

The Sino—Indian Border Conflict of 1962 : A Study of India's Strategy and Diplomacy

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

RAJESH RAJAGOPALAN

162P

DISARMAMENT DIVISION
CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL POLITICS,
ORGANIZATION AND DISARMAMENT
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI—110067. INDIA

1988



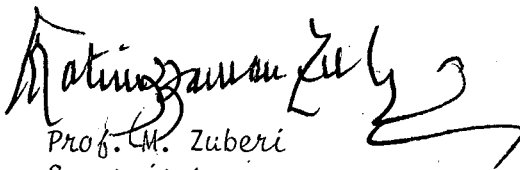
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

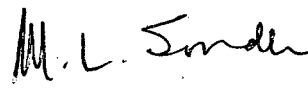
Telegram : JAYENU
Telex : 031-4967 JNU IN
Telephones : 667676
667557
New Delhi-110067

C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that the dissertation entitled ' THE SINO-INDIAN BORDER CONFLICT OF 1962 : A STUDY OF INDIA'S STRATEGY AND DIPLOMACY ' submitted by MR. RAJESH RAJAGOPALAN in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university. To the best of our knowledge this is a bonafide work.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiner for evaluation.


Prof. M. Zuberi
Supervisor


Prof. M.L. Sondhi
Chairman

19th JULY, 1988



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has benefited enormously from the insight and conceptual clarity of Professor M. Zuberi. But for his co-operation and patience, this work would have been considerably poorer.

In completing this dissertation, I have also freely drawn on the time and knowledge of a number of other people. Venkatesh Varma's comparative study of the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars provided the basic conceptual sign posts which have guided this dissertation. Professor Mira Sinha and Professor Giri Deshingar were kind enough to provide me with the benefit of their insight into the issues relating to the subject. Swamy and Hima painstakingly read the earlier drafts and reduced considerably the number of errors. Mr Pahwa's typing was, as usual, excellent.

For the drawbacks that still remain, from the conceptual to the grammatical, I remain solely responsible.

NEW DELHI
21/7/88



(RAJESH RAJAGOPALAN)

C O N T E N T S

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...	i
INTRODUCTION ...	1
CHAPTER 1 CONTAINING THE CRISIS, 1958-1962 : FORCE AND DIPLOMACY IN THE INDIAN POLICY	5
CHAPTER 2 THE BORDER WAR : SEPTEMBER 1962- NOVEMBER 1962	62
CHAPTER 3 ISSUES IN THE INDIAN RESPONSE	124
CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION	137
APPENDICES ...	142
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY ...	157

*

INTRODUCTION

Most of the basic works on the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 are personal memoirs. Such works are useful as sources of information, especially on India's decision-making during the crisis since most of these works are memoirs of people who played an important part in that process. But their drawbacks as studies of the conflict are severe. The primary intent behind such works is not so much the furtherance of knowledge as the justification of the personal part played by its authors in the debacle. Where the search for such justification necessitated the proposition of alternate hypotheses of the events which sought to portray the initiatives of other participants in the decision-making process in rather dim light, that has also been resorted to. Such attempts at finding scapegoats seriously erode the value that these works have. Cumulatively, however, they provide an unmatched insight into the process by which Indian decision-making elite sought to meet the border crisis.

Other works, though not free of a tendency to point fingers, generally tend to present a broader, non-personalized, perspective of the crisis.¹ Such works are more descriptive

¹ Neville Maxwell's account of the dispute, despite its factual shortcomings, innumerable contradictions and unabashed bias, remains the most comprehensive of such works. See Neville Maxwell, India's China War (Bombay, 1970).

with hardly anything more than a superficial attempt at analyzing the dispute. The only theoretical work that deals with this dispute, by Yaacov Vertzberger, is more a study of foreign policy making than of the conflict as such.²

This study seeks to go slightly beyond these existing works. What is attempted in the following pages is a study of the crisis in terms of India's employment of force and diplomacy as deliberate tools of a national strategy. The actual employment of these is only the visible end product of the process by which the decision to employ these instruments are taken. As such, this study seeks to examine not only the actual employment of these instruments, but also the calculus on which the decision to employ these instruments were based.

The study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the earlier period of the dispute, between August 1959 and September 1962 and the Indian formulation of a carefully orchestrated employment of force and diplomacy in its interaction with China. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section attempts to explain the calculus

2 Yaacov, Y.I. Vertzberger, Misperceptions in Foreign Policy Making: The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962 (Boulder, 1984).

of Indian decision-making during this period. This encompasses the perception of the problem and the antagonist, and the option of employing force with the existing state of Indian military capabilities. The second section deals with Indian military initiatives. The attempt is to see how the political imperative of employing military force to claim title to territory while avoiding escalation to full scale hostilities translated into actual force deployments. The interaction of diplomacy in this process, both as an escalation moderator and as an instrument of deterrence through informal alliance with third parties is studied in the third section.

