

## War and Diplomacy

### War

On October 20, 1962, the Chinese troops launched a general offensive in the Eastern and Western Sectors of the boundary. To justify the onslaught, the Chinese Government accused Indian troops of initiating a massive attack and lodged the 'most urgent, the most serious and the strongest protest' with the Government of India. It accused India of refusal to engage in discussions for the third time on October 6.

On October 22, it announced that its armed forces would no longer respect the 'illegal' McMahon Line. India repudiated Chinese accusations on October 26. The entry of Chinese troops into the Thagla Ridge area on September 8, India said, marked the beginning of a fresh assault on India's territorial integrity. It reiterated India's determination never to agree to talk or discuss under threat of force.

The war lasted about a month, from October 20 to November 21, when China declared a unilateral ceasefire and the intention to withdraw forces from territory (some, not all) overrun by it.

The loss of territory was summarized by India in a Note sent to China on December 5, 1962<sup>1</sup>:

### ***Western Sector:***

20.10.1962	13 posts from the Galwan Valley up to north of Daulat Beg Oldi overrun
21.10.1962	2 posts in the Sirijap area captured
22 - 24.10.1962	3 posts in Kongma and Hot Spring areas captured
29.10. 1962	Indian post at Changla, Jarala and Demchok attacked and fresh Indian territory occupied,
6.11.1962	fresh Chinese build-up in Spanggur area, opposite Chushul
18.11.1962	Capture of Rezangla post and shelling of Chushul airfield (Chushul was west of the Chinese Claim Line of 1960)

### ***Eastern Sector:***

#### **a *Kameng Division***

20.10.1962	Dhola, Tsengdhar and Khinzemane overrun
23.10.1962	Bumla post overrun. Tawang evacuated
17-18.11.1962	Sela position attacked
17.11.1962	Line of communication cut off 7 miles north of Bomdila
18.11.1962	Bomdila fell
21.11.1962	Chakoo taken

#### **b *Subansiri Division***

20.10 – 21.11.1962	Asafila, Taksing and Limeking overrun
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#### **c *Siang Division***

20.10 – 21.11.1962	Posts at Lamang, Henkor, Tadadege, Manigong, Mechuka, Tuting withdrawn in face of Chinese attacks
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#### **d *Lohit Division***

22.10.1962	Kibitoo overrun
26.10 – 7.11.1962	Walong shelled
16.11.1962	Walong captured.

## Ceasefire

The announcement of ceasefire and withdrawal by China caused immense surprise. The announcement was preceded by two late-night ( the usual pattern) meetings between the Chinese Prime Minister and the Indian Charge d’Affaires in Peking on November 19 and 20.

At the second meeting, the Charge pointed out that he was unable to communicate with his government since his links with India had been snapped. At the Prime Minister’s instance, the postal and telegraph channels were restored within hours of the midnight meeting. It turned out that the second meeting was a mere formality. Prior to the meeting, the Reuters correspondent had been informed of the ceasefire and withdrawal decision. The Chinese authorities made sure that he made the Chinese decision known to his headquarters in London. This meant that the Chinese decision was known before the United States announced its decision to send a politico-military mission to India (The British were to follow suit). Neither the news agency nor the Charge was given the text of the announcement, which was broadcast on Peking Radio.

The Indian Government first came to know of the Chinese decision from the statement broadcast by Peking Radio in the early hours of November 21, 1962. The statement, in part, said:

‘The Chinese Government hereby declares the following:

- 1 Beginning from the day following that of the issuance of the present statement, i.e., from 00.00 hours on November 22, 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will cease fire along the entire Sino-Indian border.
- 2 Beginning from December 1, 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw to positions 20 kilometres behind the line of actual control which existed between China and India on November 7, 1959. In the Eastern Sector, although the Chinese frontier guards have so far been fighting back in self-defence on Chinese territory north of the traditional customary line, they are prepared to withdraw from their present positions to the north of the line of actual control, that

is, north of the illegal McMahon Line, and to withdraw 20 kilometres farther back from that line.

In the Middle and Western Sectors, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw 20 kilometres from the line of actual control.

- 3 In order to ensure the normal movement of the inhabitants in the Sino-Indian border area, forestall the activities of saboteurs and maintain order there, China will set up checkposts at a number of places on its side of the line of actual control with a certain number of civil police assigned to each checkpost. The Chinese Government will notify the Indian Government of the location of these checkposts through diplomatic channels.'

