the Chinese mind and might better than anyone else (barring perhaps Mr. Bhupesh Gupta) he indicated that (1) Peking was not unduly perturbed over the expansionism of Acharya Kripalani and others who were "novices in the art of warfare" and (2) that the Chinese were good marksmen. Even this did not make the Lok Sabha ponder the military aspects of the Chinese posture.

In another context Mr. Dange almost spilled the beans. He said that "to practise expansionism two things are required firstly political guts, and, secondly, real, hard guns." Acharya Kripalani butted in to say that "the

Chinese have got both ” but Mr. Dange was more interested in establishing that the P.S.P. lacked both.

Had it not been for his post-1962 “ nationalist ” reputation Mr. Dange could have been taken to imply that India did not have either “ political guts ” or “ real, hard guns ” which China had in abundance and that the talk of helping Tibet, etc. was sheer political gallantry.

Mr. Dange added that a parliamentary debate on Tibet was as much “ interference ” in Chinese affairs as the establishment by the Chinese of “ a committee on linguistic provinces.” About the Chinese maps in which large chunks of Indian territory were appropriated to China Mr. Dange temporised: “ We should be realistic enough to know that if a line in a map is moved that part of the country does not go out of our hands. If the people believe it will, they have a poor idea about maps and their value and a poor idea about India’s own integrity also.”

The following two months witnessed much public concern about the Chinese cartographic aggression having been translated into action, especially in Ladakh. And the Communist effort was to belittle the magnitude of the problem.

But the most blatant bid to give a cold war twist to the Chinese aggression was to link Goa and Aksai Chin. Acharya Kripalani had contrasted the Chinese preparedness to put up with Gen. Chiang Kai-shek’s control of Formosa, the presence of the Portuguese at Macao and the British rule over Hong Kong with the gusto with which they “ liberated ” Tibet. He then asked whether it was not due to the weakness and helplessness of Tibet.

Mr. Dange joined issue with him. “ May I ask a separate question?” he said. “ Instead of going over to Tibet, why not ask the Government of India to invade Goa first? Advice is very simple; it is easier to liberate

Goa than to liberate Tibet, if it is being enslaved by China. But you dare not offend American imperialism because it will intervene. You know that China will never go to war with India, whatever you do. Therefore, you have the guts to fight about it, but you have not the guts to fight about Goa."

Even if his political judgment is understandably warped, Mr. Dange, for once at least, spoke the truth. It was easier for India to liberate Goa, Diu and Daman than to throw the Chinese out of Ladakh or NEFA or even to prevent further encroachment by them on our territory. Similarly, for the Chinese, it was far easier to overrun Tibet and nibble at and occupy Indian territory than even to reclaim Quemoy and Matsu. The reason is military.

The Communists were remarkably successful in their efforts to belittle the Chinese danger. Even while disclosing, after months of concealment, the construction of a road by the Chinese across the Aksai Chin plateau or the Chinese aggression at Longju, the Prime Minister pooh-poohed the idea of a general military threat from China.

Even the possibility of Sino-Soviet differences, tactical or real, he was not prepared to concede primarily because that had then become a hobby horse with the Americans and even to think along American lines was thought undesirable for a non-aligned nation.

It was on August 28, 1959, that the Prime Minister took Parliament and through it the country into confidence about the Chinese-built highway across Aksai Chin. He said: "Some reports reached us between October 1957 and February 1958 that a Chinese detachment had crossed the international frontier and visited Khurnak Fort which is within Indian territory."

He then disclosed that an Indian police party, sent to

reconnoitre the area, had been apprehended by the Chinese on July 28—a month earlier—and that an immediate protest had been launched with Peking. “It appeared that the Chinese had established a camp at a place called Spanggur well within Indian territory,” he added.

In reply to the Indian protest the Chinese, while offering to release the arrested policemen, claimed that the Spanggur Lake area was theirs. “We sent a further note to them expressing surprise at this claim and giving the exact delineation of the traditional international frontier.”

At this point, Dr. Ram Subhag Singh, a senior Congress M.P. and now a Minister at the Centre, asked a question which the Prime Minister did not like. He wanted to know “whether this is the only place which is under occupation by the Chinese troops or they have occupied some other areas also.” Mr. Nehru replied that “it would be hardly correct to say that our area is under occupation of the Chinese, that is under any kind of a fixed occupation.” But he admitted that “there have been some frontier troubles in two or three places widely separated . . . and their patrols have come within our territory two miles or three miles or thereabouts.”

Until perhaps the beginning of 1962 it remained a kind of a fixation with the Prime Minister to treat the recurring acts of Chinese aggression in isolation from each other as well as from the territorial claims depicted on the Chinese maps. Secondly, he would not let it be said that a territory was under enemy occupation even though he had set up military posts there, sent out patrols regularly further deep into our territory and arrested our men whenever they went out reconnoitring. Perhaps,

for the Prime Minister occupation meant setting up administration.

The news about the Aksai Chin highway was not volunteered even then, though it was an open secret, having been semi-officially leaked out to the Press. Mr. N. G. Goray had to get it out of Mr. Nehru by asking "whether the Chinese had built a road across this territory joining Gartok with Yarkand and whether this road has [had] been there for the last one year or so?"

The Prime Minister replied 'yes' but added that it was in northern Ladakh, "not exactly near this place." In other words, he was not prepared to link a fresh Chinese incursion at Spanggur with the Aksai Chin highway. He wanted them to be considered independently. If the Army had anything to do with this aspect of China policy, the thinking, approach and upshot would have been different.

After stressing the remoteness of the area and its inaccessibility and after recounting the Chinese claims on Aksai Chin, the Prime Minister said "there is no actual demarcation" in all this area. "So far as we are concerned, our maps are clear that this is within the territory of the Union of India. It may be that some of the parts are not clearly demarcated or anything like that. But obviously, if there is any dispute over any particular area, this is a matter to be discussed."

Mr. Goray's next question summed up the Indian position *vis-a-vis* continuing Chinese aggression—the position as revealed by the Prime Minister himself—but Mr. Nehru was not evidently pleased with the question. Mr. Goray asked: "Does it mean that in parts of our country which are inaccessible, any nation can come and build roads and camp there. We just send our parties, they apprehend the parties and because of our good rela-

tions, they release them. Is that all? The road remains there, the occupation remains there and we do not do anything about it.”

Incensed, the Prime Minister temporised: “I do not know if the hon. member expects me to reply to that. There are two or three types of cases here. *These are border and frontier questions.* In regard to some parts of the border there can be no doubt from any side that it is our border. If anybody violates it then it is a challenge to us. There are other parts regarding which it is

<sup>7</sup> Compare the foregoing with the following excerpt from the Chinese Note dated December 26, 1959.

“This area is the only traffic artery linking Sinkiang and western Tibet, because to its northeast lies the great Gobi of Sinkiang through which direct traffic with Tibet is practically impossible. Therefore, since the middle of the 18th century, the Government of the Ching Dynasty had established karens (check posts) to exercise jurisdiction over and patrol this area. In the decades from the founding of the Republic of China till the liberation of China, there were troops constantly guarding this area. After the liberation of Sinkiang in 1949, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army took over the guarding of the frontier in this area from Kuomintang troops. In the latter half of 1950, it was through this area that the Chinese Government dispatched the first units of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army to enter Tibet. In the nine years since then, the Chinese troops stationed in the Ari district have regularly and frequently brought up indispensable supplies from Sinkiang through this area. From March 1956 to October 1957, the Chinese Government built along the customary route a motor-road from Yehcheng of Sinkiang to Gartok of Tibet of a total length of 1,200 kilometres, of which a section of 180 kilometres runs through this area, and over 3,000 civilian workers took part in its construction.

“These unshakable facts should have been sufficient to prove beyond dispute that this area is Chinese territory.

“Secondly, the Indian Government says that it has been sending regular patrols to this area, and this is one way India exercises its jurisdiction. According to data available to the Chinese Government, however, armed Indian personnel intruded only three times into this area to carry out reconnaissance, namely, in September 1958, July 1959, and October 1959, and on each occasion they were promptly detained and then sent out of China by Chinese frontier guards. Apart from these three intrusions, they have never been to this area. *It is precisely for this reason that the Indian Government has been so unaware of the long-term activities of the Chinese personnel in this area that it declares that it was in 1957 that Chinese personnel entered this area*” [emphasis added].

rather difficult to say where the immediate border is, although broadly it may be known. But it is very difficult even in a map to indicate it. If a big line is drawn that line itself covers three or four miles, one might say, in a major map. Then there are other parts still where there has been no demarcation in the past. Nobody was interested in that area. Therefore, it is a matter now—it should be a matter—for consideration of the data etc., by the two parties concerned and decision taken in a normal way, *as and when there is some kind of a frontier dispute*” [emphasis added].

The discursive statement betrays wobbly thinking. At one point he calls the trouble with China a “border and frontier” question, at another he thinks “some kind of a frontier dispute” has yet to arise. But the Prime Minister was clear about one thing—that the Chinese “incursions” had no aggressive pattern behind them and did not need to be looked at from the defence point of view. He said that only “if anybody violates . . . some parts of the border” about which “there can be no doubt from any side that it is our border . . . it is a challenge to us.” That meant that the border separating Ladakh from Sinkiang and the Chinese-occupied territory of Tibet was not such a clearly demarcated frontier. Perhaps the NEFA border was in a different category according to the Prime Minister because though yet to be delineated it had been demarcated. The frontier with Pakistan, on the other hand, had been both demarcated and delineated and so any violation of it would be a “challenge” to India.

But the Prime Minister was not specific in his references to the different “kinds” of border nor did he elaborate the point. When Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee raised the pertinent question about the steps being taken



“ to enforce security measures on this border area,” the Prime Minister put a counter-question: “ which border area ” ?

In short, he reduced the problem to one of collecting data, exchanging it with the Chinese and settling the matter. This was in spite of the Chinese maps, their recurring incursions into places claimed by them (which betrayed their aggressive pattern) and the growing tension between the two countries.

When Dr. Sushila Nayyar asked “ if these troubles on the border are over the same areas of territory which the Chinese had indicated as their territory in their maps ” the Prime Minister evaded the question. When the Speaker pointedly drew his attention to it and asked about Chinese claims in Ladakh, Mr. Nehru equivocated saying that “ what we are discussing and the question which I have answered relates to about two or three miles (about five kilometres). Two or three miles are not visible in these maps ”.

The area “ in dispute ” in Ladakh was 33,000 square kilometres (nearly 10,000 square miles) but the Prime Minister talked of “ two or three ” miles because he would not then recognise the establishment of a post or laying of a road by the Chinese as occupation of territory.

The Prime Minister also discounted reports of concentration of troops by the Chinese on the borders of Sikkim and Bhutan. He told Mr. V. K. Dhage on August 25, 1959, in the Rajya Sabha that “ we do not know ” of Chinese military concentration and that the concern of the people of Bhutan and Sikkim was on account of the influx of Tibetan refugees.

The Deputy Minister, Mrs. Lakshmi N. Menon, earlier stated that the Government has “ no valid reason to think of the existence ” of Chinese plans to penetrate into Sik-

kim, Bhutan and NEFA. (Mr. H. V. Kamath toured some of these Himalayan regions and alleged that Peking was planning to overrun them.)

On August 28, 1959, the Prime Minister also made a statement on the Chinese aggression at Longju and Khinzemane. It was an interesting statement warranting the following copious extracts: “. . . on the 7th of August an armed Chinese patrol, approximately 200 strong, violated our border at Khinzemane north of Chut-hangmu in the Kameng Frontier Division. When requested to withdraw, they pushed back, actually pushed back, our greatly outnumbered patrol to a bridge at Drokung Samba. Our people consisted of ten or a dozen policemen and they [the enemy] were 200, about ten times us. They actually physically pushed our men back. There was no firing. Later on, the Chinese detachment withdrew and our forces again established themselves. All this was over a question of about two miles. I might say, according to us, there is an international border. Two miles on this side is this bridge and two miles on that side is our picket or the small force. So our patrol party was pushed back to the bridge and two miles away they stood facing each other. Then both retired. Whatever it was, later on the Chinese withdrew and our picket went back to the frontier and established a small picket there. The Chinese patrol arrived later and demanded immediate withdrawal of our picket and lowering of our flag there. This request was refused. Then there was some attempt by the Chinese forces to outflank our people but so far as we know our people remained there and nothing further happened; that is on the border itself. That is one instance which happened about two weeks ago

“The present incident I am talking about is a very recent one and, in fact, is a continuing one. On the 25th of August, that is three days ago, a strong Chinese detachment crossed into our territory in the Subansiri Frontier Division at a place south of Migyitun and opened fire (at a forward post of ours). Hon. Members will remember, I just mentioned Migyitun in connection with the Chinese protest that we had violated their territory and were in collusion with some Tibetan rebels. That was their protest made in June last and there the matter ended. Now, round about that area, a little farther way but not far from it, this Chinese detachment came and met, some distance away, our forward picket of about a dozen persons. It is said that they fired at our forward picket. They were much larger in numbers, it is difficult to say in what numbers but they were in some hundreds, 200, 300 or, may be, even more. They surrounded this forward picket which consisted of 12 men—one N.C.O. and eleven riflemen of the Assam Rifles. They apparently apprehended this lot. Later, apparently, eight of these eleven riflemen managed to escape. They came back to our outpost. The outpost is at a place called Longju. Longju is about three or four miles from our frontier between Tibet and India as we conceive it. Longju is five days' march from another post of ours, in the interior, a bigger post called Limeking. Limeking, is about twelve days' march from the next place behind it. So, in a way, this Longju is about three weeks' march from a roadhead. I merely mention this to give the House some idea of communications, transport, distance and time taken. I was saying on the 25th they captured this forward picket of ours, but eight of them (persons manning the outpost) having been captured apparently

escaped and came back on the 26th, the next day. The Chinese again came and opened fire and practically encircled this picket and the post. In fact, they came forward and encircled this post, Longju, and although there was firing for a considerable time, we had no account of any casualties. Our people apparently fired back, too. When these people were more or less surrounded at Longju they left that picket and withdrew under this overwhelming pressure. . . .

“ The moment this information came we immediately protested to the Chinese Government about it and took *certain other steps in that area to strengthen our various posts, Limeking and others*, as we thought necessary and feasible. We have, in fact, placed all this border area of NEFA directly under our military authorities. That is to say, it was (being) dealt with by the Assam Rifles under the Assam Rifles Directorate which was functioning under the Governor and the Governor was the agent of the Government of India in the External Affairs Ministry. The Assam Rifles will of course remain there and such other forces as will be necessary will be sent but they will function now under the army authorities and their headquarters ” [emphasis added].

The above was a remarkably dispassionate narration of enemy attacks on two of our outposts at Khinzemane and Longju, one near the Bhutan border and the other farther east. There was no animus in it. He made it read like a fairy tale, the Chinese came, threatened our men, pushed them back and when they went back apprehended them. At Khinzemane after the *tamasha* the Chinese went away and the *status quo* was restored. At Longju they used fire-arms, our men returned fire but were overpowered and driven back. The Chinese stayed put there.

From the military point of view, the Prime Minister revealed two interesting items of information: first, that the Chinese attacked in large numbers, far outnumbering our poorly manned outposts and, secondly, that they tried to outflank us wherever we tried to stand our ground. The nature of the weapons used by the enemy was not disclosed whereas even in the early days of the 1962 aggression Defence Ministry spokesmen used to place on record that the enemy was employing automatic weapons and artillery.

For the first time, the Prime Minister talked of steps to defend the territory, which was heart-warming. Hitherto the stress had been on the smallness of the area involved, its high altitude and inaccessibility, the possibility of error in drawing the maps, the "undelimited" nature of the boundary (in the case of Ladakh) and the preparedness for negotiations to settle individual cases in isolation. Now, he has talked of "our territory" and international frontier except in the case of Longju the location of which was given as "about three or four miles from our frontier between Tibet and India as we conceive it." That the miles referred to were aerial miles or as the crow flies and not land miles had not also been made clear. Such a clarification would have dispelled the impression that we were sitting right on the border and could, therefore, afford to leave a stretch of no-man's land in the interests of border peace.

But still the Prime Minister would not accept the aggressive intentions of the Chinese. When Mr. Goray asked what our evaluation of the Chinese policy towards us was, the Prime Minister replied: "I cannot say." By implication Mr. Nehru disputed Mr. Goray's view that "the guiding hand" behind the occupation of the Aksai Chin plateau, the other incursions in Ladakh and

the latest incidents in NEFA was the same when he added: "It is not fair for me to guess. It will be guess work, of course; *I cannot imagine that all this is a precursor to anything more serious.* It seems to me so foolish for anybody, including the Chinese Government, to function in that way, and I do not give them the credit or rather the discredit for folly. Therefore, I do not think they will do it [large-scale attack]."

The defence of Longju against this attack provided a foretaste of the difficulties in store for us in NEFA. The defenders ran short of ammunition because there was no supply coming in. We tried to send supplies by air. They were dropped but the supplies missed the defenders. "It is a mountainous area. It is not easy. It is slightly risky to send paratroopers there, risky to the men in these mountainous areas. We do not think it was desirable or worthwhile to do so at that place—dangerous." \*

These difficulties, experienced so early in the course of confrontation with China, should have made us doubly vigilant and fully prepared. But the mental reservation persisted. The Prime Minister was scandalised when Dr. Ram Subhag Singh wanted the possibility to be examined of bombing enemy-held areas to extricate them from the Chinese. "These are things for them [the Army] to consider, not for us," he declared. But after the fall of Se La when a predominant section of the military leadership wanted the Air Force to go into action it was politically overruled from New Delhi.

Even when he spoke of defence preparations the Prime Minister had in mind only minor skirmishes. Referring to the Chinese rejection of our protests, he drew a parallel

\* The quotations are from the Prime Minister's statement.

between the Indo-Pakistan cold war and what was developing between India and China. He could not visualise anything more serious. Therefore, he repeated that "minor border incidents and border differences should be settled by negotiations."

The tragedy was that only parties like the P.S.P. and the Jan Sangh which were regarded as pro-Western criticised the ambivalence of the Government in defence preparedness and prodded the Prime Minister to view the chain of Chinese incursions as a single entity and not as individual incidents. If Congressmen like Dr. Ram Subhag Singh took an identical stand they were tarred with the same brush of pro-Westernism by the Communists who wanted the Chinese aggression issue to be soft-pedalled. They never asked a question on the subject. Some Congressmen like Mr. Joachim Alva saw the American hand in efforts to ventilate Chinese aggression. Some other Congressmen like Mr. Govind Malaviya thought that in view of our "friendship for China" and "delicateness" of the situation details of Chinese attacks on Khinzemane and Longju and incursions into the Aksai Chin plateau and the Spanggur Lake area should not be divulged!

Among these diverse approaches, the Prime Minister, presumably to preserve our non-alignment, adopted an attitude of inadequate awareness of the Chinese threat. Sometimes it bordered on complacency, too. The effort was to explain away a development by reference to physical or geographical factors. Neither Parliament nor Government ever got down to brass tacks to view the Chinese threat from the defence angle, evaluating the hurdles to be crossed and the measures to be adopted. Never have I heard a Member ask in Parliament for auto-

matic weapons or training in mountain warfare for our troops. If the Congress party had been less heterogeneous and less susceptible to influences from outside and if second-rank leaders like Dr. Ram Subhag Singh had been allowed to focus public attention on the central issue of defence, the country would have been less unprepared to meet the aggression.



### CHAPTER III

## PHYSICAL DRIFT

ON October 31, 1959, *The New York Times* published an Associated Press news item from New Delhi about India's defence preparedness *vis-a-vis* the Chinese threat. Looking back in the light of our experience in NEFA it was an ominous piece of news. It said: "The Indian Army has abandoned any hope of defending large areas of India's Himalayan frontier against Communist China, it was authoritatively reported today.

"If Chinese forces based in Tibet tried next spring to take the Indian border territories they claim, India's military strategy would be to concede large areas virtually without a fight. The Indians would be prepared to resist only at points deep in their own territory. . . . Effective defence of all Indian territory is a physical impossibility. The Army's decision, it is reported, is based on inability to move large forces up to the frontier because of want of roads and other facilities."

It is not clear from the report whether the reference is to Ladakh or NEFA or both. But significantly it speaks not of inability to regain the territory already run over by the Chinese—the Aksai Chin plateau in Ladakh and Longju in the Subansiri Frontier Division of NEFA—but of the odds against preventing further thrusts by the enemy.

The authoritative aura with which the report is sought to be covered is, however, puzzling. No Indian news-

paper carried the news item which would suggest that it was an official revelation only to the Associated Press. Neither the Armed Forces Information Office nor the Press Information Bureau in New Delhi issued any hand-out to that effect, as far as my checking could establish. But these are relatively less important matters. Even if the report is based on a conversation during a cocktail party, it presents an interesting and, in the light of what has happened nearly three years after, a realistic picture of India's defence preparedness. Secondly, it reads like the assessment of a hard-boiled Army officer who has gone into the practical aspects of a military showdown with China juxtaposing the known strength and logistical superiority of the enemy with our own position. A politician would not have been so straightforward for obvious reasons.

The statement that "the Indians would be prepared to resist only at points deep in their own territory" is significant. Countries fearing aggression by land have been known to draw the line between the political frontier and military boundary. During World War II Switzerland had prepared herself to let the Nazi hordes enter deep into her neutral territory—if Hitler chose to make her belligerent—because military considerations demanded such a step. Then only defence would have been effective. According to *The New York Times* report, Army opinion at the end of 1959 was that it would be prudent to let the enemy get in rather than engage him on the difficult terrain up in the north. But this was an aspect of the looming physical showdown with China which never figured in public discussions or Parliament debates.

The Prime Minister only hinted at it in the course of his statement in the Lok Sabha on February 23, 1961,

when he gave details of the Chinese attack on an Indian police patrol near the Kongka Pass in Ladakh. He said that following the Chinese entry into Tibet the Government thought that the task of defence was more difficult in NEFA. He then highlighted the odds against which a defence build-up had to be attempted. But in the same breath he assured the House that "we are fairly protected to prevent such an intrusion."

Of course, 14 months lay between *The New York Times* report and the Prime Minister's declaration. It was possible that the position had improved considerably during that period. At least in the matter of road-building in NEFA much progress had been made.

Earlier, during 1960 itself, the then Defence Minister, Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon, had spoken in a way which could be interpreted as awareness of the magnitude of the military task. He said in Bangalore on January 16, 1960, that "no army can protect the Himalayan heights."<sup>1</sup> Did this mean that he wanted a military frontier deep inside our territory to the south of the political boundary? Was he voicing a problem which must have been agitating military minds at that time?

After the fall of Bomdi La when our defence forces had fallen back on Foothills, Anthony Mann, Special Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, said he could then reveal a secret which he had kept for nearly a month. It was that "Indian field commanders almost certainly decided to reserve their small supply of automatic weapons for key points well behind the frontline."

If the allusion was to the Western arms aid only 329 tons of military equipment had been airlifted up to November 15 in 16 sorties. This would have hardly sufficed to keep the front lines in the different sectors

<sup>1</sup> *The Statesman*...

equipped. Secondly, new weapons are first sent to the workshops so that repairing and refitting them is mastered. Then only do the men at the front get them. So it is a fair guess that the Western arms so promptly rushed to us by friendly countries during the lull between the fall of Towang on October 24 and the fresh Chinese attack on November 15 could not reach the frontline.

If, however, the arms had been deliberately kept back for use at "key points well behind the frontline," as Mann suggests, it substantiates the theory that the Army thought that really effective defence was possible only on the plains.

Mr. Krishna Menon almost said it in so many words during a speech in Bombay on April 23, 1960. *Press Trust of India* quoted him as declaring that "India does not wish to fight over the Himalayan ranges but if China has any intention of coming down the Himalayan slopes and entering the plains then we are prepared to give her a warm reception, warmer than she might expect."

But a subsequent observation of Mr. Krishna Menon in the course of the same Bangalore speech belied such a conclusion. He said: "The best way to protect these hilly areas is to integrate them effectively. This was being done all these years."<sup>2</sup>

The foregoing was meant to be a justification of the haphazard forward policy being pursued in the frontier areas. Mere spread of administration would not stem the onrush of any enemy like the Chinese. Even if the tribals had been trained in modern or guerilla warfare and properly equipped it was doubtful if they could have withstood the Chinese thrust.

A theory has been propounded that the only way to deal with an aggressor is to let him come in and then

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

harass him by guerilla tactics. It is because an aggressor is always well prepared and can shock the defenders with staggering blows. By the time the defenders realise the magnitude of the task awaiting them the aggressor advances deep into their territory. This happened to the peoples of east and central Europe when Hitler, after meticulous planning, struck them one after another. And in countries like Yugoslavia the resistance movement did harass the Nazis.

If Mr. Krishna Menon had such ideas in dealing with the Chinese our tribal countrymen in NEFA were hardly prepared for it. Their only knowledge of the enemy was through the reports of the Tibetan refugees. They knew how the Chinese had enslaved their Tibetan co-religionists and reduced them into hewers of wood and drawers of water. At the same time, several Chinese agents also had crossed into NEFA in the garb of refugees.

