

Sino-Indian Border Dispute Reconsidered

Neville Maxwell

The Nehru government sought to decide for itself where India's borders with China should lie and then impose the alignments it had chosen on Beijing, refusing to negotiate them. That meant that unless Beijing surrendered to India's territorial claims to Aksai Chin and areas north of the McMahon Line conflict was inevitable. China's military action in 1962 was reactive and pre-emptive, and that India suffered 'unprovoked aggression' is a self-serving myth. That there has been no settlement of the Sino-Indian borders is the consequence of Nehru's policies, to which successor governments, except Narasimha Rao's, have strictly adhered.

I 'The Chinese Aggression of 1962': India's Grand Delusion

In his May 1998 letter to president Clinton the Indian prime minister A B Vajpayee justified his government's nuclear tests by citing China's 'armed aggression against India in 1962' and the unresolved Sino-Indian border dispute.¹ India's political class, taking its lead from Jawaharlal Nehru, has from the outset maintained that the dispute and border war were the result of China's expansionism and, at the last, a 'massive aggression' which took India by surprise and led consequently to the collapse of its army. China's account is contrary, charging India with intransigence and irredentism and presenting its own military action as reactive and pre-emptive. It is timely to reconsider, with the added perspective of nearly 40 years and in the light of new material, the causes, in the policies of the two governments, which led to war and left the border dispute unresolved.

The Republic of India and the People's Republic of China faced a common task when they came into existence in the middle of the century: completion of the conversion of their frontiers into boundaries. That was in fact among the first formal expressions of their new identity as modern states, as they moved to emulate and catch up with the states of Europe which in the preceding three centuries, in step with the emergence of nationalism and the rise of the nation-state, had pioneered the introduction of a new political institution, the boundary: a line agreed in diplomatic negotiations (delimitation), jointly marked out on the ground (demarcation), accurately represented on a map, and described in a treaty between two abutting sovereignties which thus recognised the limits of their own and their neighbour's territory.² Pre-modern states could exist within frontiers, which were not lines but areas, zones of transition between state powers: modern states need boundaries.

So far as China was concerned when the PRC was established in 1949, the problem

of the Sino-Indian frontiers represented an important but small element of an immense task, negotiating or renegotiating to achieve agreed and accurately defined limits to sovereignty with about ten states, contiguous with China over tens of thousands of miles in often inaccessible terrain. Many sectors of that vast periphery represented the high-tide marks of foreign encroachments on the Chinese Empire, and the ousted Nationalist (Guomintang) authority had bequeathed irredentist commitments to the recovery of such 'lost lands'. Beijing's new men recognised that to take up that bequest would be to provoke intractable quarrels with many of its neighbours, particularly and most dangerously with the Soviet Union, inheritor of the vast far-eastern tracts of Chinese imperial territory annexed by tsarist Russia under the imposed treaties of Aigun (1858) and Peking (1860). Accordingly they decided that the new China would settle its boundaries on the alignments on which history had left them. Zhou Enlai used the occasion of the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung to declare his government's approach:

With some of our neighbouring countries we have not yet finally fixed our borderline and we are ready to do so... But before doing so, we are willing to maintain the present situation by acknowledging that those parts of our border are parts which are undetermined. We are ready to restrain our government and our people from crossing even one step across our border. If such things do happen, we should like to admit our mistake. As to the determination of common borders which we are going to undertake with our neighbouring countries, we shall use only peaceful means and we shall not permit any other kinds of method. In no case shall we change this.³ Later developments gave that declaration of policy much significance, and it therefore deserves analysis. Zhou makes the first step towards boundary settlement a declaration that some sectors are undetermined, with their identification. Second comes a stand-still agreement, rigorous mutual maintenance of the status quo coupled with readiness to admit and cor-

rect error if trespass occurs. Third, he looks forward to future negotiations, and offers the assurance that China will use none but peaceful means in resolving territorial disputes. Finally, he issues a warning that China will not tolerate any other approach, implying that a neighbour's use of force would be met by force.⁴

The succeeding half-century saw China implementing the policy laid down by Zhou for the most part consistently and scrupulously, and with marked, and now nearly complete, success. Boundary treaties were negotiated and sealed with Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Korea, and Laos. Negotiations are in train with Viet Nam and, to the extent that New Delhi will allow, with Bhutan: in the case of Russia and the central Asian states of the former Soviet Union negotiations have been completed, and boundaries agreed subject to caveats on a few specified points on which disputes have been left unresolved for settlement at some indefinite future date. In three instances 'peaceful means' were replaced by force of arms: with India, the USSR and Viet Nam.

In the case of the Sino-Soviet borders, Moscow initially refused to renegotiate the 19th century treaties by which the Tsars had annexed the great tracts of the Qing Empire which became Siberia and the Maritime Province, suspecting that Beijing's insistence on negotiation cloaked the intention to reclaim that territory. Conflicting readings of the treaties which made the Amur/Heilungjiang and Ussuri/Wussuli Rivers the borders led to Soviet use of force to assert the claim to exclusive rights over the entirety of the rivers and all the islands within them, and China's resistance took the neighbours to armed conflict in 1969, and the brink of nuclear war.⁵

It was not until 1987 that, under Gorbachev's leadership, the USSR agreed to renegotiate the Sino-Soviet borders and accepted the relevant principle of international law – that, in the absence of any treaty provision to the contrary, the navigable nature of the border rivers meant that the line of separation of sovereignties lay not on the Chinese bank, where

Moscow's claims had put it, but along the thalweg (an imaginary line along the deepest part of the main channel). The corollary was that the riparian neighbours enjoyed equal rights in use of the rivers. Beijing responded promptly to Gorbachev's reversal of his predecessors' position, negotiations were quickly opened and led in due course to a treaty giving the needed precise definition of the Sino-Soviet boundaries, on the eastern rivers and on China's western border. In 1997 the heads of state of Russia and China, meeting in Beijing, proclaimed their border settlement as 'a model for resolving problems left over by history' through negotiations based on equality, mutual understanding, and concessions.⁶ The Central Asian successor states to the USSR have also settled their boundaries with Beijing.

In the case of Viet Nam, China, under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, used a trivial boundary dispute, concerning distances of no more than a few hundred metres, as the pretext for an attack intended to 'teach a lesson' – the lesson being that China's hegemony must be accepted. That breach stands as a malign but solitary exception to China's otherwise principled and pragmatic approach to the settlement of boundaries.

In comparison to the magnitude of China's border problem, the task facing independent India when it emerged from the British raj in 1947 was minor. Extensive sectors of India's borders had already been transformed into boundaries by the departed imperial power. Where Pakistan had been separated, international boundaries had been laid by the Radcliffe Commission along what had been internal administrative divisions; the British, after wars and vexed negotiations, had agreed an Indo-Nepali boundary and demarcated it – that is, marked it out on the ground – and largely achieved the same with the other Himalayan states, Sikkim and Bhutan.⁷ But the attempts of the British governments in London and India to reach agreement with China to create Sino-Indian boundaries had failed.⁸ In the east, where what became independent India's North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) marched with Tibet, and in the west, where Ladakh, in the Indian-held part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, met Sinkiang and Tibet, there lay only frontiers – zones wherein the limits of sovereignty were indeterminate but, at first, separated. The potential for conflict, and the need for negotiation, lay in the inevitable impingement of the administrations of the two new states as those were extended into the frontier zones.

When administrative contact was made, the absolute and conflictual differences between the approaches of Beijing and

New Delhi immediately became apparent.

To recapitulate: the Chinese approach, as outlined by Zhou Enlai at Bandung and implemented thereafter in practice, looked to the following steps: (1) identify and declare such sectors as required definition with the neighbouring government; (2) agree jointly with the neighbour on maintenance of the status quo so that contact between forward patrols, with the risk of conflict and casualties, could be avoided; (3) negotiate to seek agreement on a mutually satisfactory boundary line, taking into account any relevant treaties, current positions, traditional movements and uses, etc; (4) establish a joint boundary commission to mark out the agreed line on the ground; (5) seal the agreement in a new and comprehensive boundary treaty.

Before similarly summarising the elements of the approach evolved for India by Jawaharlal Nehru and his advisers in the first years after independence, it is relevant to consider the character and historical context of Indian nationalism, which had a powerful and pervasive effect on the Nehru government's approach to the problem of settlement of the Sino-Indian boundaries.⁹

In the 1950s and 1960s there appeared to be a clear distinction between two separate currents in Indian nationalism, on the one hand secularist, on the other religious, specifically Hindu; but for both, the defining principle for their imagined India was territorial, creating a nexus between the two apparently opposing schools in the concept of 'sacred geography'. The bloody partition of 1947 might have been expected to shake, even destroy, the idea that India's territorial limits were historically fixed and absolute, but for Indian nationalists, both secular and Hindu, its effect was the contrary: any territorial challenge, internal or external, came to be felt as an attempted desecration of that sacred geography.¹⁰

The seedbed of Indian nationalism in both its variants had lain in the anglophone elite cloned by the British rulers in their own image, as that class grew through its developmental stages – from servitor class, through challenger movement, to inheritance of power. The great debate throughout that epoch was over the historical identity of India before the establishment of the British raj. The ruling British view, most famously expressed by John Strachey in his 1888 book, *India*, was that "there is not, and never was, an India, or even a country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious". In their efforts to fix borders for India the British did not see themselves as marking out an existing nation, but the opposite –

creating, and enlarging, a political entity by defining its limits. And that entity was not a nation-state but "an empire like other empires, an assemblage of diverse territories and peoples joined together by British military might, diplomacy and duplicity over many years and then maintained in being by means of the forcible application of British control over non-British peoples".¹¹

As the nascent, polyglot elite grew into its challenger phase, however, finding themselves with that prime characteristic of national identity, a common language (albeit in this case a foreign one, English), so they began to conceive and present themselves as members and representatives of 'the people of India', the mass whose existence as such Strachey and his contemporary compatriots had denied. Over the years the argument which Indian nationalists evolved to substantiate their demand for political power hardened into a faith, "the fervent belief that an Indian nation had existed through time – defined by culture, common experience, custom and geography".¹² That perception served as the attitudinal prism through which the Nehru government viewed the task of settling the Sino-Indian borders. If India had 'existed through time', then it followed, in the perception of independent India's first leaders, that its "traditional and customary boundaries had long existed and had evolved naturally, since they were based on the activities of populations and cultures and on geographical features such as mountain ridges and watersheds".¹³ Indeed, the "northern frontier [had] lain approximately where it now runs for nearly three thousand years".¹⁴ A corollary was that India's "historical borders" were necessarily linear", which is to say precise.¹⁵

The broad lines of that theory may be traced in the Indian diplomatic argumentation to Beijing over the borders. But its most detailed elaboration came much later in a work of advocacy of the Indian approach disguised as scholarship, written by an Indian official who had been closely involved in his government's handling of the border dispute, T S Murty.¹⁶ Murty argues that a frontier, and the line of exact separation within a frontier (i.e., the boundary), comes into existence through natural human interaction, a 'process of historic consolidation' or 'crystallisation'; and needs for validity recognition by only one of the two states concerned. Such 'historic delimitation' obviates the need for delimitation by diplomatic process, which Murty calls 'formalisation' and belittles as a mere 'garnishing' of the real boundary-forming process by historic gestation. To him

'public announcement' of an alignment by the validating government will suffice to finalise a boundary, no 'formalisation' then being necessary.