The statement laid down a condition:

'The Indian troops should not cross the line of actual control and reoccupy Kechilang River area north of the McMahon Line in the Eastern Sector, Wuje (Hoti) in the Middle Sector, or restore 43 strongpoints set up earlier in the Chip Chap River Valley, the Galwan River Valley, the Pangong Lake area, and the Demchok area or "set up more strongpoints for aggression on Chinese territory in the Western Sector".'

This defined what the Chinese meant by the line of actual control as existing on November 7, 1959. It was the line which marked the extent of Indian presence on the border on that date; any territory north or east of that was Chinese whether the Chinese were physically present or not.

The statement went on to say that issues concerning 'disengagement of the armed forces of the two parties and the cessation of armed conflict shall be negotiated by officials designated by the Chinese and Indian Governments respectively.' It presumed that the Indian Government had no option other than to accept the ceasefire.

The statement blamed the Indian Government for the conflict. It said:

'To meet the needs of its internal and external politics, the Indian Government has long pursued the policy of deliberately keeping the Sino-

Indian boundary question unsettled, keeping the armed forces of the two countries engaged and maintaining tension along the Sino-Indian border. Whenever it considered the time favourable, the Indian Government made use of this situation to carry out armed invasion and provocation on the Sino-Indian border, and even went to the length of provoking an armed clash. Or, it made use of the situation to conduct cold war against China.'

It added:

'The Indian Government, relying on large amounts of U.S. military aid, again launched powerful attacks in the Eastern and Western Sectors of the Sino-Indian border in an obstinate attempt to expand the border conflict.'

It called upon:

'All Asian and African countries and all peace-loving countries and people to exert efforts to urge the Indian Government to take corresponding measures so as to stop the border conflict, reopen peaceful negotiations and settle the Sino-Indian boundary question.'<sup>2</sup>

## Role of the United States

The reference to US assistance and the attempt to pre-empt the announcement of the dispatch of a US politico-military mission to India prompted the belief that China's decision was influenced by a desire not to engage in any conflict with the United States. It was identical to its response in the 1958 Taiwan Crisis. On that occasion, China had studiously avoided engaging the US warships that escorted Kuomintang supply convoys to the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu. Later, the Chinese had also offered to cease shelling the islands if the United States withdrew its warships. The United States agreed and the shelling petered out. The only concrete result of that venture was the resumption of periodic meetings at ambassadorial level between China and the United States.

At the outset of the conflict, Nehru had made an appeal to all friendly countries for assistance. On specific request, the United States offered support and assistance along with the United Kingdom and some other European countries. India hoped the United States would not impose unacceptable conditions, especially a military alliance which would affect adversely its policy of non-alignment and relations with the Soviet Union which had adopted a neutral attitude. At the same time, the United States announced its recognition of the McMahon Line as the frontier in the Eastern Sector, a decision which was immediately protested by the Kuomintang regime in Taiwan. For the rest of the boundary, nothing was said. Presumably, the stance taken in 1959 prevailed – that the border was ill defined.

In announcing the decision to give military assistance, the United States made clear in a statement on October 31, that the decision was ‘prompted by a specific situation’ resulting from ‘premeditated Chinese communist aggression’ which caused ‘concern’ to the United States and its allies. The United States Ambassador in India, Professor Galbraith also said in Delhi that the assistance was not calculated to involve India in a military alliance nor to compromise its policy of non-alignment.

US arms and equipment began to arrive on November 3, 1962 and the airlift was completed by November 12. Five days later, soon after the disaster at Walong, India requested US aircraft flown by US crews to airlift troops from the Western frontier to the East. After the collapse of Indian defences in the Kameng Division in western NEFA, Nehru sent two letters to President Kennedy seeking air defence of Indian cities and air strikes on Chinese bases, while Indian aircraft provided tactical support to the ground troops. Kennedy assured Nehru on November 21 that the United States along with some Commonwealth countries would respond to India’s needs. India’s inability to stem the Chinese advance also led to the announcement of the despatch of a US Navy Carrier group led

by the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal. It was a powerful signal of intention to intervene if the Chinese persisted with their military advances into Indian territory.

Despite the ceasefire and announcement of withdrawal, India went ahead and proposed a tacit air defence pact with the United States on December 1. The proposal was based on the cold reality that India was not in a position to defend its airspace at that time. It was agreed that India would prepare airstrips and radar sites. In the event of a renewal of Chinese attacks, India would commit its tactical aircraft to combat support of the army and the US would undertake air defence of Indian cities. After ground preparations, joint exercises of Indian, United States and Commonwealth air forces were held in late 1963. These were the first and last joint exercises.