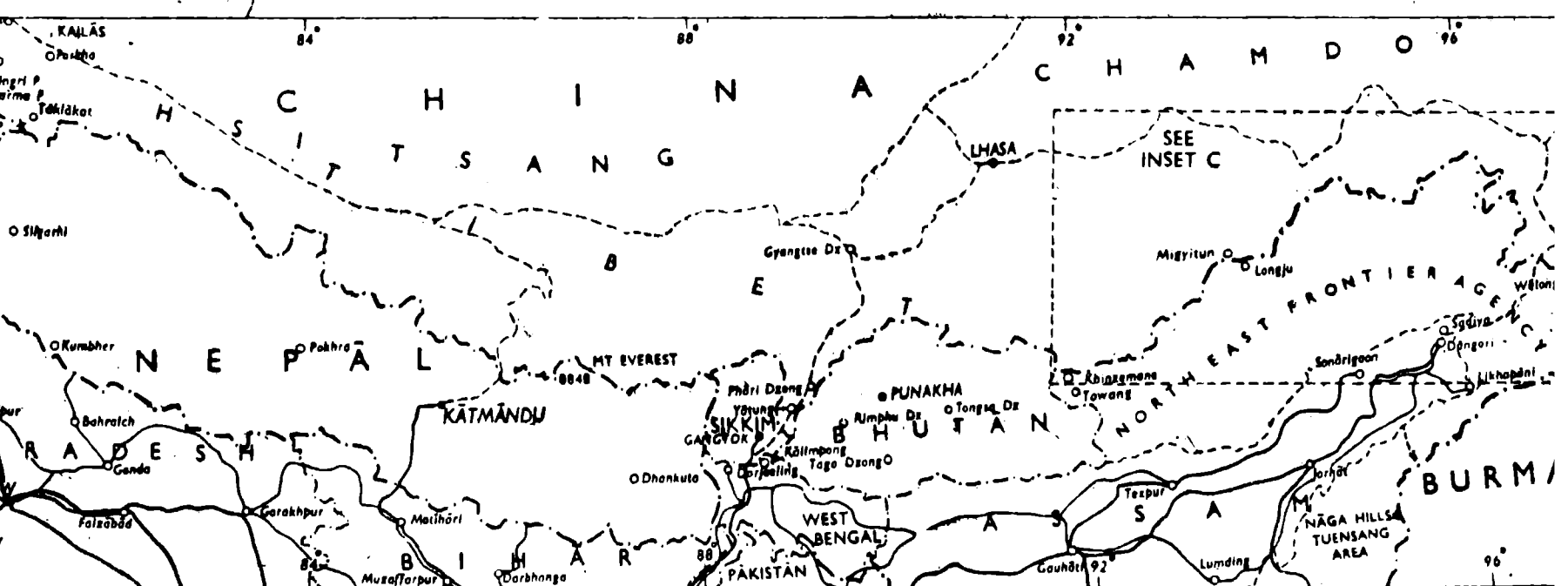
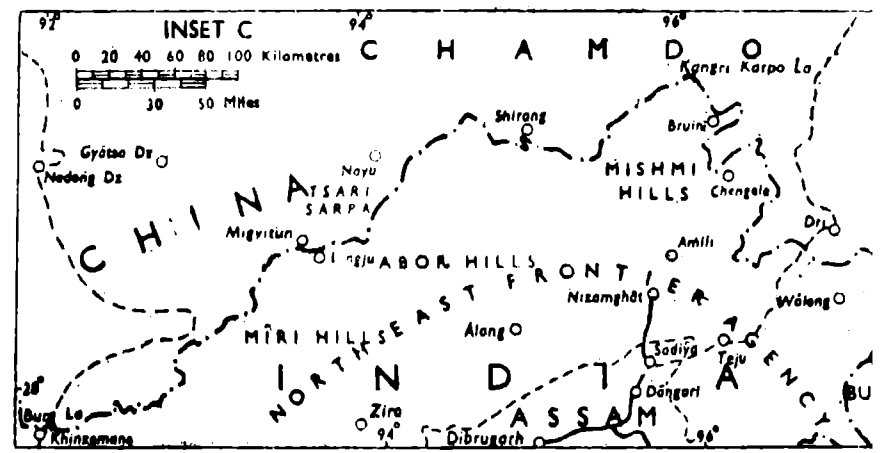
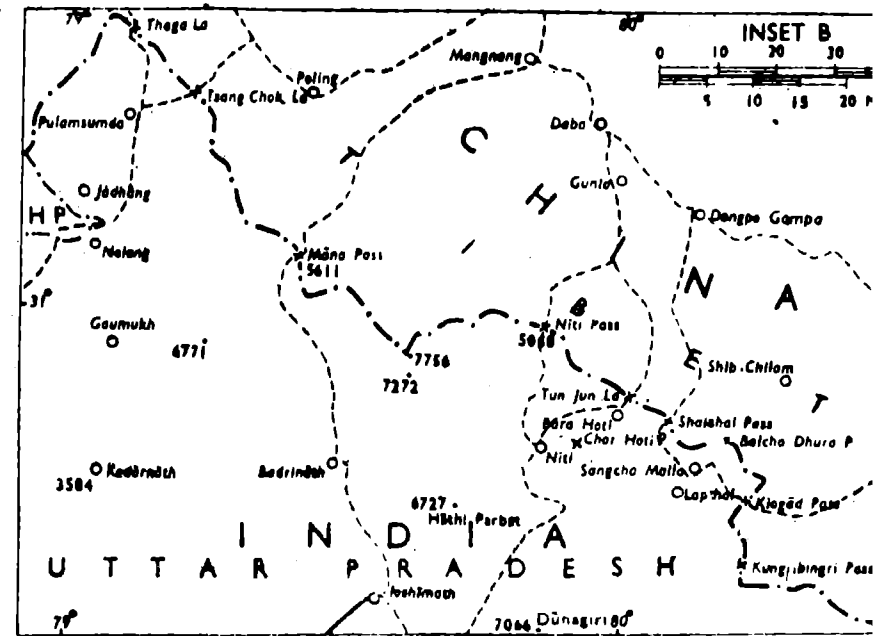
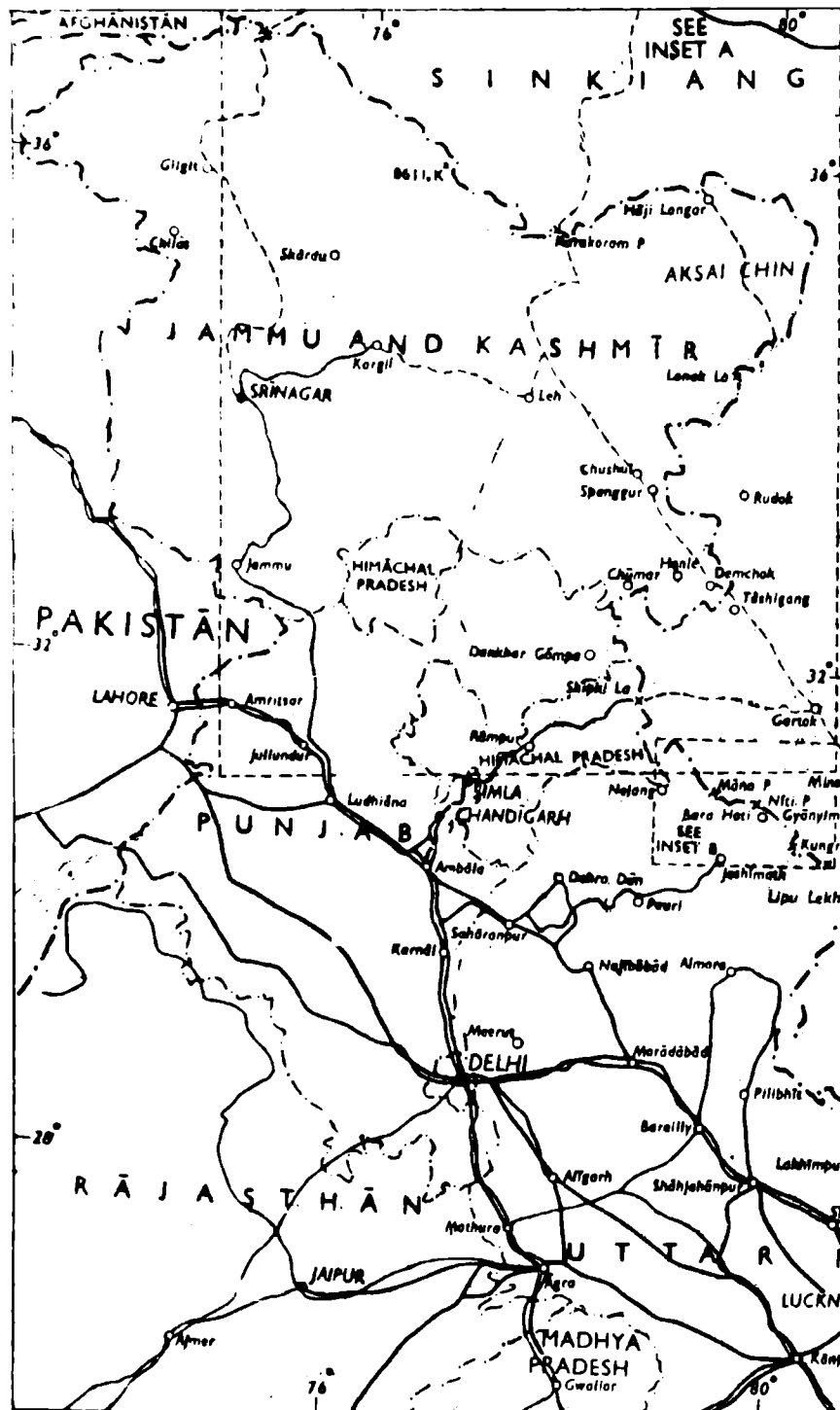
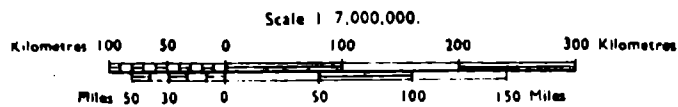
Some of them were apprehended also.<sup>3</sup> They had been at work, describing the so-called land reforms in Tibet and emphasising the ethnic bonds among peoples of Mongoloid origin. This was in fact the only basis on which the Chinese claimed NEFA as theirs.

Neither the NEFA Administration nor the Government of India could counteract effectively this propaganda. Firstly, All India Radio lacked powerful enough transmitters to reach the tribal belt. Taking the Kameng Frontier Division, except at Bomdi La, Dirang and Towang one has to make do with battery-run wireless receiving sets. Transistors are no doubt useful. But All India Radio's medium wave transmission is too feeble to be heard even 100 miles away from the broadcasting station. Secondly, until September 1962 it was

<sup>3</sup> A Chinese spy, Jamyang Gyantsen, was arrested on October 15, 1960, in the Namkha Chu river valley in Kameng.

# NORTHERN FRONTIER OF INDIA

Sikkim and Bhutan States are attached to India by special treaties.



blasphemy for All India Radio to say a **harsh word about China.**

Newspapers and periodicals cannot serve the purpose because nearly 95 per cent of the tribals are illiterate. So propaganda has to be carried on by word of mouth. We don't have trained personnel for it.

Even an adequate appreciation of the purpose of such infiltration by Chinese agents seemed to be lacking. For instance, the Shillong correspondent of *The Times of India* naively stated <sup>4</sup> that "the Chinese send their agents to the Indian border to persuade Tibetan refugees to return to India." Shillong being the headquarters of the NEFA Administration it can be justifiably assumed that the correspondent was revealing the mind of the officials there.

Further, the tribals were kept in a kind of isolation in the name of preserving their culture and way of life. This had retained the gulf which separates plains people from the hill tribes. The tribal vision remained to be enlarged, to accept the entire country as their own.

Some of the NEFA officials mixed freely with the tribals. Quite a few of them could also speak the tribal dialects. Still the tribals, particularly in the remote areas, felt that "Indians" were different from them. Evacuation of the administration in the wake of the Chinese thrust heightened this feeling. In some areas in the Siang Frontier Division the withdrawal of the civil administration was panicky. The inhabitants of the area were not taken into confidence. The officials and their families gathered the portable ones among their belongings and fled, very often by plane. At Inkiyong in the Siang Division a hospital was set afire as a kind of

<sup>4</sup> October 15, 1960.

scorched earth policy, little worrying about the invalids who had nowhere else to go.

At Dirang, in the Kameng Frontier Division, a tribal youth who had a smattering of Hindustani asked me if, "since the Chinese had left the Indians would come back." In other words, he bracketed his countrymen with the enemy. In the circumstances it was too much to expect the tribals to resist the Chinese militarily. If, on the other hand, Mr. Menon meant that the tribals should have an active part in the defence of their part of India he was perfectly right. But no steps were taken in that direction.

In some cases religious susceptibilities also came in the way of resisting the Chinese by force. The Khempo of Towang, when asked whether he would advise his followers to take up arms to fight the Chinese, replied that his religion forbade it. But a sturdy Monpa youth, evacuated to Bahrapur near Nowgong, told me that he wished he had thrown boulders from the hill tops on the Chinese swarms in the valley below. Such tribal enthusiasm wherever it existed had not been given a direction.

In the early days of British rule the external frontiers of India were congruent with the limits of the territory where the writ of the *raj* ran. This was possible for various reasons. There was never any threat from the north-east because after the fall of the Ching (Manchu) dynasty in 1911 Chinese suzerainty over Tibet ended. Tibet also had been reduced to what was called a buffer state. In the north-west Afghanistan occupied that position.

The British were aware that the tribes inhabiting the areas beyond the "administered territory" owned no master. Therefore it became the practice to exercise in



these regions what was known as loose "political control." Trans-border agencies were set up. In the north-west, because of a fear of Russian thrust gold and guns were alternately employed to buy or browbeat the tribals. The problem did not at all arise in the north-eastern region.

Mr. Krishna Menon raised a hornet's nest when during a speech at Chandigarh he talked of defending every inch of "administered territory." It was interpreted as a surrender to the Chinese of the large tracts where the Government of India's writ did not yet run. Presumably, Mr. Krishna Menon had in mind a British-like policy in respect of these far-flung areas. If so, it is not known how he could have pursued it *vis-a-vis* an expansionist China in control of Tibet. All that can be said is that in spite of the close personal equation between the Prime Minister and Mr. Krishna Menon the defence and foreign policies of the country did not always go hand in hand.

Pakistan's policy towards the hostile tribes on the Afghan border offers an illuminating example to the contrary. Field Marshal Ayub Khan had reversed Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah's idea of leaving the nomads alone. Instead, a forward policy was adopted. This meant bringing the inhabitants of the inaccessible areas under the control of the Government in Rawalpindi. The none-too-friendly relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan also had to be taken into account.

With the twin objective in view the border defences were strengthened appreciably. Taking advantage of the British-built system of communications a network of military outposts was established. These were not flag-flying checkpoints like those we had to the south of the McMahon Line but were manned by troops conversant with the

terrain and equipped with the latest American arms. The Peshawar-based air arm also could be deployed in the event of serious trouble. But an unqualified comparison between Pakistan's problem in the north-west and our troubles with China is invidious for more than one reason. First, Afghanistan is not China—in area, population or military strength. She also has no imperialist designs. Secondly, American interest in the region on account of its proximity to the Soviet Union has been a boon to Pakistan which is a member of the Western military alliances.

Even to the extent possible our foreign and defence policies did not dovetail. According to some observers inadequate appreciation of the Chinese threat or delayed realisation of the same contributed to this confusion.

There was a time when politicians seemed to be one with the Army in its reported view that in the then prevailing situation a military showdown with China should be avoided. Taya Zinkin of *The Guardian* wrote on January 22, 1960: "The Government of India has given up all hope of getting back that part of Ladakh which China has occupied. It cannot probably stop the Chinese from taking Leh if they want to.

"I am informed that India will not take action to stop Chinese aggression. For public consumption, however, Mr. Nehru continues to say that farther east India will go to Bhutan's rescue, if asked. But the road to Bhutan will take a good couple of years to build and until then nothing can be done by India.

"The hope that China will give up its claim on NEFA is also being squashed because of the realisation that parts of NEFA are vital to the development of Tibet. The Tsangpo takes a sharp turn and steep dive to become the Brahmaputra in the northernmost corner of the area.

This dive provides one of the world's best sources of hydro-electric power—enough to electrify the whole of Tibet were it to become industrialised. The Government of India had its eye on the dam site for development in the semi-distant future (the site is so far almost inaccessible from India but is within easy reach of Tibet). This priceless source of electricity explains the sudden interest China is taking in the area."

I have quoted extensively from the report because to my mind it appears to be the thinking among India's rulers at that time. It was datelined Bangalore where the All-India Congress Committee was meeting at that time. It is, therefore, plausible that Mrs. Zinkin's report reflected the discussions among the Congress leaders on the subject. Militarily, they seemed to have ruled out the possibility of regaining the occupied territory or even preventing further loss of area. They also apparently found an explanation in terms of development for the Chinese claims on NEFA. It followed from that that a similar development approach by India would meet the situation. A NEFA electrified by tapping the power resources of the area would thwart Chinese plans, it was sought to be suggested.

Hitherto, a different explanation was available for the Chinese interest in NEFA. It was that Peking, bent on retaining the occupied part of Ladakh, was anxious to swap NEFA, evidently after overrunning it, for the Aksai Chin region.

Analysing a Chinese note received in December 1959, B. G. Verghese wrote in *The Times of India*: "Two aspects of the Note are significant. The supreme importance of the Aksai Chin highway as the sole (and geographically the only possible) line of communication between western Tibet and Sinkiang is stressed more clearly than

ever before. . . . The actual situation as stated by Peking is that it is in physical occupation of all but a very small part of the area claimed by it in Ladakh. The exception is in the Demchok area. . . . All this reasoning leads to the possible suggestion that Peking may well be prepared to barter NEFA for the disputed area of Ladakh.”<sup>5</sup>

While Verghese analysed it so lucidly other observers, both at home and abroad, thought along same lines. But there are some flaws in the argument. The Chinese were then in occupation of “the disputed area of Ladakh” whereas they had yet to intrude in a big way into NEFA. Therefore, unless they were prepared for a military solution of the problem why should they first overrun more territory in NEFA and then barter it for land already in their possession? Even if Peking had a political approach in mind as Mr. Chou En-lai revealed when subsequently he equated India’s position in Ladakh to China’s status in NEFA and warned<sup>6</sup> that if India set up outposts in the Galwan Valley the Chinese troops would cross the McMahon Line—it would have to be accomplished militarily by annexing NEFA.

Still, official sources in New Delhi did not see a developing threat to NEFA. Two courses were open to India: Either to give up the Aksai Chin plateau in return for possible Chinese recognition of the McMahon Line as the international boundary in the east or to strengthen NEFA defences to thwart the barter which the Chinese were supposed to be contemplating. Neither was done.

At the same time, it was confidently put out that the Chinese would not provoke large-scale clashes across the McMahon Line. If so, it was not known how they pro-

<sup>5</sup> January 3, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> October 31, 1961.

posed to overrun NEFA territory and then use it as a bargaining lever to make India accept the *fait accompli* of the loss of the Aksai Chin plateau. If there were a clash with the Chinese troops on the NEFA border or a further incursion by them it was cited, by dint of queer logic, as proof that a war was unthinkable. If there was lull it was also adduced as a argument to rule out outbreak of hostilities in NEFA. Either way the aggressor was given the benefit of the doubt.

Let me illustrate. Speaking at Tezpur on January 10, 1960, Mr. Krishna Menon was categorical that "the India-China border dispute was not of such magnitude as could precipitate a war." <sup>7</sup> The Special Correspondent of *The Statesman* in Shillong followed it up on January 15, thus: "Reports of hostile activity by Chinese troops massed on the Tibetan side of the border have been insignificant for a month now. This, after last year's incidents, has strengthened the feeling *among the civil and military circles here* that China is unlikely to provoke large-scale clashes with India across the McMahon Line [emphasis added].

"It is now noted here that the Chinese troops, placed as they are, could have trespassed into Indian territory along the few passes still free from snow and provoked more incidents if they had wanted to do so. On the contrary, there are indications that Chinese patrols are avoiding intensive and extensive operations on or near the disputed border region, something different from what they had been used to in the recent past.

"Civil and military circles here do not tend to attribute all those developments to the hard winter alone, because the mountains and the deep defiles on the Tibetan side are much less terrifying than on the Indian side.

<sup>7</sup> Press Trust of India Report.

“ On the other hand, the feeling that is gaining ground here is that the Chinese once they had advanced their claim and backed it up with the use of force, are hesitant to provoke another spate of violent reaction within India against their aggressive action. They might now be more inclined towards a settlement through diplomatic channels than any precipitate action which might bring the two countries to a position to the liking of none.”

The correspondent was evidently reflecting the opinion at the headquarters of the NEFA Administration. The report followed a visit to the border areas of the then Defence Minister. The Prime Minister, too, was up there and both had discussions with the then Assam Governor, Gen. Srinagesh, on the border situation.

It was then claimed that there had been “ considerable build-up by India in the NEFA region during the previous twelve months. The number of “ flag-flying posts ” along the 700-mile border with Tibet had more than doubled from sixteen in the previous year. Some “ armed posts ” also had been set up.

It was further stated that the stress on development of communications which started following the Chinese occupation of Longju in the previous year would continue. “ By now most of the administrative headquarters are connected to the plains by roads and these lines of communications will be and are being extended as near to the border as possible.”

At the same time, the civil authorities were credited with the view that to counteract the political effects of the Communist rule across the border development efforts such as the spread of education and provision of modern amenities in the area “ could not go by default for the sake of defence requirements.”

A multi-pronged effort to build up NEFA's resistance

power is always welcome. Given the time and scope for leisurely development effort NEFA could have withstood the aggression better. But there was lack of realisation that development of roads and communications and spread of education would not by themselves stem the advance of armies. There was never any thought of deploying regular troops in adequate numbers at the strategic outposts or of equipping them for effective border defence.

A three-year plan costing Rs. 120 crores to build a network of communications in the border areas had been drawn up. A blue-print had been prepared for intensification of welfare schemes and spread of education in the NEFA region. By themselves both these were laudable ideas and were essential for effective defence of the strategic territory. But there was a vital link missing—that of adequate defence—which made nonsense of these schemes. For instance, it was only in the middle of 1959—full one year after the Chinese occupation of our territory in Ladakh and some parts of NEFA and four years after the Chinese started their intrusions that the Army took over control of the defence of the border with Tibet.

During 1961-62 there was a proliferation of check posts on our side of the border. The Prime Minister had said that it was wrong to call them check posts and that they were in fact military outposts. But in effect, a brigade of troops with headquarters at Towang had been made to fan out on this tricky terrain. The brigade had been split up into platoons each reinforcing the Assam Riflemen manning these posts. Their fire power was of the barest minimum. As a check against infiltration by Chinese agents they might be useful but waves of hardy Chinese soldiers swamped them. They never stood a

chance against the well-known "human sea" tactics of the enemy.

Further to complicate the situation there was either inadequate appreciation of the developing Chinese threat or doublemindedness towards meeting it. The Government had not made up its mind whether the Chinese challenge was political or military or both and how it was to be met. Even those among the politicians and policy-makers who wanted a military showdown with the Chinese did not go deep into it in terms of preparation. If there were flashes of understanding here and there they were clouded by a mass of myopia, wishful thinking and political gallantry.

Volumes can be filled with quotations from official and non-official spokesmen on the character of the Chinese threat. Subjective prejudice, attempt at cheap popularity, dogmatic refusal to perceive what was clearly before one's eyes and, above all, unreal cold war postures vitiated public and private thinking. The following random selection of pronouncements is not to labour the point but to highlight the hopelessness of the case.

On January 18, 1960, Mr. Krishna Menon declared that "while nobody could say what would happen in a conflict of physical forces it is reasonable to suppose that another square inch of our territory will not be occupied by anybody." <sup>8</sup> This smacked of a realistic appraisal of the military task coupled with determination to resist further incursions.

But just a month later, on February 28, 1960, the Deputy Defence Minister, Mr. S. S. Majithia, "visualised early settlement of the Sino-Indian dispute without resort to war." <sup>9</sup> What the basis of such optimism was he

<sup>8</sup> Speech at Bangalore—PTI report.

<sup>9</sup> Speech at Ambala—PTI report.



would not disclose. Obviously the situation could not have changed so much in so short a time.

On June 22, the then Chief of Army Staff, Gen. K. S. Thimayya, admitted at Darjeeling that "reports so far indicated that the Chinese had certainly made heavy concentrations along some of our border areas. *What worried him more was the intention which motivated the build-up.*"<sup>10</sup> [emphasis added]. Being a military man he could bring clarity to the issue and try to probe the Chinese mind, instead of giving high-sounding assurances or making bold forecasts. It was for the policy-makers to seek to understand the Chinese intentions and shape attitudes accordingly.

Gen. Thimayya did not, like some others, underrate the strength of the enemy. Asked if India was far behind China as far as army build-up and communications in the border areas were concerned, Gen. Thimayya said that "China had the advantage of an early start in developing border communications and also had the additional advantage of operating in many places in easier terrain. Indian forward posts, on the other hand, had in some areas to encounter tremendous natural obstacles."

On September 12, 1960, the General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, Mr. M. R. Masani, suggested "disengagement of troops on the Pakistan border so that a major portion of these could be withdrawn and deployed on the northern frontiers."<sup>11</sup> This question of our defences being lopsidedly Pakistan-oriented has figured again and again during the last three years.

At the height of the Chinese aggression friendly Western powers who came readily to our help felt that one

<sup>10</sup> *The Statesman.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

of the reasons for India's poor performance in the NEFA fighting was that "a large part of the Army" was tied up on the Pakistan border. To facilitate disengagement of these troops and to normalise relations between India and Pakistan they had expressed themselves in favour of bilateral talks on Kashmir and allied matters.

At home, critics of the Government's "vacillating" attitude towards China started pleading for better relations with Pakistan. Mr. Krishna Menon, as Defence Minister, on the other hand, had for long regarded Pakistan as the only threat. Subsequently as the Chinese menace intensified he included Peking among India's enemies but next to Pakistan.

This is what I have described as a cold war posture. More than military considerations, preference for one or the other *bloc* has been behind the demand for disengagement of troops guarding the frontier with Pakistan as well as the obsession with Pakistan as enemy number one. Discussions I had with Army officers on a hypothetical question whether India would have fared equally badly if the adversary were Pakistan and not China revealed the political overtones of the thinking on the subject. Here is the gist of what I have gathered.

A military showdown between India and Pakistan would have been a battle between equals, unlike it was in the case of our fight with China. Numerically, the two armies are more or less equal—taking into account the number of troops available for deployment. Both were once together in the British Indian Army so that the methods of training, tactics and thinking were by and large common. An Indian Army officer could anticipate a Pakistani move on the battle-field and vice versa. The technique of throwing in thousands of men into the battle and swamping the other party by sheer weight of numbers

is foreign to both the armies. The Chinese are different. Such is their manpower and such also is their approach to life that losses, even in thousands, are immaterial to them. So they employ "human sea" tactics. Secondly they are trained for a tougher life than what the Indians and Pakistanis are normally in for. Edgar O'Ballance points out that "long distance route marches, both by day and night, are a regular feature (of Chinese army training), taking place at least twice a week. Patrol work, infiltration and night movement across the country are taught and widely practised, which means the Red Army sub-units have great mobility within a limited radius of action." By and large, these two advantages of the Chinese clinched the issue in the NEFA fighting.