The second chapter deals with Indian decision-making and employment of force and diplomacy in the period immediately preceding the hostilities and during the war. The first section details the confusion in the decision making process leading to the establishment of a military posture that bore little relation to actual capabilities on the ground. The second section studies India's employment of force during the hostilities. The attempt is to see how the pattern of Indian force deployments determined not only the Indian capabilities to meet the military challenge but also the eventual outcome. The third section details Indian efforts to strengthen the diplomatic deterrent posture by moving from an informal,

unstated alliance to what appeared to be the beginnings of a more formalized military relationship.

The third chapter seeks to study two major issues of the conflict - the role that public opinion played in Indian decision-making calculus and the impact of the Cuban missile crisis on India's diplomatic deterrent posture vis-a-vis China. Finally, conclusions about the Indian employment of force and diplomacy in the conflict is attempted.

....

CHAPTER I

CONTAINING THE CRISIS, 1958-1962 : FORCE AND
DIPLOMACY IN THE INDIAN POLICY

(In August and October 1959, serious clashes occurred on the Sino-Indian border. For the next three years, units of the Indian Army conducted limited forward deployment into those areas of frontier that were claimed but not effectively occupied by India. Simultaneously India also explored diplomatic avenues to realize its claim to these territories. This chapter deals with both the formulation and the subsequent implementation of the Indian policy.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section traces the actual formulation of the policy, while the second and third deal with their implementation, taking in turn the military and diplomatic initiatives so formulated.

I

Employing Force : Issues in the Indian Response

Though the public debate in India about the border problem started only after August 1959, private communications between the Governments of India and China concerning the issue

had been going on for at least a year earlier.¹ Despite being aware of the discrepancies in the various Chinese depictions of the Sino-Indian border, the Government of India was in the dark about the extent of Chinese claims, as the Chinese had been maintaining that the maps they published were based on old Kuomintang maps which the People's Republic had no time to revise.²

In the summer of 1958, after receiving reports about the Chinese construction of a road across Indian territory at Aksai Chin, two patrols were despatched to the area to find out the exact situation.³ Only one patrol returned, and it reported that the Chinese road was inside the territory enclosed by the boundary as India officially represented it.⁴ The publication of a map in the China Pictorial in July 1958, which showed Aksai Chin, as well as other areas of India as

/Government
of

- 1 See the various Notes and Letters exchanged between the Governments of India and China during this period as detailed in India, Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged between the Governments of India and China, White Paper I (New Delhi, 1959). Hereinafter referred to as White Paper I.
- 2 This explanation was provided by the Chinese Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru when the latter visited China in October 1954. Prime Minister Nehru took this assurance, he later said, to mean that the "border line would be corrected before long". Ibid., p. 49.
- 3 B.N. Mullick, My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal (New Delhi, 1971), pp. 197-201.
- 4 The other patrol was captured by the Chinese and later released. Neville Maxwell, India's China War (Bombay, 1970), p. 89.

Chinese territory further alerted the Government of India to Chinese territorial claims on ^{the} border.

[In response, India, in two communications to the Chinese Government, enquired about the construction of the road in Indian territory as well as the wrong representation of the territorial boundary in maps published in official journals and asked that "since...the present government of the People's Republic of China has now been in office for so many years...(the) necessary corrections in the Chinese maps should not be delayed further".⁵ (The Chinese reply for the first time talked of the need for "consultations with various neighbouring countries and a survey of the border areas" before corrections could be affected.⁶

(This early Chinese position that the border corrections could be made only after "consultations" threw open the entire boundary for negotiations. The implications and impact of this position were reflected in the immediate escalation of the level of mutual consultations on the border question. Most of the negotiations and diplomatic posturing were thereafter conducted at the level of the two Prime Ministers.)

5 Note to the Chinese Government, White Paper I, p. 46.

6 Ibid., p. 47.

The basic Chinese and Indian positions were set out in the first exchange of letters. Expressing his puzzlement about the Chinese position, Prime Minister Nehru stated that "there never has been...a dispute so far as we are concerned.... There can be no question of these large parts of India being anything but India".⁷ The Chinese position was set out in Premier Chou En-lai's reply. "The Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited" and the McMahon Line was "a product of the British policy of aggression against the Tibet region of China" and therefore illegal. Nevertheless, he went ^{on} to add that "the Chinese government on the one hand finds it necessary to take a more or less realistic attitude towards the McMahon line and on the other hand, cannot but act with prudence and needs time to deal with this matter".⁸ (Premier Chou En-lai also asked that in the meantime status quo be maintained on the border.)

(The passive tone of Premier Chou En-lai's reply and the hint of compromise on the McMahon Line, prompted Prime Minister Nehru to send a detailed reply taking each of the sectors of the border separately.) The reply reflected the Indian position that it was the Chinese who had upset the long prevailing status quo on the border. Thus, while

7 Prime Minister Nehru to Premier Chou En-lai, *ibid.*, pp. 48-51.

8 Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru, *ibid.*, pp. 52-54.

agreeing to the proposal to maintain the status quo, Nehru also stated that "if any possession has been secured recently, the position should be rectified".⁹

(These early communications between the two Prime Ministers helped in clarifying their respective positions on the border. But further communication between the governments to explore ways to come to an accommodation on the border issue were halted by the revolt in Tibet and the subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India. To worsen an already bad situation, a serious clash occurred between Chinese and Indian armed personnel at a disputed point on the McMahon Line on 25 August 1959.

