

Review Article

NEVILLE MAXWELL'S WAR*

BY

K. Subrahmanyam**

Neville Maxwell's book *India's China War* (Jaico Publishing House, Bombay, 1970) has already been subjected to extensive comments by a number of senior journalists in this country. By and large, the comments are not commendatory and one correspondent reflected the official view that it had woven a string of half truths and mis-representations around a pre-conceived conclusion. It is natural for an ordinary Indian to get indignant over the book. The author's bias and distortions are so blatant throughout the book that one is sorely tempted to dismiss the work as purely polemical. But it would be wrong to do so for two reasons. First though there has been an attempt to play down this aspect Maxwell has claimed that officers and officials of the Indian Army and Government of India gave him access to unpublished files and reports and he has heavily drawn upon these materials, and any one going through the book cannot doubt the validity of this claim. Secondly, in spite of his bias, Maxwell has perhaps unwittingly rendered a valuable service by breaking some new ground in the debate on 1962 debacle. He has seriously and with quite some data questioned the popular view that Prime Minister Nehru was taken in by the slogan of *Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai* and did not wake up to Chinese danger till it was too late. He has also contributed to the rebuttal of the widely held impression, this with his access to official records of the time, that the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister interfered with military operations and that the NEFA debacle was due to lack of men and material.

It is not a difficult exercise to guess who could have given Maxwell access to official records. Though he tries to project an impression of having had access to a large number of officers,

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officials and unpublished records, a discerning observer can see that there are only three main areas where he has brought out information unpublished before. He deals in detail with Bajpai-Panikkar correspondence on McMahon line. He has furnished details of the Prime Minister's directives of 1954 and 1959—61 on border security and patrolling and lastly he has dealt with the events of 1962. Sufficient indication has been given in the book that the details relating to last two areas are from the Henderson-Brookes Report. This report, classified "Top Secret" is reported not to be available even to the top most officials of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs. The summary of the conclusions of the report, which was placed on the Table of the House in September 1963, was believed to have been prepared by the then Cabinet Secretary. The number of officers and officials having access to this report are, therefore, not more than a dozen and among them those who had contacts with Maxwell are even fewer. This is, therefore, a deliberate leakage at the top most level of our Service or civilian bureaucracy. The country is entitled to expect the Government to take action against the persons concerned. A reading of the book will indicate that whatsoever be the motivation of the concerned persons for this act of disloyalty, their desire to have an impartial and fair account of the events published cannot have inspired them.

It is high time the country was told the full truth about 1962. It cannot do any harm but only good to the country. Contrary to the popular belief it will not show up our political executive in any bad light but will explode a number of myths sedulously cultivated in this country through half truths and malicious distortions about lack of intelligence, unwillingness of political executive to equip the country's armed forces, existence or otherwise of plans of various persons who claim authorship to them without being precise about them and functionality of our decision making system. It will tell us what really went wrong and whether the deficiencies have really been made up since 1962. Instead of affecting the morale of people and the armed forces, it will boost it considerably. It is obvious that it cannot be the politicians who are standing in the way of such scrutiny because those who were at the helm of affairs in 1962 are all gone. But the different organisations at the Governmental level and below have a vested interest in not subjecting their organisational and functional deficiencies to a rigorous examination. They may continue to oppose the publication of a full and truthful account of the events of 1962. Knowing this full well Maxwells write their

books and disloyal persons in high places who assist them hope to get away with it.

We may analyse this book by dividing it into three parts. Maxwell's interpretation of the dispute up to Nehru-Chou En-lai meeting in April 1960 explains his entire approach to the question and reveals the extent of his general bias. His narration of the forward policy and the events leading up to the border war based on unpublished Indian Army documents sheds light on the elaborate alibi which had been constructed to explain away the deficiencies in the decision making structure in foreign and defence policy making in India, which are in fact responsible for the debacle of 1962. His account of the border war, highly distorted and even malicious at places, still throws fresh light on some of the events of the period.

Maxwell asserts by quoting Rubin that in the 19th century Tibet was under the control of China and Ladakh was probably best regarded as part of Tibet. This has been questioned by others and it has been pointed out that the custom of exchanging presents which the Chinese followed should not always be treated as tributary relationship as understood in the West. Immediately thereafter he refers to Gulab Singh's invasion of Ladakh in 1834 and the subsequent war with Tibet. If Ladakh was part of Tibet why was there no reaction on the part of Tibet to Gulab Singh's conquest of Ladakh and subsequently how could a treaty be concluded between Tibet and Ladakh in 1842? The fact that some Britishers did not consider the treaty valid is not as relevant to the issue of defining the Tibet-Ladakh relationship as the fact that a treaty was indeed concluded. Subsequently the Indian officials during the Rangoon talks in 1960 quoted this treaty to substantiate the existence of a customary and traditional boundary between Ladakh and Tibet.

Maxwell also refers to the correspondence between British Indian authorities and China to mark the boundary. The Chinese agreed to send a delegation ; but when the British reached the frontier no Chinese turned up, though the Chinese themselves had stated earlier that the border had been sufficiently and distinctly fixed. The British thereafter proceeded to fix a boundary beyond which Gulab Singh of Kashmir would not be allowed to expand. In doing so, they were to take into account "not only the assumptions and practices of the local population—very scanty indeed—but also use their own judgement over where a practical boundary should lie."

