

# Parameters of a Border Settlement with China

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India's northern frontier with China runs a distance of about 2,390 miles. In addition, to the north, are the countries of Nepal and Bhutan whose frontiers with China are 670 and 250 miles long respectively. To deal with the question of settling the border problems with China, therefore, one must think of this enormous length, specially as the border runs through some of the most difficult mountain areas of the world. Usually, a sector-wise approach is adopted in analysing the border differences and this is unavoidable because the nature of the problems are different in each of the three sectors—the western sector with the additional complication of Pakistan having occupied a part of Jammu and Kashmir State; the middle sector with the six main passes enumerated in the Sino-Indian Agreement of 1954; and the eastern sector where we have to deal with the McMahon Line.

In the western sector, a 200-250-mile length of border of a total length of about 1,100 miles upto the Shipki Pass is in the extreme west occupied by Pakistan from Gilgit and Hunza to the Shaksgam valley. The Shaksgam valley, however, has been occupied by China under the Sino-Pak Agreement of March 1963. Geography, history and recent events have all combined to play their part in raising different problems in different sections of our long northern frontier. Before we can suggest how these can be resolved, we have to make a sector-wise examination. For this purpose, we may begin with the western sector where Pakistan is also involved, and where also lies the main area occupied by China since 1950, namely the Aksai Chin plateau and its environs.

## Western Sector

### *(i) Pak-occupied Kashmir*

In 1947, Pakistan occupied the Baltistan area of Ladakh, as well as the principalities of Chitral, Gilgit, Hunza, etc., to the west of Baltistan which were a part the State of Jammu and Kashmir. These areas adjoin the trijunction of Russia, Afghanistan and China (Sinkiang) and were the nub of the Anglo-Russian rivalry in the nineteenth century. Part of the Indian border with Sinkiang, 200-250 miles of it, is now occupied by Pakistan, and the settlement of March 1963 between China and

Pakistan is only a working arrangement. This working arrangement assigns the responsibility of defence of this area to Pakistan not only upto the Shaksgam valley but also to the east of it, i.e., of the Siachen glacier, the Rimo glacier, and upto the Karakoram Pass—areas which are not even occupied by Pakistan. The agreement of 1963 thus seeks to link up the Pak-occupied area to the area occupied by China in Aksai Chin. These areas are vital to Ladakh because the Nubra river takes its origin from the “spout” of Siachen, and the Shyok river from the Rimo glacier. They are the water life-lines of Ladakh along with the river Indus which they join. The assumption of the Sino-Pak agreement that Pakistan is in possession of the border with Sinkiang right upto the Karakoram Pass is wrong. In any settlement, this agreement will have to be re-negotiated and in any case will not be valid for the length of the border east of Shaksgam which is not in the possession of Pakistan.

Secondly, the area of the Shaksgam-Muztagh valley west of Siachen has been assigned to China by the agreement with Pakistan. The Indian Prime Minister made a statement in Parliament on March 5, 1963, that the Sino-Pak border agreement was not acceptable as it concerned the border of the area of Jammu and Kashmir illegally occupied by Pakistan. He further stated, *inter alia*:

“The Pakistan line of actual control, according to the map, which the Government of Pakistan has supplied to our High Commission, lay across the Kilik, Mintaka, Khunjerab Passes; but thereafter the line left the watershed and followed neither the Aghil range, which is the traditional boundary, nor the Karakoram range, along which the alignment claimed by the Government of China lay...Running south of the traditional alignment, the Pakistan line of actual control surrendered about 1,600 square miles to China.”<sup>1</sup>

Further, by ceding Shaksgam valley to China, China became the neighbour of Siachen glacier to the west of it. The ceded area is part of the claim of Hunza north of the Karakoram range. The British were keen to cede areas of the Taghdumbash, Pamir and Raksam in order to persuade China to give up her connection with Hunza. In his desire to put an end to the relations of China with the Hunza chieftain, Curzon had offered in 1899 to surrender the grazing rights of Hunza in Raksam valley and the Taghdumbash Pamir north of the Karakoram range. On April 17, 1899, Macartney, the British Agent in Sinkiang called on the Chinese *Tao-Tai* and learnt that the Governor of the New Dominion (i.e., Sinkiang) had instructed the local authorities to defer the conveyance of Raksam to Kanjutis,<sup>2</sup> as the people of Hunza were called. Curzon had decided to offer a border alignment which while ceding the grazing rights of Hunza north of the Karakoram range,