These incidents led to a considerable hardening of the respective positions. Prime Minister Nehru admitted that "gradually, step by step, the policy of China in regard to this matter has become more rigid".¹⁰ (But he refused to contemplate the use of force as a means of solving the problem immediately)¹¹ - a refusal that was as much dictated by the

9 Prime Minister Nehru to Premier Chou En-lai, *ibid.*, pp.55-57.

10 In Rajya Sabha on 10 September 1959. See India, Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations, Part I (New Delhi, 1961), p. 138. Hereinafter referred to as PMSIR.

11 Replying to a proposal from a Member to bomb "out of existence", the Aksai Chin Road, Prime Minister Nehru said that "In places like this, decisions can only be made by conferences, by agreements. Countries do not, should not go to war without proceeding in these other ways over such matter". *Ibid.*, p. 99.

state of the Indian capabilities in this sphere that then existed and - following from that - as the role that force was to play in the overall scheme of Indian policies.

Though the total strength of the Indian Army had almost doubled since 1947, the primary focus of its strategic disposition reflected a preoccupation with the western--predominantly plains--border.¹² As of mid-1959, the Army was neither on the frontiers with China, - which was being looked after by either the local police or para-military forces like the Assam Rifles and the Jammu and Kashmir Militia - nor even contemplating the conduct of hostilities there. As such any immediate reaction to border encroachments by China would either have to be in the form of diplomatic protests or such limited employment of force as would be possible with the paramilitary forces already available. The forbidding nature of the terrain as well as its total dissimilarities with the normal theatre of operations of the regular forces of the Indian Army, ensured against the possibility of rapid transfer of forces from the Western to the Eastern theatre. (The state of the logistical infrastructure in the border area compounded the problems. There were no hard roads anywhere

12 For a detailed study of the Indian military, its growth and dispositions during this period see, Lorne J. Kavic, India's Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947-1965 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967).

within the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) - a situation that was duplicated on the western sector of the border also.¹³

Therefore, any Indian military response to the evolving border crisis had, necessarily, to be a gradual one.) The lack of inter-theatre transferability of Indian Army units, compounded by the imperative of maintaining the existing strength of forces on the western borders, necessitated the raising of additional forces committed to the Himalayan theatre. Normally a lengthy procedure, ^{this} was sought to shortened - in a move that also revealed the urgency felt - by transferring and retraining an existing formation, with new raisings being conducted to replace the forces transferred to the Himalayan theatre.¹⁴ Similarly, the creation of a logistical infrastructure in a terrain characterized by its singular hostility had also to be a long drawn out process. Here, the urgency was reflected by the deployment of formations ahead of the creation of the requisite logistical infrastructure - in the process sacrificing a part of their full combat potential.

13 A road link between Srinagar and Leh in the western sector was begun in 1954 but halted half way, though after discovery of financial irregularities. Ibid., p. 51.

14 The IV Infantry Division from Punjab was ordered to NEFA. A new Division, the XVII, was raised to take its place in Punjab. Maxwell, n. 4, p. 182.

The urgency, which dictated such a deployment, was the outcome of the changed strategic perception about the utility of employment of force as a unit of the total Indian strategy in the border dispute. This was partly the result of a change in perception about the adversary itself,¹⁵ but mainly because available intelligence reported continuous Chinese activities in the disputed areas, which were inferred as preliminary moves for military occupation.¹⁶

II

Indian Deployment of Force

(On 25 August 1959, Indian and Chinese armed personnel clashed at Longju,¹⁷ a disputed point on the McMahon Line in the eastern sector. About two months later, a much more serious clash occurred on the western sector of the border near the Kongka Pass.¹⁸ In response to these clashes and in anticipation of further Chinese forward probes, the Government of India

15 Replying to a discussion in the Lok Sabha on 27 November 1959, Prime Minister Nehru said that he doubted "...if there is any country in the world...which cares less for peace than China today". PMSIR I (i), p. 215.

16 Mullick, n. 3, pp. 238-9, and 246.

17 White Paper II, pp. 3-6.

18 Ibid., pp. 13-18.

ordered the Army to assume direct responsibility for the borders.¹⁹ In this section the progressive forward deployments of the Indian Army units are detailed, taking separately the western and eastern sectors of the border.

The Western Sector

Though the western sector of the Indo-Tibetan border had been handed over to the Army by November 1959, no actual troop deployments took place immediately due to the lack of proper infrastructural capabilities to support such deployments.²⁰ Indian dispositions on the border at this time included only local police and some para-military forces.