Thanks to the gargantuan American aid the Pakistan army is no doubt better mechanised and superior to ours in fire power. Where the quality of the human material and numerical strength are evenly matched this will undoubtedly tilt the scales. This has been conceded by the Indian Army officers I have talked to.

But the way they hoped the advantage would be neutralised was significant. First, they said that, because Pakistan was an ally of the U.S. and politically and otherwise susceptible to its influence, Washington would restrain Rawalpindi in the event of an armed conflict with India. Secondly, if this did not pan out for any reason Pakistan's cold war involvement would bring the Soviet Union on our side. In other words, they looked to political factors to solve a military problem.

Such was, generally speaking, the military thinking in India during the last decade. A similar play of political factors would have prevented the confrontation with China but for two reasons. Because of the deep-seated Sino-Soviet differences Moscow could not restrain Peking

as Washington was expected to do *vis-a-vis* Rawalpindi. Secondly, since the cold war played little part in the India-China conflict and India had sometimes to go out of her way to maintain this position Western military aid was not available to India prior to the outbreak of the hostilities.

The foregoing shows that engagement of "the bulk" of our troops on the Pakistan front was not the sole reason for the military reverses in NEFA. True, disengagement would have enabled us to throw more men into the NEFA battles but even then they would not have been a numerical match to the Chinese hordes, unless during the last five or six years our emphasis had been on raising an army at least three times larger.

In this context, it is pertinent to provide a flash back of a debate on Pakistan's defence potential and military strategy, which I had heard in the National Assembly of Pakistan in June 1962. The East Pakistanis were demanding self-sufficiency in defence and, to buttress their case, were presenting a harrowing picture of unpreparedness in the eastern region. Speaking for President Ayub Khan, Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto declared that it was unnecessary to augment East Pakistan's defences because India would have to think several times before attacking Dacca. The Indian Army, he claimed, was poised on the West Pakistan border and if to overrun the eastern wing India moved her troops the Pakistan army would march into Delhi. The terrain would enable that, he added.

One of the factors contributing to the severe Chinese attack in NEFA was perhaps an awareness of the Indo-Pakistan military situation and the trend of the Pakistani thinking on the subject. Even if the Kashmir imbroglio

were not there, it is doubtful if India could have left the western border with Pakistan unguarded.

The other argument that because the Indian troops had been trained in the Rajasthan plains on account of the Pakistan orientation of the defence policy they could not fight in the mountainous terrain of NEFA is a corollary to Mr. Masani's disengagement plea. It is again only partly true. Since total disengagement of troops from any of the frontiers is out of the question, training them exclusively in mountain warfare or desert fighting amounts to keeping all the eggs in one basket. A larger army would have enabled variegated training.

On December 9, 1960, confirming Chinese withdrawal from Longju to about three miles to the north—they occupied the outpost in August 1959 and vacated it in November 1960—the Prime Minister said in the Lok Sabha that if “we try to occupy Longju first of all it will be taking a step which, under the present understanding [to maintain the *status quo*] we are not supposed to take. Secondly, it would involve a fairly major undertaking.”

The Prime Minister's scrupulous adherence to an agreement which the Chinese had been honouring only in breach was the butt of much criticism at home. But his other statement that retaking Longju, vacated by the Chinese, “would involve a fairly major undertaking” did not receive the attention it deserved. It revealed the magnitude of the task in military terms and the state of our preparedness.

Sometimes realism drove the Government to the other extreme. Realisation of the inadequacy of our defences led not to their augmentation but a feeling of helplessness. Between December 1959 and September 1960 the Chinese had committed 102 air violations over NEFA and Ladakh. Three more violations of Indian air space

had been detected in the following three months making a total of 105 in 12 months.

Answering questions in the Lok Sabha on the subject on February 18, 1961, the Prime Minister said: " Even the Soviet Union with all its scientific knowledge and power could not shoot down U-2 for four or five years. There was a great deal of difficulty in identifying aircraft which flew above 35,000 feet. The Chinese had contended that the aircraft involved were not theirs. Looking at the geographical factors it was possible that aircraft other than Chinese might have violated the air space in this region [NEFA]. But in the western sector no such normal possibility existed and, therefore, it was concluded that the aircraft in question should be Chinese."

The reference was to the fantastic theory put forward by Mr. Chou En-lai on April 25, 1960, that " it had been found through investigations by the Chinese Government that these were U.S. aircraft. They took off from Bangkok, passed over Burma or China and crossed the Sino-Indian border to penetrate deep into China's interior to parachute secret agents, weapons, supplies and wireless sets and then flew back to Bangkok over the Sino-Indian border." It was surprising why the Prime Minister gave serious consideration to the cock and bull story.

When a member asked why the planes could not have been forced to land by the Indian jets, the Prime Minister said " it was not as if the jets were standing by. They would have had to come from somewhere else." In brief, our Army was not then equal to the task of forcing the Chinese out of the territory occupied by them or even preventing further encroachments by them. Our Air Force was not large or powerful enough to force down planes violating the air space in the different parts

of the country. Technologically our subsonic aircraft were no match to the intruders.

Such a situation should have instilled both realism and determination in the people—realism to eschew tall talk and adventurist action and determination to get even with the enemy and thwart his designs. But the proceedings in the country's highest legislative body reveal poverty of both. If criticism of the Government was off beam the thinking on the Treasury Benches was warped. The Press, by and large, kept its head but only to be ignored.

The following lengthy extract from a despatch by the Military Correspondent of *The Indian Express*<sup>12</sup> evaluated the problem in perspective and highlighted the issues before the country. Written on the eve of a Parliament debate it sought, in vain, to rivet members' attention on mundane matters like defence preparedness, army training, etc. It said: "Reports of fresh Chinese incursions will once again bring into question whether there is adequate appreciation of Chinese strategy applied to the border areas and whether our own defence measures are satisfactory, both in their approach and their content.

"For almost a decade now China has consistently pursued a policy of bringing her southern regions including Tibet under effective control, developing these regions and manning them with specially trained garrisons.

"Time, apathy of neighbours and some significant successes in the international field have helped China consolidate its position. Among the more recent successes must be counted the treaties and understanding with Burma and Nepal, isolation of India from her neighbours and further penetration into Viet Nam. . . . In the nar-

<sup>12</sup> November 11, 1961.

rower field, the key to the understanding of the military situation lies in the Chinese technique of guerilla warfare based as it is upon deep knowledge of the country and deployment of troops who are hardy, well-equipped and lodged, exceptionally mobile and capable of surreptitious attack.

“ The latest reports are that the Chinese have committed intrusions, undertaken patrolling on our territory, spread themselves out in various sectors and established fresh check posts. These are all the foundations of guerilla warfare.

“ Militarily the broad measures adopted [by India] for border defence include the construction of strategic roads under a high-powered board. Military operational commands have been strengthened and expanded and some units moved into forward areas. The air force has been reinforced with transport planes and helicopters. A number of posts, points and passes have been strengthened.

*“ All this, however, provides only the framework of border defence. The crux of the problem lies in having trained personnel for mountain warfare, who are given the necessary weapons, who have the lodging and equipment to live at high altitudes and of whom there are sufficient numbers [emphasis added].* The specific points needing clarification are (1) whether army training in mountain warfare is proceeding well and will deliver the goods, (2) whether the institution for jungle warfare is now properly established, is suitably located and will not become a replica of the academic land-air warfare school, (3) whether ordnance factories are bringing out suitable weapons for mountain warfare in sufficient quantities, and (4) whether military stores are reaching border areas in time and in accordance with requirements.”



I do not have to apologise for the length of the quotation because it sums up the situation and pinpoints the rudiments of an effective defence policy. Speaking at Dehra Dun two days later the Prime Minister said that "necessary preparations had been made for the defence of Indian territory and *in about a year or two* arrangements would be completed for developing communications to enable the Indian defence forces to move easily into the difficult mountainous terrain of the northern border" [emphasis added].

The Prime Minister vaguely put "about a year or two" as the time required to complete the communication network. The work had been in hand for 18 months by then. Even if the schedule of "a year or two" had been kept it would have been a leisurely way of building border roads. In effect, however, the progress was much slower. On the eve of the latest phase of the Chinese aggression in September 1962, only the road up to Towang in the Kameng Frontier Division was ready to take heavy military vehicles. Even here there were large patches of unusable road.

The Prime Minister glossed over the other points raised by *The Indian Express* correspondent. It is true he need not discuss in public matters of detail such as training in mountain warfare, the stores position and the output of ordnance factories. But Parliament could have evinced interest in the subject and set up a watch-dog committee to scrutinise the progress in the different fields. The people's representatives could have learnt that while the Army lacked rifles and ammunition ordnance factories had been engaged in production of civilian consumer goods. The ordnance factory at Wah in Pakistan was similarly producing tractors and pressure

cookers but the Pakistan Army was more than adequately equipped with American modern weapons.

On the other hand, after some wrangling in political terms over defence matters Members of Parliament went home satisfied because the Prime Minister assured them that during the previous two years the situation "has broadly changed" in our favour, "not as much as we want it but it is a fact that in areas which they [have] occupied progressively the situation has been changing from the military point of view and other points of view in our favour."<sup>13</sup>

The allusion was to the numerical multiplication of check posts in the Ladakh area claimed or occupied by the enemy. Negatively, the new outposts prevented reinforcement by the Chinese of the military points they had set up and also came in the way of further stealthy encroachment by the enemy on our territory. But they did not represent an accession of strength to us. The enemy build-up was across the border, all along the 2,500 miles. He was poised for attack at the shortest notice.

No member got up to ask how, if the communication network needed two more years to be completed, the military situation had improved in our favour. Then began the easy or complacent phase in our assessment of our defence position. The infection spread to even the sceptics among newspapermen.

The same Military Correspondent of *The Indian Express* felt on December 8, 1961, that "NEFA is better defended than Ladakh and that in this region India is well poised to meet the challenge of China if the threat to cross the McMahon Line be carried." He then listed the defence measures taken in this area "as the expansion of the Army's Eastern Command, the establishment of a

<sup>13</sup> Novemb 29, 1961—PTI report.

new command of the Air Force and of an important forward military base, in addition to construction of roads and setting up of posts."

"The important forward military post" was at Bum La the road between which and Towang had not been laid necessitating air-dropping of stores and supplies. When the Chinese attacked Bum La on October 20, 1962—ten months after the optimistic report appeared in *The Indian Express*—the strength of our defences was just a battalion!

The sense of self-satisfaction at the progress of our defence preparedness was coupled with efforts to belittle the Chinese build-up. Morale-boosting was good and necessary but modern wars cannot be fought on morale alone. Secondly, self-deception is different from morale-boosting.

On May 4, 1961, *The Times of India News Service* reported from New Delhi that "there is a growing feeling in the major world capitals that India and China are heading towards some serious border incidents in the next few months.

"According to military experts the Chinese and Indian forces now confronting each other in these bleak Himalayan regions are more or less equal in strength. The Chinese are known to have between 200,000 and 250,000 troops in Tibet and Sinkiang. But more than half of them are known to be labour units in uniform, who are employed on various construction jobs there. The Chinese are believed to have about 20,000 to 25,000 front-line troops deployed along the frontier from the Karakoram mountains in the north-west to the Indo-Burmese border in the east.

"Though they have developed in recent years a vast network of garrisons in Sinkiang and Tibet for internal

security purposes, *the overall logistic position of the front-line Chinese troops is, by and large, no better than the present position of the Indian forces.*

“ In the last 18 months the Indian Army has established scores of new outposts, built hundreds of miles of mountain tracks and developed a vast logistic complex to supply and reinforce the troops in several sectors *more speedily than the Chinese* could manage in the event of a crisis. *The army will take at least another eighteen months to complete its communications and supply network to the more vulnerable sectors of the border* [emphasis added].”

The report first talks of imminence of “ serious border incidents ” but concludes on a note of caution that another eighteen months at least will be needed to extend the communication network “ to the more vulnerable areas.” The description of defence build-up in between presents a picture of preparedness for a showdown. Mr. Krishna Menon, as Defence Minister, was wont to inspire reports which would first dismiss the Chinese war preparations as efforts to crush the revolt in Tibet and then present a picture of strength on our side. The idea perhaps was to impress the Chinese and make them behave. But they were not impressed!

As it was, the Chinese thrust in NEFA started eighteen months after the report was published. It seemed as if the Chinese had taken us at our word and, like the Saracen warrior, Saladin, in the Crusades, launched the attack at a time when we said we would be ready.

Another aspect of confusion was whether it was easier to defend Ladakh or NEFA. The Prime Minister said that soon after the Chinese occupation of Tibet it was thought fighting in NEFA would be a tougher job than that in Ladakh. Subsequently, after a series of incidents

in Ladakh it was said that while in Ladakh the terrain was against defenders who had to face attackers from the higher Tibetan plateau, the reverse was true in the case of NEFA. Even as late as on October 15, 1962, the Prime Minister told us at a press conference in Colombo that, from the defence point of view, NEFA was a different kettle of fish from Ladakh. We had in NEFA the advantage the aggressor enjoyed in Ladakh, he added. But the actual experience proved otherwise.

But the *Guardian* (Manchester) wrote on September 17, 1962, on the eve of the enemy thrust, that "if the Chinese Government really wanted to conquer India in the mediaeval manner, that is the way (via NEFA) its armies would come. The barren mountains of Ladakh are in comparison easily defensible." The *Guardian* knew better.

Added to all this double-mindedness were our qualms about world peace. We were afraid that an India-China conflict would trigger off a world conflagration. A policy of peace was laudable and we had several successes to the credit of our foreign policy. We had prevented many a flare-up in the different parts of the world. But when nearer home our friendship was being reciprocated with treacherous hostility adequate armed forces were the only guarantee to peace. If we wanted peace we should have prepared for war. We kept this truism in view in our policy towards Pakistan but where China was concerned we were immobilised by our excessive concern for peace in the world.

There can be no better conclusion for this chapter than the following extract from an article by N. J. Nanporia in *The Times of India*.<sup>14</sup>

"One of the fantasies with which New Delhi hypnotises

<sup>14</sup> December 4, 1961.

itself into inactivity is the supposition that a Sino-Indian conflict on the border issue would plunge the entire world into a nuclear holocaust. This is a claim which those handling the Berlin crisis can legitimately make and, in assuming that the potential for disaster is equally great along our northern frontiers New Delhi surely flatters itself unduly. Yet the dreary refrain of familiar excuses refers to the difficult terrain, the enormous size of the Chinese armies, the problem of logistics, the 'basic principles' of India's foreign policy, the Nehru-Chou 'agreement', the impossibility of being precise about anything and finally to the horrors of nuclear war."

## CHAPTER IV

### SWIFT ACTION

THE Chinese military operations in NEFA were confined to a brief time span of about three months. They were swift because of the preparation that had gone into the campaign and the time that had earlier been spent on getting the troops into poise.

The enemy was evidently aware of the limited strength of the defenders. To force India to spread thinly her meagre fighting forces all along the 2,500-mile-long frontier, the entire boundary was activated. Incidents were provoked in the different sectors so that New Delhi was left guessing about the next venue of operations. For a country with a large army or a shorter frontier it would have been no problem to match the enemy's tactics. It was not so in the case of India. The terrain and transportation difficulties reduced the mobility of the troops.

Before the full-scale military operations of October 1962, there had been several "incursions" which had the common purpose of probing our border defences and establishing bridgeheads on our territory. The thread of aggression ran through them. It was as if the areas were marked down for the 1962 attack.

An early Chinese "incursion" in NEFA was in the Lohit Frontier Division at Walong in October 1957. It was repeated in September 1958. Almost simultaneously with the occupation of Longju in August 1959, Khinze-man (to the west of Longju) in the Kameng Frontier

Division was attacked. On June 3, 1960, the enemy again appeared at Taktsang Gompa, a monastery village in the Towang area. In July 1961 the "incursion" was at Chemokarpola. The next visitation was to Roi village near Longju, where an outpost manned by 50 Assam Riflemen was overrun.

Someone sarcastically compared India's recurring efforts at the United Nations to secure admission for the Peking regime into the world organisation with the Chinese "incursions". Both were hardy annuals. But there was a method in the Chinese madness—as a matter of fact it was not madness at all. And strictly speaking the "incursions" were not annual but more frequent.

Khinzemane and Taktsang Gompa provided them ingress into the Towang area from two different routes. In the same way, Walong was intruded into and the possibilities of a further push down were presumably evaluated. Longju and the neighbouring area was also subjected to similar scrutiny.

Opinions differ about the suitability of the different regions in NEFA as points for penetration. Dr. Schweinfurth of the Department of Geography at the University of Bonn thinks that the Lohit Valley in the east and Manas Valley in the west are "the two only ways by means of which an incursion into Assam could have been launched. All other 'tracks' across the Assam Himalayan main range lead into jungle and tribal country and certainly offer no means of communication for deployment of troops." He quotes Kingdon Ward<sup>1</sup> in support of this theory.

Another advantage of Lohit Valley from the enemy point of view was that it did not provide easy egress into the Tibetan plateau. If the Chinese wanted to penetrate

<sup>1</sup> The Lohit Valley.



Assam the Lohit Valley was perhaps the obviously direct route, just as Jelep La offered an easy entry into the plains of West Bengal. But neither of these points led into NEFA which the Chinese had set out to overrun.

The siege of the Galwan Valley in Ladakh which began on July 10, 1962, was the beginning of the 1962 campaign of the Chinese. The enemy encircled the Indian post there and cut off the supply and communications line. The Chinese also began to intercept aerial supplies to the post. Simultaneously the enemy troops started digging in all along the frontier.

It was a perfect decoy. India might have thought that the trouble was concentrated in Ladakh and then the Chinese would have attacked in NEFA. The situation was so enigmatic that the Prime Minister told the Informal Consultative Committee of Parliament on Defence that he could not indicate the course the dispute was likely to take in the future. That was on August 21, 1962.

On August 14 there was a fresh clash in the Pangong Lake area between the Chinese intruders and our troops. It was announced that the Chinese had set up 30 new posts in the Ladakh area. While our attention was thus riveted on Ladakh the Chinese crossed the McMahon Line and appeared on the Thag La ridge at 2.30 p.m. on September 8. To heighten the deception the enemy troops were made to raise slogans like *Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai* and accost our men in Hindi.

The Press had often criticised the difference between our attitude to the intruding Chinese troops and that towards Pakistanis violating our border. *The Times of India* said that whereas "according to the Prime Minister military and police measures are being taken to resist Pakistani raids it is not the policy of the Government to

take comparable action against Chinese infringement of Indian sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> Whatever be the policy of the Government, the men on the spot were often taken in by the Chinese tactics. I have talked to Assam Riflemen who had faced the early Chinese attacks. They said the enemy was so tricky that he came in the garb of a friend. In the early days of the aggression the Chinese never came as attackers, emitting sound and fury. They would on the other hand read sermons on Sino-Indian friendship. So it took some time for our men to see through the game. Donning tribal costumes was another trick employed by the enemy even in the later stages of the campaign.

When we tried similar tactics they did not cut ice with the hard-boiled Chinese. For instance, the official statement on the September 8 "incursion"—the beginning of the 1962 phase of the aggression in NEFA—was deliberately worded equivocally. It said that "latest reports indicate that there is a Chinese group several hundred yards away from our post and appears to be on the Indian side of the international frontier." Highlighting the calculated equivocation, Krishan Bhatia wrote in his *Political Commentary*.<sup>3</sup> "The mildly worded official description of the situation is interpreted by competent observers here (New Delhi) to connote the Government's indirect hint to the *aggressors to withdraw peacefully*" [emphasis added]. But they did not oblige.

There were also different versions about the number of Chinese who violated the border on September 8. They were put varyingly at 300, 800 and 1,200. *The Hindustan Times* on September 15 quoted official sources to the effect that the number of Chinese intruders was

<sup>2</sup> August 23, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> *The Statesman*, September 14, 1962.

only 200. The point of intrusion was said to be in the vicinity of the trijunction of NEFA, Bhutan and Tibet.

On September 12, the Armed Forces Eastern Command was understood to have been asked to adopt "prompt defensive measures". The border posts in the area, normally manned by the Assam Rifles, were reinforced with armed forces personnel.

On September 14 it was stated that "Indian troops have moved up in strength towards the Thag La ridge". The official hand-out added that "our post in NEFA has been strengthened and the Eastern Command is continuing its efforts to deal with the situation. The GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, is in Tezpur."

The reference presumably was to the brigade at Towang which had been moved up and parcelled out to reinforce the many outposts. If the Chinese were only 300, 800 or 1,200 the defenders were "in strength". If, on the other hand, as an Assam Rifleman put it, the enemy had to be "counted in lakhs",<sup>4</sup> the thinly spread-out brigade would be no match to him, as it happened.

The impression which the official sources in New Delhi sought to give—that the Indian forces were numerically adequate to meet the challenge—registered with observers abroad, though not with the Chinese. The enemy was conscious of his strength and was also, by and large, aware of the defenders' position. But the *London Times*, taken in by our claims wrote on September 17 that "the persistence of the Chinese in standing firm in spite of the relatively heavy Indian forces now concentrated against them sharpens the Indian Government's dilemma. If they are not to be frightened out should they be thrown out?"

<sup>4</sup> "Dushman Lakho Hain" literally means lakhs of enemy troops. But the idea evidently was that they were in large numbers.

Here was a case of over-zealous public relations running into the hands of the enemy. The Chinese, poised to strike, wanted only a pretext and their propaganda machine, the efficiency of which the Prime Minister himself had conceded, worked overtime to give the impression that large numbers of Indian troops were ready for battle at the McMahon Line.

The political nature of our defence preparation was noted by a perspicacious observer like Stephen Barber. Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* on September 17, he said: "The Minister is reported to have ordered Indian defenders to fire if necessary on the Chinese intruders. This appears to be more of a political gesture than a military directive since no shooting has occurred."

Lt.-Gen. L. P. Sen, the GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, was sent for by New Delhi on September 16. According to official sources the "Government are satisfied that effective steps have been taken to keep the Chinese out of territory." In the same breath, it was admitted that "the Chinese are still a little over on the Indian side of the McMahon Line.

Firing broke out on September 20. The Chinese guns went into action at 9.30 p.m. and exchange of fire continued for the rest of the night. The venue was a spot two miles east of Dhola, where an auxiliary post of the Dhola outpost was sought to be overrun by the enemy. Three of our soldiers were wounded.

For five days thereafter the auxiliary post was the target of enemy attention. Sometimes he would attack under cover of darkness, sometimes in broad daylight. Sometimes a few hand-grenades would be thrown at the post, sometimes infantry would go into action. But the single, unchanging factor was that "a fairly substantial

number of Chinese soldiers " had reached " within a few hundred yards " of the post, to quote an official statement.

The stalemate persisted until September 26. While foreign observers came to the conclusion that " it was the beginning of infantry action for physical control of territory and not a clash of patrols " official spokesmen in New Delhi still beat about the bush. Several erroneous impressions were sought to be given: first, that they were only skirmishes between border guards and secondly that we were in adequate strength to meet the situation. The red herring of weather was also introduced, suggesting that it was hardly propitious for a large-scale enemy thrust.

From the morning of September 26 until the afternoon of September 27 there was exchange of fire in the vicinity of a patrol post near Dhola. On September 29 the Chinese intensified their attack and our forces sustained " three casualties of a minor nature ".

Again there was an uneasy lull. No incidents were reported until October 9. But both the political leaders in New Delhi and the military commanders in Tezpur must have sensed how the situation was snowballing towards a showdown. Even as early as on September 26, the London *Times* correspondent realised it and said " the battle of the Thag La ridge, if it starts in earnest, may not be a single-phase operation and the Indians could not afford a reverse."

In the October 9 fighting which continued through the following morning the enemy used two-inch mortars, automatic weapons and grenades. We suffered 17 casualties.

Meanwhile, on October 5, Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul, Chief of General Staff, visited Tezpur which was then the operational headquarters of the defence network in NEFA.

On the same day enhanced allowances were announced for troops stationed at high altitudes. These were indications that New Delhi was beginning to realise that its hopes of shadow fighting were dupes and that the time had come to come to grips with the problem. Monetary relief for men manning the high passes was long overdue. Until a few months earlier the authorities thought of making do with the Assam Rifles to guard the vulnerable passes. Then the imperative necessity of having regular troops there dawned on New Delhi. Even then it was not realised that the patriotic urge of the soldier needed to be supplemented by material inducements.