would have secured an unambiguous frontier with Sinkiang. At Curzon's suggestion, therefore, the Foreign Office in London wrote to the British Minister at Peking that he should propose the boundary line suggested by the Indian Government to the Chinese Foreign Office for acceptance. This is the line of 1889 which was conveyed by Macdonald to the Chinese Tsungli-Yamen in his letter of March 14, 1899, on the subject of the boundary between "the Indian State of Kashmir and the New Dominion of Chinese Turkistan." The proposal was prefaced as follows:

"It appears that the boundaries of the State of Kanjut with China have never been clearly defined. The Kanjutis claim an extensive tract of land on the Taghdumbash Pamir, extending as far north as Tashkurgan, and they also claim the district known as Raksam to the south of Sarikol. The rights of Kanjut over part of the Taghdumbash Pamir were admitted by the *Tao-Tai* of Kashgar in a letter to Mir of Hunza dated February 1896, and last year the question of the Raksam district was the subject of negotiations between Kanjut and the official of the New Dominion in which the latter admitted that some of the Raksam land should be given to the Kanjutis."<sup>3</sup>

As Curzon noted on March 18, 1899, the reason for making the proposal was to keep the Russians out of the area. He wrote :

"It is rather a fine balance of considerations for which, on the one hand, it is desirable to get the Kanjutis into Raksam in order to keep the Russians out, on the other hand, should the latter seize Kashgar, they may claim Hunza as a subject state."<sup>4</sup>

Though the line proposed in 1899 was not accepted by China who gave no response to it, the line of 1963 has surrendered areas further than the earlier offer. While the agreement of 1963 will have to be renegotiated with regard to the area east of Shaksgam, the second issue, namely, the alignment west of Siachen, will be linked up with the settlement of the Kashmir issue with Pakistan.

(ii) *From Karakoram Pass to Lanak La*

The chief obstacle to the settlement of the border question with China is the occupation of Aksai Chin plateau and its environs after 1950. This is an area of about 14,500 square miles and China has occupied it because, as stated by the Chinese, the road they have built across it from Khatan in Sinkiang to Gartok in western Tibet is considered vital for communication between these outlying parts of their dominions. The road enters India at Haji Langar and leaves it after traversing diagonally at Lanak La Pass. The road did not require much

construction as it is a flat plain where nothing grows but *burtse* grass; but it is difficult to maintain because the fierce winds that blow cover it thickly with soda dust. The Aksai Chin is one of the four plateaus which are in older geographical formation than the surrounding mountain ranges and it has its own drainage system flowing into lakes that form the receptacles. However, the rivers Qara Qash and Yurung Kash flow north to Khotan; and the Chip Chap and the Chang Chenmo rivers from the Indus system to the north and south of the Aksai Chin plateau.

From the Karakoram Pass east, the boundary lies along the watershed between the Shyok and the Yarkand rivers, then through Qara Tagh Pass, across the eastern bed of the Qara Qash river north-west of Haji Langar. It then ascends the Kuen Lun mountains through the Yangi Pass along the east of the mountains separating the Yurung Kash basin from those of Aksai Chin lakes, down to Lanak La Pass. China, however, claims the area surrounding the road from Haji Langar across Aksai Chin to Lanak La Pass and also the area to the west where radial roads were built from this trunk road to the west during 1959-62.

When the Colombo Powers proposed a ceasefire line in 1962, they advised that the Chinese should withdraw to a line which they held before the war of October 1962, i.e., that they should withdraw from an area of about 2,500 square miles acquired during the 1962 war. The Chinese advance had taken place in three phases. In the first phase, up to November 7, 1959, the Chinese had established posts at Haji Langar, Kongka Pass, Khurnak and Spanggur. They, thus, staked a claim to an area of about 6,000 square miles if these posts were connected. In the second phase, i.e., by September 1962, they set up further posts at Qizil Jilga, Shinglung, Dehra and Samzungling and claimed an additional 6,000 square miles west of the Aksai Chin road. The border incidents that took place from 1959 to 1962 were a result of the Chinese advance. The Indian forces set up posts, 43 of them, only after July 1962.