The Indian government's policy intentions towards the Indo-Tibetan border had already been set out in a policy directive issued by Prime Minister Nehru after the Longju clash. This directive insisted that clashes with the Chinese were to be avoided "not only in a big way, but even in a small way", unless such were "forced down upon us". Regarding the situation on the Aksai Chin, the directive stated that for the present India will have "to put up with the Chinese occupation" since India had "no check posts there and practically little of

19 PMSIR I (1), p. 161.

20 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 200. Kavic mentions the presence of an infantry battalion at Leh, optimised for contingency operations against Pakistan. See Kavic, n. 12, p. 21. No other account refers to this battalion, however.

access."²¹

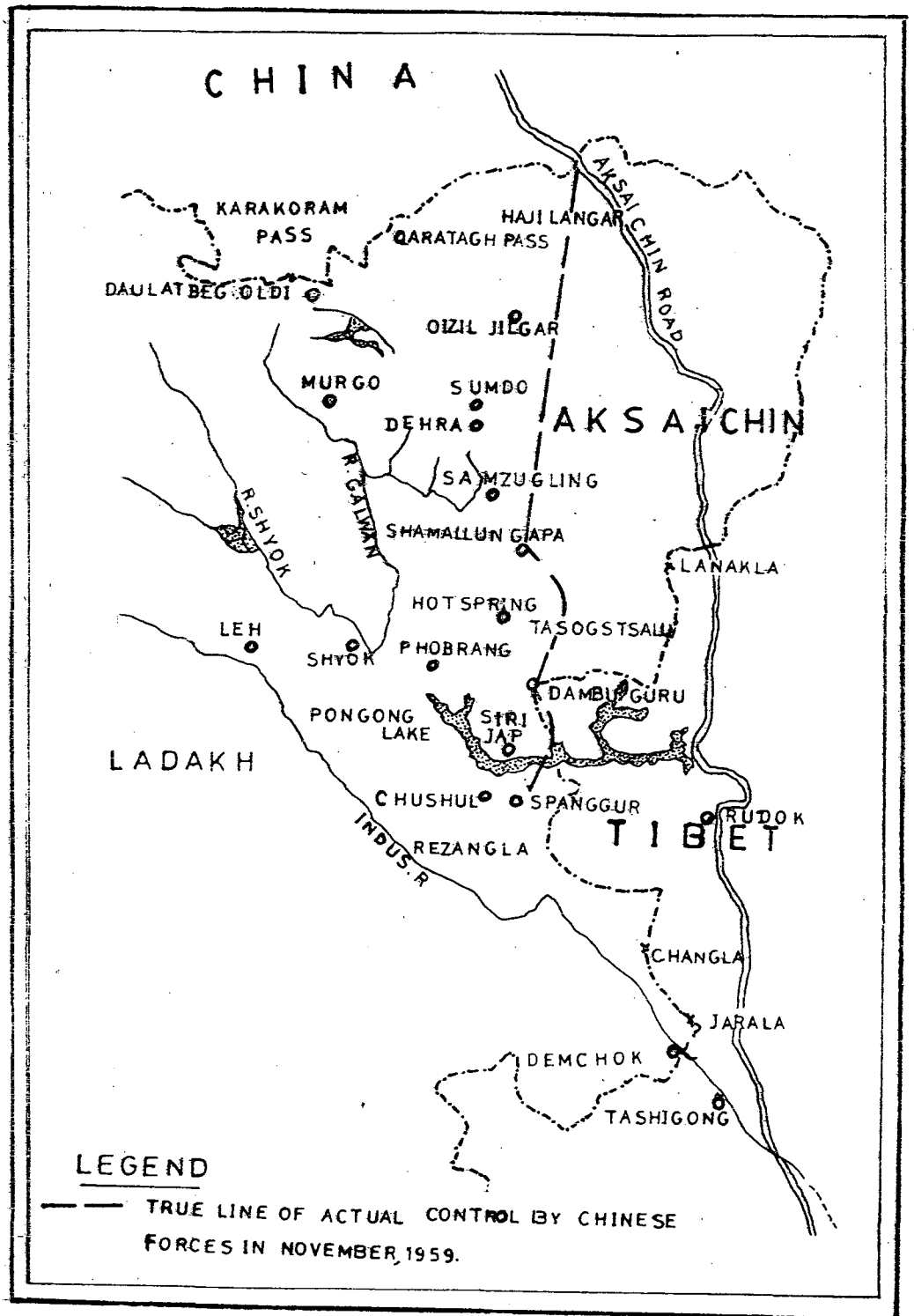
(After the Kongka Pass incident,) while the directive on avoiding clashes as far as possible continued to be held, the intentions as regards (the Aksai Chin area were altered.) (The Intelligence Bureau²² reported that despite earlier Chinese undertakings, they had been making further incursion not only in Ladakh but also in other parts of the frontier.²³ In response, the Western Command was, in February 1960, ordered to take up positions along a line roughly between Murgo, Tsogtsalu, Phoibrang, Chushul and Demchok,²⁴ The underlying imperative of avoiding clashes with the Chinese was reflected in the fact that all these positions except Demchok were between 20 and 50 miles away from the Chinese positions, which were thought to be at Qizil Jilga, Dehra La, Samzungling (on the Galwan river), Kongka Pass and Khuranak Fort (see Map 1). Demchock

21 Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 129-30.

22 Due to the lack of adequate autonomous intelligence gathering facilities, the armed forces had to depend on the civilian Intelligence Bureau (IB) for most of their information. The IB thus played a major role at both the tactical and strategic levels of collecting and distributing intelligence and therefore gained a disproportionate, though necessary, say in the decision-making process. See Ibid., p. 310.