### India's 'Internal and External Politics'

The reference to the 'needs of internal and external politics' in the Chinese ceasefire declaration, harked back to an editorial article published in the *People's Daily* by its Editorial Department on October 27, 1962. The article was titled 'More on Nehru's Philosophy in the Light of The Sino-Indian Boundary Question'.<sup>3</sup> The word 'more' drew attention to an earlier article published on May 6, 1959 which dealt with India's alleged interference in Tibet (see chapter 4). This was an unbridled, personal attack on Nehru and contradicted everything laudatory said about him in previous years.

The main thesis of the editorial was that the 'class nature of the big bourgeoisie and big landlords' of India whose interests were linked with those of US 'imperialism' was responsible for India's 'interference' in Tibet and the 'invasion' of China. Nehru represented the interests of the 'big bourgeoisie and big landlords'. He used 'reactionary nationalist sentiment' to create conditions for the exploitation and oppression of the Indian people by this class. The article cited data to buttress the claims of exploitation and oppression.

Foreign capital, it said, played a role in this. The American capital had increased its hold on the Indian economy after independence. In order to attract more capital, the ruling class needed to 'curry favour with capitalism'. Nehru as a representative of this class had become a 'lackey of imperialists', adjusted himself to their needs and had become the spokesman of this class. He used Indian troops to 'suppress national liberation movements' in the interests of US 'imperialism'. As proof, the article cited India's policy during the Korean War, its attitude to the events in Hungary in 1956, the events in Lebanon in 1958, in Cuba and in the Congo in 1961.

Nehru, the article claimed, dreamt of a 'great Indian empire' extending from the Middle East to Southeast Asia, surpassing even the colonial system of the British empire in Asia. And it quoted from Nehru's book, *The Discovery of India*, to buttress this assertion. It accused Nehru of making more than three hundred speeches in the last three years to 'vilify' China in the 'most malicious language'. The article quoted from several speeches made by Nehru.

Finally, the editorial said:

'Indian soldiers are being used as pawns by the selfish ruling circles; they are making meaningless sacrifices in the border clashes, while India's big capitalists and landlords are taking the opportunity to feather their own nests....

The Chinese people sincerely hope that the Indian people will free themselves from this lot, that India will soon become prosperous and strong, and that the Indian people will be able to lead a happy life. We hope to see a progressive, democratic, and strong India on the continent of Asia.'

Before concluding, the article advised all Communists to do what the Chinese Communist Party had done in 1929 when they supported the Soviet Union against the then Government of China. It castigated S. A. Dange, veteran leader of the Communist Party of India, for supporting the stand of the



Indian Government on the border issue. For good measure, it castigated Tito's Government in Yugoslavia for advocating Soviet intervention to end the conflict.

There was a very significant omission in the article. It made no reference to the three-point proposal made by China and recommended to the Indian Prime Minister by the Chinese Prime Minister three days earlier, on October 24. If the Indian Prime Minister was what the article said he was, could there be a settlement with him? Did the article expect the Indian Army and the people to revolt? At the least, the article was not a contribution to resolution of the conflict.

There was also a significant statement about Chinese policy towards the newly independent countries. The article said:

'The basis of China's policy towards the nationalist countries is this: Firstly, the primary common task of China and all nationalist countries is to oppose their common enemy, imperialism and colonialism, especially US imperialism. They must support one another in the struggle against imperialism and colonialism. China has consistently given active support to the struggles waged by the various nationalist states against imperialism and colonialism. Secondly, it is necessary and entirely possible to establish and develop, between China and these countries, relations of friendship and cooperation on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. It is necessary and fully possible to bring about, through friendly consultations, a reasonable settlement of all outstanding disputes among them in accordance with the Five Principles and the Bandung spirit.'

Since India was held to be in league with 'imperialism', logically there could be neither friendship nor settlement of disputes on the basis of Five Principles. Was this the reason for omission of reference to the three-point proposal?

### The Response of the Communists

The Indian Communists were quick to respond. The National Council of the Communist Party of India met on October 31 and passed a resolution offering full support to the government.

This did not prevent several leaders considered 'pro-China' from being arrested by the state governments in India.

On October 25, *Pravda*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had described the three-point proposal made by the Chinese Government as 'constructive'. It said the conflict on the border served the 'interests of imperialism' and of 'reactionary circles' inside India who were allied to foreign capital and to 'imperialist forces'. It called on the 'progressive forces' – the Communists – to demand an end to conflict. *Pravda* also recalled Soviet support to China in the 1958 Taiwan crisis whereas, by contrast, it offered no assistance on this occasion. The Chinese did not need assistance in any case. *Pravda* analysis of Indian political situation was fairly similar to the *People's Daily* analysis two days later.