China asserts that the border lies along a line from Haji Langar to Lanak La Pass and has, in the maps published since 1962, shown all the area occupied upto the advance in the war of that year, as Chinese territory. The Chinese call this advance "the line of November 7, 1959," but the actual position was that on that date they were in the first phase of their advance, as already narrated. Before that, the Chinese checkposts were at the foothills of the Kuen Lun mountains at Sanju, Killian and Kokyar Passes. In fact, our own last Consul General in Sinkiang, R.D. Sathe, travelled by this route and met the Chinese, first at one of these passes.<sup>5</sup> So did his first predecessor, G. Macartney, who wrote in his

Route Notes of 1896 of the journey from the Karakoram Pass to Yarkand. The Notes read, *inter alia*, regarding the route between Karakoram Pass and Yarkand. The ascent of the Suget Pass is by a very easy gradation.

"No. 4—Suget Kar and Road downhill all the way is the first place of human habitation on the north side of the Karakoram Pass. A Chinese officer resides there during the trading season but has no troops."6 This is 73 miles from Karakoram Pass according to Macartney.

At 124 miles, the Notes mention "No. 8 Road ascends by a zig-zag to Kilhan Pass.....At 7 miles is Khitai Taru, so called because there used to be a wall built by the 'old Chinese' (i.e., before Yakub Beg) who went from Kilion to Khitai Taru on inspection."6 There is ample other evidence that the Chinese control extended only up to the Kuen Lun mountains.

We have already mentioned the line proposed in 1899. In regard to the area east of the Karakoram Pass, this line was proposed as follows:

"From the Karakoram Pass, the crests of the range run east for about half a degree (100 li), and then turn south to a little below the 35th parallel of N. latitude. Rounding then what in our maps is shown as the source of the Kara-Kash, the line of hills to be followed run north-east to a point east of Kizil Jilga and from there follows in south-easterly direction the Lak Tsung range until that meets the spur running south from the Kuen Lun range which has been hitherto shown on our maps as the eastern boundary of Ladakh. This is a little east of 80°E longitude."7

This shows that Curzon had offered to settle the boundary line right up to the point where the Sinkiang border touched Tibet and in so doing, offered a portion of the Aksai Chin as well. The considerations that weighed with him were to keep the Russians out of Sinkiang and to exclude any claim over Hunza. He was keen that both Afghanistan and China should be offered territory to thereby act as a buffer between Russia and the Indian empire. It was, thus, that Wakhan was offered to, and accepted by, Afghanistan, but China did not oblige by accepting the bait of Taghdumbash Pamir, Raksam and a portion of Aksai Chin that was made for a similar reason.

In any future border settlement, the Indian side will have to consider giving up the area through which the road from Sinkiang to western Tibet passes through the plateau of Aksai Chin, to which the Chinese have no claim except that of advance into the area since 1950.

(iii) *From Lanak La to Shipki Pass*

The Lanak La route leads to north Tibet and the next landmark on

the Ladakh-Tibet border is the Pangong Lake, an elongated lake spreading east and west—the western portion being in Ladakh. Khurnak Fort is on the Indian side of the lake but the Chinese have contested this. To its south are Spanggur and Chushul on the Indian side of the border, and where the Indus enters Ladakh, are Tashigong in Tibet and Demchok in India. The Chinese have advanced a claim to Demchok which they call Parigas, and to Chuva and Chuje (as they call the places) at the junction of the Spiti and Pare rivers. The frontier in this region between Ladakh and western Tibet is defined by watersheds. To begin, in the north, there is a watershed between the Chang Chenmo and Chumerang rivers in Ladakh and the streams flowing into the Dyaptso in Tibet. The two main routes south of Lanak La lie along the Indus at Demchok/Tashigong and at the crossing of the Satluj river into India near Shipki Pass.

The Chinese alleged that at Parigas is “a very small area (which) has been invaded and occupied by India in recent years.”<sup>8</sup> “Chuva and Chuje” are also claimed by the Chinese to have been occupied by India in 1958. They claim that here the boundary lies at the junction of the Spiti and Pare rivers of the Satluj watershed.