23 Mullick, n. 3, pp. 305-6.

24 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 199.



MAP 1. THE WESTERN SECTOR, NOVEMBER, 1959.

alone was less than twenty miles from the southern extremity of the main Chinese road.²⁵

(Chinese military strength across the border was estimated to be at more than one regiment,²⁶ and ~~was~~ provided with supporting arms and also reportedly, some armour.²⁷ It was also believed that the Chinese network of roads had made great progress and (though still short of completion) gave them immense advantage of supply and manoeuvrability.

(The Indian Army's capabilities to meet such a Chinese force or to carry out the government's directive were grossly inadequate.) There were only two battalions of the Jammu and Kashmir militia in Ladakh. There were neither regular troops, nor supporting arms. Logistical capabilities were pitiable with no road to or within the Ladakh sector. The Srinagar-Leh road had not been completed and Leh was still supplied by either mules or by air. Chusul also had a landing strip but all other positions in Ladakh had to be supplied by air drops.

(The preparations for meeting the military contingency in the Ladakh sector aimed at the eventual deployment of an

25 Ibid., pp. 199-200.

26 One Chinese Regiment was roughly comparable to an Indian Brigade.

27 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 200.

infantry brigade group once suitable operational infrastructure were created. A line of forward bases and posts ~~was~~ was visualized from Shyok Valley to Daulet Beg Oldi, near the southern entrance to the Karakoram Pass, with Chushul being the "anchor" for this system of posts.²⁸ The brigade group to be inducted (consisting of five infantry battalions plus supporting arms) was to be in addition to the militia battalions already in the sector.²⁹ (Further contingency planning for the Ladakh sector convinced the Indian military planners that existing logistical deficiencies would severely limit the preparation of a successful defence against a serious and sustained Chinese attack.³⁰

(Similar contingency plans for the Sikkim-Bhutan sector took into account not only the military threat from the north but also the possibility of Pakistani interference in the corridor between the northern tip of East Pakistan and Bhutan. The plan in this sector aimed at the eventual deployment of an infantry Division with one brigade at Kalimpong, and one brigade at Gangtok with its forward elements stretching to the Natu Pass on the Sikkim-Tibet border. The relatively easier terrain and the resultant existence of better logistical

²⁸ Kavic, n. 12, p. 87.

²⁹ Ibid. See also Maxwell, n. 4, p. 200.

³⁰ Kavic, n. 12, p. 88.

facilities in this sector helped in a rapid realization of the plans. (By January 1960, one infantry brigade with one battalion and Brigade Headquarters was sited at Siliguri, one battalion sent to Kalimpong, and one battalion to Gangtok with its forward elements extending to the Natu Pass.³¹ In the Ladakh sector, the 114th Infantry Brigade was inducted with the 7th and 14th Jammu and Kashmir militia under its command.³²

Indian intelligence had been reporting continued Chinese military and related activity since late 1959. It was apprehended that the Chinese were now trying not only to occupy the ^{territory claimed in} 1956 but even to push beyond it.³³ These suspicions were strengthened by what was felt to be the "uncompromising attitude" of the Chinese during ^{the} April 1960 summit meeting between Prime Ministers Chou En-lai and Jawaharlal Nehru, and confirmed when the Chinese put forward a new map which claimed more territory during ^{the} Official's Meeting on the border questions. In May 1960, therefore, further posts were ordered to be set up.³⁴ Though the Indian government had earlier pledged to avert clashes, it was

31 Kavic, n. 12, p. 87.

32 Maj. Gen. Jagjit Singh (Retd), The Saga of Ladakh: Heroic Battles of Rezang La and Gurung Hill, 1961-62 (New Delhi, 1983), pp. 38-39.

33 Mullick, n. 3, pp. 308-9.

34 Ibid., p. 307.

rationalized that there was no commitment on not setting up border posts as long as this did not involve clashes with the Chinese.³⁵ In any case, the logistical capabilities obtaining precluded the induction of new troops and limited the establishment of additional posts for another year.

In April 1961, the 1/8 Gorkha Rifles Battalion was inducted into Ladakh, raising the total Indian strength in the area to a total of three battalions including the two militia battalions. The original schedule of troop inductions into Ladakh had called for four of the five battalions to be inducted in 1960 with the remaining one to be inducted in 1961 for a total strength of 7 battalions. The continuing logistical logjam prevented these planned inductions and as late as September 1962, only two of the new battalions had been inducted into the area.