Following this the British considered alternative boundaries. W.H. Johnson fixed one boundary which put the boundary along the Kuen Lun range, but this was questioned by other Britishers. In 1873 the British again considered pushing their boundary from Karakoram to Kuen Lun since Yakub Beg, the ruler of Sinkiang, himself considered that the southern border of his country lay along the Kuen Lun range. In 1889 Lord Lansdowne, the British Viceroy, wrote that since the land between Karakoram and Kuen Lun was of no value and inaccessible, the British should encourage China "to take it if they showed any inclination to do so. This would be better than leaving a no man's land." In the 1880s the Chinese told Younghusband that their boundary ran along the Karakoram range and the watershed between the Indus and the Tarim basin. In 1891-92 a Chinese official Li Yuan-ping explored their border by travelling up the Karakash River and travelling through Lingzi Tang salt pan and reaching Changchenmo river. In 1896 the Chinese claimed Aksai Chin as their territory to the British representative, McCartney stationed in Kashgar, who had presented the Chinese with an atlas in which the boundary was drawn according to W.H. Johnson's line along the Kuen Lun range. McCartney reported back about this argument and commented that "probably part of Aksai Chin was in Chinese and part in British territory". A British intelligence report of the same year agreed with this view.

In 1897 Sir John Ardagh, the British Director of Military Intelligence, taking note of China's weakness and the eagerness of Russia to advance into Sinkiang, pleaded to advance the boundary from Karakoram, which was regarded by the British as natural frontier of India, to Kuen Lun. He felt that this should be done to keep "our enemy from any possibility of occupying the longitudinal valleys and there preparing to surprise the passes." Viceroy, Lord Elgin, rejected this advice. He felt that "no invader has ever approached India from this direction, where nature has placed such formidable barriers." Elgin was for McCartney proposal to draw the boundary following the Lak Tsang range dividing Aksai Chin proper from the Lingzi Tang salt plains. This was proposed to China in 1899. China never replied to this proposal.

The British treated Aksai chin as part of Tibet in the hope of having it as a buffer in case the Russians occupied Sinkiang.

Travellers from India "had by the 1940s arguably established a prescriptive right at least to the lower reaches of the Changchenmo up to the Kongka Pass and perhaps as far as the Lanak Pass."

The above is a summary of the frontier developments in the western sector recorded by Maxwell in his book. During this period while the British surveyors and travellers roamed over all this area, the Chinese authority over Sinkiang and Tibet declined and they reoccupied both these areas only in 1949-51. The Chinese claim that they entered Western Tibet from Sinkiang through Aksai Chin in late 1950. This claim has been accepted by many including Maxwell. However, there are doubts whether they really did it or subsequently claimed that they had done it. Maxwell quotes with approval Chou En-lai's statement at Bandung and contrasts its reasonableness with India's "intransigent" approach.

"With some of these countries we have not yet finally fixed our border-line 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 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."

It does not occur to Maxwell that while Chou En-lai was proclaiming a reasonable approach, the Chinese were neither maintaining "the present situation" nor "restraining their Government", but were actually constructing the Aksai Chin road. Maxwell records the fact that an Indian patrol went to Lanak pass in 1952 and 1954 and set up an Indian flag at the pass. In 1959 miles before Lanak pass the Indian patrol was ambushed at Kongka la and Chou's assurances of peaceful means were not evident. However, in the course of the whole book Maxwell is unable to trace any serious contradiction between Chinese words and deeds, till he comes to the actual Chinese attack. That also he tends to underplay.

Maxwell draws pointed attention to Chou En-lai's conversation with Nehru when he indicated that though China was not willing to accept the McMahon Line drawn by the British as fair, they were willing to accept it as an accomplished fact. He derives the corollary from this proposition that India should have accepted the accomplished fact of Chinese occupation

of Aksai Chin. Are the two propositions really analogous? India was in possession of the area up to McMahon Line by 1950 before the Chinese entered Tibet except for Tawang which was occupied in 1951. But as Maxwell has himself recorded the Chinese were not in Lanak La in 1952 or 1954. What was the area under their occupation when the dispute came out into the open? Maxwell's book (the Indian edition) does not provide the map which has been published by the Government of India showing that in 1959 the Chinese occupied through establishing a series of posts the area bounded by a line from slightly west of Haji Langar to Sam Zung Ling to Kongkala to Dambu Guru. They moved forward from this line throughout 1960 and 1961 when all the time Chou En-lai was talking about the status quo. Completely overlooking this cardinal fact Maxwell interprets Chou En-lai as eminently reasonable and Nehru as intransigent and he finds it difficult to understand Nehru's submerged distrust of China. He notes this line of control on page 199 of his book but fails to link it up. A remarkable aspect of Maxwell's presentation of the problem is its total neglect of what happened on the ground since 1958 when Nehru first wrote to Chou En-lai questioning the Chinese right to construct the road and move into Aksai Chin. Maxwell attacks Nehru's word juggling on "maintaining the status quo". According to him, Chou by status quo meant "the situation obtaining at present" while for Nehru it meant the position as it was before the Chinese moved in.

Here again a small but significant phrase of Chou, quoted by Maxwell on page 135 of the book, escapes his attention in subsequent treatments. Chou does not talk of 'status quo' but of '*long existing* status quo of the border'. Even according to the Chinese and Maxwell the road was begun in 1956 and before that there were no *Chinese military personnel* in Aksai chin. Nehru wanted China to restore that *long existing* status quo, by asking Chinese personnel to go beyond the Indian claim line and offering to withdraw the Indian personnel beyond the Chinese claim line. Where is the word juggling in this proposition? By casually, yet perhaps deliberately, omitting the word long existing, it is Maxwell who juggles with words and comes out with a preposterous charge against Nehru. He assumes that according to this proposal the Chinese would have to evacuate about 20,000 sq. miles without bothering to define what was China's area of occupation at that stage. He also

concedes that Nehru was prepared to permit them to use the road, but still considers Nehru's proposal ingenious.