### **Middle Sector**

The border runs here from Shipki Pass in Himachal Pradesh to the border with Nepal, through Uttar Pradesh, a distance of 340 miles. Immediately after the Sino-Indian agreement of 1954, the Chinese made intrusions here at Wuje, i.e., Bara Hoti, and at Shipki Pass. The agreement of 1954 had mentioned the six main passes, Shipki, Mana, Niti, Kungri-Bingri, Darma and Lipu Lekh Passes over which the trade routes could be used. The boundary follows the main watershed divided by the Himalayas, of the Satluj in Tibet and of the Ganga in India.

Apart from the intrusions at Wuje, south of Niti Pass and near Shipki Pass, the Chinese have claims regarding Sang and Tsungsha, east of Nilang Pass which the Chinese state that the British occupied in 1919. There is one other small claim south of the six passes mentioned in the agreement of 1954. This is Puling Sumdo, a traditional market which the Chinese allege India occupied only in 1955. It is located north of Gaumukh, and was once part of Tehri Garhwal State. The boundary line follows, after crossing the Satluj at its bend, the Zaskar range and lies through the Shipki Pass. Thereafter, it follows the main watershed through the Ghaga Pass, Mana Pass, Niti Pass, Kungri-Bingri Pass, Darma Pass and Lipu Lekh Pass. The six passes mentioned in the 1954 agreement should be given in demarcating the boundary accordingly.

### Eastern Sector

This is a distance of 950 miles. According to the Chinese claim advanced in 1960, the border is from the south-eastern tip of Bhutan eastward to 94°E longitude and then north-eastward to Nizamghat along "where the southern foot of the Himalayas touches the plains on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra."<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Chinese claim a major portion of Arunachal Pradesh, north of the river. This claim is, however, tempered by the fact that China vacated the small pockets in this area near Bhutan and in the extreme east which they occupied during the war of 1962. The dispute about Thag-la ridge and Migyutin is not against the McMahon Line but the correct delineation of it at these two points.

There has never been a Chinese or Tibetan presence in the areas south of the Himalayas, east of Bhutan. The Chinese claim in respect of the Tibetan provinces of Monyul, Loyul and Tsayul is applicable to areas north of the Himalayas. In 1913-14, at the Simla Conference, there were two agreements, one in March 1914 between Tibet and India; and the other later between all three, including China. This latter agreement was in respect of the boundary between Tibet and China and was initialled by all three plenipotentiaries, and later denounced by China. However, the so-called McMahon Line was the boundary agreed to between India and Tibet east of Bhutan. The Chinese signed the agreement with Burma on the basis of the McMahon Line. The Tibetans or the Chinese never penetrated south of this line which is an ethnic, geographical and historical line. In the talks between Indian and Chinese leaders, there has never been any claim to the areas south of this line. On the contrary, the Chinese have indicated from time to time that they would accept this line though they denounce the Simla Conference of 1913-14. The British government kept undeveloped the area north of the Brahmaputra as they feared the people living there and left them alone. After independence, this area and its people have been treated as no different from other parts of the country. Development has been rapid and the people have shown themselves to be quick to adopt changes. Arunachal Pradesh is a state of the Indian Union with a legislature, and the people are an integral part of the country.

The atmosphere of goodwill that has been generated by the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to China in 1988 has rendered a settlement possible. The Indian government will have to take the consent of the Parliament, so it will no doubt associate the Opposition parties with it as to the settlement proposed.

## NOTES

1. *Documents on China's Relations with South and South East Asia (1949-1962)* ed. by Ambekar and Divekar, p. 222. Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1964.
2. NAI, Foreign Department Secret Proceedings, August 1899 (168-201), 168—Extracts from the Kashgar Diary for fortnight ending 30.4.1899.
3. *Ibid.*
4. NAI Foreign Department Secret F Proceedings, May 1899 (154-210) "Russian interference with the action of the Chinese authorities assigning lands in Raksam to the Mir of Hunza".
5. In a letter from Shri R.D. Sathe to the writer.
6. NAI Foreign Department Frontier B—Proceedings, September 1897, 288-92 Route Notes by G. Macartney.
7. NAI Foreign Department Secret F—Proceedings, August 1897, 168-201.
8. Report of officials of India and China 1960, Chinese Report CR 37.
9. Report of Indian and Chinese officials, 1960, Indian Report, p. 3.