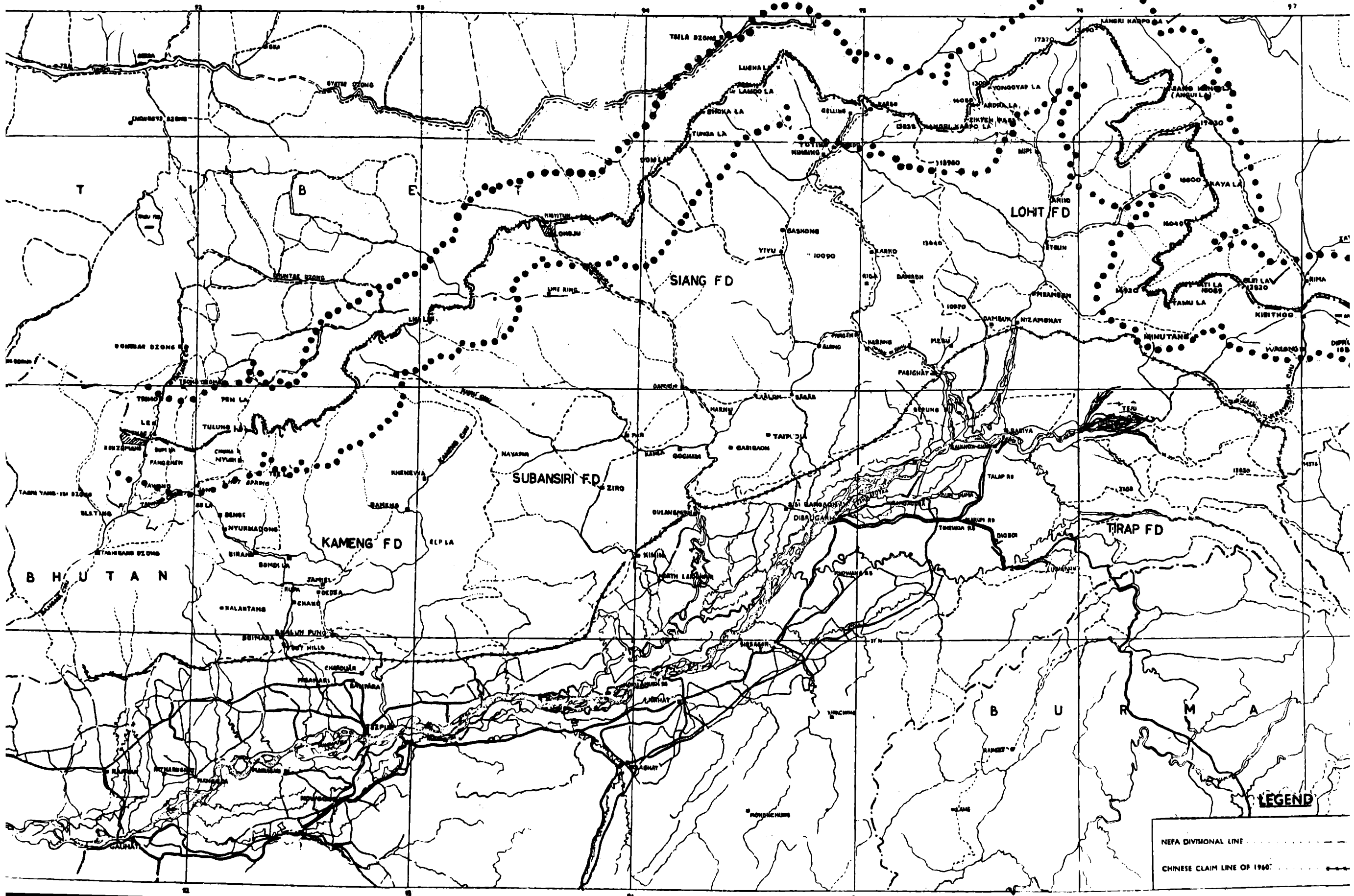
Wading through the debris of the abandoned army camp at Rupa, south of Bomdi La, I came across letters received by the jawans. Invariably they contained references to money problems at home. While it might not be possible to keep every jawan free of financial worry, every extra bit would have helped steel their determination. Even the belated gesture was in practice robbed of its grace. First, I was told that it took months before the Finance Ministry's concurrence with the scheme was obtained. Secondly, according to the privates I had talked to in NEFA, the jeep and truck drivers got a rebuff from Lt.-Gen. Kaul, who subsequently took over as Corps Commander at Tezpur, when they pleaded for extension of the benefit to them. He was said to have ruled that only those who spent a minimum of 20 days in a month at the mountain posts were entitled to the enhanced allowance.

This had a deleterious effect in some cases, if what I heard was true. Some of the drivers deliberately went slow on the mountain roads to prolong their stay and earn the extra doubloons, it was rumoured. Official sources, however, denied this.

# OUTLINE MAP OF NEFA

SCALE 1"=16 MILES (APPROX)

LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL SEPARATING CHINESE AND INDIAN FORCES ON 7 SEP 63  
AREA OF DEMILITARIZATION 20 KM ON EITHER SIDE OF THE LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL AS DEFINED BY THE CHINESE  
AREA OF DISPUTE REGARDING INTERPRETATION OF McMAHON LINE



**LEGEND**  
NEFA DIVISIONAL LINE  
CHINESE CLAIM LINE OF 1960

October 10 was a landmark in the early fighting in NEFA. The enemy used heavy mortar and medium machine guns and the exchange of fire went on throughout the day. Our casualties were six killed, eleven wounded and five missing. The enemy lost nearly a hundred men.

The fat was now squarely in the fire. Illusions of touch and go were shattered—perhaps on both sides. The enemy must have realised that India could not be fooled for all the time. Our jawans who had been earlier taken in by friendship slogans were now wise to the enemy's game and the relatively high Chinese casualties must have impressed on the enemy that we had begun to mean business. According to people who fought there, after October 10, the Chinese did not again try the ruse of lulling us with slogans and grabbing our territory on the sly.

The agonising reappraisal which must have taken place in the minds of policy-makers in New Delhi was ingeniously spelled out by the *London Times*.<sup>5</sup> It said: "Nothing in the record or morale of the Indian Army would suggest that it is likely to be tardy in moving to push the Chinese back over the Thag La ridge but at the political level in New Delhi the feeling in recent days has been that action to do so has been too long delayed. One partial explanation is probably that the Army's orders have been uncertain. The Government's first hope was to squeeze out the intruders and to use the minimum force in doing so. It was, it is believed, only later when it appeared that the Chinese were not to be herded out that the Army was ordered to eject them with all necessary force. A complementary explanation is that the Indian Army has a sharper awareness than the

<sup>5</sup> October 5, 1962.



civilians in the Government of the magnitude of the task awaiting it."

Without suggesting that the foregoing is the gospel truth, it is necessary to highlight a few significant points made by the newspaper. First, comes the appallingly unrealistic nature of political thinking on the military task in NEFA. Egged on by ill-informed critics at home and abroad and exasperated with the Chinese nibbling tactics, the Government of India decided to tell the Chinese: "thus far and no further." But what such a thwarting of the aggressor's scheme of things would mean in military terms was not evaluated realistically. It was thought the enemy could be "squeezed out".

When this proved militarily impossible, only two alternatives were available. To fall back and let the enemy occupy more territory or to take a last-ditch stand and fight it out. Neither could be done for lack of preparation, both political and military. Politically, the country had not been trained to assess the military situation dispassionately and gain time to prepare for the ultimate task even at the cost of further initial setbacks. Militarily, we were not a match to the well-prepared enemy.

Incidentally, the *Times* analysis gives the lie to the Chinese propaganda that India had fired the first shot in the NEFA fighting. The Prime Minister's outspokenness in announcing to journalists at Palam airport on October 12 that the Army had been ordered to throw out the intruders was seized by Peking for concocting countless lies. That "order" did not trigger the trouble in NEFA, as the Chinese had been trying to tell the world. It followed, and did not precede, large-scale and well-thought-out Chinese thrusts. If it were a plan for full-scale hostilities with China the Prime Minister would not have announced it, that too in such a casual manner.

A subsequent report in the London *Times*<sup>6</sup> substantiates the point. It read: "There is no apparent realisation here (New Delhi) of the magnitude of the military contest which India may now have begun. Observers in a position to know better are still speaking lightly of a swift action to eject the '300 or 400' Chinese. Official accounts of continual strengthening of the original Chinese force have been ignored."

The "apparent lack of realisation" explains the Prime Minister's statement. It was in the nature of administering a warning to a froward child. The action contemplated in the reprimand was not meant to be taken nor was there mental and other preparation to translate words into deeds.

The Chinese naturally took advantage of the Prime Minister's remark. Hardly two days later, on October 16, they provoked a further incident. Our troops stood their ground but did not even try to advance towards the enemy positions on our territory. The incidents were kept up for the next two days.

Ultimately on October 19, what began as a usual nocturnal exercise in sniping at our patrols developed into a major attack. Our forward posts near Khinzemane and Dhola were simultaneously attacked in full force. The enemy was equipped with automatic rifles and 9 mm guns. Heavy mortar and machine guns were pressed into action. Supply-dropping planes were attacked and a Russian-built MI 4 helicopter, which was evacuating casualties, was shot down.

It was both a surprise and a massive attack. Groups of Chinese came from "the new positions they built south of the Thag La ridge" and first talked to the jawans on the north bank of the Namka Chu river. They

<sup>6</sup> October 11, 1962.

then attacked. The enemy was two battalions strong—2,000 men—whereas the defenders were only 600—two companies.

The border posts at Khinzemane and Dhola fell on October 20. Still the post at Dhola could have held out further but control of the relatively unguarded Chejao bridge enabled the enemy to squeeze our troops out. The enemy deployed a full division in the Thag La ridge area between Dhola and Khinzemane. Having crossed the Namka Chu river unmenaced by the defenders the Chinese spread themselves out. Their attacking line from Dhola to Khinzemane stretched from six to eight miles which prevented regrouping by the already thinly spread out defence columns.

Not satisfied with containing our troops in both Ladakh and Kameng, the enemy opened another front in the Lohit Frontier Division in the east of NEFA. The official communique issued on October 22<sup>7</sup> reveals the

<sup>7</sup> Information was received yesterday evening that the Chinese were concentrating opposite our post at Kibitoo near the McMahon Line in the Lohit Division of NEFA and were digging trenches on their side of the border. At 3 a.m. today the Chinese launched a vigorous attack on this post and fighting is still going on. Information has also been received that the Chinese have been concentrating on Longju since yesterday.

More details are now available of the Chinese attacks on our posts in the northern sector of Ladakh. Out of the 16 posts, 11 were simultaneously attacked on the morning of October 20. Of these, four had fallen up to yesterday. The remaining seven posts successfully repulsed the attacks on them and have fallen back to regroup for offering better resistance.

In their offensive operations, the Chinese are not merely using mountain guns and heavy mortars but are also logistically supported by a large fleet of trucks.

In the southern sector of Ladakh in the Pangong Lake area the Chinese have so far attacked five posts. Here again the Chinese were supported by heavy mortars and mountain guns in their assaults. Of these, four posts have fallen after very heavy fighting. One of these heroically repulsed three determined attacks and inflicted heavy casualties on the Chinese. This post was overcome only when the Chinese in their last attack brought up tanks in support of their assault.

extensiveness of the front. Only a well-prepared army could have launched such simultaneous attacks in different sectors.

Tsang-Dhar, a brigade headquarters in the Thag La ridge area, was abandoned by our troops on October 23. Four out of five outposts each manned by a platoon also fell on the same day. The enemy reached Brokenthang and Zaminthang, overcoming pockets of resistance on the western side close to the Bhutan border.

Suddenly the enemy also launched an attack on Bum La, to the east of Khinzemane. Towang, the regional administrative headquarters and the seat of the largest Buddhist monastery in India, lies directly to the south of Bum La. As the crow flies Towang is only 6 miles or 11 kilometres from Bum La and 16 miles or about 29 kilometres from the McMahon Line. At the time of the Chinese attack there was only a 25-mile-long (40 kilometres) footpath linking Bum La with Towang. Tusker, the road-building organisation, had prepared the alignment for a *pucca* road but before it could be taken up the Chinese aggression began.

Two interesting facts stand out in the context of the military situation after the fall of Khinzemane and Dhola. Because of the possibility of a Chinese attack through Bhutan our defensive positions were on the west, as near the Bhutan border as possible. So when the enemy spread out to the east where the system of communications was also more primitive he had a walk-over. Secondly, the attack on Bum La to the east indicated a two-pronged thrust on Towang.

Above all, from the defence point of view, the terrain to the south of the Thag La ridge was unfavourable. Once we had to abandon the positions on the ridge Se

La was the only pass which we could have held. This seemed to be the military thinking at that time.

The enemy was active elsewhere, too. More troops were massed near Longju in the Subansiri area. The build-up continued in the vicinity of Kibitoo.

There was more bad news on October 24. Lumpu in the Khinzemane-Lumpu axis fell. With that we had lost the last hold on the Thag La ridge. In the Subansiri district the Chinese entered Longju and attacked a border post at Asafila to the south-west of Longju. It also fell after some resistance. This was manned only by the Assam Rifles.

Bum La, too, had to be abandoned. This gave the enemy the additional advantage of mounting an attack on Towang from an altitude from the north. In the Lohit region Kibitoo had been given up by the defenders, exposing Walong for an attack.

By October 25, a three-pronged attack, from west, north and east, developed on Towang. After the fall of the brigade headquarters at Tsang-Dhar, the Towang defences were in bad shape. It would take time to rush troops up from the divisional headquarters at Dirang in the far south. Airdropping, hazardous in the weather and other conditions then prevailing, would only be a drop in the ocean. It was also thought inadvisable to commit more troops there. The enemy, on the other hand, was a division strong.

The next point of resistance in the Kameng area was Jang, to the east of Towang. It lies directly to the north of Se La. But the resistance at Jang did not last more than a day. At the same time, the enemy maintained the thrust towards Walong in the Lohit sector.<sup>6</sup> Walong is 85 aerial miles from the Digboi oilfields of Assam.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter V for a description of the Walong battles.

With the fall of Jang ended the first phase of fighting in the Kameng region. There were a few incursions in the Siang Frontier Division also and a couple of posts, primarily manned by the Assam Rifles, were abandoned. But the main brunt of the battle was borne by the Kameng area. The thrust in the Lohit Division seemed more diversionary, to pin down the troops there and to make India rush reinforcements to the east to defend the coal and oilfields of Assam.

A deceptive lull descended on the battle-fields in Kameng. From time to time, the defenders made probing attacks in the Jang area but they were both half-hearted and feeble. The stalemate continued for three weeks.

The Indian military psychology was built around the impregnability of Se La. It is by all means a difficult terrain between Towang and Se La. There is a drop of a thousand feet from the Towang administrative centre into the Towang valley and Indian guns covered the bottom of the valley. Then follows an incline of more than 4,000 feet to Se La. Like the defenders of Thermopylee, our troops, even if outnumbered, could hold this pass by mowing down the enemy as it negotiated the incline.

Perched on the 13,750-foot high pass, we thought we were on top of the situation. "We have got the terrain on our side now and this time we are prepared," our officers told visiting journalists on November 15, three days before the fall of Se La. Our officers visualised only two possibilities: either the enemy would push forward and get a good thrashing at Se La or the worsening winter would freeze our respective positions with Se La as the watershed.

There was also complacent under-estimation of the enemy resources. It was confidently predicted that until

the Bum La-Towang road was built the enemy could not move heavy equipment into NEFA. (A press party which visited Se La on November 15 heard the sound of blasting of rock. This was thought to be in connection with the laying of the Bum La-Towang road which would in that case have taken at least a month to complete. The Chinese finished it in 13 days.)

The biggest weapons they could have, according to these calculations, were mortars and light howitzers carried by mule trains. It was on this assumption that a dozen tanks were taken up to Dirang on the tricky road. Numerically, too, we had nearly a division at Se La, even if its actual fighting strength was only that of a brigade. Stores and supplies for not less than three weeks were stock-piled in the area.

Instead of meeting us head-on in the unfavourable terrain conditions, the Chinese crossed the Palit range of mountains by means of a yak track and surprised us at the rear. The number of troops engaged in this out-flanking movement is not known but considering the terrain and the path the enemy had chosen it could not be very large. Newspaper reports put the number of attackers at Se La at 20,000. An official communique issued on October 19 put it at "approximately four brigades supported by artillery and heavy mortars"

Another enemy column bypassed Se La from the east and cut off the road between Se La and Bomdi La, a few miles north of Bomdi La and about eight road miles to the south of Dirang, the divisional headquarters. This had bottled up the troops concentrated in the north for the defence of Se La and left the defenders of Bomdi La to fend for themselves.

On November 18 two attacks on Bomdi La were repulsed by our troops. The earlier pattern of a two-

pronged attack was developed and a fresh onslaught launched on the night of November 18. Then our men had to give in.

For the next few days there was sporadic fighting in the mountains south of Bomdi La. The Chinese announced a cease-fire on November '20—one month after the severe thrust across the Namka Chu river—and from November 24 there was no fighting, not even skirmishes.



## CHAPTER V

### BATTLE FOR FIFTY YARDS

UNTIL November 14, 1962, Walong to most of us was a mere place name, a dot on the map of the North-East Frontier Agency. Since then it is no longer so. Its name is now blazoned in letters of gold on the pages of India's history. Like Rajouri, Trafalgar, Stalingrad or Plassey it will be remembered by posterity as a place where patriotism defied death, where the will to resist aggression and tyranny overshadowed more material factors like manpower and weapons of war.

Walong is the farthest administrative centre in the north-eastern region. Longitudinally, Walong, Kibitoo where we used to have a check-post, and Rima, the largest military cantonment in the eastern part of Tibet, stand in a straight line. The Krawnaon Chu River, which farther south is called Lohit, links these three places.

Latitudinally, if you draw a horizontal straight line from Diphu Pass, it will cut Walong at a distance of 10 kilometres to the west. It is far to the south of the international frontier and even the 1960 claim line of the Chinese does not cover it. It, however, lies within the 20 kilometre demilitarised zone mentioned by the enemy.

The hilly outskirts of Walong could have been the venue of a turning point in our military struggle against the Chinese, if only we had enough manpower and munitions to cover literally 50 more yards of the inhospitable terrain. About 3,000 officers and men of the Indian

Army repulsed here not less than 15 fierce attacks, launched in quick succession, by a full Chinese division of 15,000 men. For three days and nights, our men held a seven-mile front and inflicted on the enemy the heaviest casualties in the NEFA fighting—not less than 5,000 men.

Considering the fact that the Chinese firepower was at least thrice more effective than our own, the odds were 15 to one in favour of the aggressor. Secondly, while the enemy troops after months of preparation bore down the mountain ridges, our officers and men, hurriedly called to the front, had to walk non-stop for two days to reach their defensive positions. Our jawans had to trek for six hours to refill their water bottles.

There are three ridges in a row to the west of Walong. Our troops christened them green pimple, yellow pimple and trijunction. The highest ridge, trijunction, where mountain ranges meet, is 13,500 feet high. The second in altitude is yellow pimple, so called because of the profusion of autumn leaves on its slopes and peak. The lowest, about 10,000 feet high, is green with vegetation. These are pimples against the background of the stalwart Himalayan ranges but from the plains they are high hills with treacherous slopes. The Lohit river with its many tributaries flows through these ridges making movement across them doubly difficult. Control of these ridges would give the enemy a whip-hand over Walong and enable him to immobilise its vital airstrip, the only supply line for our defence forces.

From the high plateau on which Rima stands the enemy marched down on Kibitoo on October 21. Our post there fell after a day of some fighting. Then the enemy forces split themselves into two, one section moving in from the east through the 16,850-foot high Diphu

Pass and the other pressing down on us from the north. By November 14 the enemy had established himself on top of the lowest ridge, green pimple, and was planning to scramble up the other two commanding heights.

Early on November 14 a company of Kumaonis set out for yellow pimple. From there they were to move down to dislodge the enemy from the lower hill feature, green pimple. In other words, while the enemy was trying to move upwards to gain control of the higher ridges we were planning to bear down on him from a superior altitude. It meant we had grasped the secret of mountain warfare and were out to use the hills as allies.

Marching all through the day the Kumaonis reached the vicinity of their target by nightfall. Our men were only 50 yards from yellow pimple when the enemy counter-attacked. It was a massive onslaught. The darkness of the night and the lack of familiarity on the part of our men with the terrain—only the previous day they landed at Walong airstrip—offset the advantage of the altitude. The enemy attacked from two directions.

Among the early casualties was the company commander. Second Lieutenant Khatri took his place and stayed rooted there. The battle raged as before. Manpower for the enemy was less precious than ammunition for us. Waves and waves of attacks were pressed with the result that, though each of the jawans carried four times the usual load of 50 rounds of ammunition, our fire power was at a low ebb by daybreak.

But the resistance was kept up until midday. Our company was practically wiped out but the enemy casualties were many times more. As for ammunition it had been exhausted long before the hands that used it had grown limp. A few more men and a little more ammuni-

tion would have written a different finish to the epic battle for 50 yards.

Meanwhile, a company of Dogras who had just landed at Walong was rushed to the rescue of the besieged Kumaonis. Shedding their kits, including blankets, so that they could carry more ammunition, the Dogras set out for trijunction, the highest hill feature. This meant they had to break through the Chinese encircling the Kumaonis at yellow pimple.

But as ill-luck would have it by the time the Dogras reached trijunction—at 10 p.m. on November 15 after a nine-hour march—the enemy had silenced our guns at yellow pimple. This had enabled him to divert his full wrath towards the Dogras. As usual, with the dawn of November 16 came a massive enemy counter-attack. Two more Dogra companies were coming up but the enemy would not let them connect.

Collectively, our men, be they Kumaonis, Dogras or Sikhs, fought and died gallantly at Walong. But even more thrilling were individual acts of heroism, deeds which will survive for ever the doers who have perished. Fighting men all over the world, even perhaps Chinese, will be inspired by their example. Posterity will cherish their memories and many a future Indian boy and girl will strive to emulate the unknown soldiers. They are deathless.

There is, for instance, Lt. Bikram Singh who was at the head of a company of Sikhs guarding yellow pimple. That was the time when our reinforcements were coming in and the airstrip was the vital link in our supply line. Lt. Bikram Singh communicated to the brigade headquarters that the enemy was closing in on him from three sides—on the fourth side lay the Lohit river—and that the vanguard of the attackers was a battalion strong.

The hill feature being vital for the defence of the air-strip we had to hold it as long as possible. Accordingly Lt. Bikram Singh was asked to stay put at all costs. He replied that they could hold it for half an hour but none of them would return.

The ridge was prevented from falling into enemy hands for one and a half hours. But thereafter when the brigade headquarters called them for a situation report there was no response from the wireless set. Not one of them, including Lt. Bikram Singh, survived. The enemy occupied the hill feature but over their bodies.

Then there was the doctor, Lt. Subba, who would not withdraw from the front even though the situation was hopeless. He preferred to die with his comrades, tending as many of them as he could in their last hours. When can such glory fade?

There were others who, even after they were captured preferred death to a Chinese prison. Naik Parsuram, Lance Naik Channa and Sepoy Khazur Singh were overpowered and were being taken to an enemy camp. On the way was a 2,000-foot deep khud. One of the men sprang on a nearby pine tree and leapt to his death into the khud. The other two followed suit as the surprised Chinese guards followed the first towards the tree. They embraced death cheating the enemy.

Sepoy Nain Singh was another "unknown soldier" who fell in the Walong fighting. He was a mortar sharpener. While at work he wounded himself badly and his intestines came out. But he would not allow himself to be withdrawn from the battle-field. After preliminary treatment he exchanged tasks with one of his comrades and took up the job of refilling light machine gun magazines.

The post was besieged by the enemy and had to be abandoned. While withdrawing from his bunker Sepoy Nain Singh stumbled and fell. His intestines came out again, this time for ever. Sepoy Nain Singh did not rise again.

Then, while on their way to trijunction the Dogras had to cross a tributary of the Lohit river. A pontoon bridge built across it gave way and it was nearing midnight. Then Sepoy Ganesh Ram stood for 45 minutes in the icy cold water and helped his comrades cross the stream, in some cases bodily lifting them.

Even in the early days of Walong fighting our men displayed such heroism. There was Naik Bahadur Singh of the Kumaon Regiment who was killed at Kibitoo on October 21/22. He was at the head of men who fought unto the last and were wiped out. Deservedly Naik Bahadur Singh was posthumously awarded Vir Chakra on November 12, 1962.

In the same fighting, on October 20, an officer of the mountain regiment was wounded by the enemy. Sepoy Ambulance Assistant S. Joseph of Field Ambulance rushed to the rescue of the wounded officer. He had to crawl his way through enemy shelling. But just as he reached the spot where the officer lay Sepoy Joseph himself received a burst from an automatic weapon and was killed. He, too, was awarded Vir Chakra.

In short, in this sector officers and men fought and died shoulder to shoulder, in the true glorious tradition of the Indian Army. Like the 10-year-old son of Louis de Casabianca, second-rankers here stood their ground heedless of approaching enemy because their superiors had ordered them to hold the particular posts. But the superior officers were no longer alive to revoke the orders. So both perished.

Examples from the Walong sector disprove the canard that unnerved by the superior might of the enemy our men panicked and withdrew from Se La. They also prove that given the proper leadership the Indian jawan is the best fighter in the world.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHY THE DEBACLE

I ASKED an Army officer which of the two—the fiasco at Se La or the fall of Bomdi La—he regarded as a worse disaster. He said that the two debacles were almost telescoped in time as well as in their disastrous consequences. But psychologically Se La was a bigger blow. The Army, as it were, pinned all its hopes on its impregnability and when it fell without even much of a struggle it knocked the bottom of our national pride, our position as a nation capable of defending itself.

To the officers and men in other theatres of war the surrender of Se La must have been a rude shock. Only on November 11 the Prime Minister was telling the Informal Consultative Committee of Parliament on Defence that the tide was turning in our favour in NEFA. Journalists who had been to Se La a few days before its fall spoke highly of the preparedness and morale of our troops. Ironically, however, their encouraging reports appeared in the Press almost simultaneously with the news of its abandonment. Similar optimism on account of the strategic advantage of Se La as a defence bastion must have been felt in the different Army units. The defenders of Bomdi La especially were banking on weeks of bitter fighting at Se La and, if the worst should happen, of confrontation with an enemy considerably weakened by the experience at Se La. In practice, however, the enemy troops attacking Bomdi La bypassed Se



La and were none the worse for it. They arrived at Bomdi La spruce and fresh. The retreat following the Se La fiasco also affected the morale of the troops *en route*. It exaggerated the strength of the enemy and his military prowess and sapped our self-confidence.

What caused the fiasco at Se La? Newspapermen who had gone to Se La a few days before it fell said they clearly noticed a yak track across the Palit range and bypassing Se La. What was so obvious to the untrained eye could not have escaped the attention of the military leadership.

Further, it was well known in Towang and its neighbourhood that the people of Mago village to the north-east of Towang migrated in winter to the village of Lagani, south-west of Se La. And they took a mule track which skipped Se La.

*The Hindustan Times* reported from New Delhi on November 17 that "the possibility of an enemy flank trying to attack the Indian defence positions in the Se La area from behind if necessary by going through Bhutanese territory is not ruled out." So the military authorities must have anticipated it and prepared themselves for it.

I have seen with the NEFA Administration officials maps of the Kameng Division on which the foot-paths and mule and yak tracks were marked. Among them was the route the enemy had taken in outflanking the Se La defences.

Though outflanking is not an original Chinese strategy the Chinese are notorious for it. In the Korean War when Gen. MacArthur attempted an ~~offe~~ offensive towards the Yalu river the Chinese "volunteers" cut off the rear of his forces—as dramatically and unobtrusively as they effected the manoeuvre at Se La. Our Army is well aware of this because some of the officers and men who

fought in NEFA had heard about it first-hand during their peace mission in Korea following the cessation of hostilities there. Like the "human sea" frontal attacks, outflanking tactics are an invariable weapon in the Chinese armoury.

Our own troops had employed the technique with outstanding success against the Chinese themselves. I am referring to the infiltration of our troops behind the Chinese forces in the Chip Chap region in Ladakh in April 1962. Foreign observers had described it as an "unusual outflanking manoeuvre" and an "end-run manoeuvre". In the words of Warren Unna of *The Washington Post* "it would have been looked upon as absurd by any student of the conventional manual of arms but its success was not only boosting the morale of the Indian troops but also created a stir among the usually China-awed military circles of Asia."