He is unable to appreciate Nehru's distinctions between negotiations and talks. He does not care to take note of Chinese style in negotiations with which the world and Nehru especially were quite familiar. Pan Mun Jom has almost been adopted in English vocabulary to indicate talking without negotiating. The present Paris talks, the Chinese-American talks at Warsaw and the Chinese-Soviet talks at Peking are all easily recognised as talks as distinguished from negotiations. Evidently Maxwell does not approve of Nehru adopting such negotiating strategy.

Nor does Nehru's distinction between the eastern and western sectors of the boundary make any sense to him. NEFA is populated and was under a well established civil administration while Aksai Chin was an uninhabited bleak no man's land. Chou's demand in reply to Nehru's proposal of mutual withdrawal from the uninhabited Aksai Chin, that the same should apply to inhabited and administered NEFA sounds very reasonable to Maxwell. He records the fact that NEFA border was brought under the Indian Army jurisdiction only after August 1959 and only the Assam Rifles were patrolling NEFA before that date. The Chinese military construction of a road through the no man's land, their constant probing forward from Aksai Chin plateau through Lingzi Tang salt plains through the Karakoram ranges into the Indus basin is equated with the civil administration in the populated NEFA.

Maxwell quotes General Sir John Ardagh, the British DMI's justification to shift the boundary from the Karakoram range to Kuen Lun on the ground that a strong enemy (at that time Ardagh had Russia in mind) could move along the longitudinal valleys of the no man's land between Karakoram and Kuen Lun and surprise the passes leading into Ladakh, but it does not occur to Maxwell that this was exactly what the Chinese were doing after 1959 all the time talking about maintaining the long standing status quo. Nor does Maxwell take serious note of two Chinese claim lines—the claim line of 1956 November which did not claim Chipchap valley and most of Galwan valley and the one of 1959 which modified the earlier line to claim both. Maxwell is able to clearly distinguish between Aksai Chin plateau, Lingzi

Indus system (Chipchap and Galwan) while he deals with the question in the British period. But all these distinctions vanish when he deals with post-1956 period and the Indian posts in Galwan and Chipchap valleys become probes into Aksai Chin.

Maxwell is all admiration for the way Chou conducted his press conference at the end of his visit to Delhi in April 1960 and approvingly endorses the way in which he claimed Chinese affinity for the Karakoram on the lines of Indian affinity to the Himalayas. Neither Tibet nor Sinkiang is Han country though both territories might have been under Han suzerainty for various periods of history. The Himalayas abut the Indian heartland. The Karakoram is thousands of miles away from the Han country. This arrogant effrontery of Chou En-lai appears to him to be an appropriate riposte to Indian sentiment about the Himalayas.

While Chou En-lai talked of watershed principle and Maxwell reasons that on that basis Karakoram should be the watershed, neither Chipchap valley nor Galwan valley belonged to the Tarim basin but to the Indus basin. The watershed between the two basins lay somewhere along the McCartney line which divided the Aksai Chin plateau from Lingzi Tang salt plains. Maxwell does not care to go into the issue why in that case the Chinese should object to Indian posts in Indus basin.

He is critical of Nehru's refusal to accept Chou's proposition that there existed between the two countries a line of actual control up to which each side exercised administrative jurisdiction. Nehru stated that facts regarding status quo were in dispute. Maxwell accepts without any reservation that the Chinese really administered territory limited by their claim line (whether of 1956 or 1959 he never cares to define). Not only the 1959 claim line contradicts the watershed principle, in 1959 the Chinese did not exercise control up to that line claimed by them. The detailed maps published by the Government of India along with Colombo proposals make this clear. The Chinese never published details of their posts. Nehru was, therefore, right in stating that status quo as claimed by the Chinese was in dispute.

One can point out to any number of such deficiencies in Maxwell's narrative. He is very selective in his treatment of facts. While he dwells on some at great length, he passes over others after very casual tantalising mention. He refers to Dr. Gopal persuading

Nehru that India's claim to Aksai Chin was stronger than China's. He refers to doubts entertained by Cabinet members when Gopal made his presentation. He also refers to Gopal encouraging him to write the book. But as to Gopal's arguments which convinced Nehru, he does not let readers have their benefit.

His selectivity in facts becomes more marked when we come to his treatment of forward policy. He feels that Nehru's treatment of Chinese presence in Aksai Chin as aggression compelled him to take action and this resulted in the forward policy. Whoever made available to him official unpublished documents either did that in a selective way or Maxwell uses the information available to him in that manner. He speaks of Indian probes into Aksai Chin when he is actually referring to Indians in the trans-Karakoram area and in the process tries to confuse the readers as to the purpose of the so called "forward policy".

Maxwell very correctly starts by recording that the objective of the forward policy was to block potential lines of further Chinese advance. If he had paused to reflect for a while at this stage it would have dawned on him that Chou En-lai was talking with his tongue in his cheek when he referred to long-standing status quo. On the other hand, the Chinese were steadily advancing from Aksai Chin through Karakoram into Indus basin. When Nehru proposed mutual withdrawal it was to stop the Chinese advance into Indus basin. Hence to draw any analogy between this and India's control over NEFA as Maxwell has done is to ignore the basic fact of Chinese intrusion into Indus basin area, which he himself had conceded was legitimately India's.