*Pravda* changed its tune a few days later, after the end of the Cuban missile crisis. On November 5, it favoured a ceasefire but did not endorse the three-point proposal. It wanted both sides to work towards finding a 'mutually acceptable solution' and avoid a prolonged conflict. This was recognition of the fact that India was in no mood to surrender to Chinese demands. In referring to China and India, it went back to the same formulation as contained in the Tass statement of September 10, 1959: China was a fraternal country building socialism, the Soviet Union enjoyed good friendly relations with India which it valued greatly.

The Chinese who had reported the first *Pravda* comment in the *People's Daily*, did not print the November 5 article. Four days later, the *People's Daily* reported on the sale of Soviet fighter aircraft to India as announced by Nehru in the Indian Parliament. On November 15, the newspaper commented that support to 'reactionary nationalism' was against proletarian internationalism and, indeed, against Marxism-Leninism. It was not long before the Chinese Communists were involved in serious public polemics with their Soviet counterparts. India was not the only reason; the handling of the Cuban missile crisis by

the Soviet Union was a major issue. Effectively, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party ceased to support each other's policies in relation to the United States and India.

### **The Three-Point Proposal, October 24, 1962**

Soon after the start of hostilities, the Chinese Government made a three-point proposal, which was sent to Nehru in a letter by Chou En-lai which was marked by courtesy and moderate language.

The proposal envisaged:

- 1 Boundary question must be settled peacefully through negotiations. The line of actual control along the entire boundary should be respected and armed forces withdrawn 20 km from this line by both sides.
- 2 If this was accepted by India, China was willing to withdraw to north of line in Eastern Sector through mutual consultation on the understanding that both countries would respect the traditional customary line in the Middle and Western Sectors.
- 3 Subsequently, the Prime Ministers should meet to seek a friendly settlement.<sup>1</sup>

Nehru's equally courteous reply was sent on October 27. He suggested the withdrawal of forces should be to the positions they held as on September 8, 1962, the day the Chinese forces challenged the Dhola post in the Thagla Ridge area. Once that was done, India would be willing to receive Prime Minister Chou or a Chinese delegation to 'discuss and arrive at further agreed measures which can facilitate a peaceful settlement of our differences on this border question ...in one stage or in more than one stage as may be necessary.'<sup>5</sup>

This was unacceptable to the Chinese. Chou repeated the suggestions once again in his letter of November 4, 1962. Nehru's reply on November 14, was direct and frank.

He said:

'Your present proposal in brief amounts in broad terms to this: because India had been pressing China to remedy the forcible alteration of the *status quo* since 1957 in the Western Sector, China has undertaken since September 8, deliberately and in cold blood, a further massive aggression and occupied larger areas of Indian territory and is now making the magnanimous offer of retaining the gains of the earlier aggression plus such other gains as it can secure by negotiations from the latest aggression on the basis of the Chinese three point proposal. If this is not the assumption of the attitude of a victor, I do not know what else it can be.'

### Reactions of the 'Nationalist Countries' or the Non-Aligned Nations

Both China and India felt the need for political support from the non-aligned countries. India did not want to be seen isolated from its non-aligned friends; China was determined to win over these countries to its line of thinking – that there was no middle ground between the 'socialist' and the 'imperialist' blocs and their best interests were served by joining China in its anti-imperialist crusade. In public and private communications, both sides referred to the interest of the newly-independent countries in issues like peace and solidarity.

Chou sent letters to the Heads of Governments in the Afro-Asian countries on November 15. He said the border dispute was 'a legacy of British imperialist aggression'. Military intervention by the United States in the dispute would affect adversely not only China and India, it would also be disadvantageous to the Afro-Asian world as a whole. A few days earlier, he sent letters to a few of them in response to proposals made by President Nasser of the United Arab Republic (Egypt) and commended China's three-point proposal. India and Nehru personally had been in regular touch with leaders of the Asian and African countries during the crisis.

President Nasser had taken the lead in support of India. He had sent letters to leaders of Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ceylon

(Srilanka), Indonesia, Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, the Sudan, and Yugoslavia. He had proposed an immediate ceasefire followed by withdrawal of forces to September 8 positions (which was India's key demand); formation of a neutral zone between the two armed forces; and by negotiations thereafter to seek a permanent solution to the border problem. The proposal was rejected by China. Responses from other states varied.