From that ideological position adopted by the Indian government it followed that, unlike other states which found it necessary to negotiate agreement with neighbours as to the alignment of their common borders, India already possessed fixed borders with China, negotiation thus being otiose. The only necessity was for the Indian government to 'discover' the exact alignment of the country's borders with China through its own archival research, with consultation of history and mythology and taking security interests into account. Once the appropriate alignment had been decided upon it could be announced and depicted on maps. Indian posts would be set up "along the entire frontier ... especially in such places as might be considered disputed areas", as Jawaharlal Nehru was to instruct his government; and the resulting manned boundary would "not be open to discussion with anybody".¹⁷

Thus India: (1) would insist that all sectors of its claimed border with China were already defined; (2) as soon as possible would advance its state forces into the territory it claimed; (3) would refuse to enter into any agreement for maintaining the status quo until all territory claimed was under Indian control; (4) would at all stages refuse to submit its claimed boundary alignments to negotiation. Each of those points was in absolute contradistinction to the Chinese approach and in sum they amounted to an insistence that for India the definition and consolidation of boundaries with China would be a unilateral process.

Such a one-sided procedure is nugatory in international law:

An international boundary cannot be fixed solely by the administrative act of one of the adjoining states. At least two parties must be involved and their joint efforts are necessary in order to effectuate an acceptable division between their territories. Therefore, if a state proceeds alone to survey and delimit its border areas, no juridical principle will apply the effects of such unilateral action to another state which, being directly interested, has not co-operated in any way in its execution or consented to accept its consequences. From the point of view of the non-participating state, the international boundary remains undefined.¹⁸

But so long as the border which India claimed to be pre-existing accorded to the perception held in Beijing, or was acceptable to the Chinese government, there should be no cause for conflict, although

the Indian approach would rule out joint redefinition by diplomatic process. What would happen, however, if the boundary 'discovered' by the Indian government conflicted with China's understanding of the alignment of the traditional and historic frontier? And if a Chinese presence were found to be within what India claimed to be its anciently-established limits, but was asserted by Beijing as expressing China's own reading of history? Such a presence could only be regarded by India as adverse and illegitimate, and the trespassers would be asked to withdraw and expected to comply. Refusal would elevate the offence from trespass, to incursion, to aggression. Once the charge of 'aggression' was made public, politicians and press would take it up and demand armed action to repel the aggressors. Failure to respond would open the government to logically valid charges of surrender of national territory – and therefore military action against China would become an unavoidable political necessity.

Thus the package of linked policies evolved privily by Nehru and his advisers in the years immediately after India attained independence would, if consistently applied, promise to lead ineluctably to armed conflict on the Sino-Indian borders. The first overt expression of India's policy for the consolidation of its claimed border with China came in February 1951 when an Indian official party, escorted by a strong paramilitary column, marched into the Tibetan monastery centre of Tawang, proclaimed it to be Indian territory, and ousted the Tibetan administrators. In thus presenting an annexationist fait accompli to the authorities in Lhasa – as well as those recently established in Beijing – the Indian government was both continuing and modifying the policy towards the north-east frontier applied by their British predecessors.

The reassertion of Chinese authority in Tibet in the first decade of the 20th century – and its collapse in 1912 – led to an attempt by the British Indian government to replace the established and traditional limit of its administration in the north-east, which lay beneath the foothills of the Assam Himalayas, with a 'scientific frontier' that ran along the crest of the mountains, some 60 miles to the north.¹⁹ Such a frontier projection would in effect annex some 60,000 square miles of territory which China regarded as its own, being an extension of Tibet, and which was depicted as Chinese on British official maps as well as China's. Most of that great tract was unadministered, occupied by tribal people who fiercely and effectively resisted intruders, whether from north or south; but a tapering salient of territory

at its western extremity, running down to the plains from the monastery centre of Tawang, was administered, by Tibet's ecclesiastical authority.

Britain convened in Simla in 1913 a tripartite conference, including a Tibetan delegate and a representative of the Chinese central government, the ostensible purpose of which was to reform and regulate relations between Lhasa and Beijing. The foreign secretary of the Indian government, Sir Henry McMahon, used the occasion, however, to arrange secret, bilateral negotiations in Delhi in March 1914 in which the Tibetan representative was induced to accept the desired new border line. That line, which came to be named after the foreign secretary, was drawn on a map with an appropriate scale of eight miles to the inch, covering the sector from just short of Laos to Bhutan (the British then included Burma as part of their Indian empire). That map was not shown, of course, to the Chinese representative at the conference. But McMahon tricked him into initialling a different map, on a very small scale, which, while purporting to illustrate only a proposed division of Tibet into Inner and Outer zones, also incorporated McMahon's secretly-drawn alignment.

McMahon's actions at Simla exceeded his authority, and an American international lawyer and student of this history arraigns him for, among other sins, "lying at an international conference table and deliberately breaking a treaty between the United Kingdom and Russia".²⁰ McMahon's domineering chicanery was infructuous, however. The Lhasa authorities repudiated their representative's actions; the Chinese government, suspecting what had gone on behind its representative's back, declared that any agreement reached between Britain and the Tibetan authorities would be illegitimate and null; in his report to London the Viceroy disowned McMahon's dealings with the Tibetans; and the home government tacitly expressed severe disapproval, it appears, by transferring McMahon out of India. Thus the 'McMahon Line' was stillborn.²¹ It was left to another imperial frontiersman serving the British government in India, a man very much in the McMahon mould, to breathe life into it a quarter of a century later.

In the mid-1930s Olaf Caroe, then a middling official in New Delhi, disinterred from the archives the documentation concerning McMahon's abortive border advance, and persuaded the British government to begin pretending that the McMahon Line was India's legal boundary, legitimated by the formal assent of Tibet and China – Caroe arranged a dip-

omatic forgery to support the false assertion that the boundary had been agreed at the Simla conference.²² Consequently in the 1940s some British maps began showing the McMahon Line as the boundary, qualified only with the wording, 'Undemarcated' (that is, still awaiting agreement on its exact alignment and marking out on the ground by joint process of the two neighbours). During the war and immediately after it the British began the task, difficult and dangerous (because of tribal hostility), of extending their administration towards their claimed border. Those forward movements immediately drew strong protests and demands for their withdrawal from the Chinese government, then Nationalist. Those protests were repeated, redirected to the incoming Indian authorities, in early 1947; and in 1949 the Nationalist government, although by then in extremis, still delivered in New Delhi a formal note again repudiating all documents emanating from the Simla Conference.

By the time India became independent in August 1947 the British had made some progress towards making the McMahon Line good on the ground as India's north-east border, in defiance of China's protests; and the successor government in New Delhi took up the task of completion.

Against that historical background the new government of independent India cannot be criticised for continuing an inherited policy, and maintaining the British claim to a boundary on the McMahon alignment, although the wisdom of attempting to sustain and use Britain's supportive falsehoods and forgery is questionable. On the other hand, Britain's policy on the limits of its imperial possessions reflected great power, often indeed supremacy; and even so, the British always showed a politic awareness that it was advisable to take full account of a neighbour's sensibilities when trying to fix borders, and that force exerted on the ground needed to be balanced by pragmatism and diplomatic finesse. It is not easy to imagine a British government adopting such a provocatively obdurate tactic as Nehru was to apply in this instance: that if the new China questioned the legitimacy of the McMahon Line, as had the old, India would simply refuse to discuss the subject.

The forceful reassertion of Chinese central authority in Tibet that began in November 1950, seen by many in India (and elsewhere) as an invasion, galvanised the Indian government into alarmed activity. (Dispatch of an Indian expeditionary force to Lhasa, in the steps of Younghusband, to pre-empt or resist the PLA, was seriously considered.)²³ The

prospect of a Chinese military presence, at least potentially hostile, along what the minister responsible for its defence, Sardar Patel, recognised to be the 'undefined' northern frontier²⁴ added a new dimension to India's perceived threat horizons. After urgent consultations, plans were laid for the rapid extension of administrative and defence arrangements in the north. On 20 November 1950 Nehru proclaimed in the Indian parliament that the McMahon Line was India's border with Tibet in the north-east, reiterating the British falsification about its having been "fixed by the Simla Convention of 1914". He conceded that China's maps showed a contrary border line, well to the south, and had done so "for the last 30 years"; but, he went on, "[Chinese] map or no map", the McMahon Line was India's boundary, "and we will not allow anybody to come across [it]". That forthright declaration was the first public articulation of India's unilateralist approach to the problem of boundary settlement.

In annexing Tawang three months later the Nehru government exceeded its predecessors' ambitions and intention. McMahon had drawn his line to bring Tawang into India, but even in Caroe's time the government had second thoughts about that. To begin to take over the tribal tracts which China, although claiming them, had never administered, was one thing – those comprised, in imperial terms, a no-man's land; but to annex a tract which since they first contacted it the British had recognised as administered Tibetan/Chinese territory, was quite different. Therefore during the years of the second world war the British engaged Lhasa in discussions looking to the re-drawing of McMahon's alignment so as to leave Tawang, with its great monastery, to Tibet. They tried to present that proposal as a magnanimous concession, seeing it themselves as a 'sop' which might induce Lhasa to accept the rest of the McMahon alignment as the border. They failed. The Tibetan authorities would not bite.²⁵ Indeed upon India's achieving independence Lhasa dispatched to New Delhi a formal request that the new post-imperial government withdraw all its predecessors' intrusions into the territory between the McMahon Line and the traditional border beneath the foothills.

Lhasa vigorously protested India's seizure of Tawang, and again made clear that Tibet regarded the McMahon Line as a chimera, without validity as a boundary. From Beijing, however, came no comment, although by then the PLA had established itself in Lhasa, its advance units cannot have been far from Tawang, and the Chinese government appears to

have received prompt reports of the Indian action.²⁶ That silence was the first indication that the new men in power in China were willing to accept McMahon's boundary alignment as he drew it, along with other distasteful bequests from the period of China's prostration. Further evidence to that effect followed, again expressed in silence – and this appeared conclusively to confirm intended acquiescence. The People's Republic might have been expected to continue and intensify the protests which its Nationalist predecessor had vigorously been issuing over the British and more recently Indian advances into NEFA; but in the event Beijing ignored the Indian government's accelerated military and administrative thrusts up to the McMahon Line. (As will be seen, the Chinese did react, however, when Indian personnel pushed northward across the Line.)