Secondly, he says the objective was to establish an Indian presence in Aksai Chin. He should have defined what was geographically Aksai Chin but he carefully evades this. Even up to October 1962 India never got within miles of Aksai Chin. Most of the Indian posts with a few exceptions were within a 20 Kilometre belt of what the Chinese claimed as their line of control on 7 September 1962 but which was very much in advance of their claim line of 1956 and which actually covered the Chipchap valley, Galwan valley, Nacho chu valley and Shyok valley which were all part of the Indus system. He further advances the view that this was an attempt to undermine Chinese control of the disputed areas by the interposition of Indian posts and patrols between Chinese positions, with

a view to cutting their supply lines and ultimately forcing them to withdraw. A look at the location of Indian posts as they were when the Chinese overran them in October 1962, given in the detailed map published by the Government of India, would show that only one post in Nacho chu river valley, one in Galwan valley, one at Siri Jap and one at Yula outflanked the Chinese posts. Other Indian posts did not.

One wonders whether Maxwell saw the official files on the forward policy and still comes to the above distorted conclusions or his patron whether in the Ministries or the Army Headquarters filtered some of the relevant files and steered him to the above conclusions. The so-called 'forward policy' was conceived just to prevent the Chinese from advancing further. The Indian Army was instructed to establish posts "to prevent the Chinese from advancing any further and also dominating from any posts which they may have already established in our territory." Curiously enough Maxwell quotes this directive in page 221 of his book but still draws conclusions that are not derivable from this directive and fails to draw the inescapable conclusion that contrary to their verbal assurance the Chinese were steadily advancing into Ladakh across the Karakoram.

He calls this policy irrational because it was based on the assumption that no matter how many posts and patrols India sent into Chinese claimed and occupied territory the Chinese would not physically interfere with them provided only that the Indians did not attack any Chinese positions. As mentioned above the policy was meant to fill in the gaps unoccupied in our own territory to stop the Chinese from advancing further. It was meant to test the bona fides of Chinese stand on status quo. The Chinese demonstrated that their aim was to occupy up to their claim line by force and all their talk about long standing status quo and their having exercised control in the territory from November 1956 was blatant lie. No doubt there was in the earlier period an assumption that a post established in the no man's land to prevent further Chinese advance would not be attacked by the Chinese. But this assumption was not held in all organisations since the middle of 1962. In fact the Director of Intelligence Bureau started warning from the middle of 1962 that there was every likelihood of Chinese resorting to military action. Subsequently Maxwell himself refers to general alert sent out to Western Command in September 1962. He has also mentioned

elsewhere to the Western Command's misgivings and also Nehru's awareness of the risks involved.

Maxwell repeats the familiar story about Indian defence preparedness having been neglected and quotes Lorne Kavic's book **India's Quest for Security** in support. Kavic's book gives the following data. The strength of the Indian Army rose from 280,000 in 1947 to 550,000 in 1962 (before the Chinese attack). India acquired a full Centuria armoured division, two regiments of AMX light tanks in this period. The Navy acquired 1 aircraft carrier, 2 cruisers, 3 destroyers, 11 new frigates apart from other miscellaneous vessels. The Air Force acquired 6 squadrons of Hunters, 4 squadrons of Mysteres, 3-4 squadrons of Canberras, 2 squadrons of Ouragaons, 2 squadrons of Gnats and 60 helicopters.

The defence expenditure in those years were as follows :—

(In crores of Rupees)

1951-52	190.15
1952-53	195.06
1953-54	200.56
1954-55	207.46
1955-56	203.09
1956-57	229.49
1957-58	297.87
1958-59	294.10
1959-60	280.56
1960-61	295.25
1961-62	320.34

A glance at the above data will show that while there could be a charge that what was spent was inadequate and the expenditure was not incurred to derive maximum cost effectiveness it would be difficult to substantiate any thesis that the armed forces were neglected or were allowed to run down. It is interesting to note further that the defence expenditure during Krishna Menon years was thirty to fifty per cent more than the average of previous five years. In these 10 years the foreign exchange expenditure was about Rs 300 crores.

In the case of expenditure on manufacturing establishments the following are the figures during those years —

(in crores of Rs.)			
1951-52	20.14	1957-58	17.78
1952-53	20.43	1958-59	19.09
1953-54	17.55	1959-60	25.56
1954-55	16.99	1960-61	28.79
1955-56	16.74	1961-62	43.73
1956-57	16.46		

Here again one may note the acceleration in expenditure during Krishna Menon years when he was charged with having neglected the country's defence needs and amused himself making coffee percolators. Maxwell refers to the development of semi-automatic rifle and reports that in 1958 a paper agreed to jointly among the Service Chiefs was sent to Production Board and no action was taken on these proposals. Presumably the official papers which would have told him what T. J. S. George records in his biography of Krishna Menon that the project got stuck in Army Headquarters till March 1962 (p 251 **Krishna Menon**, Jonathan Cape, London 1964) were not made available to him.

It is difficult to argue that the Se La debacle took place for lack of men. As Maxwell points out by the end of the campaign India was able to put in 25 battalions as against perhaps three divisions used by the Chinese. If one recalls the equipment returned by the Chinese the charge of inadequacy of equipment will be found untenable. Indian Army at Kameng had tanks while the Chinese had none. When the Indian Army fought the Pakistanis in 1965 the gap in quality of weaponry was very much more. So long as we cling to these myths to explain away the debacle the real reasons for the debacle will not be adequately investigated and correct lessons drawn.