Guinea made some suggestions that China was able to support. President Nkrumah of Ghana was critical of the automatic support extended by the Commonwealth since it would worsen the situation. By implication, he was against US assistance, too. While Kenya was equivocal, Ethiopia and Uganda came out in support of India. Tanganyika (Tanzania) suggested a three-country Commission to study the dispute and make recommendations. In Asia, Malaysia deplored China's attack. So did Cyprus in the Mediterranean.

The responses gave satisfaction neither to India nor to China. The newly-independent countries were not ready to support China in its opposition to the United States which might have intervened if the conflict had continued, nor were the same countries, though part of the non-aligned movement, ready to align with India. From their perspective, the conflict between two of their main supporters weakened their ability to safeguard their own independence. And, they were not ready to annoy one or the other.

In recognition of this dilemma, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister of Ceylon convened a meeting with diplomatic representatives of Burma, Ghana, Egypt and Indonesia in Colombo on November 20. She said that the conflict between India and China could broaden into a larger conflict involving great powers, which would damage non-alignment. She suggested that interested countries should meet and make a joint approach to India and China.

When the interested countries – Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Indonesia, Ghana and United Arab Republic – met in Colombo

in early December, the Ceylonese Prime Minister, the Chairperson said that the conflict had enabled Cold War politics to enter into the Afro-Asian community. India had been compelled to seek arms aid from the Western powers. This did not help the cause of non-alignment. Among the participants, Burma and Cambodia were keen that the conference should not sit in judgement on the merits of the dispute between China and India. It was decided at the end of the meeting by the conference participants that the unanimous conclusions — which came to be termed as the Colombo Proposals — would be presented to India and China by the conference participants.

### The Colombo Proposals

The Prime Minister of Srilanka accompanied by the Indonesian Foreign Minister, travelled to Peking in early January 1963. While claiming a 'positive response' on the part of China, Ch'en Yi clarified that the proposals would form a basis for preliminary direct talks with India. When the Prime Minister, accompanied this time by the representatives of Ghana and the United Arab Republic, travelled to India later, the proposals were accepted '*in toto*' in the light of the clarifications given by Mrs. Bandaranaike. Later, the Chinese accused her of altering the proposals midway in deference to Indian wishes. She stoutly denied this.

In substance, the Colombo Proposals suggested that China should withdraw to the north of the McMahon Line and Indian troops reoccupy the area south of it; in the Western Sector, China should withdraw from the areas it had occupied during the conflict which should be turned into a demilitarized zone to be administered by civilians from both sides until a negotiated solution of the border dispute was found. The Proposals were mainly intended to create conditions for discussions between the two parties; they were not a judgement on the merits of the dispute.

In subsequent correspondence, India kept insisting that China accept the Proposals *in toto* before India would engage in talks. It was not the Indian insistence on withdrawal of forces which prevented China from accepting them. Chou had stated in his letter of November 28, 1962 to Nehru that the Chinese forces 'will not only evacuate the areas they reached in their recent fight in self-defence but will withdraw to positions far behind those they held on September 8 or October 20, 1962.'<sup>7</sup> China wanted direct talks with India to discuss its own agenda. The *People's Daily* editorial article on Nehru had named the issues – border dispute, Indian interference in Tibet and, more important, India's relations with the United States; and, by implication, with the Soviet Union. Chou En-lai even sent a 'personal' message to Nehru through the Indian Charge d'Affaires for a private, unpublicized meeting. Little did he understand the dynamics of the open Indian political system.

India had assumed all along that border incursions would remain at the level of skirmishes and not escalate to a major attack. It paid a heavy price for that assumption. It is doubtful if China was satisfied with the gains. Was the territorial gain in the Western Sector sufficient compensation for the loss in international prestige and position? It had predicated its policy on solidarity with the newly independent 'nationalist' countries. The war weakened its position, not strengthened it. However, China did strengthen its own position in one country – Pakistan.

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- 1 Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, December 5, 1962, *White Paper VIII*, pp.66-69.
- 2 Statement of the Chinese Government, November 21, 1962, *White Paper VIII*, pp.17-21.
- 3 More on Nehru's Philosophy in the Light of The Sino-Indian Boundary Question, by the Editorial Department of the *People's Daily* on October 27, 1962. See Appendix E for full text.

- 4 Letter from Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister of India, October 24, 1962, *White Paper VIII*, p.1.
- 5 Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, October 27, 1962, *White Paper VIII*, pp.4-5.
- 6 Letter from the Prime Minister of India to Premier Chou En-lai, November 14, 1962, *White Paper VIII*, pp.10-13.
- 7 Letter from Premier Chou En-lai to the Prime Minister of India, November 28, 1962, *White Paper VIII*, pp.24-26.