The manoeuvre was said to have been prepared for 18 months and was executed quietly without any fanfare of publicity. While the Chinese had retreated from their forward posts on our territory to the Tibetan bases at the height of the winter (March-April 1962) India air-dropped troops and supplies beyond the positions held by the enemy. Our patrols, undeterred by the heavy snowfalls, doggedly advanced our check posts. One of our patrols reached the frozen Chip Chap river after paralyzing an earlier Chinese advance towards the strategic Karakoran Pass leading into the Pakistan occupied part of Kashmir. As a result we set up an outpost at Daulat Beg Oldi.

But it was not an aggressive manoeuvre. As Stephen Barber<sup>1</sup> put it, "Western military experts are satisfied that the Indian moves are purely passive in intent and

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, May 6, 1962.

aimed at squeezing the Chinese out rather than forcing any head-on clash."

Not only did we try our hand with remarkable success at outflanking the enemy but had also experienced it in the Second World War at the hands of the Japanese who were equally good at the game. It was in the jungles of Kohima.

From the information available to me, it seems we expected outflanking from the west, via Bhutan and were preparing ourselves for it. If the Chinese had tried the western flank they would have found the openings in the jungle-clad mountains mined. They would then have had greater difficulty in reaching the Towang-Bomdi La road and in intercepting it between Dirang and Bomdi La.

Theoretically, it was possible to have prevented the aggressor from bypassing Se La. In practice, however, it could not be attempted. Our numbers being relatively small we could not have turned tail on the enemy who was containing us head-on with the bulk of the four brigades massed for attack, while more enemy forces rolled down the yak track to menace us at the rear. If we had withdrawn to regroup and foil the bypass, the enemy had enough troops to push forward through Se La itself. Our front would have been open then.

Even then Se La need not have been abandoned so readily but for bad generalship. It is difficult to pin down the responsibility for the fiasco. Technically the Corps Commander is answerable for it. But he is believed to have instructed the divisional headquarters at Dirang to continue the fight even after the bypass.

In the confusion which ensued it was not known who had decided to the contrary and set in motion the panicky withdrawal. Maj-Gen. A. S. Pathania, who was in

charge of the operations on the spot, is a battle-scarred veteran. It is surprising that he should have lost his head. It seems he was among the first to be contaminated by the defeatism of the Seventh Brigade which had been pushed back from Bum La and Towang. Stragglers from the north were allowed to mix with the troops at Se La and spread alarming accounts of the enemy strength and our weakness. I have heard it on good authority that Gen. Pathania left his post when the Chinese intercepted the road between Dirang and Bomdi La soon after the Se La manoeuvre. But I could not find the answer to the question whether he had asked his men to follow suit at that time. It is not even clear if a formal order to retreat was issued to the troops and if the fact of withdrawal had been conveyed to Brig. Hoshiar Singh and others who were regrouping their forces for a counter-attack on the enemy.

The fact that Brig. Hoshiar Singh and his men had, instead of retreating through Bhutan, crossed the path of the enemy shows that they were in the dark about the impromptu withdrawal and that they were under the impression that we would regroup our forces and engage the enemy somewhere between Dirang and Bomdi La.

It is suggested in extenuation of Maj.-Gen. Pathania that after the Chinese intercepted the road he wanted to hold them on either side and for this purpose had asked Brig. Gurbax Singh at Bomdi La to move up towards Dirang. The Bomdi La defences having already been depleted by dispersal of troops such tactics were not practicable.

The self-same officers and men had faced similar situations in the deserts of West Asia and the jungles of Kohima on the Burma border. Their positions were besieged and they were bottled up. But they fought their way

out. It could not be entirely due to the British generalship. While bombardment of the enemy positions relieved the pressure on the besieged troops their supplies were maintained by air. Both these advantages were lacking in NEFA. Provisions, though vital for army, constitute a small fraction of its essential supplies. For instance, a division needs 200 tons of ammunition a day as against 13 tons of provisions.

In World War II the Fourth Division had displayed superlative skill in mountaineering during the Gabes fighting in Tunisia when they dashed across Matmatas.

The tricky weather, the mountainous terrain and the proximity of the enemy rendered aerial supply impossible. Since it was decided not to draw the air force into the fight bombardment of enemy bases was ruled out. It cannot be said how far the political decision not to employ the air arm contributed to the debacle in NEFA. But there is no political or military justification for not using the air force.

One of the reasons advanced for confining the fighting to the soldiers at the front was the vast superiority, technical and numerical, of the Chinese air force. But it is not such an undisputed fact as it has been made out to be. According to U.S. intelligence reports, the Chinese air force does not have enough strength to mount and sustain a massive air attack.<sup>2</sup> Their subsonic Mig 17 and trans-sonic Mig 19 jets are equivalent to the Mysteres and Hunters we have. The only jet bombers they have, IL 28, are comparable to IAF Canberras. They were still using TU-4 bombers which are obsolescent. Even if the

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "At present China is in great want of everything—trained personnel, communication and radar equipment, fuel and rockets. Virtually all that a modern air force requires is lacking"—Wing Commander Asher Lee of the Royal Air Force in *Military Review* published by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Kansas, August 1963.

Chinese air force were superior that would hardly justify our inaction. The numerical and other advantages the Chinese Army enjoyed did not make us throw up our hands.

Secondly, our targets, which would be their newly acquired positions on our territory would have been far nearer than our locations (even in NEFA) would be from the Chinese air bases in Tibet. By bombing enemy positions in the vicinity of our besieged troops we would have regained local initiative and released our men from the pressure of the aggressor. Politically also, we would not have been extending the scope of the conflict—a step which President Truman could not take in the Korean War—because we would be bombing our own territory occupied by the enemy. As for punitive raids on our cities and industrial centres, a nation at war, with the flower of its youth in the valley of death and its very honour at stake, could afford some civilian casualties as well. It would have only steeled the people's determination to fight the Chinese. Above all, what is the special sanctity of the civilian population?

Whatever might have been the difference which deployment of the air force would have made to the course of the NEFA fighting psychologically to limit the war to the soldiers exposed to the Chinese cannonade was a big damper. The open justification of the inaction in political terms was even worse. Imagine the feelings of the soldiers caught in the Chinese grip at Se La when they heard that India would not use the air force to bombard their besiegers because China might then retaliate and bomb Calcutta and New Delhi.

With or without air support our men at Se La could have fought after they had been outflanked. After all, the Chinese artillery could not have been moved across

the mountains along mule tracks. Even the troops which effected the bypass could not be large in numbers. Even if our supply line had become tenuous the enemy's sources of replenishment could not be inexhaustible. If we had fought to retain control of the road either by staying put and facing the enemy fire from both sides or by withdrawing into the jungle and regrouping, the situation would have been different. I have heard it said that if only the defenders of Bomdi La fought on for six more hours the Chinese would have turned back. After all, the supply lines of the enemy were stretching and it was one thing to turn the flank of the defenders and surprise them and another to sustain an attack against them. Moreover, after the by-pass at Se La nearly a division of our troops was behind the enemy. So he might have asked himself: "who is behind whom?" Only we could not cash in on the situation.

There were also two opinions in the Army about pinning all our military hopes on Se La. Some thought it would be easier to fight at Bomdi La than at Se La. Maj.-Gen. Pathania fell between two stools by emaciating the Bomdi La defences without being able to take a resolute stand at Se La. Brig. Gurbax Singh at Bomdi La was made to disperse his troops up in the north with the result that the enemy when he launched a two-pronged drive on Bomdi La had almost a walk over.

Valiant fighters like Brig. Hoshiar Singh did not have enough men with spine to fight the Chinese at Se La. The brigade headquarters was confused and could not make up its mind whether to take a last-ditch stand at Se La or to fight rear-guard action at Bomdi La.

At Se La we not only suffered national humiliation but also lost a jewel of a soldier, Brig. Hoshiar Singh. It is difficult to think of an officer who can replace him.

The late Brig. Hoshiar Singh, unlike some of the officers then in control of the operations in NEFA, had risen from the ranks. At the age of 18 in 1934 he joined the Army as a private. Six years later he was promoted to be a Junior Commissioned Officer. He was commissioned in 1941.

He saw active service in the war of 1939-45. After a spell as instructor at the Infantry School, Mhow, he took over command of the Second Rajputana Rifles in Jammu and Kashmir in November 1948.

Since Independence he had seen active service in Kashmir and Nagaland. After a brief stint as Deputy Commandant at the National Defence Academy, he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier in October 1961—exactly one year before he took over command of the 62nd Infantry Brigade at Se La.

He was killed one month before his 46th birthday, almost to a day.

Looking back, it seems the Se La campaign had been mismanaged from the beginning. It may be that after the enemy crossed the Namkha Chu river it was not possible to hold him in the north of Se La. But after we had withdrawn into what we then thought to be the fortress of Se La we had allowed the enemy full three weeks to prepare and carry out the next thrust. Between October 25 and May 15, but for a few probing moves in the direction of Jang, nothing was done either to menace the enemy or to prevent a build-up by him. The road between Se La and Foot Hills was relatively free of snow or landslides. If only we had moved up an infantry division and spread ourselves out at Se La the enemy by-pass would have lost its sting for us.

But the pertinent question is: from where could the infantry division have come? According to some ob-



servers if we had not joined battle at Walong and rushed those troops—even if they were no more than a brigade—to Se La the situation would have been different. The protagonists of this view feel that the enemy could not have penetrated into the Lohit Division because of the paucity of communications there. Secondly, if in spite of absence of roads the enemy pushed forward we could have not only held him in the plains of Assam but also taught him a lesson which he would remember for life.

The flaws in this argument are that (1) we could not allow the oil and coal fields of Assam to fall into enemy hands, and (2) their destruction through a scorched earth policy would cost our development and defence dear. According to a Communist journalist (of Dange persuasion) the Assam oil fields are, in terms of their yield and potentialities, not so attractive as to make the Chinese try to seize them. In spite of their limited economic value the oil fields are invaluable to us. Secondly, the Chinese own supplies of fuel not being very large<sup>3</sup>—petrol and kerosene smuggled into Tibet from Nepal were yielding fancy profits to the operators—even small quantities would be welcome to them.

My appreciation of the decision to fight in Walong is more emotional. In the context of the pattern of fighting in the Kameng area, especially the panicky abandonment of Se La, the Walong battles came like a breath of fresh air to a suffocated person. They lifted our spirits and made us feel young and alive again. Together with

<sup>3</sup> "The Red Chinese armed forces can be likened to a huge dragon which sits and licks its lips in a self-satisfied manner but only a few of its teeth and claws are sharp—many are missing. Nor can it walk very far, if at all. It is also completely dependent upon Russian fuel to enable it to spit fire. The military hierarchy is ageing, lives in the past, is guerilla warfare-minded, is cautious and reluctant to change with the times." Edgar O'Ballance, *The Red Army of China*.

the courageous stand we had taken at Chushul in Ladakh, the battles fought at Walong restored our self-confidence.

If in the confusion that was Se La withdrawal officers loaded their belongings into one-tonners and drove down the mountain road leaving the jawans to follow suit by foot or to fend for themselves, in Walong officers and men vied with each other in braving enemy bullets. They fought together and died together. In other words, the failings which came to light in the Se La campaign were not ingrained in the Indian Army. They were, by and large, individual lapses induced by the circumstances. Walong brought out this truth.

Furthermore, the fighting at Walong was necessary in the interests of the security of not only our eastern border but of a friendly and independent neighbour like Burma as well. Even newspaper reports admitted that "elements of a second division have come in from the east, probably by way of Diphu Pass, through wild uninhabited country to threaten the Indian flank at Walong."<sup>4</sup> If left unchecked, the enemy would have made another Aksai Chin of the Lohit region and also developed physical contact with the Naga hostiles.

Burma, being like India a peace-loving country engaged in developing its economy and uplifting its people, lacks the military means to thwart such treachery by Peking. The terrain on the Burma border with China also makes defence a difficult task. Even countries with large armed forces cannot safeguard the entire length of their frontiers. The Kachin area presents other problems, too. There are at least 100,000 Kachins living in Yunnan on the Chinese side of the border. They are related to the Kachins on the Burmese side. Two Kachin leaders, Nau Seng and Duwa Marang Lashan, are

<sup>4</sup> The London Times.

in China and maintain contacts with Communists in Myitkyina and Bhamo. More than all, like a section of the Nagas on our eastern frontier groups of Kachins are up in arms against the regime in Rangoon. And the Chinese always establish links with such rebel elements.

The valiant stand taken by our troops at Walong foiled such enemy calculations. The casualties the enemy suffered there were heavy even for the Chinese for whom manpower is cheap and nearly endless.

Last but not least, the psychological impact of the automatic weapons which the Chinese used unnerved our men at Se La. Our Army had single-shot bolt action .303 Lee Enfields, a few Bren and Sten guns and 25 pounders. The enemy deployed M-1 Garand semi-automatic rifles, a few Browning automatic rifles and 75 mm pack howitzers transportable by mules.

In effect, given a perfect aim the Lee Enfields are more deadly. In the first World War the Indian soldiers were such good marksmen that the Germans thought we had automatic weapons.<sup>5</sup> The principal advantage of an automatic rifle is its relatively higher range which is not so essential in mountain warfare. The enemy can be allowed to come near without the defenders placing themselves in target positions. And for a pot shot at a proximal enemy an automatic weapon is not required. Offsetting the unwanted (for mountain warfare) advantage in range, the striking power of the Browning rifle is low. Once they got over the scare and stood up to the spray of bullets, our soldiers, especially in the Walong area, realised that the injuries inflicted by the automatic

<sup>5</sup> Cf. "He (the Chinese soldier) is taught basic infantry drills and tactics, mainly of a guerilla nature and on a sub-unit level, which revolve around his infantry weapons. Little time is wasted on formal drill as such. . . . His marksmanship is poor and he fires little live ammunition." Edgar O'Ballance, *ibid.*

weapons were by and large marginal. They would literally eject the bullets from their bodies with their bare hands as one would a thorn.

Above all, the wastage of ammunition which an automatic rifle entails is phenomenal. Sometimes a hundred rounds are fired to claim a single life. On the other hand, in the bolt action rifle, the gun position has to be altered every time a spent shell has to be ejected and a new bullet brought into place. The semi-automatic rifle combines in itself the advantages of both the .303 rifle and the automatic weapon without the disadvantages of the latter, except in the matter of striking power. That our Army did not have even the semi-automatic weapons was a tragedy. But our men would still have fought, and fought well, if amateur expertise in military matters by politicians had not sapped their confidence and exaggerated in their eyes the fire power of the enemy.

The decision to take tanks towards Se La was another military mistake. It seems prestige considerations more than sound military judgment contributed to the folly. Because the former Chief of Army Staff, Gen. K. S. Thimayya, had ordered seven Stewart tanks to be taken to Zozi-La and beyond to Dras in Kashmir up a gradient of 3,000 feet in four miles and because he had differed with Mr. Krishna Menon's handling of national defence the feat was sought to be repeated. In actual fact the tanks did not contribute much to the defence of Kashmir. They only had a psychological impact on the Pakistan-armed and inspired tribals. Even the Pakistani regulars might have been overawed. But not the Chinese.

Of the 11 tanks proposed to be taken only seven reached the divisional headquarters at Dirang. The rest were immobilised *en route*. The hasty and unplanned

manner of moving up the tanks was also unworthy of responsible leadership. The men manning the tanks were on the zigzag road for the first time and so could not negotiate the tricky hairpin bends. If they had driven up there earlier they would have acquainted themselves with the lie of the land.

Even those that reached Dirang were of little avail. The manoeuvrability of tanks in a terrain like that being limited they became vulnerable to attacks round the road bends and destruction by being pushed down precipices. I have even heard reports—the veracity of which I cannot vouch for—that hand grenades were successfully used by the enemy to immobilise the tanks.

Even if they had not been rendered immobile, the utility of tanks in the fighting would have been marginal. Their high velocity guns could not go into action over mountain crests or at rising ground levels. It was also said that there was not adequate artillery support to the tanks. As for the surprise element, the enemy was well aware that our tanks were on their way to Dirang. Peking Radio announced it even before seven of the tanks reached Dirang.

Finally, our commanders seemed to have an ingrained feeling that the plains offered better scope for defence than the mountainous terrain. It was natural in the case of officers and men who had, so to speak, earned their spurs on the plains. But the mountains, when befriended and properly canalised, are a dependable ally. The altitude of the area being defended minimises chances of being outflanked. But there is a snag. The mountain ranges, one towering over another, may cause diffusion of strength as it happened along the Thag La ridge. In mountain warfare compactness is strength.

Secondly, a hill feature is less vulnerable to lightning

attacks and overpowering by quick-firing infantry or tanks the guns of which are of low elevation. Our men, in platoon strength, could hold for hours waves of attacks by enemy battalions in Walong and inflict heavy damage on him.

Thirdly, the height enables the enemy to be located with ease. Finally, the terrain offers scope to draw the enemy in and engage him from entrenched positions on the reverse slopes of the mountains. In fact, the Chinese employed all these tactics against us.

An aggressor, too, can bend a hilly terrain to his fell purpose. The narrow front of the defender facilitates cutting the flank by a numerically superior enemy, as at Se La. Most infantry and artillery weapons have a flat fire power which misses the twists and turns of the terrain.

On balance, however, the defender is better placed among mountain ranges than the aggressor. Even when outflanked the former can regroup his forces and counter-attack, unless as at Se La the leadership is lacking in qualities of head and heart.

For effective mountain warfare, we would need, besides semi-automatic weapons, light machine guns with nearly five times the fire power of our heavy medium machine gun, mortars, light mountain artillery and anti-personnel mines.

Above all, as I have said, the hills and their inhabitants need to be cultivated and befriended. Casual visitors whether they be soldiers or administrators cannot profit from the commanding heights of the terrain and the generous hospitality of the inhabitants. The Chinese had allowed us at least two years to accomplish these tasks but we employed the time in wordy warfare and complacent contemplation of our peace-time "victories"

Some of our men had complained that enemy agents in tribal clothes misled and betrayed them. "Couldn't you make them out?" I asked one of them. "No—all the Lamas look alike," he replied.

It was a dangerous generalisation. It would be like saying that all South Indians or Punjabis looked alike. Either background knowledge of the different tribes and their diverse characteristics or a little effort to study their habits and understand their ways of life would have plugged this loop-hole.

Add to these were natural disadvantages which have been aptly summed up by Brig. W. F. K. Thompson, the Military Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>6</sup> "The Chinese have by far the better land access as they have been building frontier roads and airfields since they annexed Tibet. In the vicinity of the Tibetan frontier of NEFA there are passes of up to 16,000 feet. On the Indian side the precipitation is great. The mountains are covered in dense forest and thick snow in winter.

"Land communications with the area from India are exceptionally difficult. On the Tibetan side the high plateau, over which the Chinese have built approach roads and airfields, is extremely cold in winter but snow-fall is light.

"The military problem is not the relative size of the Indian or Chinese armies but how many troops each side can maintain in the frontier area. India can only match China's ability by means of air transport and the dropping of supplies by parachute. Even so, in establishing a favourable air situation for the use of her air transport she may find herself at a disadvantage with regard to the accessibility of airfields."

<sup>6</sup> November 12, 1962.

Having discussed the factors which positively contributed to the debacle, let me now turn to the gossip on the subject. It has been said by self-appointed critics of the Army that it lost because it was road-bound. It is as good as saying we lost because it was the Indian Army with its distinctive ways of training and upkeep which fought for India and not the Chinese army. Secondly, which army is not road-bound, to some extent? Why did the Chinese choose to penetrate the Kameng Frontier Division with its relatively better developed communications network and not Siang or Subansiri where there is no motorable road from the frontier to the foot hills? Even Communist armies require supplies and they can be reached either by road or by air. Even after outflanking our defences at Se La the enemy connected up with the road. Why?

But being road-bound, most of our troops developed a weakness which the enemy was free of. By and large, our officers and men needed transport or porters to carry even medium-sized equipment. The Chinese carried it themselves. This dependence on porters was a drag on our progress.

Linked with the road is the role of Tusker, the road-building organisation in NEFA. Several charges have been levelled against Tusker but the most damaging is that its officers had fallen into ease-loving ways and had dragged the Army officers with them. This was sought to be substantiated by the fact that the Tusker camps were well-equipped and tolerably comfortable. It is an essentially Hindu and generally civilian—as distinct from military—approach to identify discomfort with sacrifice, valour and other virtues. Even when on active service fighting men have to be fed and maintained well.



Austerity does not add to their fighting qualities.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, it is one thing to be comfortable when possible and another to go "soft".

The Tusker men and officers are pioneers. They had penetrated the forbidding regions and laid roads in the most remote areas. Scores of them laid down their lives in the process. They stayed in the area all through the year braving the rigours of the climate. Is it then fair to grudge them amenities like running water and a fire in winter?

The effort to contrast the slow progress of road-building by Tusker with the rapid development of communications under the Chinese is odious. The Tusker-laid roads are according to specifications, the gradient being one in 20. The Chinese build roads without any such inhibitions.

The terrain also has to be taken into account. On the Tibetan plateau laying a road is relatively child's play. Not so in NEFA.

Finally, thanks to the lack of co-ordination between our Defence and External Affairs Ministries, we had provided the enemy with a graphic account of the terrain in the Kameng region. At the talks between Indian and Chinese officials in 1960, the enemy put as many as 12 questions about certain locations in the Kameng area. In all they sought 25 clarifications concerning NEFA. Considering the area involved the Chinese interest in it was patently fishy. As against 57 questions<sup>8</sup> asked about

<sup>7</sup> Cf. "Bodily the regular (Chinese) soldier is cared for quite well. He has two uniforms, a padded one for winter and another of lighter material for the summer. He has sufficient food and is well fed by Far Eastern peasant standards. . . . In barracks or camp he eats two meals a day, of rice or millet, depending on what part of the country he is in, with occasional fish or meat to make it more balanced." Edgar O'Ballance, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix I.

the entire border 18 questions concerned the Kameng and Siang Frontier divisions.<sup>9</sup> Short of supplying the enemy with classified maps—which in any case we ourselves did not have then—we provided him with all the data. If a military officer had been associated with the talks such a catastrophe would have been avoided.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Excerpts from the Report of the Officials of the Governments of India and the People's Republic of China on the Boundary Question (pages 37-40—Indian section).

" . . . Whereas the Chinese side provided answers to only 59 of the 118 questions put by the Indian side—and these too were in most cases incomplete or partial answers—the Indian side answered fully all the 57 questions put by the Chinese side. . . . At one stage the Chinese side questioned the relevance of the attempts to obtain a detailed understanding of the boundary line claimed by them, and proposed that the Indian side restrict themselves to some specific and important points on the boundary so that all discussion on item one (location and terrain features of the boundary) could be completed by the 12th session of the conference. The Indian side pointed out that item one was of basic importance because only when the two sides had a precise and clear understanding of the location of the alignment would they know the exact areas of dispute and be able to bring forward documents in support of the stands of the two Governments. The Chinese side themselves had asked many detailed questions and the Indian side had always replied to them.

" The Chinese side then withdrew their proposal but wished to know *whether the insistence of the Indian side on knowing the precise location of the Chinese alignment meant that if they knew it Indian personnel would not cross the line. . .*" [emphasis added].

## CHAPTER VII

# WAGES OF POLITICS

SEVERAL explanations, equally plausible, have been offered for the debacle in NEFA. A number of factors have cumulatively contributed to our military debility. Taken individually, they do not perhaps explain, much less justify, the magnitude of the reverses.

That the defence aspect of our continuance as an independent Power has been neglected goes without saying. While it has nothing to do with our foreign policy of non-involvement in Big Power conflicts and military entanglements, the neglect of defence is a natural corollary to our peace policy. Since Independence we had been banking on peace in the world. While the fear of a military conflict with Pakistan was always there, we had at the same time hoped that it could be avoided or, at the worst, that it would not be a major and long-drawn-out showdown.

As I have stated earlier, we thought the East-West cold war would enable us to keep the uneasy truce with Pakistan until time either healed the wounds of partition or facilitated our economic development to a stage where a military confrontation with India would be unprofitable for Pakistan. Here again the stress was on economic development, not building up the sinews of war simultaneously.

During the Dulles era in American foreign policy when non-alignment was looked down upon as immoral, it was

clear that if the United States allowed Pakistan to wage war on India the Soviet Union would be with us through and through. Later, when Washington distrust of the non-aligned Powers had mellowed it was on the cards that the U.S. would not allow an Indo-Pakistan war. The recent China-Pakistan flirtation was an offshoot of the restraint Washington was trying to bring to bear on Rawalpindi.

In other words, we were seeking a diplomatic, and not a military, way out of the situation near our frontier. China, as a potential aggressor, was a dark horse in those days. Mr. Krishna Menon, as Defence Minister, sharply disagreed with the assessment of the then Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Thimayya, that China more than Pakistan was India's enemy. Mr. Krishna Menon dismissed Gen. Thimayya's views as a projection of pro-Western thinking. Gen. Thimayya returned the compliment by reading Communist motives into Mr. Krishna Menon's policies. Even when the Krishna Menon-Thimayya controversy erupted into the open besides the facetious issue of civil or military supremacy cold war considerations predominated. The possibility of a Chinese military threat and the steps for meeting it were not thought of.

Some observers had been taken in by Mr. Krishna Menon's hostility, on the surface, for Pakistan. But if it were genuine and as deep-seated as that of the Pakistan rulers for India or that of the Jan Sangh leadership towards Pakistan, we would have prepared for war with that country. Instead of resting content with a warning to Pakistan that an attack on Kashmir would be taken as an attack on the rest of India as well—this meant that we might prefer fighting on the more vulnerable Wagah border to joining battle on the mountain terrain of Kash-

mir—we would have trained our men for mountain warfare in Kashmir itself. Secondly, we would not have chosen to live with the ceasefire line but tried to recover from Pakistan control the Muzaffarabad region of Kashmir—the so-called Azad Kashmir. Militarily, recovery of the territory of the former Gilgit Agency, which Pakistan has incorporated in its domain, would have been as difficult as throwing the Chinese out of the Aksai Chin plateau. But “Azad Kashmir” was a different kettle of fish.