After India's incorporation of Tawang the frontier fell quiet again, while the two neighbours built up their internal communications, building roads, sending out patrols and survey teams, establishing posts – and thus moved closer to impingement. Diplomatically, the next event was the holding in 1954 of negotiations on trade and intercourse across the Tibetan sector of the Sino-Indian border, which looked among other matters to the terms of India's surrender of various rights and privileges which the British had induced Lhasa to grant, including maintenance of armed personnel within Tibet. As the Indian government prepared for those negotiations its basic policy towards border consolidation, which might be summarised as "lie low and say nothing about the borders but make good our claims", was reconsidered, but only to be confirmed. As a key participant in the discussions put it:

The general view was that we should not allow China to take this opportunity to rake up the whole issue [of the borders]. In any case, China was not going to recognise the McMahon Line which we considered to be our northern frontier and so there could not be any negotiations on that score.²⁷

Therefore "it was decided that the question of the frontier would not be allowed to be raised, as in India's view this was well settled by custom, tradition and usage. If the Chinese raised it, the Indian side would refuse to discuss it".²⁸ That decision was challenged within the government, at high level, but Nehru stood fast on the strategy he had chosen: that the subject of the borders should be left to China to raise, and if or when it did so, "We can plainly refuse to reopen the question and take our stand [on the position Nehru had stated in Parliament],

that the territory on this side of the McMahon Line is ours, and there is nothing to discuss about it".²⁹ In the event the Chinese side in the negotiations did not bring up the question of borders either, although it did intimate that it considered that to be a subject to be discussed on another occasion.

The Agreement on Trade and Intercourse in Tibet which issued from the negotiations enshrined in its preamble the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence", the first of which was "Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty"; and the Indian government seized on that principle as foreclosing any future challenges from Beijing about its border claims. By that time it had completed its secret and unilateral investigations and decided upon the alignment of the borders with China. In July 1954 Nehru circulated a memorandum on the Sino-Indian borders to ministries concerned, describing the Tibet treaty as "a new starting point of our relations with China and Tibet". He went on:

Both as flowing from our policy and as a consequence of our agreement with China, this frontier should be considered a firm and definite one, which is not open to discussion with anybody. A system of checkposts should be spread along this entire frontier. More especially, we should have checkposts in such places as might be considered disputed areas.³⁰

That 'firm and definite' border appeared in new maps issued at about this time by the official cartographer, the *Survey of India*, and it was very different from what had been shown in previous maps. Those generally had reflected the actual position, as stated by the home minister, Patel, that when India became independent the Sino-Indian frontier was undefined. As noted above, the McMahon Line had begun to be marked on British maps after 1940, replacing a border alignment which had matched that shown on Chinese maps, running along the foot of the hills; but then the McMahon Line was still qualified as 'Undemarcated'. The new maps showed it as a full and final international boundary. To the mortification and concern of their rulers, Bhutan and Sikkim were shown as included within India's boundary. But it was in what became known as the western sector of the Sino-Indian border, where the state of Jammu and Kashmir marched with a corner of Sinkiang and with Tibet, that the greatest change appeared. There a new boundary line, categorical in depiction, looped up to the north-west from the Karakoram Pass to the Kuen Lun mountain range so as to include within India a tract of territory comprised for the most part of the Aksai Chin plateau.

At India's independence the situation in the western sector was unchanged since the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India, in its official publication of record, generally short-named as *Aitchison's Treaties*, stated in 1931 that "The northern as well as the eastern boundary of the Kashmir state is undefined".³¹ In the north-east the line India claimed as its boundary had at least a pseudo-diplomatic basis in McMahon's 1914 subterfuges, and a fairly precise cartographic expression.³² But the boundary now claimed in the western sector had no foundation other than that it had been proposed and considered as a possible claim-line – and rejected – within the British Indian administration, as had a number of alternative possible boundary alignments for that sector, all markedly less advanced than the line chosen. As the outstanding Indian analyst of this history put it, "the Indian claim to Aksai Chin had no basis in treaty, usage or geography".³³ It was not until five years after the issuance of the new maps that an official was sent to London to devil up a case for the Aksai Chin claim from the archives. He managed to do so, with the aid of a critical falsification, of which his government made much use.³⁴

If, as Nehru had ruled, nobody (which is to say, China) was to be allowed to question the wildly irredentist claim now cartographically advanced for Aksai Chin, then India's border policy had become wholly inimical to Nehru's often stated wish for India's close and friendly relations with China, and to that extent contradictory, even irrational.

But how solid was Nehru's often voiced aspiration for friendship with China? Much has been made of his repeated expressions of friendly and positive regard for China during this period of the 1950s, when slogans about Sino-Indian brotherhood were shouted by Indian crowds welcoming official visitors from China, and certainly he made India an open and active supporter of the People's Republic's international interests at that time. Consequently there has been readiness to accept his and the wider Indian perception and portrayal of the 1962 border war as an act of perfidy by Beijing, a treacherous betrayal by a friend. But an underside to Nehru's approach to China, one marked by suspicion, animus, and territorial acquisitiveness, has been illuminated since that time. The light was shone not by a critic but by a man whose admiration for the prime minister was unqualified, even adulatory, and who was a close and influential adviser through almost the whole of Nehru's time in office – N B Mullik, director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB),

which in 1951 was given responsibility for foreign as well as domestic intelligence.

Mullik, who described himself as a Bengali-speaking Bihari (his name is Bengali and apparently he did not wish to be taken for a Bengali) served in the Indian Police Service (IPS) for more than a decade before India's independence. His first contact with Nehru, in 1934, led to his receiving a nasty snub from the then Congress leader, who of course held a low opinion of all members of the IPS, especially Indians thus acting as enforcers for the raj – and that rankled with Mullik for years.³⁵ But when, after independence, he joined the Intelligence Bureau, becoming director in 1950, the old slight was forgotten, and as is clear in his most revealing trilogy, *My Years With Nehru*, Mullik came to revere the prime minister, personally and as a statesman. Nehru, it is also clear, not only from Mullik's account but from the influence, even power, the IB came to exercise on those aspects of government policy which Nehru dominated, responded with full trust in Mullik's perception and judgment.

In Mullik's account, when in 1952 he sought from Nehru guidance as to India's strategic orientation, and therefore the prime targets for the attentions of the IB, he was instructed that China must be counted as one of 'two enemies', the other being Pakistan. He was therefore told to lend all support to anti-Beijing Tibetan emigres, "to help them in every way possible and maintain their morale".³⁶ Mullik was one of those who had urged dispatch of an Indian expeditionary force to forestall and oppose Chinese occupation of Tibet, and he quickly built up supportive relations with the Dalai Lama's brother and other members of the Tibetan oligarchy who had fled to India upon the arrival of the PLA in Lhasa. This must have brought him into co-operative contact with the CIA, whose agents were working from about 1956, with Indian connivance at least, to foment the revolt in Tibet that broke out in 1959.³⁷

According to Mullik, Nehru foresaw that conflict with China over the borders was inevitable, and played for time. Therefore he maintained his posture of friendliness, which was also partly genuine, to lull China into a sense of security while India made good its border claims. Nehru went some way towards confirming that interpretation himself, after the dispute became a public issue in India, in defending his tactics in Parliament. The government had been alive to the problem of the northern borders from 'the very first day' (presumably, of its existence), he said. It was decided not to raise the issue

with China but rather to make it clear, in maps and statements, where India placed its borders: "Why should we go about asking China [and raising] this question when we felt sure about it? ... We felt we should hold by our position and that the lapse of time and events will confirm it, and by the time, perhaps, when the challenge of it came [from China] we would be in a much stronger position to face it".³⁸

Because border protection was the responsibility of the home ministry, under which the IB operated, it was in giving effect to Nehru's policy in that regard that Mullik's influence was most potent and extensive. Implementation of Nehru's directive that a system of checkposts be established right along the border, and "more especially... in such places as might be considered disputed areas", was Mullik's responsibility, one which he said he 'pursued... with single-minded effort'.³⁹ His account of that project merits quotation at length:

In setting up the checkposts all along the frontier, as we then understood its location, we often came in conflict with both the Army Headquarters and the ministry of external affairs. We were often accused of going into disputed territory or trespassing beyond our border though, except that some of our patrols did sometimes cross into Tibet or Sinkiang due to the faulty nature of the maps, we had located the checkposts within our claimed frontier. If we went too near the frontier, we would be accused of causing provocations. We did not give in and our contention was that as the responsibility for guarding the frontier had been given to us, we were free to open the posts wherever we thought they would serve us best.... Moreover, once we claimed a territory to be our own, we were free to go and open our post there, no matter whether the Chinese disputed our claims and raised protests.⁴⁰

Mullik knew he was armoured against the army and external affairs by Nehru's unwavering support.

We were always quite confident that finally when the dispute [within the government] was referred to the prime minister he would decide in our favour because we were only carrying out the orders specifically given by him to me.... This is what happened on more than one occasion when the army headquarters or the external affairs ministry reported against us to the prime minister. The file came back with the note that as we had already opened the post we need not withdraw from it but we should be careful to see that we did not trespass into Chinese territory.⁴¹

Sometimes, Mullik admitted, his patrols did encroach onto what he conceded to

be Chinese territory, once 40 miles into Sinkiang; but even on that occasion, when "the External Affairs Ministry was very angry", the prime minister commented that the patrol party must have been led astray by faulty maps. "And so further trouble [for the IB] was averted."

But so difficult was the terrain for India in the western sector, so very far-flung its border claim there, that it was to be several years before Mullik could push his patrols into contact with the Chinese in that sector. He succeeded at last in October 1959, when a long-distance patrol he had specially organised to set up a new post on 'the international frontier', as Mullik called the Indian claim line, was intercepted by a Chinese force near the Kongka Pass. In the ensuing firefight the Indian patrol suffered – nine killed, with the survivors being captured. That clash brought Nehru's support for Mullik's actions under its severest strain. At a top-level meeting the IB was accused by the army and foreign office officials of acting as 'aggressors and provocateurs'. The army insisted that no further movements of Mullik's armed police should take place along the frontiers without prior military clearance, "and the prime minister had to give in to the army's demand". The result, Mullik regretfully recalls, was that "the protection of the border was thereafter handed over to the army and all operations of armed police were made subject to prior approval of the army command".⁴² In a bizarre inversion of actuality, typical of the deceptions being spun by New Delhi in those days, the army's assumption of responsibility for the borders was presented as evidence of the seriousness with which the government viewed the 'Chinese threat'. In fact that it was a measure to protect China from the provocations Mullik, with Nehru's support, was bent on continuing and which, the army recognised at that time, must draw it into a conflict it could only lose.

The inhibition on forward Indian patrols into Chinese-held territory was not to last long, as it turned out. Sweeping changes in an army headquarters corrupted by political interference and favouritism, with courtier-soldiers replacing old-guard professionals,⁴³ meant that by the summer of 1961 the army itself had launched onto a 'forward policy' and was advancing troops into Chinese-held territory in the western sector to implement India's claims, regardless of Beijing's protests and warnings and reckless of the PLA's overwhelming superiority in weaponry, numbers and logistics. The aim of this hare-brained scheme, misbegotten by military adventurism out of Gandhian satyagraha (soul force), was somehow to extrude the

Chinese from Indian-claimed Aksai Chin – to make them leave without actually forcing them out.