(A number of initiatives were taken by the government to improve the logistical infrastructure in the northern areas, both directly by the Central Government and by the State governments of Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh with support from ^{the} Centre.) These included increased expenditure of development funds on the border regions, construction of new

35. This distinction was appreciated more by the political leadership than the military. See D.R. Mankekar, The Guilty Men of 1962 (Bombay, 1968), p. 143. See also Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 71-74.

roads and improving existing ones etc. Steps to strengthen the constabulary and raise their efficiency to something similar to the Assam Rifles were also taken.³⁶

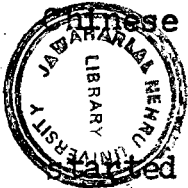
These measures, though taken as early as 1959, did not bear immediate fruit. Thus, the governmental directives on induction of troops into Ladakh and their deployment to forward areas remained unfulfilled. (As late as March 1961, for instance, the Army Headquarters informed the government that limitations of air transport had made it impossible to induct the proposed brigade into Ladakh. This meant that the two militia battalions that were in Ladakh could do little more than to prevent the Chinese from advancing across their own claim line and defend Leh.³⁷

The operationalization of the governmental directive on forward deployment of troops created further tactical disadvantages for the Indian Army. The lack of facilities prevented the induction of the originally proposed number of battalions, thus reducing the number of troops available to carry out the tasks allotted to the brigade, while the absolute political necessity of establishing the large

36 These details are from Kavic, n. 12, pp. 71-74.

37 Mankekar, n. 35, p. 145.

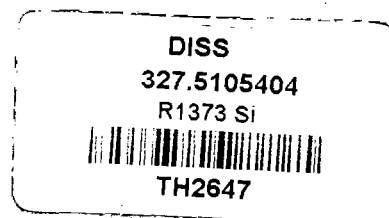
number of posts that were required, necessitated that these posts be established with far fewer number of troops than would have been desirable. Logistics, or the lack of it, also determined the siting of these posts at tactically disadvantageous positions on valley floors, so as to facilitate air supply - a condition necessitated by the lack of roads within Ladakh. Such posts were extremely vulnerable to Chinese troops occupying the higher slopes.



By September 1961, further intelligence reports came in about Chinese activities, especially in the Galwan river valley. These were taken as indications of Chinese forward moves with the object of filling out the Chinese claim line of 1960. Specifically their occupation of the Chip Chap river valley by the establishment of a post there, brought them to their 1960 claim line in this sector.³⁸ It was also believed that the Chinese response to Indian posts would be passive taking the form of diplomatic protests rather than active military measures to remove these posts by force. In November, therefore, a new directive was issued to the Army which called for:

- (i) Forward patrolling towards the international border in Ladakh so as to prevent the Chinese from advancing any further and also dominating from any posts which

³⁸ Kavic, n. 12, p. 169.



LH-2647

might have already been set up. The earlier instructions about avoiding clashes except in self-defence was retained.

- (ii) The effective occupation of those sections of the border where logistical difficulties did not exist to the extent it did in Ladakh. This was to be done by setting up posts and by patrolling.
- (iii) Efforts to be made "to position major concentrations of forces along our borders in places conveniently situated behind forward posts from where they could be maintained logistically and from where they can restore a border situation at short notice."³⁹

This directive was not very different from the earlier governmental directives as regards the basic aim -- the setting up of border posts with the objective of preventing further Chinese incursions, while avoiding clashes other than in self defence. The major difference this time was the sense of urgency which reflected the impact of the continuing Chinese forward moves.

39 This was the formal directive that became the basis for the so-called "forward policy" and is quoted at length in Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 221-3. Emphasis added. For a criticism of the term 'forward policy', see Michael Brecher, India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World (London, 1968), p. 153.

These directives were communicated by the Army Headquarters to the Western Command in December 1961, with two alterations. The directive on build up of troops behind the forward posts was not communicated and the phrasing of the earlier part of the directive concerning the domination of post was changed so that it now ordered the Western Command to set up posts "to dominate any Chinese posts already established on Indian territory".⁴⁰ Though this seemingly indicates a major shift in emphasis, it probably only reflected the realities on the ground.

The onset of winter prevented any major moves on the ground immediately, though Indian troops had begun to move forward in a small way. In April 1962, another battalion, the 5th Jat, was moved to Leh.⁴¹ The Headquarters of the 14th Jammu and Kashmir battalion was moved to Panamik and Daulet Beg Oldi was transformed into a military base with supply depots at Sultan Chusku and Murgo.⁴²

While avoiding clashes in the earlier part of the forward deployments of the Indian and Chinese troops were relatively easy as they rarely came into contact with each

⁴⁰ Cited in Maxwell, n. 4, p. 223. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ Singh, n. 32, p. 43.

⁴² Major S.R. Johri, The Chinese Invasion of Ladakh (Lucknow, 1967), p. 80.

other, by mid-1962 this was no longer possible. With posts being set up by each side further and further forward, it was impossible to prevent at least some of them to be so sited that it presented a threat to either the post directly or to the supply lines of the other side.

The logistical difficulties earlier mentioned resulted in the Chinese domination of Indian post in most cases. Nevertheless, some of the Indian posts, especially in the Galwan river valley sat astride the Chinese supply routes and therefore threatened some of the Chinese forward posts.

The Chinese reacted to these moves on the ground swiftly. They had already formally announced that they were re-starting forward patrolling.⁴³ On 10 July Chinese forces surrounded the Galwan river post in great numbers in what seemed to be preliminary preparation for an all out assault. The Indian troops held their ground, and the Chinese did not force the issue till their general assault started on 20 October.