In his account of forward policy Maxwell reveals that the Government instructed in November 1961 that "in view of the numerous operational and administrative difficulties, efforts should be made to position major concentrations of forces along our borders in places conveniently situated behind the forward posts from where they could be maintained logistically and from where they can restore a border situation at short notice". But the Army Head

Quarters omitted this portion of the directive when they transmitted Government's decision to the two Army Commanders. Maxwell or the person who gave him all the information does not bother to explain who did this and why. Maxwell is fair to Nehru when he stresses that Nehru's concept of forward policy did envisage a logistic build up to back up the forward policy and it was likely that this change in the directive was without his knowledge.

Curiously enough Maxwell's account is completely silent on the Government effort in this direction. In 1959-60 India purchased Fairchild Packet aircraft from USA specifically for supply dropping. Some indications of the background discussions would have been helpful to assess whether adequate thought had been given for the logistic support at that stage by professional planners. Nor is there any detailed reference to subsequent purchase of An-12 aircraft or Mi-4 helicopters though these have been mentioned with reference to the Soviet attitude towards the dispute. The real thrust in logistic effort was the construction of the Border Roads but Maxwell completely ignores this area. It has been mentioned that in those days an influential section of professional opinion was lukewarm about the Border Roads and preferred to have a no man's land between the Chinese and ourselves and this was one of the reasons for the delay in determining alignments of new roads.

An attempt has been made to give an impression that this lack of planning was mostly due to General Kaul's inept handling and the celebrated unpublished Army report has been quoted to say "that systematic planning and coordination which were the responsibility of the General Staff.....were progressively neglected". But nowhere in the book or for that matter in any other literature so far published does one come across any mention that during 1958-59 after Nehru started to talk of the possibility of a war with China the Army Head Quarters, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, and the Ministry of Defence prepared an overall picture of the threat and a comprehensive plan of measures to face it. General Kaul maintains, probably with justification, that he was the first Chief of General Staff to draw up in 1962 three years after the dispute with China came out in the open, a comprehensive list of requirements and even then he did not present it along with a threat assessment to the Government. In most of the literature on the subject written mostly by officers of middle level ranks and foreigners no distinction has been sought to be made between tactical intelligence assessment,

theatre requirements, on the one hand and strategic intelligence assessment and the country's overall requirements on the other. Some of the writers have come across information that some Brigadier here some Major-General there or even an Army Commander forwarded an assessment, a plan or a list of his requirements and immediately jump to the conclusion that these were all overlooked and neglected by Nehru and Krishna Menon. But these sub system plans, requirements and assessments had to be fitted in within an overall assessment and plan and presented to the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister. Was this ever done by any of the Chiefs of Staff or the Ministry of Defence? Secondly, in all other countries the responsibility for planning operations in a theatre is that of the local Army Commander and the Army Commander is entitled to go to the Defence Minister with his plans and requirements. The Chief of Staff is the highest professional adviser to the Government and not a superior Commander of the Army Commander. If this system had functioned properly it would have put more pressure on the Defence Minister and the Prime Minister. Army Commanders and Corps Commanders would have been heard at the highest level before decisions were taken. But contrary to this constitutional position the COAS—and in the pre-1963 days the CGS—has concentrated in his own hands powers to plan petty little operations, undermining thereby the authority of the Army Commanders and trying to run things from Delhi. This aspect was highlighted in the 1965 war and fortunately the concerned Army Commander was able to assert his position. Otherwise we might have had another Sela at Khem Karan. It would appear that systematic planning did not deteriorate under Kaul as the "Army Review" is reported to have said but it was never there. Till 1964 the country did not have a comprehensive defence plan and it is absurd to say that Nehru and Krishna Menon were averse to planning.

As late as in May 1969, the Aeronautics Committee presided over by C. Subramaniam which included Air Marshal (as he then was) P.C. Lal and the late Air Marshal Raja Ram stated that decision making in defence was not based on a long term assessment of threats nor planning for long term requirements related to such long term assessments of danger.

The alibi usually held out is that Nehru and Krishna Menon were against such long range planning for the possibility of a war

with China. Maxwell has countered this myth effectively. From 1959 onwards Nehru frequently mentioned the possibility of a war and Menon, if at all, was even more anti-Chinese. All that the myth makers could come out with is that in the early 1950s Nehru disapproved of the proposal to make out a pamphlet on Chinese tactics. Was ever such a proposal put upto Nehru after 1957 and did he then turn it down ?

Why then did the "Army Review" say this about planning ? But what else would it have said when the team commissioned to write the report included one of the former important officers of the Army General Staff ? In which other country of the world would we have this strange phenomenon of somebody being asked to investigate the deficiencies of the organisation to which he belonged only 18 months back and write a report ?

Very rightly Maxwell highlights the decline of Military Intelligence in India to the fact that the British in their days never admitted Indians into this area. The senior staff posts in the Directorate of Military Intelligence were either sinecures or stepping stones. He records the growth of IB's influence but fails to trace the reasons for it. If Sardar Patel's letter to Nehru in November 1950 is quoted today as evincing Sardar's extraordinary foresight a reading of that letter shows that the IB was behind the letter. Sardar himself had referred in his letter to a separate appreciation being forwarded from the IB. It was in 1952 Nehru, after a disastrous failure of a Military Intelligence operation, thrust the responsibility for external intelligence on an unwilling and protesting IB, following the Himmat Singhji report on border security (again the myth makers always slur over this, occupation of Tawang, Nehru's guarantee to Nepal etc in ascribing *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai* spirit to Nehru and charging him of overlooking China's potential hostility).