The rehearsal, or tuning up, for the collision for which Nehru had set the course had come in the middle sector of the frontier, as it came to be called, beginning with a mildly worded protest note from the Chinese government in July 1954 about an intrusion by an armed Indian patrol. What had happened in that sector, it appears, was that the Chinese, backing up the Tibetan position on the lie of the traditional border, had consolidated a 'scientific frontier'. That is, they claimed, and controlled, not only the mountain passes, but small trans-montaigne tracts as well. Through 1954, 1955 and 1956 there was patrol friction in the area, with continuing exchange of diplomatic protests, until discussions were opened between the two governments. Those were infructuous. An ominous tone was struck by India in a note late in 1956 in which a Chinese armed presence on the Indian side of a pass claimed by New Delhi to mark the frontier – an assertion denied by Beijing – was described as 'aggression'.⁴⁴

The border dispute proper surfaced when China publicised the completion of a motorable road across Aksai Chin, linking Sinkiang with western Tibet. The Chinese described that notable engineering feat in an article on the achievements of their first five-year plan in the July 1958 issue of *China Pictorial*, and showed it on a map. The road construction had been noted while it was in progress by the IB and Mullik had urged establishment of army and armed police posts to monitor or impede it. But, in Mullik's account, at a meeting in January 1959 he was overruled by the army, with the support of the ministry of external affairs (MEA). The army's view, expressed by the then chief, General Thimayya, was that the road did not constitute any strategic threat to India and that the establishment of military posts in that area was beyond the army's logistical capacity and that anyway it would be folly to try to engage China militarily in this area. The reasoning of the ministry was that:

this ... territory was useless to India. Even if the Chinese did not encroach into it, India could not make any use of it. The boundary had not been demarcated and had been shifted more than once by the British. There was an old silk route [across it] which ... the Chinese had only improved [to make their road]. It would be pointless to pick quarrels over issues in which India had no means of enforcing her claims.⁴⁵

An Indian patrol was dispatched to check the lie of the road when spring made that possible, however – and nothing was heard

from it after the end of August. Then, on November 3, New Delhi was informed that the patrol had been detained, and its personnel deported. The Chinese asked for a guarantee that there would be no more such 'unlawful intrusions', and warned that those were inconsistent with friendly relations.⁴⁶

The construction of the road and the arrest of the patrol demonstrated that the Aksai Chin was solidly under Chinese control and administration, and practically beyond India's purview. But the official Indian maps issued from 1954 showed the territory crossed by the road as unquestionably Indian. Now the impasse to which Indian policy had from its inception inexorably been directed was reached. Either the Indian government was going to have to resile from its absolutist and unilateral approach to border settlement, or the Chinese government would have to withdraw from what was for them a strategically vital tract, which it considered to have long been Chinese territory. So an irresistible force, or anyway an unassuageable demand, had met an immovable object.

At about the same time as the reconnaissance patrol was dispatched to investigate the road the ministry of external affairs, in reversal of the approach it had advocated a few months previously, sent a formal complaint to Beijing – not about the road itself but about the international borders shown in the map with the *China Pictorial* article about it. Those, the note pointed out, did not coincide with the border of India as shown on India's latest maps. (The little sketch map in the magazine put China's boundaries along the Karakoram range in the west and the edge of the Brahmaputra valley in the east, as most maps issued in China had long shown them – and all now still do.) Nehru, this note of August 21, 1958 recalled, had alluded to just such cartographic contradictions in discussion with Zhou Enlai when he visited China in 1954 and had been reassured that "current Chinese maps were based on old maps" and that the People's Republic "had had no time to correct them". But the PRC had now been in existence for 'many years', and India "trust[ed] that the corrections [would] be made soon". The note concluded with an offer, which seems deliberately offensive, to send a free copy of the latest Indian official map to guide Beijing's cartographers.⁴⁷

In the historical context and the political circumstances of the time, that note is astonishing. Its peremptory tone would still have been out of place if addressed to the ruler of Sikkim or Bhutan, and its political implications were huge. In effect,

it required China, through changes in its maps, first, to ascribe *ex post facto* legitimacy to McMahon's covert dealings with the Tibetans, thus imputing to the latter treaty-making rights and by implication sovereignty; second, to concede that the Aksai Chin tract was Indian territory, and therefore that the Chinese administration and development there amounted to 'unlawful intrusion'. And it was soon to be proved that the position taken in this note was by no means an opening bid calculated to leave plenty of leeway for diplomatic bargaining: the Indian government was advancing a non-negotiable demand.

Beijing's reply merely restated what Zhou had told Nehru: China's maps of the day were based on those authorised by the nationalist government and it would not be appropriate unilaterally to alter their depiction of boundaries. That must await surveys and the outcome of consultations with the countries concerned. In December 1958 Nehru himself joined the exchanges with a letter to Zhou Enlai, opening a personal correspondence which was to parallel formal diplomatic exchanges through the mounting conflict.

Nehru's tone was cordial, though the iron fist showed in some passages through the velvet. Referring back to the maps which had been complained about, he feigned surprise, claiming that he "had not been aware at any time previously that there was any frontier dispute between our two countries". He recalled Zhou's assurance at their meeting in 1954 about reproductions of old pre-liberation maps, but said that the "continued issue of these incorrect maps" nine years after the PRC's inauguration was 'embarrassing'. About the McMahon Line, Nehru reminded Zhou that they had discussed that sector in 1956, in the context of boundary negotiations then in progress between China and Burma, and that Zhou had assured him that China 'proposed to recognise this border with India', as it was doing in the case of Burma. The nub of Nehru's letter lay in this sentence: "There can be no question of these large parts of India [shown as within China on Chinese maps] being anything but India and there is no dispute about them".

Zhou replied promptly, in January 1959. In summary his points were: (1) The Sino-Indian boundary had never been formally delimited. That is, no treaty or agreement on the boundary had ever been concluded between the Chinese central government and a government of India. (2) "Border disputes [did] exist between China and India", and therefore it was unavoidable that there would be discrepancies between their respective maps. (3) The Aksai Chin area was China's and had "always been

under Chinese jurisdiction". (4) The McMahon Line had no legitimacy as an international boundary but China was likely to accept that alignment at the appropriate time and circumstances, as it was doing in the negotiations with Burma. There, already, can be foreseen the outline of a possible settlement: China would legitimise the McMahon alignment as the boundary in India's north-east, while India waived or sharply modified its claim to Aksai Chin. But the path to that resolution could lie only through negotiations, for which, Zhou said, Beijing was now preparing.

Noting the recent friction between patrols in parts of the border, Zhou concluded with the proposal that 'as a provisional measure, the two sides temporarily maintain the status quo, that is to say, each side keep for the time being to the border areas at present under its jurisdiction and not go beyond them'. This was the measure that China saw as the essential preliminary to negotiations, which otherwise would be jeopardised or poisoned by public reactions to armed clashes in disputed areas. In Nehru's view, however, to come to such an agreement would be to acquiesce in, even condone, China's 'aggressive' occupation of Indian territory, and thus tacitly legitimise it. The alternative was to retain the option to use force, when it became available, to assert India's claims. (It was to be nearly 40 years before an Indian government would have second thoughts about Nehru's position, and accept the Chinese proposal.)

Outright rejection of Zhou's proposal by Nehru would have unwelcome consequences, however. It would amount to an implicit declaration that India would insist on advancing its forces into all territory it claimed; and while precisely that intention was central to Nehru's policy it would, if stated openly, expose a bellicosity at odds with India's pacific international posture and reputation, as well as prompting immediate defensive measures by China. Therefore in his reply in March Nehru prevaricated, introducing the casuistry that more and more was to mark the Indian diplomatic argument. He wrote:

I agree that the position as it was before the recent disputes arose should be respected by both sides and that neither side should try to take unilateral action in exercise of what it conceives to be its right. Further, if any possession has been secured recently, the position should be rectified.

Thus Nehru, while appearing, at a first reading, to accept Zhou's proposal, in fact rejected it. His second sentence, contradictory to the first since it looked to res-

toration of what the Indian side judged to be the acceptable status quo ante rather than the maintenance of the status quo which Zhou had proposed, fore-shadowed what before long would harden into Indian insistence that China must 'vacate its aggression' by withdrawing from Aksai Chin before there could be negotiation. As Nehru put it in his next letter (26 September 1959): "No discussion [between the two governments] can be fruitful unless the posts on the Indian side of the traditional frontier now held by the Chinese forces are first evacuated by them". There by, in effect stipulating that China would have to reverse its position, at least suspend its claims, and evacuate the territory claimed by India before negotiations could begin, Nehru blocked any possibility of a peaceful, negotiated resolution of the dispute. In the near-40 years since then, no successor government in India has been able – or has sought – to overcome that impediment.

As had been the case in India's refusal to come to a stand-still agreement along the border, this refusal, in effect, to submit the dispute to negotiation could not be openly stated, since India was known as an insistent advocate of peaceful negotiation, without any setting of pre-conditions; in all international disputes.⁴⁸ Therefore casuistry was invoked again, and the Indian refusal to negotiate was masked in the diplomatic exchanges, which were in effect encoded with semantic obfuscation to give the impression that the refusal was China's.⁴⁹ Nehru was personally involved in the drafting of the most important of the diplomatic notes, memoranda and letters.⁵⁰

The clash at the Kongka Pass, which caused an angry public outcry in India (much to Mullik's satisfaction),⁵¹ brought Zhou Enlai to urge an immediate summit meeting. Nehru stalled for some months but then agreed to receive Zhou Enlai in New Delhi in April (1960), making it clear domestically that the meeting was not for 'negotiations' but only for 'talks'. (He drew that distinction explicitly, and used it to fend off the critics who suspected he intended to surrender to what he had himself presented as 'Chinese aggression'.) Zhou Enlai nevertheless came to the summit meeting optimistic because he had recently signed an agreement with Burma, resolving border problems older and far more complex than those with India, and legitimising that section of the McMahon Line which covered the Sino-Burmese border.⁵²

At the summit meetings China's proposal for settlement was made explicit for the first time: "reciprocal acceptance of present actualities in both sectors and

constitution of a boundary commission".⁵³ This meant that the Chinese were prepared to formalise the McMahon alignment if the Indians dropped the claim to the whole of Aksai Chin and negotiated a mutually acceptable boundary in the western sector. An alignment proposed by the British to China in 1899, leaving the road well inside Chinese territory but providing for a marked advance for Indian possession, would have provided a good target for Indian negotiators. But Nehru's position was adamant: no compromise, no stand-still agreement, no negotiations. Only China's diplomatic surrender and a promise to withdraw from Aksai Chin would have met the Indian demands.