The Prime Minister had often explained our attitude in political terms. In view of our abhorrence of war—limited or global—we would not force the issue of vacation of Pakistani aggression, he used to say. But, in effect, he betrayed our military unpreparedness for the task. Mr. Krishna Menon, notwithstanding his sabre-rattling posture towards Pakistan, had never looked at the Kashmir question from the military point of view.

In this context, the following explanation of Mr. Krishna Menon's “anti-Pakistanism” by one of his close supporters becomes pertinent. A Pakistani journalist, prone to Leftist opinions, wanted to know how Mr. Krishna Menon's attitude to Pakistan could remain statically hostile while Pakistan's relations with China were getting more and more cordial and while a ‘neutralist’ and anti-Western trend was distinctly growing in that country. The answer was that it was to a large extent make believe, to divert people's attention from China because concentrated wrath on Peking would have its political repercussions at home. This conversation had taken place in May 1963, after the collapse of the Indo-Pakistan negotiations.

Mr. Krishna Menon's tactics consisted of covering up military unpreparedness with tall talk. Verbally exhibi-

tionism too the shape of decrying Pakistan as India's enemy number one. In the northern half of India harsh words against Pakistan are the most efficacious opium for the masses. Grandiose paper schemes for manufacture of tanks and supersonic planes were publicised. The Pakistan Government readily obliged Mr. Krishna Menon by feigning alarm at India's growing military strength. It suited the Pakistan leaders' own bid to keep the people busy with anti-Indian hysteria and, at the same time, seek more arms from the West. During the 14 months I had spent in Pakistan in 1961-62 not a week passed without Pakistani officials and journalists alluding to Mr. Krishna Menon's pyrotechnics and drawing their own conclusions from them. The Defence Ministry pavilion at the Industries Fair in New Delhi in the winter of 1961 received such a build-up in the Pakistani Press that the NEFA debacle in the succeeding winter came as an anticlimax to it.

From the military point of view, the double-faced attitude to Pakistan was a tragedy. An armed confrontation with Pakistan would have given us a realistic assessment of our strength. The country would have known what war meant in modern times and the Army would have got over its soft mood. Instead of planning to assemble different international models of aircraft, we would have concentrated on strengthening the defences of the country in the real, hard way.

Politically also, the cynic would argue that a military showdown would have clinched many of the Indo-Pakistan issues, including Kashmir. I have heard Pakistani friends endorse such a view on the ground that a defeat on the battle-field would bring realism to the policies of the vanquished country, be it India or Pakistan, and end the present mental wallowing in the mud of mutual hate.

As for the contention that it would not be one war but a succession of them because the vanquished would try to get even with the victor, modern wars do not come so cheap. In spite of the anti-American sentiment in Japan, especially for the atom-bombing of Hiroshima, Tokyo does not think in terms of a war with the U.S. even if it were free to do so. In Europe, Franco-German relations have improved after the war and not deteriorated.

For the Indian Army, steeped in a pacifist atmosphere since Independence, there was no opportunity to test its mettle. Rescuing flood victims and separating sewage from drinking water became the order of the day for the jawans. Deploying the army for relief work in a major national disaster like an earthquake is understandable but using troops to fight perennial floods or rectify municipal mismanagement of New Delhi's sanitation is culpable. Neither the Naga hostiles nor the occasionally unruly mobs who in Bombay or Calcutta defied the law and overpowered the police provided much scope for putting military prowess to test. The assignments in Korea and the Gaza strip were comparable to sentry duties. Even in Katanga there were only spells of shooting and the "enemy" was luxury-loving, European mercenaries of Mr. Tshombe and not battle-hardened, rough Chinese troops. The terrain and climate were also different. Above all, by the time the troops from the Congo, who had seen action in recent times, returned to India the October-November phase of the Chinese aggression had ended.

The police action in Hyderabad and the liberation of Goa did not call for much fighting qualities. As for the war in Kashmir, the real accomplishment was landing our troops in Srinagar before the tribals and their helpers in

the Pakistan army reached there. If after the sack of Baramula the Pakistanis marched on Srinagar straight-away the position would have been different and difficult for us. But the attackers being after loot and rape took their own time at Baramula. That gave us a head start.

In other words, since Independence the Army has had no experience of fighting in the real sense of the term. An atmosphere of pacifism permeated the country, including the cantonments. The officers who had earlier sheltered in the shadow of British superiors did not have opportunities of leading their men in action independently or planning and carrying out military operations. This led to three disadvantages: (a) the officer corps had by and large gone "soft", (b) some of them had developed or seemed to develop political ambitions, (c) the gulf dividing them from the ranks had widened.

Let me illustrate. In an Army like ours, reared on British traditions, the peace-time routine puts the top brass in the position of *burra sahebs* in the civilian world. Their contacts with the ranks are limited and cursory; camaraderie is almost non-existent. Sharing a bunker or a sleeping bag with a jawan on the battle-field is a far cry from the atmosphere this kind of life generates. Class and other distinctions are accentuated. The jawan with his meagre pay, relatively low origin and poor educational background will be like chalk before the cheese of the western educated, sophisticated and comparatively well-off officer.

I had noticed this social disparity manifest itself even in the midst of the fighting in NEFA. I was going to a forward area in the company of the officer commanding a unit. We stopped on the way for breakfast. When I offered an egg to the driver of the jeep he politely declined saying that it was months since he had eaten one.



His breakfast consisted of *chapatis* and tea whereas the officers and their guests like us had western style food.

It is true that a *chapati* is more welcome to the jawan than slices of bread because he is accustomed to that type of food from childhood. It is also more wholesome but when it becomes a status symbol taste and nutritional value take the second place.

On another occasion, a group of jawans, mostly those who trekked back from the forward areas of the Kameng Frontier Division, were complaining bitterly of the contemptuous attitude of some of the officers towards them. They were alleging that the retreating officers stacked the vehicles with their belongings, including commodes, but would not take in any jawan. The ranks were asked to follow the officers on foot.

The officers' side of the medal is that while the jawans were putting up with even indignities from the white men, they now seemed to think they were on par with the officers because the latter were Indians. Unfortunately Independence and the consequent Indianisation of the Army have not tackled this ticklish psychological problem. A new relationship based on equality but consistent with discipline which an Army requires has not been evolved. The Chinese had tried to make capital out of this unfortunate situation.

A German journalist who had fought in the Second World War was unfavourably impressed by the equation which existed between our officers and men. True, it is far better than in civilian life in caste-ridden India. A business executive or a bureaucrat does not even enquire of his chauffeur or *chaprasi* whether he has had lunch or dinner. An Army officer does normally find out if his orderly or driver has eaten and will even offer to buy him rum at the club. But there the relationship ends.

There are, no doubt, honourable exceptions. Lt.-Gen. S. F. H. J. Manekshaw, who is now the Corps Commander at Tezpur, does not avail himself of the privilege of a special mess due to him. Gen. J. N. Chaudhri, the Chief of Army Staff, is known for his clubbability with all ranks. But one swallow does not make a summer. More and more officers should emulate Gen. Chaudhri and Gen. Manekshaw. The class walls within the fighting forces should be pulled down without endangering discipline.

Being an army of no occupation for 15 years has had its toll in other respects, too. Linguistic clannishness developed in the fighting forces. Some believed they were born a "martial race". To a group of stragglers from the Kameng region I was recounting the valorous deeds of the Sikhs in Ladakh and Walong. One of the men protested that the Kumaonis were superior in fighting qualities. Similarly a good word for the Gurkhas would annoy the Mahrattas or the Madrasis.

Even stories with a linguistic bias had been circulated. A canard was current in NEFA that the Chinese had told the tribals that they were free to shelter the dark-skinned among the Indian soldiers but if they offered asylum to the bearded men they would be dealt with severely. The converse of this concoction was heard elsewhere.

On the battle-field, however, no such distinctions remain or have remained. The ground around the Rupa camp on way to Bomdi La is littered with the mortal remains of Indians of all languages and religions. We saw Madrasis lying dead side by side with Sikhs and Gurkhas. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh blood had soaked the ground with its countless shallow graves. I regard it as the holiest spot in India. Similarly in the Walong

region. Kumaonis, Sikhs and Dogras, not to mention others, had fought and died there shoulder to shoulder.

Casualness and complacency, which are dangerous in an army, have also resulted from our peace policy. Army exercises were being held more on paper than on the field.

When the massive Chinese advance opened the nation's eyes to the gravity of the situation there was criticism in Parliament that ill-clad and ill-equipped troops had been rushed to the cold regions at high altitudes. The Government merely denied it. But nobody raised the pertinent point how, if for the previous 18 months our men had been manning the forward check posts, they could be suddenly exposed to conditions of extreme winter at great heights. If the reference was to the reinforcements they were not in such large numbers as to cause shortage of winter clothing. The fact of the matter was that the Army authorities had not even thought of winter clothing for the troops—either those already stationed in NEFA or those that might be sent up there—because the long winter had hitherto meant little or no activity on the part of the troops. Exercises were few and far between and patrolling nominal.

Inspection visits by senior officers were a farce. I was told of one such occurrence in a forward area in the Kameng Frontier Division in August 1962, a month before the massive Chinese attack. Its fraudulence and superficiality reminded one of the "inspection" of the village elementary school by the district educational officer. The distinguished visitor is properly wined and dined; he goes back laden with mementos without even caring to find out if the school exists.

In the case of the August inspection carpets, deck chairs and provisions preceded the officer who reached the bri-

gade headquarters on a pony. He had neither the patience nor the stamina to go farther up. He had heard accounts of the situation from the men from the different check posts. He even talked to some of the junior officers at the outposts over the wireless. He took it for granted that everything was "O.K." After a sumptuous lunch and some small talk he returned to his headquarters by helicopter. It was not all dishonesty. An army of no occupation, like ours, naturally forgot the ways of war and relapsed into the sloppy habits of our civilian life. Some of our national characteristics like taking things for granted asserted themselves.

Secondly, why should the Army of the land of the Buddha, Asoka and Gandhiji, which had won more laurels in preserving and promoting peace than in waging war, anticipate and prepare for bloodshed and killing? Establishment of check posts, laying of roads and spreading out of troops were a formality to facilitate settlement of the "border problem" through exchange of lengthy notes and ultimate negotiations across the table.

Last but not least, journals launched by Mr. Krishna Menon and his sycophants were being widely distributed in the Army camps. Their theme song had been that a Sino-Indian war was unthinkable and impossible. How could a "socialist" country like China invade India? Even those who disbelieved such propaganda felt that if the policy-makers ruled out war with China why should they exert themselves in anticipation of one. In the long run, it would have been cheaper for the nation to have provided in the Central Budget for the maintenance of the periodicals published by Mr. Krishna Menon's friends than finding compulsory circulation for such journals in the Army messes and canteens.

The Indian jawan is easily the best fighting material in the world. His patriotism and loyalty to officers are second to none. He has adjusted himself remarkably to the political vicissitudes. Those who had volunteered during the war years did so primarily for economic reasons. Collectively they had even been looked down upon as mercenaries. But Independence did not find them wanting. Their paramount loyalty remained to the country.

*Vis-a-vis* officers who were prepared to fight and die the average jawan's attitude is one of total obedience and full-fledged loyalty. The fighting in the Walong region has proved once again that without the so-called democratisation (which Communists plump for) the Indian Army has the highest tradition of officer-ranks fellowship. In the battle for yellow and green pimples officers had died for their jawans and vice versa. Nothing brings out the best in the Indian jawan as such an atmosphere.

The Indian jawan is also perhaps the cheapest, from the upkeep point of view. Milk, *chapatis*, lentils, an occasional meat dish and some rum keep him going, whatever be the climate or altitude. Bath is a luxury which he must have even at the heights of Nathu La. But it is not a costly proposition because the trees provide the fire wood and even ice melts and boils at a certain temperature.

The circumstances in which India had won her freedom and the isolation of the political elements from the fighting forces have bred aloofness in the Services. The politician had always looked down upon the defence forces. Perhaps the first occasion when the Congress leaders interested themselves in the Army was during the Red Fort trial of the Indian National Army men. But

that was also political interest. The excitement that the Royal Indian Naval mutiny evoked was similarly emotional. The role of Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali, an unageing revolutionary, in the R.I.N. mutiny was an instance in point. She and her fellow-Socialists were all sympathy for the mutineers. They conjured up visions of a revolutionary situation which a Lenin would utilise to seize power. The poor cadets were taken in. The D-Day was set.

Then Mrs. Asaf Ali left Bombay for Poona to convince and convert Gandhiji. But she never returned to Bombay until after the mutiny had been quelled and several cadets lost their lives or means of livelihood!

A career in the defence services is quite popular in northern and western India. The southern and eastern parts of the country are catching up in this respect. But still the Army and the other defence services have not got integrated into the national life. A mediocre businessman is more successful financially than an Army officer. A third-rate politician commands more pull and even respect than an able General. The controversy between Mr. Krishna Menon and Gen. Thimayya was an instance in point. A luscious film star or an average poet is more in the limelight than a gallant soldier.

An interesting anecdote narrated to me by an Army officer highlights the ignorance of military matters among the highly placed. The Estimates Committee of Parliament was hearing evidence of Army officers about defence appropriations. When a senior Brigadier appeared before the committee, the Chairman, a distinguished Congress M.P., accosted him as "captain". The officer kept quiet because he was aware of the supremacy of the civilian authority. But someone else evidently drew the attention of the Congress leader to the *faux pas*. So when

the sittings of the committee concluded the Chairman gracefully told the officer: "I am sorry, Brigadier-General, I had wrongly addressed you as captain."

The officer politely replied: "Thank you, sir, but there is no rank like Brigadier-General yet in the Indian Army."

Such basic lack of acquaintance with military matters among men who swayed the rod of administration and among those who held the purse strings of the nation naturally emaciated the fighting forces. Even Acharya Kripalani, such a trenchant critic of Mr. Krishna Menon and his unpardonable bungling of national defence, pleaded for disarmament and reduction in defence expenditure.<sup>1</sup> What else would one expect from a Gandhian? But if Gandhians are to be the arbiters we cannot expect better performance from the Army.

The following which I have learnt from a knowledgeable source further illustrates the point. A few months before the October aggression it was thought that the Army should have automatic weapons. Sanction was given for acquiring 10,000 such rifles. The Army authorities then pointed out that the number was too small to go round even among those in the most forward areas—they could not equip even a division. Further,

"I would submit—and this is a very delicate point to which I have to draw attention of the House and the country—we had believed that in a non-violent India, the last thing that the Government would contemplate would be an increase in the military budget. But I am sorry to say, and I think it would disturb the soul of the Father of the Nation, that in recent years there has been an increase of about Rs. 100 crores more than in the previous year and then in the supplementary demands there was an increase of Rs. 14 crores. Again, this time there has been an increase of Rs. 13 to Rs. 14 crores in the defence budget.

"May I ask why are we increasing our military establishment? Have we any designs on any country? . . ." From a Lok Sabha speech on March 14, 1958.

the trainees and the repair workshops should also have a new weapon introduced into the Army.

Financial experts weighed in rupees and naye paise the pros and cons of the project and finally shelved it. This reminds one of the poignant Jack London story in which want of a piece of steak resulted in the wrestler losing the bout and his career.

Between 1955 when the Chinese started nibbling at our territory and 1962 when aggression assumed massive proportions we had spent Rs. 2,600 crores on defence. Of this amount Rs. 260 crores was on capital account, that is on defence undertakings. The 1963-64 budget alone provides for an expenditure of Rs. 160 crores on defence undertakings. The total defence outlay for the current year is Rs. 870 crores.

Given foresight and planning the expenditure could have been phased. In that case, firstly, the burden on the tax-payer would have been less oppressive and, secondly, the results of the earlier investment would be showing by now.

An additional annual outlay of Rs. 50 crores from 1954 would have kept the Army adequately equipped by now. It would have been only about half of the Central revenues which, between 1954 and 1962, would add up to Rs. 6,500 crores. During the same period our expenditure on five-year plans was of the order of Rs. 12,000 crores. The expenditure on the will-o'-the-wisp Community Development scheme and the fatuous Grow More Food projects would have added up to a larger sum than what national defence needed.

After the armistice in Korea the published figures of Chinese expenses on war preparations are colossal. They are nearly Rs. 900 crores annually. The 1957 military budget was of the order of 2.3 billion American dollars



or about Rs. 920 crores. In 1955 it was even higher—2.7 billion U.S. dollars or over Rs. 1,000 crores. The total outlay on “national defence” during the first five-year plan period (1953-58) was 12 billion U.S. dollars, or about Rs. 4,800 crores.

Pakistan which in population, size and resources is about one-fourth of India spends on an average Rs. 100 crores annually on the armed forces. (The official Budget figures are 1959-60: Rs. 95.9 crores; 1960-61: Rs. 98.1 crores; 1961-62: Rs. 98.6 crores; 1962-63: Rs. 102.54 crores; and 1963-64: Rs. 112 crores.) This is double the figure for 1948-49. Besides these figures given under the head of defence expenditure, a part of the outlay on other ministries goes to the upkeep of the fighting forces. Especially the grants to the so-called Azad Government of Jammu and Kashmir are primarily for the maintenance of the Pakistan troops stationed in the area. With the total Central revenues amounting to about Rs. 350 crores, Pakistan has been spending between Rs. 120 crores and Rs. 130 crores annually on military preparations.

American aid which is the mainstay of Pakistan's military preparedness is in addition to the above. Washington does not disclose the actual amounts spent on equipping the Pakistan army and air force.<sup>2</sup> A part of the

<sup>2</sup> During the CENTO Ministerial Council meeting in Karachi in April 1963 the Pakistani spokesman reportedly complained that the military assistance to his country was not adequate. American journalists then in Karachi reported in that context that the value of the military hardware so far made available to Pakistan was 1.2 billion American dollars or about Rs. 600 crores. The total aid, both military and economic, was put at three billion American dollars.

*Cf.* “The value of military aid Pakistan receives from the United States under the Mutual Security Agreement has never been officially disclosed, but according to semi-official reports, American contribution to Pakistan's defence expenditure matches Pakistan's allocations from her own resources. On this basis, Pakistan should be getting a military aid of Rs. 112 crores

expenditure on this count is included in the domestic defence budget on the ground that American troops are stationed in the country or in the region which includes West Pakistan, Iran and Turkey or East Pakistan and Thailand. But it has been stated by American official spokesmen that military aid was as much as the economic assistance given to Pakistan. This works out to about 1.5 billion dollars or Rs. 650 crores between 1954 and 1962.

It is impossible for India to match such outlay nor is it necessary for peace-loving nations to spend such sums on the fighting forces. But our *per capita* expenditure on defence has been as low as Rs. 12 as against Rs. 400 in Britain and Rs. 1,500 in the U.S.A.

It will be instructive to note how Britain reacted, in policy terms, to the outbreak of hostilities in Korea. The first phase of the war from June 1950 to the end of the year when China formally entered the fray was the time when the Labour Government in Britain undertook a heavy rearmament programme. Expenditure on defence had been steadily reduced in the years following the Second World War. It came down from £1,500 million in 1946 to £770 million in 1949 (i.e. from about Rs. 2,028 crores to nearly Rs. 1,001 crores).

The first and foremost step of the British Government after it became a party to the Korean conflict was to raise the pay of the armed forces personnel. This cost the exchequer £35 million a year more (Rs. 46 crores). An additional £1,000 million (about Rs. 1,500 crores) went into the cost of equipment and increased arms production over a period of three years. This was roughly equal to the total Central revenues in India from 1954 to 1960. And the Korean war did not pose an immediate or direct

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including the increase of Rs. 10 crores Pakistan has now estimated." *Press Trust of India* report dated June 9, 1963, from Rawalpindi.

threat to Britain. Soon the island was caught in an economic and political crisis but rearmament went on.

Theoretically two ways were open to India after she became free: to disband the fighting forces altogether or to keep them in fighting trim. India could have said that non-violence was not merely a policy of the ruling party but a creed for the nation and demobilised the fighting forces. That would have been an idealistic step. It is difficult to say if other countries, especially Pakistan and China, would have respected our ideal and stayed away from our territory. It cannot also be said with certitude that in the event of an aggressor violating our territory we would have been able to "resist" him non-violently or whether our idealism would have evoked such a response in the world outside that a United Nations force would have defended our freedom.

A Jayaprakash Narayan or a Ram Manohar Lohia can advocate such policies and confidently predict their success. But more worldly mortals like us cannot soar such lofty heights.

Therefore, the only course really open to India was to build up her defences. The Indian Army, as we inherited it from the British Government, had a limited purpose. In the words of the Garran Tribunal of 1933 its main functions were "protection of Indian frontiers against *local* aggression and maintenance of internal security" [emphasis added]. The Garran Award further clarified that "though the scale of the forces is not calculated to meet external attack by a great Power their duties might well comprise the *initial resistance* of such an attack pending the arrival of Imperial reinforcements" [emphasis added].

By 1937 the scope was slightly widened but defence of India still remained the white man's burden. The

new functions of the Indian Army were: "The defence of her land frontiers against aggression by a second class Power; initial operation with available forces and pending the arrival of Imperial reinforcements; protection of her land frontiers against aggression by a first class Power." The catch lies in the semantic difference between defence and protection. One is the work of a soldier, the other the duty of a sentry. In other words, the Indian troops could defend the land border between India and "a second class Power" but they could only mount guard on a land frontier separating the country from "a first class Power."

In 1938-39, on the eve of the Second World War, the Chatfield Committee regarded the Imperial outposts as bastions of India's external defences. After some of these outposts had fallen to Japan the Allied fighting forces took over the responsibility of safeguarding our shores. Thus neither the outbreak of a world war which enveloped a part of our territory nor the initial British and American setbacks in East Asia brought about a change in the character of the Indian Army. Only its numerical strength rose from about 250,000 to nearly two million between May 1940 and December 1943. Thirty-five new infantry battalions had been raised between June and November 1940 and the Indian Army earned the appellation of the largest voluntary force.

Though the Modernisation Committee with the then Major-General Auchinleck as Chairman had recommended "wider use of mechanisation" the Army remained essentially a manual force. At the height of World War II only three divisions, the sixth, ninth and tenth, were "on the higher scale of mechanisation".

Cessation of hostilities had brought down the strength of the Indian Army to 1.8 million in July 1945. Parti-

tion further depleted its strength and fighting power. Especially the mechanised units were affected.

The task of independent India was, therefore, to regroup the fighting men and equip them adequately. The Pakistani-inspired invasion of Kashmir underscored the necessity of a strong standing army.

I asked some Army officers who among free India's defence ministers (excluding Mr. Y. B. Chavan) had done most for the building up and modernisation of the Army. They had no doubt that Sardar Baldev Singh, India's first Defence Minister, had done the most in that direction. Next they put Mr. N. Gopaldaswami Ayyangar. According to their rating, Mr. Krishna Menon, who held the portfolio during a crucial period, was at the rock bottom, below even Dr Kailash Nath Katju.

The late Mr. Baldev Singh, firstly, was no stranger to the fighting forces. He might not have brought about revolutionary changes in the Army nor weaned the troops away from the British traditions but he helped their consolidation. Not being a politician with over-reaching ambitions, he did not, like one of his successors, create lobbies and groups inside the fighting forces.

Mr. Gopaldaswami Ayyangar brought into play his great administrative talent. Beyond laying down policies he did not interfere in the day-to-day working of the Services. He had no cohorts to promote or enemies to destroy.

Mr. Krishna Menon's performance was, on the other hand, disastrous. Unable to evolve a rational policy, he interfered with the routine of the fighting forces. Without introducing an alternative system of discipline he tended to undermine the jawan's traditional loyalty to his officers. He fostered cliques, sowed dissensions and

fought his power-political battles in the Defence Headquarters.

It is not my contention that all of Mr. Krishna Menon's protégés are unworthy of the responsibilities thrust on them though later events have proved many of them to be so. But a young nation like ours which is not surfeit in military talent needed to make the best use of the Army leadership available in the country. Already the Army was short of officers—as many as 600. It was different with Pakistan where a military *coup* claimed casualties among the top brass in the barracks. When military men play politics the vanquished pay with their lives and careers. Not so in India. The Services have always accepted the supremacy of the civilian authority composed of politicians. There was, therefore, no need to drag the Army officers into the political arena.

This brings us to the oft-asked question whether the decision to clear NEFA of Chinese intruders was military or political. Some of those who during the Thimayya-Krishna Menon controversy upheld the supremacy of the politician over the man in uniform have suggested that it was a military decision. But how could it be so in a set-up like ours? All decisions whether their repercussions be military or economic are political.

It was sought to be explained away that the decision was taken on the basis of a military appraisal of the situation. This would first of all raise the pertinent question: since when did Mr. Krishna Menon start seeking and accepting the advice of the Chiefs of Staff in defence matters? Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul, who was then Chief of General Staff and was later made the Corps Commander at Tezpur, was reported to have given it in writing that our defences were not adequate to resist a Chinese onslaught there and then.

Subsequent developments also do not substantiate the theory that the Army had advised confrontation with the Chinese. Even if the Army authorities had underrated the Chinese strength they would not have kept their house in such a state of disorder and yet advised a show-down. If any of the former leaders of the Army are guilty of such a casual approach to national defence there is no need to protect them and shield their reputations, if any.

The years of no occupation since Independence seem to have given rise to a new class of Army officers who can collude with politicians to land the country in the straits in which it found itself last September-October. Since qualities of head and heart ceased to be a passport to promotion for military officers—war and fighting having been ruled out—the more ambitious among them started currying favour with the politicians.

August 1962 appeared most propitious for the pastime. The Chinese menace was growing day by day. But the political predilection in New Delhi was that the Chinese did not want war. The people at large did not share this illusion. Small but vocal groups in Parliament, including several Congress M.P.s, were chafing at the Government's inaction. The Press, too, was in no mood to condone defeatism.

In such circumstances a General with an eye on the future need only tell the Ministers that a network of border posts plus half-hearted preparations for "positional warfare"—Gen. Kaul's pet phrase in those days—would contain the Chinese. The harassed policy-makers would have jumped at it. Since they were convinced of Chinese "pacifism" or abhorrence of war with India such a show of simulated strength, they would have calculated, would without provoking the enemy silence the

critics at home. Did not the liberation of Goa, Diu and Daman win the crucial north Bombay election for the party?