But the intelligence reported by the IB was consistently played down in the Army Head Quarters. P.V.R. Rao who was defence secretary from November 1962 to January 1967 and therefore had intimate knowledge of both 1962 and 1965 operations has categorically stated in his book **Defence Without Drift** that the allegation that in 1962 and 1965 intelligence failed was a canard. He has also mentioned that the Joint Intelligence Committee was either "moribund or ineffective". The secretariat for this Committee was provided by service officers and it was presided over by a Joint Secretary from External Affairs. It would appear that the intelligence

reports flowing into Army Head Quarters were never processed into overall intelligence assessments for the benefit of the Chiefs of Staff or the Government. With this crucial failure how could the Army Head Quarters or the Ministry of Defence even make out any convincing case of their overall requirements for meeting the Chinese threat. Whatever was asked for were just demands unrelated to any specific threat assessment, If the threat assessment had been conveyed to the Finance Minister and the Finance Ministry they would not have dared to refuse funds (indigenous or foreign exchange) asked for. It has been alleged that the Finance Ministry asked the Defence Ministry to accommodate the foreign exchange requirements for items like self loading rifles within the overall ceiling given (TJS George in **Krishna Menon**). This may well be so. How could the Defence Ministry have determined the relative priorities of the foreign exchange requirements of different schemes without a proper threat assessment before them? It is not easily realised either by Maxwell or others who have dealt with this subject that the failure was that of the system of decision making and not merely of individuals. From the Aeronautics Committee Report's findings it is obvious that the defects in the system have not yet been by and large remedied.

Why was the intelligence played down by the Army Headquarters? Unfortunately the Intelligence Bureau in those days combined the functions of external intelligence and internal security. It may be recalled—and this book also details those incidents—that the conduct of a number of Generals was being investigated during the period 1959 to 1962. Correctly or incorrectly the senior staff in the Army presumably felt that the Intelligence Bureau was behind these investigations. It would appear that the consequent aversion developed towards the Intelligence Bureau affected the attitude of the Army Head Quarters towards the Intelligence reports emanating from the IB, with the result that the intelligence though available was not used.

This also explains the apparent contradictions in the conduct of the Prime Minister. In his attitude towards the Chinese and his diplomatic stand he appears to have taken into account the intelligence reports and hence his distrust of Chou En-lai, his talk of continuing aggression and the possibility of a war. But when it came to an appreciation of the detailed military implications there was apparently no military assessment before him. Hence he and Krishna Menon

were absent from the country in the crucial period of September 1962. Presumably there was no system of regular and periodic intelligence assessments going down to Army Commanders, Corps Commanders and others. The entire issue of failure in intelligence (relating to the Directorate of Military Intelligence Bureau) was dealt with in Defence Minister Chavan's summary of Henderson Brooke's report in the following terms :-

“As regards, our system and organisation of intelligence, it would obviously not be proper for me to disclose any details. However, it is known that in the Army Headquarters, there is a Directorate of Intelligence under an officer designated as Director of Military Intelligence, briefly known as DMI”.

“The enquiry has brought out that the collection of intelligence in general was not satisfactory. The acquisition of intelligence was slow and the reporting of it vague”.

“Second important aspect of intelligence is its collection and evaluation. Admittedly, because of the vague nature of intelligence, evaluation may not have been accurate. Thus a clear picture of the Chinese build-up was not made available. No attempt was made to link up the new enemy build-up with the old deployment. Thus field formation had little guidance whether there were fresh troops or old ones moving to new locations.”

“The third aspect is dissemination of intelligence. It has come out that much faster means must be employed to send out processed and important information to field formations, if it is to be of any use”.

“There is no doubt that a major overhauling of the intelligence system is required. A great deal has been done during the last six months. The overhauling of the intelligence system is a complex and lengthy task and, in view of its vital importance, I am paying personal attention to this”.

The collection mentioned here refers not to collection of intelligence by the IB but collection of tactical intelligence by DMI ; but the vague wording generally led the country to believe it to be a reference to IB which was beyond the scope of Henderson Brooke's enquiry. One of the areas in which there has been a radical reform in the last few years is in external intelligence which has been

separated from internal security and the two functions are now discharged by two separate organisations.

But one looks in vain for such detailed analysis in Maxwell's book. He appears to have accepted without any probing questions what he was told by interested parties.

Maxwell tries hard to take what he considers to be a balanced view in his chapter on "The View from Peking". He brings out the interaction between the Sino-Soviet dispute and the Sino-Indian dispute. He tries to check the Indian and Soviet acts against their respective statements and accepts the Peking's view of the contradictions between the two in both cases. He quotes approvingly the motto "It's not what you are, it's the way that you act" and feels that Peking could aptly have applied this to India and the Soviet Union. What bewilders a reader is what stops Maxwell from checking the applicability of this motto to Peking itself. He casually dismisses the views of the Soviet, Polish and other Communists that Longju and Kongka pass incidents could have been deliberately provoked by the Chinese in pursuit of their policy towards the Soviet Union and the Super Power detente. He completely ignores the withdrawal of Soviet technicians from China in 1960, repudiation of nuclear weapons agreement in July 1959, the Bucharest confrontation between Khrushchev and Peng Chen, the twentyfirst Soviet Party Congress and its effect on Sino-Soviet relations and the impact of these events on the Chinese attitude towards India. He mentions that Chou En-lai took up the issue of Sino-Soviet border in 1955-56 with Khrushchev but does not examine whether there could be any connection between the Chinese handling of the two border issues. He draws pointed attention to the fact that only two big neighbours of China could not settle the border issue and earlier in his book he has referred to the area occupied by Russia in Central Asia after the Yakub Beg rebellion. It does not occur to him whether China's tough attitude towards Aksai Chin could not have some connection with the line they were to take subsequently with the Russians. He does not explain why the Chinese talking of maintaining the *long standing* status quo were constantly moving forward and crossing the Karakoram and intruding into Indus basin. Why could they not have started negotiations with Nehru on the basis of his proposal with status quo maintained where their line of posts existed in 1959? Surely they did not have a domestic opinion to deal with as Nehru had.