Steven Hoffmann, the American scholar whose linkage of India's border policy to the nature of its elite's nationalism is cited above, offers an insight into the mindset of Nehru and his advisers when they received Zhou and the Chinese team. They perceived in the Chinese wish [to negotiate a boundary settlement] an attempt to denigrate the historical authenticity of the Indian nation. A true nation would not, in the Indian view, be asked to negotiate its historically evolved borders. That request or demand could come only from a neighbour who (like India's former British rulers) regarded the Indian nation as an artificial creation.⁵⁴

Thus in Hoffmann's analysis the more the Chinese side pressed for negotiations the more affronted were the Indians at what they felt as an impugment of their very national identity, and therefore the more determined their refusal. Hoffmann's explanation derives from years of interviews with those who were Nehru's closest advisers at that time and, bizarre as it sounds, rings true.

Diplomatic exchanges continued after the failed summit, official teams of the two sides producing detailed statements of their historical and geographical arguments. But the deadlock was now complete and the accelerating implementation of India's 'forward policy' in the summers of 1961 and 1962, with consequent confrontations and, later, gunfire clashes, brought war steadily nearer. Nehru, while (in another context, that of India's annexation of Goa) saying that his "whole soul react[ed] against the thought of war", was phlegmatic, indeed insouciant, in openly discussing the prospect of war with China. That confidence seems to have reflected the fact that his closest advisers, especially Mullik, were ready to the last to assure him that China would never use force against India, and that Beijing's increasingly heated warnings were bluster and bluff. It also expressed, it seems, what a contemporary Indian observer called his

country's 'great power complex'.⁵⁵ Nehru's vision of a Sino-Indian conflict was apocalyptic, he thought of a war that in its intensity and duration would shake the world. His premise, that India and China were powers of equal strength and resolution, was to be belied by India's total and immediate collapse under the shock of China's blows.

Rationally, if the forward policy were left out of consideration, the belief that China would never attack India was well founded. Such action would, indeed, be most invidious for Beijing, and it was difficult then – as it is now – to see any possible strategic or political advantage that China could hope to draw from hostilities with India. But by the beginning of the 1960s the PRC had begun to feel seriously threatened. The friendly strategic alliance with the USSR was breaking up; the nationalist rump on Taiwan, which American influence kept in China's seat in the UN, was intensifying its armed forays against the mainland; in a programme that had begun in 1956⁵⁶ the CIA was continuing to train, arm and transport rebel groups into Tibet, and trumpeting the cause of the Dalai Lama, by then in exile in India.⁵⁷ Not surprisingly the Chinese suspected the same influence was behind the military provocations which India was mounting (and certainly Mullik maintained close contact with the CIA station-head in New Delhi.)⁵⁸ What else, they might have asked themselves, could explain an Indian policy that could yield no material benefit to India but if continued must become at the least a worrying distraction for China's defence forces? So a military response to close off the threat from India inevitably came under consideration in Beijing, and precautionary force deployments began to be made.

By October 1962 the forward policy had created great tension in the western sector. Numerous small Indian army posts had been set up in Chinese-claimed and-controlled territory, and all had been closely confronted by the PLA, always in superior force. Armed clashes had occurred, the Chinese had suffered casualties. Beijing's protests and warnings that China's forces would be forced to retaliate had become angry and explicit. Then the Indian government resolved the issue for the Chinese leadership, removing any doubt about its intentions. A note dated October 6 was read in Beijing as "finally categorically shut[ting] the door to negotiations". Then Nehru, speaking to journalists on October 12, made a public declaration that the Indian army had been ordered to 'free our territory', that is, to take the offensive to implement India's claims. Nehru's handling of the dispute had by that time

made that statement politically inescapable for him: what else could his government do but order attack if, as he had said was the case, China had deliberately invaded Indian territory? His bravado aroused jingoist jubilation among the Indian political class and satisfaction in the west, where the statement was taken as an ultimatum, even a declaration of war⁵⁹ – but horror among the commanders in the field whose troops would have to execute the Balaclava-like orders.

Nehru's commitment referred to a confrontation which had developed on the McMahon Line – or rather, to be precise, on the Chinese side of the McMahon Line. The map on which McMahon had drawn his line was based on an elementary survey, and when in the 1950s Indian administrators reached the frontier area they concluded that in certain sections McMahon should have placed it several miles further north. Since the Chinese were carefully observing the line as McMahon had drawn it as the de facto border, calling it 'the line of actual control', it was clearly in India's interest that nothing be done to disturb the situation in that sector. With every year that passed China's observance of the McMahon Line served to strengthen India's claim. Nevertheless, as soon as they were able to do so the Indians began setting up outposts in several sectors to the north of the McMahon Line as McMahon had drawn it, maintaining that it was their right to make such unilateral 'corrections'. Since Beijing balked at this 'nibbling at Chinese territory', as Deng Xiaoping later described it, the result was a protracted series of armed confrontations, beginning with a clash at Longju in August 1959 and continuing to the present.

The only strategically significant patch of territory claimed by India north of the line as McMahon had drawn it lay at its western extremity, where an Indian position on the highest local feature, Thagla Ridge, would give the outpost overview of a Chinese base and communications. In June 1962 the Indian army, acting on orders originating from Mullik to occupy the Ridge, established a post on the Namka Chu, a mountain stream running along its foot – the crest was beyond the troops' logistical reach. In September the Chinese reacted just as they were doing in the western sector, confronting the new Indian post with a superior containing force. The Indian government then proclaimed that it was the Chinese who had sent forces across the McMahon Line, and Nehru made his public vow to have them thrown back.

The Indian army was struggling against agonising difficulties to get even lightly

armed infantry to the area – all weapons and supplies had to be man-carried over steep ridges at altitudes lethal to its unacclimatised and under-clad troops: the PLA, its heavy weapons and supplies, were transported by truck to just behind Thagla Ridge and then by mules across it. To drive the Chinese off the ridge by assault was a military impossibility, even after the Indians had managed to concentrate a brigade of infantry – indeed any Indian concentration could easily be outnumbered by the Chinese. The divisional commander whose troops would have to obey the order and launch a hopeless attack recalled his reaction to hearing Nehru's statement on the radio news:

The statement hit me like a bludgeon. I found it hard to believe that any responsible person let alone a statesman of international repute could publicly make such an irresponsible operational pronouncement.... The military implications and the likely Chinese reaction were clear, at least to us up at the front. If Nehru had declared his intention to attack, then the Chinese were not going to wait to be attacked.⁶⁰

On October 9 the Indian troops had made a tactical move preliminary to an assault on the ridge. That foolhardy sally was promptly driven back, but not before the Indians had inflicted heavy casualties on the Chinese. A few days later another battalion struggled down onto the riverline to reinforce the Indians, bringing their number to about 2,500. The deployment of the Indian troops was as if for attack, not defence. Thus there were no grounds for doubt in Beijing that Nehru meant what he said, and that an Indian assault on the Chinese positions was imminent.⁶¹ Nor was there any doubt that such an assault could be repulsed, with massive losses among the attackers and minimal Chinese casualties. But Beijing must have appreciated that such a localised victory would only have worsened China's problem. The Indians' defeat would have augmented their complaints of victimisation and charges of Chinese aggression – which were being believed in the west – and determined them to fight again as soon as they were strong enough. Only a punitive blow on a far greater scale could be expected to deter India from continuing its attempts to make good its border claims by force.

Before dawn on October 20 the PLA launched a pre-emptive offensive, and the border war began.⁶² The Indian troops beneath Thagla Ridge fought while their ammunition lasted, about 30 minutes, before they were overwhelmed, and the Chinese advance in the east continued until Tawang was re-occupied. The most

advanced Indian 'forward policy' posts in the western sector were also wiped out. The Chinese forces then paused, and Zhou Enlai appealed personally to Nehru. He offered a ceasefire and withdrawal of the PLA to positions behind the McMahon Line, calling for India, in return, to end its forward probing and open negotiations "to seek a friendly settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question". Nehru rejected the offer instantly. Three weeks later a second Chinese offensive took only three days to crush all Indian resistance in the disputed areas, in both the western and eastern sectors. Panicking, Nehru appealed for American military intervention in terms so hysterical that the Indian ambassador delivering the message wept with humiliation.⁶³

The PLA troops stopped their advance when they reached China's claim lines. Then China declared a unilateral ceasefire from November 22, and a month later withdrew its armed forces to positions 20 kilometres behind the McMahon Line.

Thus began and ended what prime minister Vajpayee described to president Clinton as "China's armed aggression against India". The account and analysis above show that the border war of 1962 was nothing of that kind. India created a border dispute, refused to negotiate it, and then attempted to make good its claims by armed force. A military response was imposed upon Beijing, and when it came it was measured and appropriate. China's reactive use of force was justified, strategically and politically, indeed Indian policy had left Beijing no realistic alternative. As one Indian commentator put it, "the catchphrase of [China's] 'unprovoked aggression' came to be peddled in the aftermath of the border war purely for political reasons – it was a cold political gimmick to win sympathy...."⁶⁴ But since that misrepresentation served as balm for the deeply wounded pride of the Indian political class it was immediately accepted as truth, and has been a cherished delusion in India ever since. Vajpayee showed in his letter to president Clinton that the Indian government is still ready to seek advantage from the old fiction.

II

Why the Dispute Is Still Unresolved

China's victory in the border war was complete, India's defeat absolute, but as a continuation of diplomacy by other means China's punitive expedition was only partially, and temporarily, successful. The Indian army's debacle led to a purge in headquarters. Only one or two of the courtier-soldiers survived in their careers.⁶⁵ the Indian army was returned to professional command and the political interfer-

ence which had led it into the forward policy and to debacle was ended. The borders fell quiet, there were no more challenging Indian probes in the western sector or across the McMahon Line – for 25 years. But nothing changed in the government's diplomatic approach. Nehru's position was as adamant as ever and indeed now reinforced with an imagined sense of injury and betrayal as well as real humiliation. China's use of force had not accomplished conclusively and lastingly either of its two political objectives: to bring India to the negotiating table; and to show the Indians that pending such negotiations it would be futile and self-destructive to try to impose India's territorial claims on China by force.

Zhou, whose personal experience of dealing with Nehru had left him contemptuous and angry,⁶⁶ took off the gloves in terminating the prime ministerial correspondence, in April 1963. He accused Nehru of taking "a dishonest approach, which shows that India has no intention whatever to hold negotiations", and ended with a *tant pis*: "If the Indian government, owing to its internal and external political requirements, is not prepared to hold negotiations for the time being, the Chinese government is willing to wait with patience". Thirty-six years later, it is still waiting.