Supporters of Mr. Krishna Menon have been lately spreading the story that the former Defence Minister's was the lone voice raised in the Cabinet against "provocative" defence preparations near the McMahon Line. But a Communist leader of the Dange faction told me that on hearing of our defence preparations he had tried to plead with Mr. Krishna Menon against such "*provocations*" but the latter bluntly told him off. He did not want to learn military strategy from "book worm Marxists". The political line then was anxious to strike but afraid to wound. When the Army entered the fray such tight-rope walking became impossible.

It used to be said openly in New Delhi then that since the Chinese at the Thag La ridge did not number more than a battalion a brigade should clear them with ease. The large enemy build-up on the other side of the border was ignored.

Piecing the foregoing together it seems that politically ambitious Generals have misled the politicians into complacency. Since some of these Army officers were creatures of the former Defence Minister—he was fond of saying that he wanted 'loyal' but not competent officers—he can be justifiably called the centre of the vicious circle. It is also not impossible that, having started it, Mr. Krishna Menon could have ostensibly spoken against military measures in NEFA when the issue came up before the Cabinet sub-committee. If subsequent developments substantiated his faith in the Chinese reluctance to fight India, he would have claimed it as another feather in his cap. If they resulted in a fiasco, as they actually did, he could have turned back and said: "I told you so."



There seemed to be also wheels within wheels. By September 1962 Lt.-Gen. Kaul had apparently fallen from Mr. Krishna Menon's grace. He was holidaying in Kashmir when he was asked to command the Corps at Tezpur. So it is possible the politician having used the General to divide and rule the Army wanted to get rid of him. Nothing could have led so easily to such a consummation as putting him in charge of such a hopeless operation.

There is a school of thought among Army leaders and politicians that while the McMahon Line could be the political frontier an alignment more or less congruent with the Chinese 1960 claim line and running along the crest of the foot hills should represent the defence boundary. In other words, they think the aggressor can be better resisted in the plains than on the mountains of NEFA. I have alluded to this theory in the earlier chapters and have also discussed the advantages and disadvantages, from the military point of view, of fighting in the mountains.

But when the enemy lays claim to a mountainous territory and backs it up with armed force a showdown with him in the area coveted by him becomes inevitable. If we let the Chinese come in up to the foot hills or their 1960 claim line, how do we dislodge them without fighting in that terrain? Even if we check their advance at the foot hills, won't NEFA become another Aksai Chin or "Azad Kashmir"? Won't it be more difficult to push them out then than it would be to prevent their penetration earlier?

If the Chinese aim is to roll further down and occupy more territory it will be a different matter. A convincing defeat in the plains will knock the bottom of their earlier aggression and deprive them of the illgotten terri-

tory. If, on the other hand, the enemy stays put in NEFA as he has in Aksai Chin and Pakistan has in a part of Kashmir and employs other weapons in his variegated armoury, like subversion, to bring about a political change in New Delhi, how does the Indian Army stationed along the foot hills thwart his designs without fighting in the hill area? It was a different situation in which Switzerland had prepared herself in 1941/42 to let the Nazis occupy a part of her territory. It was part of a grand strategy on either side. The Swiss knew that Hitler had the conquest of Europe, if not the whole world, on his agenda of aggression and also that the Allies would ultimately strike back.

A discussion on the Chinese war aims becomes apposite here. Many theories are advanced making a process of elimination necessary. That the Chinese were not interested in NEFA but had occupied a part of it to use it as a bargaining counter to make India give up, *de jure*, the Aksai Chin plateau has already been shown to be an untenable theory. Without the Aksai Chin highway the aggression against NEFA would have been nearly impossible. If a link with their Tibetan colony was the prime consideration of the Chinese, they would prefer a road through the Lohit Frontier Division because it would be nearer and less vulnerable to tampering by the Tibetans. It would also be less affected by snow than the Aksai Chin highway.

The political reason for the Chinese aggression is said to be to remove India from their path to domination or leadership of Asia and Africa. This is a hang-over of the American-induced belief that the competing systems of democracy and Communism are fighting for the mind of Asia and Africa. And India and China are believed to represent the contenders respectively. A few months

before the October aggression of the Chinese I had spent some time in Burma and Ceylon. Earlier I was in Pakistan. Recently I had been to Nepal. Parliamentary democracy is not regarded in these countries, including Ceylon, as the beau-ideal. Very few people in these countries are genuinely enamoured of the democratic system. Many of those who vouch lip sympathy for the system, like the East Pakistani critics of President Ayub Khan in Pakistan, the supporters of U Nu in Burma, the United National Party in Ceylon and the K. I. Singh Group in Nepal, are the dispossessed vested interests in the political sense. If put back in power, they will be no more tolerant of non-conformism than the present regimes in these countries. So this is a slender thread binding India to these neighbours. The situation cannot be far different in Africa.

Economically, India evokes in these countries both envy and indifference. She is accused of cornering a lion's share of the foreign assistance—both eastern and western, though primarily American—and of trying to develop her economy unmindful of the interests of her neighbours. On the other hand, the "spectacular" progress of the Chinese economy inspires awe and admiration in these peoples. In textile trade, which was until recently an Indian monopoly, Chinese are offering stiff competition in Burma, Ceylon and even Nepal. In 1957 it was claimed that China exported 600 million yards (about 550 million metres) of cotton textile cloth. This would be roughly ten per cent of her total cloth output.

Between 1950 and 1958 China's foreign trade had risen in value from about Rs. 850 crores to nearly Rs. 2,300 crores. By 1959 she had signed trade agreements not only with India but also with Afghanistan, Burma, Cam-

bodia, Ceylon, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, the Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria) and Yemen. She had a barter arrangement with Pakistan. Peking's trade with non-Communist countries, which were mostly Asian-African States, was of the order of Rs. 500 crores annually in 1957. "Between 1954 and 1957, Peking's trade with the underdeveloped non-Communist countries in the Far East (East Asia) and South-East Asia increased by over 75 per cent, at a rate more than three times as fast as the increase in Japan's trade with the same region in the same period."<sup>3</sup>

Export of manufactured and capital goods fetches the political dividend of prestige in the developing countries. The paeans of praise showered on Chinese locomotives in Ceylon was an instance in point. There was no doubt that India lagged behind in this respect.

Militarily that Peking was a giant was well known in the Asian-African countries even before the October aggression in NEFA. That further confirmed it. Against this background of facts of life, it is wishful thinking to assess India as a fly in the ointment for the regime in Peking bent on "dominating" Asia and Africa.

Another theory is that it hurt China to see India non-aligned and that, therefore, she embarked on military aggression to drive India into either of the *blocs*. If so, nothing could have achieved it so easily as pursuing the thrust into Assam last November. With her territorial integrity and freedom at stake India would not have hesitated to do anything to check the Chinese advance. If, hypothetically speaking, India still refused western military assistance, she would have been overrun by the Communist armies and integrated into the Communist *bloc*.

<sup>3</sup> *Communist China and Asia* by A. Doak Barnett, Vintage Books, New York.

So if that was the Chinese objective they would not have halted at Foothills in the Kameng Frontier Division and brought into play the ceasefire tactics.

The process of elimination leads us to the heart of the Chinese intentions which are political. Peking is impatient about the spread of Communism in this part of the world. At the 81 Communist Parties' Conference in Moscow in 1960, the Chinese were said to have taunted the late Mr. Ajoy Kumar Ghosh, the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, about the dismissal of the Communist Ministry in Kerala. After that experience, they wanted to know if the C.P.I. would still pursue "parliamentary means."

The Chinese also evidently expected a political collapse in New Delhi in the wake of their military thrust. Like their swift and relatively easy progress on the battle front, the tremendous political upheaval in support of Nehru in India and the failure of the majority of the Communists in India to practise "revolutionary defeatism" (which in effect means rising in revolt against the Government at home so that the "socialist" aggressor can have a walk over) must have surprised the Chinese leaders. A military conquest of the whole of India not being on the agenda here and now—and also not being possible—the Chinese switched over to the next phase in their tactics.

A long lull in fighting coupled with a political stalemate will bring back complacency and lethargy in New Delhi. The Communists and their friends can campaign against taxation and restraints on certain kinds of public activity in the name of the under dog and without appearing to be helping the enemy.

Finally is the defence of NEFA linked militarily with the situation in Tibet? That was how the British had

visualised it when they ruled the sub-continent. But we cannot afford that luxury. We have to co-exist with a Chinese-occupied Tibet. There is little prospect of another Tibetan uprising and far less chances of any such effort succeeding. The Tibetans are being outnumbered by Hans in their own homeland.

A policy of persistent defence build-up without illusions and inhibitions alone can safeguard our frontiers. More troops, better equipment, stiffer training, a cool, collected but determined leadership and a vigilant and patriotic population will enable us to live down the stigma of October-November 1962 and free our territory of aggressors. We have all these ingredients. Only we have to press them into national service.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DANGEROUS STALEMATE

AN enemy like Peking cannot be fought on the battlefield alone. His tactics, immediate as well as long-term, have to be understood and matched. A perspicacious observer of men and matters like Mr. Frank Anthony, M.P., said in the Lok Sabha that the "dismissal" of Mr. Krishna Menon as Defence Minister had stopped the Chinese in their tracks. The Defence Minister, Mr. Y. B. Chavan, thought that the unity forged by the nation and the solidarity displayed by the people in the face of the aggression had made the Chinese turn back from Foot Hills.<sup>1</sup>

I wish either of these explanations were totally true. While Mr. Anthony's assertion can be dismissed as a product of political prejudice—a dangerous attitude of mind in defence matters—the Defence Minister's opinion can at best be a platitude. If the Chinese aim was annexation of more or all of Indian territory, here and now, neither the "dismissal" of Mr. Krishna Menon—assuming that the enemy banked on his help from within—nor even the banning of the Communist Party and the total stoppage of all its activities—overt and covert—would have deflected them from their course. Similarly, while our national solidarity might have dashed to the ground the enemy's ideas of an easy walk over, an amorphous

<sup>1</sup> Debate on the NEFA reverses—September 21, 1963.

entity like spontaneous popular upsurge would not remain deflated for all time. If the enemy had pressed home his initial military gains the mass enthusiasm for national defence generated by his treacherous and sudden attack would not have remained at its original height.

Following the Chinese withdrawal, we, the visiting newspapermen, asked officials of the NEFA Administration what according to them must have been the reaction of the tribals to the enemy occupation. One of them, who had better remain anonymous, realistically replied that it would be kidding ourselves to think that the tribals, to a man, detested the army of occupation and menaced it. A large number of them were indifferent and so must have reconciled themselves to the yellow imperialism. A conscious minority with a strong will to freedom must have made things difficult for the enemy. And it is on the cards that a few mercenaries and enemy agents collaborated with him.

It happens in all countries and under all climes. Even when the Londoners' will to resist was being steeled by Hitler's *blitz* there were these three categories among the inhabitants of the British metropolis. And it would have been the case in a Calcutta or New Delhi under enemy attack. While active Communists and those employed by them would have helped the enemy another minority would be resisting the Chinese at every step. Such is the stuff civilian populations are made of.

"Spirit can often be weighed against planes," the late Mahadev Desai had said in 1942. But besides spirit, well-trained and adequately equipped fighting forces would be required to checkmate and defeat a powerful and well-prepared invader. On November 21, 1962, when Peking announced its decision to withdraw "unilaterally" our



fighting forces were not in such a state of preparedness.<sup>2</sup>

At the outset, it must be noted that while in our country the civilian authority the supremacy of which is unquestioned has very limited, if at all, knowledge of military matters and the fighting forces scrupulously keep away from politics, Mao Tse-tung "is the most distinguished of the Communists who have given military theory their concentrated and continuous attention."<sup>3</sup> No doubt, Marx and Engels had written articles in the *New York Tribune* on the Crimean War. But they were believed to have come from the pen of General Winfield Scott who subsequently ran for the U.S. Presidency. Stalin had commented on Clausewitz but we have it on the authority of Nikita Khrushchev that the whilom Soviet dictator did not know how to read a military map! (And we have to believe the latest version of "socialist" truth.) In the words of Katzenbach, having led in war a nation which was not industrialised Mao Tse-tung had done for anti-industrial warfare what Lenin contributed to the understanding of imperialism.

As a western writer put it, Mao's military problem was how to organise *space* so that it could be made to yield *time*. His political task was to make *time* yield *will*. Given the vast manpower at his command, the accomplishment of these tasks through *organisation* can make Mao invincible. He does not believe in a short and swift war but a protracted struggle. The lightning action, as in the case of NEFA, is but the first phase because, whether initially successful or otherwise, he is for "avoiding a military decision." Mao wrote in 1936:

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The Communist M.P., Mr. Inderjit Gupta's gibe in the Lok Sabha (September 21, 1963) that it was not because of the Indian Army that the Chinese decided to withdraw.

<sup>3</sup> E. L. Katzenbach, Jr., in *The Guerrilla—And How To Fight Him* (Frederick A. Praeger, New York).

“The ten-year revolutionary war we have fought may be surprising to other countries, but for us it is only like the presentation, amplification and preliminary exposition of the theme (of avoiding a military decision) in an . . . essay with many exciting paragraphs yet to follow. . . . Our War of Resistance cannot be quickly won and can only be a protracted war. . . . As a distant journey tests the strength of a horse and a long task proves the character of a man (so) guerilla warfare will demonstrate its enormous power in the course of a long and ruthless war. . . .”

The protracted war, according to Mao, passes through three stages, the “strategic defence” (the army is called frontier guards or volunteers in this period), the stalemate, a period of preparation for his men and confusion for the victims, and, finally, the shift to the offensive. During the first period of the war, the army takes an active political role. “When the Red Army fights, it fights not merely for the sake of fighting, but to agitate the masses, and to help them establish revolutionary political power; apart from such objectives, fighting loses its meaning and the Red Army the reason for its existence.”

The first stage slips into the second because, in Mao’s words, the Communists have by now “retreated in space but advanced in time.”<sup>4</sup>

The stalemate starts. Mao does not mince words about this phase of the struggle. In his view, countries with legislative bodies cannot fight a war of attrition either financially or psychologically. When the financial burden of defence mounts, when a long lull in fighting lulls politicians into a mood to settle old scores the ability to fight of the troops at the front is sapped. This phase of

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

war, Mao says, is the cheapest for him and the most expensive for the "enemy."

Applying the theory to the situation now prevailing in our country, the feelings of the jawans guarding the border can be gauged when day in and day out newspapers and radio bulletins speak of agitations by goldsmiths and others, "marches" by Communists against taxes, charges and counter-charges of corruption, operation of the so-called Kamaraj Nadar plan with its rich harvest of political confusion and bickerings and, last but not least, the Colombo proposals and the possibility of negotiations with the enemy. A nation does not fight this way. Last year's aggression, the ruthless enemy massed on the border and the unscrupulous elements at home playing the Chinese game are made to be forgotten—at least for the nonce. It was in anticipation of this Bedlam that the enemy withdrew "unilaterally."

Indo-China's example illustrates the point further. After a three-week invasion the Communists accomplished the following: (a) terror had been struck in the French civil and military authorities in both Indo-China and metropolitan France, (b) the French forces had been made to spread themselves more thinly than even before along an extended front, (c) the urge for autonomy and political freedom had been spurred in the hearts of the people of Laos and Cambodia, (d) the French expenditure on military preparations in Indo-China had gone up by about Rs. 30 crores, and (e) the United States had to foot an additional bill of nearly Rs. 230 crores as assistance to the French. Even the fall of Dien Bien Phu did not achieve such lasting results!

It has become customary for our politicians to wax sentimental about the blessings in disguise flowing from the Chinese aggression. The usual items of political

unity, national solidarity, etc. are listed on the credit side of the ledger. But it is conveniently overlooked that "guerilla warfare, mounted from external bases—with rights of sanctuary—is a terrible burden to carry for any government in a society making its way toward modernization. For instance, it requires somewhere between ten and twenty soldiers to control one guerilla in an organised operation."<sup>5</sup>

The summing up of the Indo-China war by General Vo Nguyen Giap of North Viet Nam<sup>6</sup> sounds the tocsin for all present and potential victims of such type of aggression. He says: "Such was the essence of the strategic direction of the Dien Bien Phu campaign and of the winter-spring campaign as a whole. Its main object was the destruction of enemy manpower. It took full advantage of *the contradictions in which the enemy was involved* and developed to the utmost the spirit of active offensive of the revolutionary army. This correct, clear-sighted and bold strategy enabled us to deprive the enemy of *all possibility of retrieving the initiative, and to create favourable conditions to fight a decisive battle on a battlefield chosen and prepared for by us*. The strategic direction ensured the success of the whole winter-spring campaign which was crowned by the great victory of Dien Bien Phu" [emphasis added].

One year after the massive thrust into NEFA we have yet to regain the military initiative and there is still no prospect of our joining battle with the enemy on a soil of our own choice.

<sup>5</sup> *Guerilla Warfare in Underdeveloped Areas* by W. W. Rostow (Praeger).

<sup>6</sup> *People's War, People's Army*, by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap.

## CHAPTER IX

### POSTSCRIPT

WHEN Mao Tse-tung belittled the capacity of countries with legislatures to wage long-drawn-out wars he could not have had India particularly in mind. But the excursion by Members of Parliament into matters military during the recent monsoon (August-September 1963) session showed us living up to his expectations.

Early in the session, taking advantage of a debate on a no-confidence motion Mr. Krishna Menon expatiated on the virtues of the policies pursued during his tenure of Defence Ministership. He said: "In 1959 the Chinese brought their act of betrayal more to the surface. *From that time onwards it would be not a bold but an ignorant or reckless man alone, who has no regard for history who can say that we were inactive.* During 1959 to 1962 thousands of square miles of territories which have been under the exclusive dominance of China was (were) brought, not under our occupation, but in such a way as our presence was established and Chinese aggression was checked. This was in Ladakh"<sup>1</sup> [emphasis added].

But the present Defence Minister, Mr. Y. B. Chavan, who, unlike Mr. Krishna Menon, did not have to defend past lapses, had a different story to tell when he made the statement on the "state of military unpreparedness"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, August 22, 1963, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2.

on September 2, 1963. He disclosed that "our training of the troops did not have a slant for a war being launched by China," that "there was indeed an overall shortage of equipment both for training and during operations," that the practice had crept in "in the higher Army formations of interfering in tactical details even to the extent of detailing troops for specified tasks" and that "the *collection* of intelligence in general was not satisfactory."

But a week earlier Mr. Krishna Menon was saying "it is not the time to go into these matters, whether we take equipment or anything else." Referring to the criticism that "the Government machine makes coffee pots and, therefore, cannot make guns," Mr. Krishna Menon had cited the example of Australia "where they turned out of their ordnance factories not only coffee pots but something else also."<sup>3</sup> He, however, cleverly evaded the basic issue that weaponry for the Australian army—or for that matter the Pakistan army as I have pointed out earlier—was not in short supply whereas such was the case in our country.

Mr. Krishna Menon went on to say: "We were prepared for it (the Chinese aggression). From 1959 onwards that preparation was going on. But let it not be forgotten that the Chinese army has been fighting for the last 35 years and it consists, as far as we know, of 150 divisions of men. It is not a factor which should frighten us because a country, large or small, whether it has strength or otherwise, must resist.

"It was said the other day that political decisions have been taken to resist the Chinese in NEFA. I beg' with great respect to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; and to the House, to ask who else could make the decision to fight against a country except those who can make political

<sup>3</sup> Lok Sabha speech, August 22, 1963.

decisions. . . . And for myself, and I feel sure the Government will make no apologies for the assertion of civilian control over the Army.”<sup>4</sup>

But the enquiry into the NEFA reverses revealed a different picture. Mr. Chavan put it euphemistically when he said that “even the largest and the best equipped of armies need to be given *proper* guidance and major directives by the Government whose instrument it is”<sup>5</sup> [emphasis added].

Politicians, even if some of them are or were policy-makers, differing from each other is no novelty, especially in our country. It does not require much research to cull from Mr. Krishna Menon’s past speeches and statements assertions that a war with China was unthinkable and that, therefore, there was no need to prepare for it and that Pakistan was our *only* enemy. But the more sinister part of the argument was putting the blame on the fighting forces while, in the same breath, reiterating civilian control over the Army.

The Communist speaker, Mr. Inderjit Gupta, spelt it out less ambiguously. He said: “I want to know whether it was Lt.-Gen. Kaul or not who advised the Prime Minister on this question of adopting the forward policy, which was reflected in that famous statement of the Prime Minister (that he had ordered his troops to throw out the Chinese). He should have been in a position to know the real state of our preparedness and our military equipment and so on *vis-a-vis* the Chinese. Did he or did he not give this advice that we were strong enough to carry out probing movements? Was he or was he not responsible for the movement of troops from Towang to Dhola which led to the immediate attack? We may have

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2.

been lulling ourselves into complacency thinking that probing attacks would not invite a big counter-attack, but who was responsible we would like to know, because we have been told here continually that somebody sitting in armchairs in Delhi sent out orders there and pressurised the Army Command into doing something which, left to itself, it would not have done. My knowledge is not that " \* [emphasis added].

Let us for the moment ignore the innuendo that the Chinese aggression of last winter was in the nature of a counter-attack provoked by our " probing movements " and " forward policy." More mischievous is the unconcealed effort to shift the blame on to retired Generals who could not defend themselves in the House and white-wash the role of politicians who have a ready forum in Parliament.<sup>7</sup> Mr. Krishna Menon, significantly, did not participate in the debate on the NEFA reverses though in fairness to himself and his critics he should have summoned moral courage to do so.

Lt.-Gen. Kaul reportedly did not defend Mr. Krishna Menon in his evidence before Lt.-Gen. Henderson Brooks and Brig. Prem Bhagat who conducted the military inquiry into the NEFA reverses. Secondly, in the penultimate stage of his military career, Lt.-Gen. Kaul had fallen from Mr. Krishna Menon's grace. He was on a vacation in Kashmir when the Prime Minister recalled him and put him in control of the Corps at Tezpur. Further,

\* Lok Sabha speech, September 21, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. The following excerpt from Mr. Krishna Menon's speech in the no-confidence debate on August 22, 1963: " At no time, to my knowledge, has any member of the Government or the Government collectively or the administration given any instructions to any commander or any military element of any kind which is not legitimately in his sphere. At no time has anyone had the stupidity to interfere with the deployment of troops or with what angle they should hold the gun or anything of that kind. It is ridiculous. . . ."



he had again reportedly differed from the policy-makers when, following a visit to the forward areas, he said that what was in store was not "positional warfare."

It is significant that the Communists and other defenders of Mr. Krishna Menon had never in the past questioned Lt. Gen. Kaul's capacity to be the Chief of General Staff. They never had any second thoughts about his meteoric rise on the military firmament. Now they have suddenly become aware of his clay feet and his unworthiness to head a task force. The quintessence of this argument is that the Army has only responsibility but no power because the supremacy of the civilian authority is reiterated over and over again. In other words, we are again lapsing into the unenviable days of the pre-aggression period.

Mr. Krishna Menon pleaded the alibi of inadequate funds but his critics, notably Mr. Prakash Vir Shastri in the Lok Sabha and Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the Rajya Sabha pointed out that there were recurring shortfalls in expenditure.

Summing up, it would have been better if the NEFA enquiry report had not been published in such a summarised form. The political debate on it has only added insult to the injury.

## Appendix I

[EXCERPT FROM THE REPORT OF THE OFFICIALS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON THE BOUNDARY QUESTION, MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.]

### *Clarifications sought by the Chinese side.*

#### *Eastern Sector*

**Question 1:** What were the co-ordinates of the point south of the Mela Pass where the Indian alignment turned east, as stated in the Indian side's description?

**Answer:** The point south of the Mela Pass where the Indian alignment lay east was approximately Long.  $91^{\circ} 40'$  minutes E and Lat.  $27^{\circ} 48'$  N.

**Q2:** How far south was Khinzemane from the Indian alignment and what were its co-ordinates?

**A:** Khinzemane was situated at Long.  $91^{\circ} 46'$  E and Lat.  $27^{\circ} 46'$  N and lay immediately south of the boundary which ran along the Thag La ridge.

**Q3:** At what point did the Indian alignment cross the Namjang river?

**A:** The boundary crossed the Nyamjang river east of Khinzemane.

**Q4:** What were the terrain features followed by the Indian alignment from the point south of the Mela Pass where it turned east to reach  $92^{\circ}$  East Longitude?

**A:** The boundary started at Teygala on the Mela ridge and ran along the Thag La ridge, crossed the Nyamjang east of Khinzemane and ran along the Zanglung ridge to Bum La. From Bum La the line ran along Nakchutpa range to Tsona Chu.

**Q5:** From  $91^{\circ} 40'$  E Long.,  $27^{\circ} 48'$  N Lat., how did the Indian alignment run along Tangla (Thag La)? Where were the turning points? What were the co-ordinates of the peaks and passes on this ridge?

**A:** From  $91^{\circ} 40'$  E Long.,  $27^{\circ} 48'$  N Lat., the Indian alignment ran along the crest of the Thag La ridge. It lay across the Thag La pass at approximately  $91^{\circ} 44'$  E Long.,  $27^{\circ} 46'$  N Lat.

**Q6:** What were the specific locations of Teygala, Zanglung ridge and Nakchutpa range?

**A:** Teygala was located at point  $91^{\circ} 40'$  E Long.,  $27^{\circ} 48'$  N Lat. Zanglung was the name given to the great Himalayas east of Nyamjang Chu. Nakchutpa was the name given to the Great Himalayas east of Bum La.

**Q7:** What was the direction in which the Tangla (Thag La) mountain range ran?

**A:** The ridge ran in a west north-west to east-south-east direction.

**Q8:** What were the co-ordinates of the Indian alignment where it crossed the Namjang?

**A:** The Indian alignment crossed the Nyamjang at approximately  $91^{\circ} 46'$  E Long., and  $27^{\circ} 46'$  N Lat.

**Q9:** What were the co-ordinates of the Indian alignment where it crossed the Tsona Chu?

**A:** The Indian alignment crossed Tsona Chu at approximately  $92^{\circ} 0'$  E Long.,  $27^{\circ} 44'$  N Lat.

**Q10:** On what terrain features were the three northward protrusions of the Indian alignment between  $92^{\circ}$  East and  $92^{\circ} 30'$  East Longitude based? What were the co-ordinates of the respective turning points?