His treatment of this chapter makes Maxwell look almost an uncritical apologist for Peking.

Maxwell's bias reaches new heights when he starts dealing with the Thagla incident. He distorts the note of Ministry of External Affairs of 10 September 1959. The note read "They (Indians) request that the status quo should be maintained at all these places and that the Chinese personnel should not alter the present position by crossing the Thangla ridge and trying to occupy any territory to the south of the ridgeThe Government of India agree pending further discussions the position as stated above should not be altered by either side". There is no mention of undertaking not to set up posts south of Thagla. This is a meaning Maxwell deliberately imports into the text of the note and then proceeds to accuse India of provocation, and implies that the Army Head Quarters had doubts etc. When it came to the difference between the Chinese claim lines of 1956 and 1960 involving hundreds of square miles Maxwell could easily justify it by the small scale of the map and the thick line drawn on it and he felt that Indians were making too much fuss. But when it comes to McMahon line the small map and the line are transposed on a proper map and the small difference elucidated to show up that Indians were provocative though the Indian officials had clearly told the Chinese officials in 1960 talks and the Indian note of September 1959 also asserted that Thagla ridge was the boundary in the Indian view.

Maxwell gives details of the meeting held under Krishna Menon on 9 September 1962 when the decision was taken to push the intruding Chinese out. The orders, according to him were that 9 Punjab battalion was to move to Dhola post immediately, *with the rest of the 7th Brigade to follow within 48 hours*. At that stage only half a battalion of 7th Brigade was near Dhola post. The second battalion of the brigade was at Dirang Dzong on the eastern side of Tsela pass since it could not be maintained at Tawang. The third battalion was at Misamari. At the time the decision was taken the information was that there were 600 Chinese south of Thagla. At this time General Kaul was on leave. The military officers attending the meeting were General Thapar and General Sen. If the decision was taken to evict 600 Chinese and that the 7th Brigade would concentrate at Dhola in 48 hours obviously the information furnished to the Government by the Chief of the Army Staff and the Army Commander should have been palpably wrong. So much for the

information available at the Army Head Quarters about our own troop disposition let alone enemy's. Maxwell caustically remarks, "If Thapar and Sen were not informed of this fact either they or the General Staff or both were not doing their Job". General Kaul cannot be blamed for this.

Again according to Maxwell intelligence was available by 20 September 1962 that there was a Chinese battalion at Le, just behind Thag La and behind that there were two Chinese Brigades with divisional artillery and the rest of a division at Tsona Dzong some twenty miles behind linked almost to Thag La by road. These intelligence reports were available at the Army Head Quarters but reached the field formations only after a time lag of ten days to a fortnight. So much for the popular story that the IB failed in 1962.

Maxwell continues with his story of the happenings of 22 September. At a meeting in the Defence Ministry at this stage General Thapar is reported to have expressed his misgivings that the Chinese would retaliate and overrun the posts in the Western Sector. According to Maxwell's version these misgivings were rejected and he attributes this in a general way to the belief of the civilian officials of the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence. This appreciation is alleged to have been confirmed by Mullick (DIB)'s estimation. Maxwell is careful not to attribute any specific views to any official. It is difficult to believe that DIB Mullick did express such an estimation and even if he had tried to it was not his business. General Thapar asked for the order in writing and the order given was :

"The decision throughout has been as discussed at previous meetings, that the Army should prepare and throw out the Chinese as soon as possible. The Chief of the Army Staff was accordingly directed to take action for the eviction of the Chinese in the Kameng Frontier Division of NEFA as soon as he is ready."

Once again the prejudice of Maxwell's informant comes out when H. C. Sarin, the official who signed the order, is described as a relatively junior official. He was then number three in the Ministry of Defence and was number two in dealing with General Staff matters and was promoted to the rank of Additional Secretary within six weeks of this event.

Maxwell does not comment on the fact that the order was asking the Army to prepare and then throw out the Chinese and action was to be taken only when the Army was ready. The Army was not being given an impossible order. When General Umrao Singh protested against this order his removal was recommended by Generals Sen and Thapar.

Maxwell points out even when General Thapar feared Chinese reaction and sent a general alert to Western Command he did not recall his CGS General Kaul who was on leave in Kashmir.

He also quotes General Kaul's account of his interview with Nehru on 3 October 1962. Nehru is reported to have stated.....“we would have no option but to expel them from our territory or *at least try to do so to the best of our ability*. If we fail to take such action the Government would forfeit public confidence completely”. This is not a picture of a Nehru who gave an impossible task to the army.

On 7 October, Army Headquarters received information from Consul-General, Lhasa that heavy mortars and artillery in divisional strength had been concentrating behind Thag la and *Chinese troops were talking of an attack on Tawang*. This information was passed on to General Kaul. Maxwell makes much of the fact that this information was passed on to General Kaul without comment and feels it showed that Delhi was suffering from a paralysis of will. This comment appears to be uncalled for in the absence of an indication that earlier information was ever assessed in Delhi. He brings in the Intelligence Bureau into this and says there was no indication of the importance attached to this by them. He had referred to earlier information of 22 September and this confirmed that. Further, Intelligence Bureau was not the agency to assess the information it had collected beyond checking its *prima facie* reliability, History tells us this was absolutely reliable information. This comment shows his strong bias against the Intelligence Bureau.