Beijing's approach has not changed since Zhou Enlai first expressed it at the 1960 summit meeting. One of its most explicit statements since then was given pithily in 1981 by Deng Xiaoping, when he received a member of the Indian parliament:

China has never asked for the return of all the territory illegally incorporated into India by the old colonialists. China suggested that both countries should make concessions, China in the east sector and India in the west sector, on the basis of the actually controlled border line, so as to solve the Sino-Indian border question in a package plan.⁶⁷

The position in which Nehru had impaled his government has made reversal, even adjustment, very difficult. His own and other politicians' rhetoric apart, during the border war parliament had passed a resolution binding the government – and its successors – to 'recover' all Indian-claimed territory occupied by China. The official maps issued so confidently in 1954 to illustrate the 'firm and definite' – and non-negotiable – Indian borders can be cited to argue that any compromise settlement with Beijing would involve ceding Indian territory. The constitution does not give power of territorial cession to the executive. Thus it can be argued that a constitutional amendment would be required before a treaty could be imple-

mented, and in any conceivable political circumstances that would be extremely difficult to obtain. So even if any Indian government were prepared to brave a political storm by opening negotiations with Beijing with a view to settling the borders, the attempt would still meet the roadblock erected by Nehru.

Successor governments nevertheless stepped cautiously and slowly towards normalising relations with Beijing. Indira Gandhi, her father Nehru's near-successor, returned diplomatic representation to ambassadorial level in 1967. Under the Janata government in 1979 A B Vajpayee, then foreign minister, visited China, and after that visit low-level official discussions of the two governments' positions on the borders were re-opened, only to strand immediately on the basic contradiction – that what Beijing proposed to negotiate New Delhi held to be unnegotiable. Those meetings nevertheless sputtered on, and by the mid-1980s relations were on a steady and improving basis. Then in 1987 the border dispute was suddenly revived in an acute form, and turned again towards the arbitration of force, a second round of India's China war.

As in the early 1960s, a change in army headquarters had placed in top command another soldier with a 'Napoleon complex'.⁶⁸ Earlier it had been Nehru's kinsman General Kaul, a lowly public relations officer lifted by the prime minister's favour to the lofty and too-demanding office of chief of the general staff, then corps commander charged with sweeping the PLA out of the territory India claimed. In the 1980s it was General K Sundarji, chief of army staff, another ambitious soldier and, again like Kaul, without combat experience in his record. He developed an Indian Ludendorff plan, looking to a conflict that would enable India to deploy its military superiority to render Pakistan a 'broken-backed state'. In 1986 Operation Brasstacks, the largest Indian military exercise held up to then, was mounted on the border with Pakistan – with the aim, as one analyst put it, of "creating a situation in which Pakistan would be compelled to attack".⁶⁹ Sundarji was denied the opportunity to put his plan into effect because the Pakistani government kept its head and refused to be provoked. He then turned his attention, and the army's weight, against China in the McMahon Line sector.

The situation in that eastern sector had become inflamed again by yet another outbreak of what may be called the 'Longju syndrome', after the site of the first armed clash on the borders: the Indians' insistence on a right to move into areas north of the McMahon Line wherever their

appreciation of local topography suggested McMahon had drawn it too far to the south (they have never found sectors where he drew it too far north). As had been demonstrated since 1959 and crushingly in October 1962, China disallowed such unilateral adjustments and invariably confronted them. Nevertheless in 1985, when the spring thaw reopened the patrolling season for the Indians, a small detachment of the Special Services Bureau (SSB, established in 1963 as a border reconnaissance and intelligence unit) was sent forward to establish an observation post above the Sumdarong Chu (river). The site gave the post an overview of Chinese military dispositions behind Thagla Ridge; and so the new post was not only on the Chinese side of the map-marked McMahon Line, it was in an area of special significance and sensitivity since it had been the spark-point for the border war. In laying down the conditions for the PLA's unilateral withdrawal in 1962 Beijing had specified that the triangular tract of territory between the map-marked McMahon Line, the Bhutan border and Thagla Ridge was to be kept de-militarised, and reserved the right to 'strike back' if India moved into it.

The Chinese did not react immediately to the establishment of the new post, however, and it went unchallenged until the onset of winter when the SSB detachment withdrew. Investigating the vacated site, the Chinese noted that work had been commenced to make this an all-year-round post: they demolished those structures and built their own, clearing a helipad. On the SSB's return to resume the position in July 1986 they found the Chinese securely installed there. Word of that Chinese anticipation quickly leaked into the Indian press, with official spokesmen as usual portraying it as an unprovoked intrusion into Indian territory; and on August 8 the Indian government formally accused China of having deliberately sent forces across the McMahon Line. The Chinese pre-emption of the Sumdarong Chu site and denial of it to India was seized on by General Sundarji as a challenge which the army must take up, and a new exercise, Operation Falcon, was quickly organised on the basis of a regular map exercise, Operation Chequerboard, which had been scheduled for about that time. Operation Falcon was to confront China with a display of great offensive force on its border, as Brasstacks had with Pakistan.

So on the winding down of Brasstacks at the beginning of 1987 the Indian army began heavy troop deployments from west to east and south to north. Just as a beginning, three infantry divisions, although stretched and fatigued from their role in

Brasstacks, were moved across India into the McMahon Line sector. By April 1987 the Indian army had, in strength, taken up the positions beneath Thagla Ridge in which its battalions had been overwhelmed at the outset of the border war. The Indians established two strong points threatening the Chinese post on the Sumdarong Chu: Chinese forces were immediately deployed to confront them in two opposing posts only 7-10 metres away. The Indians made additional shallow advances across the McMahon Line at some seven widely separated points, bringing immediate Chinese responses and close-contact confrontations between the opposing troops. Thus Sundarji threw down the gauntlet.

By this time, after decades of intensive re-arming and expansion, the Indian army was very different from the weakly-armed, ill-clothed force that had been painfully mustered in 1962 to drive the PLA out of their commanding positions on Thagla Ridge and later, although in strong defensive positions, had crumbled without giving battle because of incompetent generalship. Not only were the Indian troops now well prepared and armed for warfare in this terrain, roadheads had been brought nearer the key frontier areas, and plenty of transport aircraft and combat helicopters were available to provide supply and ground-attack support. At the peak of the exercise India had deployed 12 divisions, with additional independent brigades, against the Chinese in the north-east. Ground support and fighter-bomber aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) were brought into airfields in Assam and north Bengal: by one account from a reliable informant, five squadrons.

General Sundarji's calculation was that if the Chinese were drawn to respond as they had done in 1962 and used lightly-armed infantry to launch fast-moving, hard-hitting sweeps up to and around Indian positions, they could be stopped, surrounded and wiped out by superior Indian forces striking from prepared defensive bases – a tactic Sundarji called 'encirclement/annihilation'.⁷⁰ His strategy called also for limited counter-offensives into Tibet if the Chinese reacted in force, with the IAF in an infantry support role, extending, if necessary to ensure control of the air, to raids on Chinese air force bases in Tibet. Sundarji's battle scenario seems to have taken Viet Nam's successful resistance to China's invasion as exemplary: not long before he had led an Indian military delegation to Hanoi.

The Chinese did not react as they had done in 1962, however. They heavily reinforced in Tibet, inducting field forces from Chengdu and Lanzhou, with fighter-

bombers and combat helicopters suited to operations at high altitudes. The leadership in Beijing was no doubt aware of the view expressed in official circles in New Delhi – to be fair, on their eccentric fringes – that India should advance its frontier to the Tsangpo River,⁷¹ and therefore took no risks. In May, Beijing formally warned India of the serious consequences if it persisted in 'aggression'. There were unconfirmed reports at the time that the Indian army planned and prepared a divisional attack to clear the Chinese out of the Sumdurong Chu area; but twice, according to those reports, last-minute orders called off the attack.⁷² Such an action would undoubtedly have re-ignited a full scale border war, perhaps something more; but in the absence of anything but pinpricks Beijing declined to be provoked into retaliation.

The Indian government's presentation of the confrontation as another consequence of China's aggressive encroachments onto indisputably Indian territory drowned out Beijing's more truthful account, as had happened in the run-up to the border war. But considering the explosive potential of this confrontation surprisingly little attention was publicly paid to it internationally.⁷³ Satellite observation gave Washington a grandstand view of everything that was happening, however, and the administration watched developments closely, from about March 1987. It appears that the Americans brought up the subject with the vice-chairman of the Chinese military commission, General Yang Shangkun, during his visit to the US in April, evoking the response that although China wanted a peaceful settlement it would have to react if India kept up its aggressive probings along the frontier. That reminded Washington's officials of Deng Xiaoping's vehement criticism of India during the Beijing visit of Caspar Weinberger, then defence secretary, in the previous October when, according to the well-informed Washington correspondent of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Deng had "accused India of nibbling at Chinese territory and said that China would have to 'teach India a lesson' if this practice did not stop". When secretary of state George Schultz went to Beijing in March 1987 Deng repeated that warning about the potential consequences of India's actions, and advised the administration to take into account the anxiety caused among India's neighbours by American plans to provide India with high-technology defence equipment.⁷⁴

The Americans did not like any of that at all. Long gone were those jubilant days when Washington's highest hopes (and deepest plans?) were fulfilled in India's

great falling-out with China. Now such a conflict would be contrary to all the USA's political and strategic interests, and it can safely be assumed that the Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was so informed. From Moscow Gorbachev had before this made it clear that the USSR wished to see good relations restored between New Delhi and Beijing, having himself taken the simple – but portentous – step needed to begin the resolution of the equally embittered and apparently intractable Sino-Soviet border dispute.

The confrontation eased with remarkable speed at the end of the summer of 1987, that anti-climax presumably reflecting a belated assertion of authority by the Indian prime minister or cabinet, in response to American warnings. New Delhi toned down its statements; and then extended an olive branch by seeking an invitation for prime minister Rajiv Gandhi to visit Beijing.

Flag meetings between local commanders of the opposing forces along the McMahon Line were arranged, leading to disengagement in some areas. The eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation of the four posts in the Thagla triangle continued, however. Throughout the eastern sector the Indian army remained deployed in force in forward positions, giving its troops, so another general of the Sundarji school was to opine in 1995, "moral ascendancy over the Chinese for the first time since their humiliation on these very mountains in 1962".⁷⁵ General Sundarji's tenure ended not long after this and he retired, maintaining that the challenge he had mounted, and Beijing's passive response to it, had restored the morale the Indian army had lost in 1962, 'putting its tail up again'.⁷⁶

Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in December 1988 did not lead to any breakthrough but the ongoing discussions on the border were raised to a higher level. Two years later prime minister Li Peng returned Rajiv Gandhi's visit. While again there was little to show from that summit meeting so far as the border dispute was concerned, behind the scenes progress was being made because the Indian approach had changed after Gandhi's visit, on the official level if not yet politically. One factor in that change was probably the aftermath of Sundarji's brinkmanship. The deployment of perhaps 60,000 troops in remote locations and extremely arduous conditions along the border (some estimates put the number at double that) put a heavy strain on the defence budget and was destructive to troop morale. But unilateral withdrawal of the bulk of the forces deployed on the China borders, even their significant thinning out, would

inevitably be assailed as retreat and surrender by the politicians, on the government as well as opposition side. If India's strained and distorted military posture was to be corrected it would have to be done under the cover of an agreement with China providing for mutuality.