The Galwan post incident only confirmed what the Indian government already believed - that China would not use force against the forward posts that India was setting

43 Note to the Indian Government, 30 April 1962, White Paper, VI, p. 39. See also Mullick, n. 3, p. 324.

up.⁴⁴ But while not directly assaulting such posts, the Chinese surrounded these posts with large number of troops preventing land communication and forcing these posts to be supplied through airdrops. Other than the Galwan post, Indian posts at the Chip Chap river valley, Yula and Sirijap and several smaller posts on the Depsang plains were also so surrounded.⁴⁵

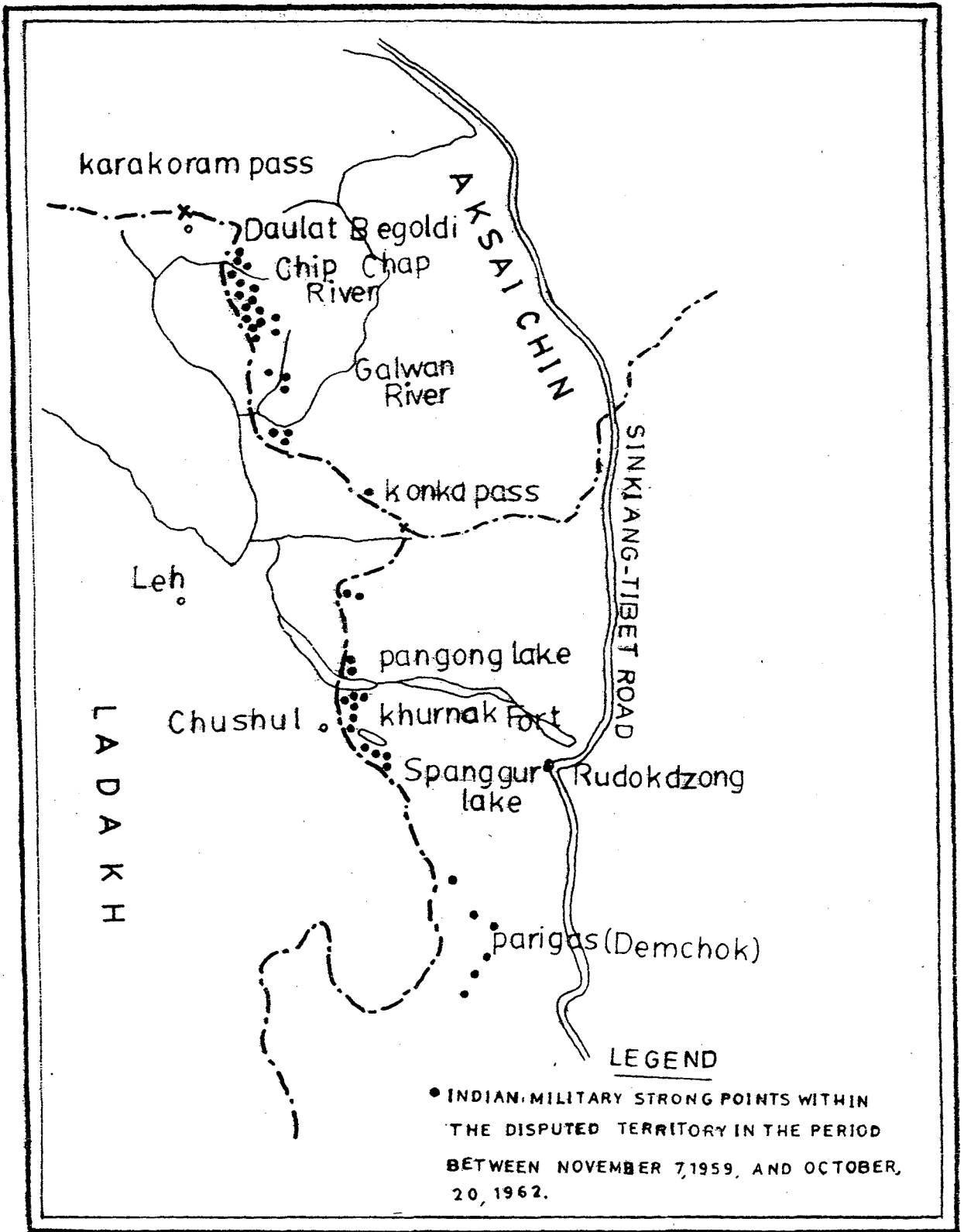
On 17 August the Army was directed to use force, if necessary, to prevent such encirclement of Indian posts.⁴⁶ The threat to these isolated posts, the number of which expanded from 13 to more than 60 between April 1961 and August 1962,⁴⁷ (Map 2) had already been communicated to the Western Command which had been ordered to send reinforcements. But in the absence of sufficient troops, the Western Command could do little. Of the originally scheduled five battalions, only two had so far been inducted. As these were also set up in posts all over the frontier, there were practically no tactical reserves behind the forward line of posts. In response to a

44 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 237. Singh n. 32, p. 40.