**A:** The northward protrusions of the boundary between  $92^{\circ}$  East and  $92^{\circ} 30'$  East were based on the actual alignment of the crest of the Great Himalaya Range in this region. The peaks and the co-ordinates were:

18982 ( $92^{\circ} 16'$  E— $27^{\circ} 49'$  N)  
 18525 ( $92^{\circ} 16'$  E— $27^{\circ} 52'$  N)  
 19359 ( $92^{\circ} 20'$  E— $27^{\circ} 47'$  N)  
 21271 ( $92^{\circ} 23'$  E— $27^{\circ} 51'$  N)  
 21450 ( $92^{\circ} 24'$  E— $27^{\circ} 48'$  N)  
 21420 ( $92^{\circ} 26'$  E— $27^{\circ} 52'$  N)  
 20769 ( $92^{\circ} 27'$  E— $27^{\circ} 49'$  N)

**Q11:** At what point did the Indian alignment cross the Subansiri river and what were its co-ordinates?

**A:** The alignment crossed the Subansiri river at approximately Long.  $93^{\circ} 13'$  E and Lat.  $28^{\circ} 22'$  N).

**Q12:** How far south of Migyitun did the Indian alignment cross the Tsari river and what were

**A:** The alignment crossed the Tsari river immediately south of Migyitun at approximately

the co-ordinates of the crossing? What was the shortest distance between Tso Karpo and the Indian alignment? What were the terrain features followed by the Indian alignment in this portion?

Long.  $93^{\circ} 33'$  E and  $28^{\circ} 39'$  N. The shortest distance between Tso Karpo and the alignment was roughly about a mile and a half. The natural features followed in this region was the ridge separating the tributaries of the Tsari Chu south of Longju on the one hand and the Oto Chu flowing into the Tsari Chu north of Migyitun, and the Lilung Chu basin on the other.

*Q13:* What was the distance between Longju and Migyitun?

*A:* The distance between Longju and the alignment south of Migyitun was about two miles. Migyitun itself was in Tibet.

*Q14:* What were the terrain features followed by the Indian alignment from the point where it crossed the Tsari river? The co-ordinates and geographical features of some of the points along this portion of the Indian alignment might also be supplied.

*A:* After crossing the Subansiri river the alignment lay northward along the ridge west of the Pindigo river (flowing into the Subansiri); and then at about a point approximately Long.  $93^{\circ} 18'$  E and Lat.  $28^{\circ} 37'$  N, the alignment turned north-eastward along the ridge lying to the north-west of the Hariak river (flowing into the Tsari river) up to Peak 18056 feet (Long.  $93^{\circ} 32'$  E and Lat.  $28^{\circ} 41'$  N) whereafter it turned south-east and east to cross the Tsari Chu south of Migyitun.

*Q15:* What were the co-ordinates of the heights on the ridge separating the tributaries of Tsari Chu south of Longju on the one hand and the Oto Chu flowing into the Tsari Chu north of Migyitun and the Lilung Chu basin on the other? What were

*A:* Height 17599 feet (co-ordinates  $93^{\circ} 42'$  E Long.,  $28^{\circ} 40'$  N Lat.) was located on the ridge separating the tributaries of the Tsari Chu on the one hand and the Oto Chu flowing into the Tsari Chu north of Migyitun and the

the co-ordinates of the point nearest to the south of Tso Karpo?

*Q16:* At what place did the Pindigo river flow into the Subansiri river? At what place did Hariak river flow into the Tsari Chu? The Indian side might furnish the heights of peaks on the ridge west of the Pindigo river and their co-ordinates; and the heights of peaks on the ridge north-west of the Hariak river and their co-ordinates.

*Q17:* Was there a ridge between Longju and Migyitun? If so, what was its height in comparison with that of Longju?

*Q18:* Did the watershed pass between Longju and Migyitun or was the watershed here cut by the valley?

*Q19:* How far was the Indian alignment east and south of Tsari Sarpa? What were the co-ordinates of the point where the Indian alignment which had been going eastward turned northward?

Lilung Chu basin on the other. The co-ordinates of the point nearest to Tso Karpo were  $93^{\circ} 40'$  E Long.,  $28^{\circ} 40'$  N Lat.

*A:* The Pindigo river flowed for its whole course well within Indian territory and joined the Subansiri at  $93^{\circ} 16'$  E Long.,  $28^{\circ} 22'$  N Lat. The Hariak river also flowed for its whole course in Indian territory and joined the Tsari Chu at  $93^{\circ} 31'$  E Long.,  $28^{\circ} 37'$  N Lat. The heights of the ridges west of the Pindigo river and north-west of the Hariak river were about 16,000 feet.

*A:* Longju and Migyitun lay in the Tsari 'valley. The height of the intervening ridge was about 10,000 feet. The height of Longju was slightly over 9,000 feet.

*A:* The fact that a river cut through did not invalidate the principle of the watershed. The alignment ran along the watershed and at the point where the Tsari river broke through the line ran between Migyitun and Longju. The average height of the watershed in this area was about 15,000 feet.

*A:* The alignment was about four miles to the south and four miles to the east of Tsari Sarpa. The alignment turned northward at approximately Long.  $93^{\circ} 57'$  E, and Lat.  $28^{\circ} 40'$  N.

**Q20:** What were the terrain features followed by the Indian alignment south of Tsari Sarpa? If there were ridges the Indian side might furnish the heights of peaks and the co-ordinates.

**A:** South of Tsari Sarpa, the boundary followed the southern watershed of the Lilung Chu. This watershed was about 16,000 feet high.

**Q21:** What were the geographical features of the Indian alignment between  $93^{\circ} 30'$  East Longitude and Tunga pass?

**A:** Between  $93^{\circ} 30'$  E Long. and the Tunga pass the alignment lay along the ridges lying to the south of Tso Karpo and Tsari Sarpa and separating the basins of the Oto Chu and Lilung Chu in Tibet from the tributaries of the Subansiri in the south. From peak 16,454 feet (Long.  $93^{\circ} 59' 5''$  E, and Lat.  $8^{\circ} 48'$  N) the alignment lay through peak 16,894 (Long.  $94^{\circ} 2'$  E and Lat.  $28^{\circ} 51'$  N) along the crest of the Great Himalayan Range up to the Tunga Pass.

**Q22:** At what point did the Indian alignment cross the Tsangpo river, and what were the co-ordinates of the crossing?

**A:** The alignment reached the western bank of the Dihang at approximately Long.  $95^{\circ} 2'$  E and Lat.  $29^{\circ} 8'$  N (west of Korbo in India) and then, moving up along the midstream crossed over to the other side at approximately Long.  $94^{\circ} 59'$  E and Lat.  $29^{\circ} 10'$  N (west of Mongku in Tibet.)

**Q23:** What were the precise locations of the main turning points; and what were the heights and co-ordinates of the peaks and passes on the Indian alignment between the lower reaches of the Tsangpo (what the Indian side called the Dihang) river and the Tsayul (what the Indian side called the Lohit) river?

**A:** The following were some of the peaks located at or near the main turning points in the alignment between the Dihang and the Lohit rivers:

	Long.	Lat.
15720	$(95^{\circ} 27' \text{ E} - 29^{\circ} 2' \text{ N})$	
18484	$(96^{\circ} 05' \text{ E} - 29^{\circ} 28' \text{ N})$	
9700	$(96^{\circ} 24' \text{ E} - 29^{\circ} 15' \text{ N})$	
15899	$(96^{\circ} 07' \text{ E} - 29^{\circ} 05' \text{ N})$	
19430	$(96^{\circ} 32' \text{ E} - 29^{\circ} 04' \text{ N})$	

	<i>Long.</i>	<i>Lat.</i>
14917	(96° 17' E—	28° 23' N)
16061	(96° 48' E—	28° 20' N)
The main passes in this area were:		
Zikyon Pass:	Long. 95° 30' E	and Lat. 29° 06' N
Andra Pass:	Long. 95° 33' E	and Lat. 29° 09' N
Yonggyap Pass:	Long. 95° 36' E,	and Lat. 29° 13' N
Kangri Karpo Pass:	Long. 96° 5' E	and Lat. 29° 28' N
Aguia Pass:	Long. 96° 23' E	and Lat. 29° 13' N

**Q24:** At what point did the Indian alignment cross the Tsayul river, and what were the co-ordinates of the point of crossing?

**A:** The alignment crossed the Lohit river north of its junction with the Dichu at approximately Long. 97° 01' E, and Lat. 28° 19' N.

**Q25:** From the junction of the Tsayul river and the Tiso river up to Diphuk pass what terrain features did the Indian alignment follow? If they were mountain ridges, what kind of mountain ridges?

**A:** The alignment crossed the Krawnaon river at approximately 97° 01' E Long. and 28° 19' N Lat., lay on the opposite bank along the ridge separating the waters of the Latte and Dichu basins, and proceeded along the crest of the ridge to the mountain range at peak 15283 feet which was the trijunction of the boundaries of India, Burma and China. The co-ordinates were approximately 97° 23' E Long. and 28° 13' N Lat.

## *Appendix 2*

### STATEMENT BY THE DEFENCE MINISTER REGARDING NEFA ENQUIRY

THE Defence Minister, Mr. Y. B. Chavan, made the following statement in both Houses of Parliament on September 2, 1963:

1. Sir, I wish to inform the House of the results of the enquiry to investigate our reverses in the operations occasioned by the Chinese aggression across our northern borders during the months of October-November 1962.

2. Though the officers appointed to enquire into these reverses were asked to examine the operations with particular reference to the Kameng Division of NEFA, they quite rightly came to the conclusion that the developments in NEFA were closely correlated to those in Ladakh and their study of NEFA operations had to be carried out in conjunction with developments and operations in the Ladakh sector. Thus, the enquiry made and the conclusions emerging from it are results of study into the entire operations on our northern borders.

3. As I had informed the House on April 1, 1963, in reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, with my approval the Chief of Army Staff had ordered a thorough investigation to be carried out to find as to what was wrong with

- (i) our training;
- (ii) our equipment;
- (iii) our system of command;
- (iv) the physical fitness of our troops; and
- (v) the capacity of our Commanders at all levels to influence the men under them.

4. While conveying to the House the terms of reference of this enquiry, I had made it clear that the underlying idea in holding this enquiry was to derive military lessons. It was meant to bring out clearly what were the mistakes or deficiencies in the past so as to ensure that in future such mistakes are not repeated and such deficiencies are quickly made up. Consequently, the enquiring officers had to study in great and intimate detail the extent of our preparedness at the time, the planning and strategic concepts behind it and the way those plans were



adjusted in the course of operations. This also necessitated the examination of the developments and events prior to hostilities as also the plans, posture and the strength of the Army at the outbreak of hostility. In the course of the enquiry a very detailed review of the actual operations in both the sectors had to be carried out with reference to terrain, strategy, tactics and deployment of our troops.

5. The conclusions drawn at the end of the report flow from examination of all these matters in great detail. In these circumstances, I am sure, the House would appreciate that by the very nature of the contents it would not be in the public interest to lay the report on the table of the House. Nor is it possible to attempt even an abridged or edited version of it, consistent with the consideration of security, that would not give an unbalanced or incomplete picture to you.

6. I have given deep thought to this matter and it is with great regret that I have to withhold this document from this august House. The publication of this report which contains information about the strength and deployment of our forces and their locations would be of invaluable use to our enemies. It would not only endanger our security but affect the morale of those entrusted with safeguarding the security of our borders.

7. Before I turn to the main conclusions of this enquiry, may I bring to the notice of the House that I had already made clear that this enquiry is the type of enquiry which the Prime Minister had in mind when he promised such an enquiry to the House in November 1962, into the state of military unpreparedness to meet Chinese invasion? I would like to assure the House that we had at the outset made it clear to those who were entrusted with this enquiry, and they in turn made it clear to the persons whom they found necessary to examine, that our main intention was to derive lessons to help in our future preparedness and not in any way undertake a witch-hunt into the culpabilities of those who were concerned with or took part in these operations. This was absolutely essential to get a full, factual picture of the situation as it obtained in October-November 1962. I may specially mention this to remind the House that in considering these matters, we should never miss the proper sense of perspective or say or do things which could only give heart to the enemy and demoralise our own men. I have no doubt that the House would wish to ensure this spirit to be maintained.

8. The enquiring officers submitted their report to the Chief

of Army Staff on May 12, 1963. After obtaining some complementary information the Chief of Army Staff submitted this report along with his comments to me on July 2. Considering the enormous mass of details that had to be gone into with meticulous care by the enquiring officers, as I have myself seen, I would consider that the report has been completed with commendable speed.

9. The first question in the terms of reference was whether our training was found wanting.

The enquiry has revealed that our basic training was sound and soldiers adapted themselves to the mountains adequately. It is admitted that the training of our troops did not have orientation towards operations *vis-a-vis* the particular terrain in which the troops had to operate. Our training of the troops did not have a slant for a war being launched by China. Thus our troops had no requisite knowledge of the Chinese tactics, and ways of war, their weapons, equipment and capabilities. Knowledge of the enemy helps to build up confidence and morale, so essential for the jawan on the front.

10. The enquiry has revealed that there is certainly need for toughening and battle inoculation. It is, therefore, essential that battle schools are opened at training centres and formations, so that gradual toughening and battle inoculation can be carried out.

11. It has also revealed that the main aspect of training as well as the higher commanders' concept of mountain warfare requires to be put right.

12. Training alone, however, without correct leadership will pay little dividends. Thus the need of the moment, above all else, is training in leadership.

13. The second question was about our equipment. The enquiry has confirmed that there was indeed an overall shortage of equipment both for training and during operations. But it was not always the case that particular equipment was not available at all with the Armed Forces anywhere in the country. The crucial difficulty in many cases was that, while the equipment could be reached to the last point in the plains or even beyond it, it was another matter to reach it in time, mostly by air or by animal or human transport to the forward formations who took the brunt of fighting. This position of logistics was aggravated by two factors:

(i) The fast rate at which troops had to be inducted, mostly from plains to high mountain areas; and

(ii) Lack of properly built roads and other means of communications.

14. This situation was aggravated and made worse because of overall shortage as far as vehicles were concerned and as our fleet was too old and its efficiency *not* adequate for operating on steep gradients and mountain terrain.

15. Thus, in brief, though the enquiry revealed overall shortage of equipment, it has also revealed that our weapons were adequate to fight the Chinese and compared favourably with theirs. The automatic rifle would have helped in the cold climate and is being introduced. The enquiry has pinpointed the need to make up deficiency in equipment, particularly suited for mountain warfare, but more so to provide means and modes of communication to make it available to the troops at the right place, at the right time. Work on these lines has already been taken in hand and is progressing vigorously.

16. The third question is regarding our *system of command* within the armed forces. The enquiry has revealed that there is basically nothing wrong with the system and chain of command, provided it is exercised in accepted manner at various levels. There is, however, need for realisation of responsibilities at various levels, which must work with trust and confidence in each other. It is also revealed that during the operations, difficulties arose only when there was departure from accepted chain of command. There again, such departures occurred mainly due to haste and lack of adequate prior planning.

17. The enquiry has also revealed the practice that crept in the higher Army formations of interfering in tactical details even to the extent of detailing troops for specified tasks. It is the duty of commanders in the field to make on-the-spot decisions, when so required, and details of operations ought to have been left to them.

18. The fourth question is of physical fitness of our troops. It is axiomatic that an unacclimatised army cannot be as fit as one which is. The enquiry has revealed that, despite this, our troops, both officers and men, stood the rigours of the climate, although most of them were rushed at short notice from plains. Thus, in brief, troops were physically fit in every way for their normal tasks, but they were not acclimatised to fight at the heights at which some of them were asked to make a stand. Where acclimatisation had taken place, such as in Ladakh, the height factor presented no difficulty. Among some middle-age-group officers, there had been deterioration in standards of physical

fitness. This is a matter which is being rectified. The physical fitness among junior officers was good and is now even better.

19. The fifth point in the terms of reference was about the capacity of the commanders at all levels during these operations to influence the men under their command. By and large, it has been found that general standard amongst the junior officers was fair. At unit level there were good and mediocre commanding officers. The proportion of good commanding officers and not-so-good was perhaps the same as obtained in any army in the last world war. At Brigade level, but for the odd exception, commanders were able to adequately exercise their command. It was at higher levels that shortcomings became more apparent. It was also revealed that some of the higher commanders did not depend enough on the initiative of the lower commanders, who alone could have the requisite knowledge of the terrain and local conditions of troops under them.

20. Apart from these terms of reference, the enquiry went into some other important aspects pertaining to the operations, and I would like to inform the House about this also. This relates to the following three aspects:

- (i) Our intelligence;
- (ii) Our staff work and procedures; and
- (iii) Our "higher direction of operations".

21. As regards our system and organisation of intelligence, it would obviously not be proper for me to disclose any details. However, it is known that in the Army Headquarters, there is a Directorate of Intelligence under an officer designated as Director of Military Intelligence, briefly known as DMI.

22. The enquiry has brought out that the *collection* of intelligence in general was not satisfactory. The acquisition of intelligence was slow and the reporting of it vague.

23. Second important aspect of intelligence is its *collection and evaluation*. Admittedly, because of the vague nature of intelligence evaluation may not have been accurate. Thus a clear picture of the Chinese build-up was not made available. No attempt was made to link up the new enemy build-up with the old deployment. Thus field formations had little guidance whether there were fresh troops or old ones moving to new locations.

24. The third aspect is dissemination of intelligence. It has come out that much faster means must be employed to send out processed and important information to field formations, if it is to be of any use.

25. There is no doubt that a major overhauling of the intelligence system is required. A great deal has been done during the last six months. The overhauling of the intelligence system is a complex and lengthy task and, in view of its vital importance, I am paying personal attention to this.

26. Now about our staff work and procedures. There are clear procedures of staff work laid down at all levels. The enquiry has however revealed that much more attention will have to be given, than was done in the past, to the work and procedures of the General Staff at the Services Headquarters, as well as in the Command Headquarters and below, to long-term operational planning, including logistics as well as to the problems of co-ordination between various Services Headquarters. So, one major lesson learnt is that the quality of General Staff work, and the depth of its prior planning in time, is going to be one of the most crucial factors in our future preparedness.

27. That brings me to the next point which is called the higher direction of operations. Even the largest and the best equipped of armies need to be given proper policy guidance and major directives by the Government, whose instrument it is. These must bear a reasonable relation to the size of the army and state of its equipment from time to time. An increase in the size or improving the equipment of army costs not only money but also needs time.

28. The reverses that our armed forces admittedly suffered were due to a variety of causes and weaknesses as stated above. While this enquiry has gone deeply into those causes it has also confirmed that the attack was so sudden and in such remote and isolated sectors that the Indian Army as a whole was really not tested. In that period of less than two months last year, only about 24,000 of our troops were actually involved in fighting. Of these, those in Ladakh did an excellent job even when overwhelmed and outnumbered. In the eastern-most sector, though the troops had to withdraw in the face of vastly superior enemy strength from Walong, they withdrew in an orderly manner and took their toll. It was only in the Kameng sector that the Army suffered a series of reverses. These battles were fought on our remotest borders and were at heights not known to the Army and at places which geographically had all the disadvantages for our troops and many advantages for the enemy. But such initial reverses are a part of the tides of war and what matters most is who wins the last battle.

29. Before I end, I would like to add a word about the

famous "Fourth Division", which took part in these operations. It is indeed sad that this famous Division had to sacrifice its good name in these series of reverses. It is still sadder that this Division during the actual operations was only "Fourth Division" in name, for it was not fighting with its original formations intact. Troops from different formations had to be rushed to the borders to fight under the banner of the "Fourth Division", while the original formations of the Division itself were deployed elsewhere. I am confident, and I am sure the House would share with me that the famous "Fourth Division" would live to win many more battles if there is any future aggression against our country.

30. Before I conclude, I would like to mention that we have certainly not waited for this report to be in our hands to take corrective action. The process of taking corrective action had started simultaneously with the institution of this enquiry and the House would recollect that I had informed it of the same.

31. What happened at Se La and Bomdi La was severe reverses for us, but we must remember that other countries with powerful defence forces have sometimes suffered in the initial stages of a war. The aggressor has a certain advantage, more especially when the aggression is sudden and well-prepared. We are now on the alert and well on the way of preparedness, and this enquiry while bringing home to us our various weaknesses and mistakes would also help to strengthen our defence preparedness and our entire conduct of such operations.

*Notes:* The enquiry was conducted by Lt.-Gen. Henderson Brooks and Brig. Prem Bhagat. In the eastern sector, under the Corps Commander, Lt.-Gen. B. M. Kaul, there were two Major-Generals, M. S. and A. S. Pathania. The latter was in charge of the defence of the Kameng Division.

### *Appendix 3*

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS LEADING TO CHINESE AGGRESSION

### EASTERN SECTOR

(*Courtesy: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*)

#### 1956

*28 November.* Mr. Chou En-lai visited India. Besides discussing many international issues with Mr. Nehru, he referred to the border between India and China; and it was decided that while there were no disputes regarding the border, there were certain petty problems which should be settled amicably by the representatives of the two Governments. Mr. Chou En-lai added that in the case of Burma, the Government of China had accepted the formalisation of the boundary in 1914 (the McMahon Line) and proposed to recognise it with India also—that is the Eastern Sector of the Indian alignment. Mr. Chou En-lai said he would consult the Tibetan authorities in this regard.

#### 1957

*5 June.* The Government of India returned to the Government of China all lands in their use or occupation at Yatung other than those within the walls of their Trade Agency.

*13 September.* India proposed that the question of the representation of China should be taken up by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

*October.* A Chinese party came to Walong in the Lohit Frontier Division of the North East Frontier Agency of India.

#### 1958

*14 December.* Mr. Nehru wrote to Mr. Chou En-lai drawing attention to the wrong delineation of the Sino-Indian boundary in an official Chinese journal. He said the continued issue of incorrect maps was embarrassing and any possibility of grave

misunderstanding between the two countries should be removed as soon as possible.

*17 December.* The Government of India drew the attention of the Government of China to the intrusion of aircraft, and requested them to take early steps to ensure that such violations did not occur.

### 1959

*17 January.* The Government of India protested against Chinese intrusions into Walong in October 1957 and into the Lohit Frontier Division in September 1958.

*23 January.* Mr. Chou En-lai, in his reply to Mr. Nehru, contended that the Sino-Indian boundary had never been formally delimited and there were certain differences between the two sides over the issue. The Government of China had not raised the issue in 1954 because conditions were not then ripe for its settlement. He added that the McMahon Line had never been recognised by the Government of China. As for Chinese maps, Mr. Chou En-lai claimed that the boundaries drawn on them were consistent with those on earlier maps.

In other words, the Government of China officially repudiated the traditional, delimited boundary between the two countries which had been well recognised by both sides for centuries. Going back on all their assurances and violating the Agreement of 1954, they laid claim to about 50,000 square miles of Indian territory.

*31 March.* The Dalai Lama crossed the frontier into India and was given political asylum. But it was made clear to him that he should not indulge in political activity on Indian territory.

*26 April.* The Government of India protested to the Government of China against unbecoming and unjustified attacks made by responsible persons in China on the Government of India for granting political asylum to the Dalai Lama.

*16 May.* The Government of China cautioned India against having two fronts and said that the Five Principles would be respected according to convenience.

*5 December.* The Government of India drew the attention of the Government of China to the fact that during the previous two months a number of unidentified aircraft, approaching from Tibet, had flown over Indian territory.



## 1960

*7 August.* An armed Chinese patrol crossed into Khinzemane in the Eastern Sector and pushed back an Indian patrol.

*11 August.* The Government of India protested to the Government of China against their violation of the Indian boundary at Khinzemane.

*25 August.* A large Chinese detachment crossed the frontier in the Subansiri Division of the North East Frontier Agency and occupied the Indian frontier post at Longju after opening fire on the small Indian garrison and outflanking it.

*28 August.* The Government of India protested against the Chinese attack on the Indian post at Longju.

## 1961

*14 February.* The Government of India published the report of the officials of the two sides on the boundary question. The report made clear, on the basis of a vast amount of evidence, that the traditional, delimited boundary between the two countries was that shown by India and that China had made unwarranted claims to about 50,000 square miles of Indian territory and was in unlawful occupation of about 12,000 square miles of this. The Government of China for long did not even acknowledge the existence of the report. Finally, in May 1962, they published a garbled and truncated version of the Chinese section of the report.

*3 June.* A large Chinese party moved into Taktsang Gompa which is about five miles within Indian territory in the Kameng Frontier Division of the North East Frontier Agency.

*29 July.* The Government of India protested against the Chinese intrusion into Taktsang Gompa.

*13 July.* Mr. R. K. Nehru, Secretary-General in the Ministry of External Affairs, passed through Peking on his way back to Delhi from Mongolia and met leaders of the Chinese Government to ascertain whether any progress could be made on the basis of the report of the officials.

*July.* A Chinese patrol crossed the Eastern Sector of the Indian alignment about one mile west of Chemokarpola in the Kameng Frontier Division.

*31 October.* The Government of India drew the attention of the Government of China to their numerous incursions across the boundary, continued unlawful occupation of a large part of Indian territory and the construction of new roads and check

posts. They urged the Government of China to withdraw from Indian territory and desist from aggressive activities.

### 1962

**2 June.** The Agreement of 1954, which had been violated both in letter and in spirit by the Government of China by their harassing of Indian pilgrims, traders and nationals in Tibet and by their aggression into Indian territory, lapsed.

**22 August.** The Government of India suggested discussions between the two Governments in order to define measures to restore the *status quo* of the boundary in the Ladakh region which had been altered by force during the last five years by China. The Government of China, however, continued to maintain that discussion on the boundary question should take place without any attempt at reducing current tension and creating a proper climate for discussions.

**8 September.** Chinese troops intruded into Indian territory across the Thag La ridge in the North East Frontier Agency of India.

**17 September.** The Government of India warned the Government of China that they would be solely responsible for any incident arising out of intrusions to the south of the Thag La ridge by Chinese forces.

**19 September.** The Government of India expressed their readiness to hold discussions at the appropriate level but also affirmed their determination to maintain inviolate the territorial integrity of India.

**21 September.** The Government of India protested against the attack on an Indian post by Chinese troops in the Dhola region of the North East Frontier Agency of India.

**6 October.** The Government of India stated that no talks or discussions with the Government of China could be undertaken unless they corrected the situation created by the latest Chinese aggression in the eastern sector and withdrew their forces to their side of the international frontier.

**20 October.** The Chinese troops launched a large-scale attack on Indian defence posts in both the western and eastern sectors and advanced deep into Indian territory.



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