Acceptance of Beijing's 40-year-old standing offer to open negotiations aimed at delimiting the boundaries and then jointly demarcating them continued to be unthinkable in New Delhi. But if Nehru's refusal to agree a stand-still on the borders could quietly be circumvented, some officials appear to have reasoned, the army's predicament could be resolved; and the line of actual control on the borders, if left undisturbed for decades or generations, might ultimately come in India to be considered negotiable. It was recognised however that an attempt to reach an agreement with Beijing that would allow military disengagement carried high domestic political risks, and so had to be approached warily and tentatively. So first the MEA sent up a trial balloon.

In August/September 1991 the Chinese vice-foreign minister, Qi Huaiyuan, visited New Delhi and held talks with officials and then with the prime minister, V P Singh. After Qi's departure Indian officials tipped off diplomatic correspondents that the meetings had produced a break-through – an agreement by which both sides would maintain the status quo along the Sino-Indian borders. The leak was displayed on the elite's notice-board, the main English-language newspapers, on September 2.⁷⁷ The implication such an agreement would carry in Nehru's terms, effective waiving of India's claim to Aksai Chin, was not recalled: the news was received calmly by politicians and press, even with satisfaction. But in fact the claim that an agreement to maintain the status quo had been reached was false. All that had been agreed in the talks were measures to facilitate communication between the two confronting forces on the border.⁷⁸ But that the trial balloon attracted no hostile fire must have encouraged the Indian officials who had floated it to press on, to try to enable the army to disengage, and to take a first step on the long road towards a boundary settlement.

Those efforts gathered strength when P V Narasimha Rao, a former foreign minister, became prime minister of a Congress government: he may have felt more freedom of movement than his immediate predecessors because the Congress Party had in 1988 resolved that India should seek a settlement with China based on "mutual interest" and "acceptable to the peoples of both countries".⁷⁹ Furthermore, J N Dixit, a widely experienced and activist

diplomat, became foreign secretary and gave focus and fresh impetus to the feelers the MEA had been putting out to Beijing. By June 1993 a draft had been drawn up with the Chinese side. The prime minister approved it as the basis for final discussions to be held in Beijing during a summit visit scheduled for September; but in the interim he and Dixit held a series of meetings with political leaders in which they explained the reasons behind the government's approach, and argued that an agreement would be in the national interest. Approval was obtained, even from opposition parties – and the insistence that there be no leaks during that process was respected for once.⁸⁰ Consequently there was public surprise when, at the end of the meetings in Beijing, it was announced that an agreement had been signed "on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the line of actual control in the India-China border areas".

The agreement, on three pages and with only nine articles, is a model text, concise and clear. No-one familiar with the course of the Sino-Indian dispute could read it without reflecting how much conflict and destruction would have been avoided if in 1959 Nehru's government had agreed to Zhou Enlai's urging of just such a stand-still agreement. For the Indian side the essential passage, one that could have liberated Nehru too, is the caveat that "references to the line of actual control... do not prejudice [the two sides'] respective positions on the boundary question".⁸¹

In summary, the agreement provides that:

- Neither side shall use or threaten force.
- Both sides shall strictly respect and observe the line of actual control (LAC).
- Force levels on the LAC shall be reduced to "a minimum level compatible with... friendly and good neighbourly relations...."
- The parties shall work out, in a reinforced joint working group, how to achieve those ends.

Narasimha Rao's careful preparation of the political ground bore fruit, and there was no outcry in India against the agreement. That in effect it demolished one of the twin pillars of Nehru's border policy went unremarked.

The agreement, which like that of 1954 opened with an invocation of the 'Five Principles' of peaceful coexistence, looked to drawing the dangerous friction along the border out of the dispute and opening the way to a Sino-Indian detente, enabling incidentally a strategic re-deployment by the Indian army. But the rub lay in its implementation, which had to begin with agreement on the exact alignment of the LAC. Insistence by the Indian side on

retention of the petty and strategically meaningless territorial acquisitions made during Sundarji's adventurist exercise meant that that became a vexed and protracted process, still continuing.

It was understood by both sides in the 1993 summit negotiations which clinched the agreement that the first task thereafter must be to disengage the dangerously proximate four posts near the Sumdorong Chu. The opening Chinese position on that issue was that the Indians should withdraw first (thus making the Chinese posts, reactive in origin, superfluous, and allowing their withdrawal). Beijing's argument was that all the posts were clearly north of McMahon's line, and therefore outside disputed territory, in China proper. But to the Indian side there was no such thing as 'disputed territory', what India claimed to be Indian, was Indian; and therefore there could be no question of the Indian forces initiating the disengagement from the four Sumdorong Chu posts. The Chinese must withdraw first, thus conceding that the territory concerned was Indian. At a working group meeting in New Delhi in August 1995 a compromise was agreed – for mutual, simultaneous withdrawals.⁸²

The prompt announcement of that agreement, hailed by the Indian foreign secretary, by now Salman Haider, as a 'historic step', was received by no means as calmly as on previous occasions. Words and good intentions were one thing in Indian political opinion, withdrawal from even a patch of territory quite another. The agreement and the subsequent withdrawal of the two Indian outposts near Sumdorong Chu was strongly criticised by politicians and journalists. Typical, though among the mildest, was the complaint by a former foreign secretary, A P Venkateswaran, who saw in the agreement an instance of India "buckling under and conceding an advantage without ensuring a quid pro quo...."⁸³ There have been no subsequent significant disengagements from advanced positions, although there have been reports of substantial Indian troop movements away from the China border and towards Pakistan.

In December 1996 a further agreement was signed, again in New Delhi, on "confidence-building measures in the military field" along the LAC. In this the two sides bound themselves not to attack, and to take measures to reduce or limit their military forces in the border areas. Limits were set on the scale and location of military exercises, and provision made for swift communication. Self-restraint was called for in the case of confrontations due to differences on the location of the LAC, and the process of clarification and con-

firmation of that was to be speeded up. The regular meetings to that end continue, but they have been deflected away from the original aim of a progressive strategic disengagement, without prejudice to basic border claims, back towards the nub of the dispute – which territory belongs to which side?

So it is that, as prime minister Vajpayee wrote in justifying his government's nuclear tests to President Clinton, the Sino-Indian border dispute remains unresolved. Indeed it is as far from settlement, and even from negotiation, as ever. The recent public designation of China as India's primary strategic enemy by ministers of the Indian government indicates that the intention of the Narasimha Rao administration to achieve pacification of the borders along the line of actual control does not sit with the approach of the ruling BJP party, and suggests that while it remains in power renewed confrontations may be expected on the border. So reconsideration of the continuing Sino-Indian border dispute confirms, first, that it was not only entirely avoidable but was created through irrational policy-making on the part of the Indian government; second, that the failure to resolve it before the border war and in the decades since is the responsibility of India; third, that it was India's policy which transposed a diplomatically deadlocked dispute to the field of war – and, if continued, might do so again.

Seen in historical perspective the border war looks diminished, even trivial. But the conflict had far-reaching and malign consequences not only for India and China but also for the international community. How differently world politics would have developed if Nehru had shown the wisdom and political courage of U Nu of Burma and, like him, had negotiated a mutually satisfactory boundary settlement with Beijing and sealed it, about 1959, with a treaty of friendship and non-aggression. China would then have been spared the odium the conflict and Indian frame-up brought, and instead its international reputation would have been greatly enhanced. Beijing's assumption of China's UN seat would probably have been brought forward by years. India would not have embarked on the intensive re-arming which led Pakistan to venture the 1965 war. Sino-American relations might well have mended sooner, with likely effect on Washington's approach to Vietnam. And of course one excuse for India's nuclear tests would not have existed – but then that is doubly bogus, the Hindu nationalist party had been committed to India's acquiring nuclear weapons since soon after independence.

Notes

- 1 Prime Minister A B Vajpayee's letter to president Clinton, *New York Times*, May 13, 1998.
- 2 The definition and the argument here draw on Ainslie T Embree's suggestive paper, 'Frontiers into Boundaries: The Evolution of the Modern State' in *Imagining India: Essays on Indian History* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989).
- 3 *Documents on International Affairs 1955*, (OUP, London, 1958), p 423.
- 4 If this statement is read in hindsight knowledge of what had been happening on and about the Sino-Indian frontier over the five years before Zhou made it, it seems logical to infer that he had in mind the Indian approach, by then clearly demonstrated by movement of forces, public statements and new cartographic claims, as the counter-model to what China intended.
- 5 See the writer's papers in *China Quarterly* (October-December 1973), *Pacific Community* (Vol 1, No 1), *Modern China* (Vol 1, No 1, January 1975), *Foreign Affairs*, (Vol 57, No 1, Fall, 1958), *International Affairs* (Vol 47, No 1, January 1971).
- 6 Text in *World Affairs* (New Delhi), Vol 2, No 1, January-March 1998, p 139.
- 7 J R V Prescott, *Map of Mainland Asia by Treaty* (Melbourne, University Press, 1975), chapters 12, 13, 14.
- 8 A summary of those attempts is in the writer's *India's China War* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1970). For full accounts see the series of historical studies by Alastair Lamb, notably *The McMahon Line* in two volumes (Routledge and Keegan Paul, London, 1996) and *Tibet, China and India 1914-1950* (Roxford Books, Hertingfordbury, Herts, 1989).
- 9 Steven A Hoffmann was the first student of the Sino-Indian dispute to recognise how important Indian nationalism was in the evolution and implementation of New Delhi's policy. See his *India and the China Crisis* (University of California Press, 1990), passim.
- 10 Ashutosh Varshney, 'Contested Meanings: India's National Identity, Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Anxiety', *Daedalus* 122, No 3 (1993).
- 11 Alastair Lamb, *Incomplete Partition: The Genesis of the Kashmir Dispute 1947-1948* (Roxford Books, Hertingfordbury, 1997), p 2.
- 12 Hoffmann, op cit, p 25.
- 13 Hoffmann, op cit, p 25.
- 14 The Indian government's note on the 'Historical Background of the Himalayan Frontier of India', White Paper II, p 125.
- 15 Hoffmann, op cit, p 25.
- 16 *Frontiers: A Changing Concept* (Palit and Palit, New Delhi, 1978). It was Murty, then an officer in the Indian Frontier Service, whose on-the-ground investigations in the late 1950s convinced him that the boundary in the eastern sector should lie on the crest of Thagla Ridge rather than where McMahon had drawn it, several miles to the south. He later became a member of the team of Indian officials which produced a report on the historical evolution of the borders after the failed Nehru/Zhou summit.
- 17 From Nehru's memorandum on the northern borders, circulated to ministries concerned in July 1954. It was secret and has not been officially published, but it was shown to the Indian writer D R Mankekar, who quotes it indirectly in his book, *Guilty Men of 1962* (Tulsi Shah Enterprises, Bombay, 1968), p 128, and Mankekar shared his transcription of the original with the present writer, who first published it in India's *China War*.
- 18 A O Cukwurah, *The Settlement of Boundary Disputes in International Law* (Manchester University Press, 1967), p 159.
- 19 Lord Curzon defined a scientific frontier as one 'which unites natural and strategic strength, and by placing both the entrance and the exit of the passes in the hands of the defending Power, compels the enemy to conquer the approach before he can use the passage'. Curzon, 'Frontiers' in *Oxford Lectures on History, 1904-1923* (Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, New York, 1924), p 9.
- 20 Rubin, Alfred P, book review (of Alastair Lamb's, *The McMahon Line*) in the *American Journal of International Law*, Vol 61, 1967, p 827.
- 21 The history of the McMahon Line is documented and quite clear. It is given in summary in this writer's *India's China War*, but most fully in Alastair Lamb's two-volume study (*The McMahon Line: A Study in the Relations between India China and Tibet, 1904 to 1914*), extended in his further account, *Tibet, China and India 1914-1950: A History of Imperial Diplomacy* (Roxford Books, Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire, 1989); and there are important further insights in Karunakar Gupta's brave and distinguished book, *The Hidden History of the Sino-Indian Frontier* (Minerva Associates, Calcutta, 1974).
- 22 K Gupta, op cit, p ix and passim; Alastair Lamb, *Tibet, China and India 1914-1950*, Chapter XII. The forgery consisted of a doctored 1937 reissue of the 1929 edition of Aitchison's *Treaties*, the Indian government's official record, which bore the original date and purported to be the original version. It was first exposed in a paper of the Harvard Center for International Affairs (April 1963) by Sir John Addis, a British diplomat. Caroe's unprincipled commitment to the Indian side of the dispute was demonstrated when in an article in the *Manchester Guardian* of February 13, 1960 he cited as evidence in its support the forgery he had himself arranged.
- 23 B N Mullik, *My Years With Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal* (Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1971), p 80.
- 24 This is in Sardar Patel's letter on Sino-Indian relations to Nehru, November 7, 1950, which is widely quoted. The reference here is to Mullik, op cit, p 118.
- 25 See Lamb, 1989, Chapter XIII.
- 26 An eye-witness account of the arrival of the Indian force in Tawang was published later. *Xinhua*, (New China News Agency), September 16, 1959.
- 27 Mullik, op cit, pp 155/56.
- 28 Mullik, op cit, p 150.
- 29 This statement of Nehru's thinking was articulated by K M Panikkar in a letter to Sir G S Bajpai, who had urged the government to be open with China about its claims in the north-east. See the writer's *India's China War*, pp 76/77.