In spite of this intelligence General Kaul proceeded with his moves. Maxwell grants that on 10 October, 1962 it was the Chinese who attacked at Tseng Jong. Generals Kaul, Sen, Thapar, other General Staff officers and the Air Force Chief met Nehru and Krishna Menon on the night of 11 October. According to a number of accounts Maxwell was able to obtain Nehru told the soldiers

that decision whether the army should carry out the earlier plan, stay put at Namka chu or retire to a more advantageous position must be theirs. Generals Thapar and Sen told Krishna Menon next morning that the 7 Brigade should stay where it was. Maxwell acknowledges that Nehru was punctilious in leaving decisions to the soldiers but he further comments that "having by his own long sustained and open favouritism to Kaul assisted in the demoralisation of the Army High Command by 1962, he was no longer dealing with professionals but courtiers". But he does not explain why General Umrao Singh, General Daulat Singh and others could get away with their dissent. It may also be recalled that Generals Thapar and Sen were Lieutenant Generals in their own right before General Kaul came to the Army Headquarters.

Maxwell gives a correct account of Nehru's airport interview on 12 October, 1962. Nehru said "Our instructions (to the Army) are to free our territory.....I cannot fix a date: that is entirely for the Army". He then pointed out "that wintry conditions had set in already in the [Thag La] region, and the Chinese were strongly positioned because they were in large numbers and were situated on higher ground. Moreover, the main Chinese base on their side of the border was quite near". However, Maxwell cannot resist the comment that Nehru's words left a misleading impression.

He refers to Delhi press reaction and a report in a newspaper that the Chinese troops at Thagla were 'third rate garrison troops' and maliciously and quite unjustifiably adds that such information presumably originated in Mullick's crystal ball in the Intelligence Bureau. His own references to intelligence available on various dates do not justify such a comment and only gives further clues as to who could be Maxwell's informant and furnished the official documents to him. Lastly it also enables one to judge Maxwell's susceptibility to influence.

Maxwell at this stage refers to the Chinese assertion that Khrushchev had been informed in the second week of October 1962 of the Indian build-up and plans to attack the Chinese and Khrushchev replied that his Government had similar information and if the Chinese were attacked it would be natural for them to fight back. An interesting view about this exchange is available in Harold Hinton's *China's Turbulent Quest* (Macmillan, London 1970). According to his hypothesis China agreed to support the Soviet Union

on the Cuban adventure and in return the Soviet Union agreed to endorse China's stand vis-a-vis India in modification of the earlier Soviet posture. When Cuban crisis was resolved and did not work out according to Soviet plans, the Soviet Union reverted back to its pro-Indian stand. China then accused Khrushchev of 'adventurism and capitulationism' in regard to Cuba.

Maxwell justifies Chinese decision to attack India. Once again this is based on the premise that Indians were advancing into Chinese territory and ignores the actual truth of Chinese advance. His deliberate misinterpretation about the so-called Indian commitment in the area south of Thag La has already been referred to. Evidently his informant and the official records to which he had access did not reveal to him that the Chinese started building up for attack sometime before they intruded across the Thag La Ridge and that was only baiting a trap, in which they were successful. But Maxwell is categorical that it was not a trap.

According to Maxwell the political objective of the attack was to bring India to the Conference Table. If the world had been searching for an answer to the question how President Johnson could have hoped to bomb North Vietnam to compel it to come to the conference table Maxwell provides the answer. Johnson was taking a leaf out of Mao Tse-tung's book and with analogous results too.

Maxwell mildly chides the Chinese for turning 'the truth on its head' and consoles us that Chou-En-lai initially did not subscribe to the falsehood and a ten-day period was necessary for him to wrestle with his conscience and utter the big lie in his letter to the Afro Asian Governments.

Maxwell justified the Chinese attack as an attempt to bring India to the conference table. But he has to deal with Nehru's reply to Chou that India would be prepared to undertake talks and discussions at any level mutually agreed, to arrive at agreed measures which should be taken for the easing of tension and correction of situation created by the unilateral forcible alteration of the status quo along the India-China boundary if the Chinese went back at least to the position where they were all along the boundary prior to 8 September, 1962. This would mean that the Chinese objectives as interpreted by Maxwell would have been achieved and so Maxwell had to find a justification for Chinese refusal to accept

Nehru's proposals. Therefore he sees in Nehru's suggestion an implication that Indians wanted to return to all the posts already overrun in both sectors and then only they would start talking. But the proposal referred to discussions and talks if the Chinese went back and did not say anything about India reoccupying those positions. This is one more of his deliberate and malicious misinterpretations.

Maxwell's account of Sela-Bomdila deployment and operations is full of deliberate untruths. He does not do justice to Brigadier Palit (as he then was) and his recommendations to make a stand at Sela and does not bring out how Palit's plans were modified by General Pathania with disastrous results.

Before concluding, it is necessary to draw attention to Maxwell's connections and his judgement about India. He wrote a series of articles in *Times* (London) before the General Elections in 1967 in which he asserted that it was doubtful whether the ensuing General Elections would get through peacefully and even if they did that was likely to be the last free elections in India. Thereafter, according to him, it was inevitable that the Indian Army should take over (not in a coup de'tat but along Ne Win's first take over in Burma, by invitation). It would appear that he did not exactly invent such a thesis but was only faithfully reflecting the views of a section of the Delhi elite with which he was in close contact, during his seven years stay in Delhi.

This book stands self-condemned because of its author's extreme partiality and prejudices, its contradictions and finally its attempts at *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*.