- 30 This memorandum, never made public, was shown to the Indian journalist D R Manekar, who quoted it in his book, *Guilty Men of 1962* (Tulsi Shah Enterprises, Bombay, 1962). Manekar shared his transcription of the original with the present writer.
- 31 C U Aitchison, (ed), *Collection of Engagements, Treaties and Sanads, Etc, 1931*, Vol XII, Part I, p 5.
- 32 If transposed to the ground McMahon's line would be about 400 metres wide, sufficient definition for a de facto boundary provided both sides wished to avoid clashes.
- 33 Karunakar Gupta, *The Hidden History of the Sino-Indian Frontier* (Minerva Associates, Calcutta, 1974), p 52.
- 34 The official was S Gopal, at the time head of the foreign ministry's historical division, later hagiographer of Jawaharlal Nehru. For details of the falsification and its utilisation see Gupta, op cit, p 34.
- 35 B N Mullik, *My Years With Nehru, 1948-1964* (Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1972), Part I.
- 36 Mullik, op cit, pp 84-85.
- 37 A Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet* (M E Sharpe, New York, 1987), chapter 8.
- 38 Maxwell, 'China and India: The Un-Negotiated Dispute', *China Quarterly*, July-September 1970, p 51.
- 39 Mullik, op cit, p 190.
- 40 Mullik, op cit, p 193.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Mullik, pp 242-44.
- 43 Krishna Menon, defence minister, was largely to blame for this but Nehru also bore heavy responsibility, notably for the steady patronage which enabled his kinsman B M Kaul to rise in rank far beyond his abilities.
- 44 'Aggression' by a neighbour affords the basis upon which a state may exercise the right of self-defence - but not 'where the sovereignty over territory a state claims to protect is disputed, as will surely be the position in a boundary dispute' A O Cukwarah, *The Settlement of Boundary Disputes in International Law*, p 7.
- 45 Mullik, op cit, pp 204-05.
- 46 The writer has given fully detailed and documented accounts of this and subsequent events in India's China War, drawing largely on the diplomatic correspondence published by India in a series of White Papers. Unless otherwise indicated those are the source for quotations used here.
- 47 The diplomatic exchanges between New Delhi and Beijing were published contemporaneously by the Indian government and regularly collected into a series of White Papers, and quotations from the notes and prime ministerial letters are from those unless otherwise stated. Exact citations are not given, the dates indicated being sufficient references.
- 48 After the border war, in a concluding letter, Zhou Enlai asked Nehru: 'In the past you always advised other countries to settle disputes peacefully through negotiations without setting any preconditions, why has the Indian government taken a diametrically opposite attitude towards the Sino-Indian boundary question?' White Paper, No IX, p 13.
- 49 Maxwell, 'China and India: The Un-Negotiated Dispute'. *The China Quarterly*, July-September 1970.
- 50 Hoffmann, op cit, p 39.
- 51 Mullik dedicated his volume, *The Chinese Betrayal*, to the memory of the Indian casualties at the Kongka Pass whose 'sacrifice made the country aware of the true nature of Communist China'.
- 52 U Nu had from the beginning accepted that the Sino-Burmese border was undefined, and could be established only through negotiations. He resisted popular demands that his government take a defiant and intransigent approach, and as a result Burma emerged from the negotiations with a boundary very close to what it had sought, and a treaty of peace and friendship with China. For a full description of the intricacies of the Sino-Burmese border problem and settlement, see Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma* (The Cresset Press, London, 1962), Part Five, 'Frontier Issues'.
- 53 *India's China War*, p 159.
- 54 Hoffmann, op cit, p 256.
- 55 A D Gorwala, quoted by Hoffmann, op cit, p 50.
- 56 Hoffmann, op cit, p 38.
- 57 *International Herald Tribune*, September 16, 1998.
- 58 J K Galbraith (American ambassador at the time) to the writer, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, winter 1993-94: quoted with permission. The links between Mullik and the CIA may have gone further than New Delhi, he appears to have been a frequent visitor to Washington.
- 59 *The New York Herald Tribune* ran an approving editorial headed 'Nehru Declares War on China'. In the United States and Britain the developing Sino-Indian conflict was watched with *schadenfreude*.
- 60 Major-General Niranjan Prasad (Ret'd), *The Fall of Tawang* (Palit and Palit), New Delhi, 1981, p 69.
- 61 Details are given in two admirable accounts of how Indian troops bravely tried to execute the impossible orders that came down the line of command from the political leadership through the corrupted levels of Army HQ, Western Command, and IV Corps, to the divisional and brigade commanders whose duty it would be to launch the attack: Brigadier John P Dalvi's, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian Border War of 1962* (Thacker and Co, Bombay, 1969) and Major-General Naranjan Prasad's, *The Fall of Tawang* (Palit and Palit, New Delhi, 1981).
- 62 Beijing falsely charged that Indian forces had that day attacked in the Thagla Ridge area and the western sector, and that the Chinese had counter-attacked. The truth, that Chinese forces had pre-empted the Indian attack which Nehru had heralded to the world, would have served China better.
- 63 B K Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second* (Viking, New Delhi, 1997).
- 64 R C Ayer, 'The Sino-Indian Dispute', *Frontier*, Calcutta, November 21, 1970, p 12.
- 65 Notably the then brigadier and director of military operations D K Palit, who is one of the quartet of officers blamed for the Indian debacle in the army's official Report (still unreleased), but who rose to be major-general. Naturally his own account gives no hint of that complicity: *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (Hurst and Co, London, 1991).
- 66 Zhou still harboured, and expressed, those feelings when the writer discussed the Sino-Indian conflict with him in Beijing in 1971.
- 67 Quoted by Karunakar Gupta in 'Sino-Indian Relations: Getting the Facts Straight', *The Statesman* (New Delhi) May 11, 1981.
- 68 The diagnosis was made in conversation with the writer by a senior Indian official who knew the General well.
- 69 Ravi Rikhye, *The War That Never Was: The Story of India's Strategic Failures* (Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1988), p 35.
- 70 Interview with General Sundarji at Harvard in November 1993.
- 71 Mullik, op cit, p 130, quoting, with approval, the view of Ram Manohar Lohia, a prominent parliament member at the time, 'that we should extend our frontier to the Brahmaputra (or the Tsangpø) River in Tibet'. It was only thus, Mullik argued, that "the Indian troops can meet the Chinese on more equal terms so far as physical condition and acclimatisation are concerned".
- 72 Ravi Rikhye, *Times of India*, April 16, 1947.
- 73 The writer's article, 'Towards India's Second China War?' in *South* (London, May 1987) is an exception. He had been alerted to the scale and seriousness of the Indian challenge by informants in official Washington.
- 74 Nayan Chanda, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 4, 1987, pp 42-44.
- 75 General Ashok K Mehta, 'Why Are We Quitting Our Territory?', *Hindustan Times* September 13, 1995.
- 76 Sundarji to the writer, Harvard, 1993.
- 77 *The Hindu*, *The Times of India*, *The Statesman*.
- 78 This was categorically affirmed to the writer a year later by a member of the Chinese side in the New Delhi talks, and later confirmed in discussions with officials in the foreign ministry in Beijing. It was emphasised that the status quo as of that time was in fact totally unacceptable to China, containing as it did close-proximity confrontations with Indian troops north of the McMahon Line: disengagement accomplished by Indian withdrawals would have to precede an agreement to maintain the status quo. Proof that this had been a trial balloon, that the 1961 reports were deliberate falsifications, came in 1993 when an agreement to maintain the status quo was really negotiated, and expressed in a treaty.
- 79 Surjit Mansingh, 'Sino-Indian Relations', *Asian Survey*, Vol XXXIV, No 3, March 1994.
- 80 Interview with J N Dixit at Hull University, March 8, 1995. There was a sticking point in the Chinese wish for inclusion of wording that signalled Beijing's refusal to recognise India's 1975 annexation of Sikkim, and that was in the draft when Rao went to Beijing in September 1993. The Indians insisted on deletion, and the Chinese gave way at the last moment.
- 81 Quotations from a copy of the text obtained from the Indian ministry of external affairs.
- 82 This background draws on discussions in the foreign ministry in Beijing in October 1996 and later discussions with Indian officials involved.
- 83 *The Pioneer* (New Delhi) September 3, 1995.