45 Mullick, n. 3, pp. 334-5; Mankekar, n. 35, p. 41.

46 Mankekar, n. 35, pp. 41-42.

47 Singh, n. 32, p. 45.



MAP 2. INDIAN FORWARD POSTS IN THE WESTERN SECTOR

complaint from the General Officer Commander-in-Chief (GOC-In-C) Western Command, the Army Headquarters told the Western Command that the Government of India was fully aware of the impossibility of guaranteeing the prevention of further Chinese ingress into Indian territory or the defence of Leh and accepted this position.⁴⁸

In September, in the first major clash in the Western Sector since the Kongka Pass clash nearly three years ago, several Chinese were killed. This action was the outcome of the order handed down from the Army Headquarters in August, which gave permission to use force to prevent the Chinese from completely surrounding Indian posts.

The Eastern Sector

The Eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border stretches from Bhutan to Burma. At the time of the Sino-Indian border conflict, the area of dispute was under the administrative control of India and called the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA). Militarily, the responsibility for the border lay with the Eastern Command of the Indian Army, which raised the XXXIII Corps to directly take charge of McMahon Line, which India claimed as the border.⁴⁹

48 Mankekar, n. 35, pp. 43-44.

49 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 174; Captain S.R. Johri, The Chinese Invasion of NEFA (Lucknow, 1968), p. 32.

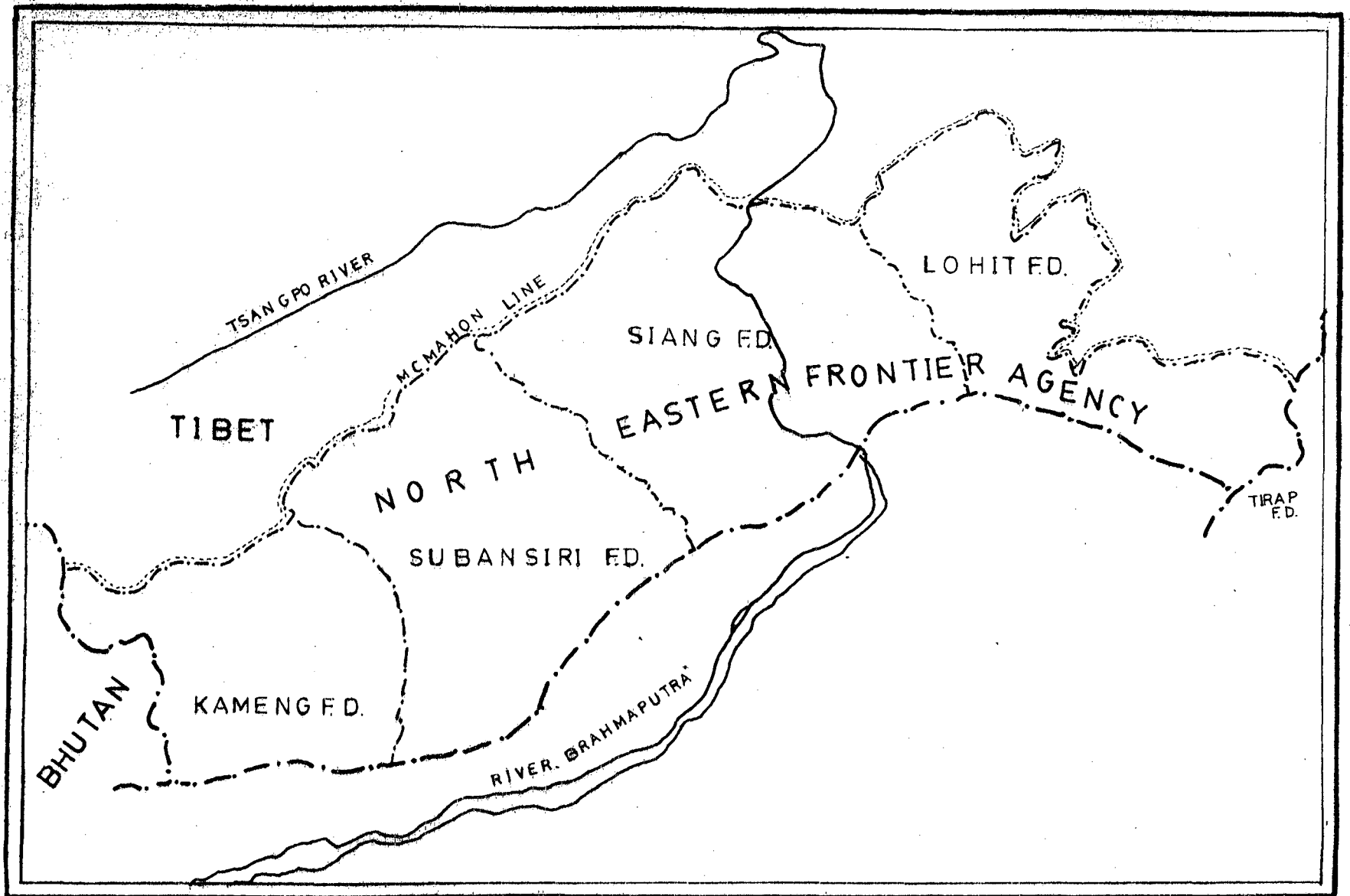
Though the defence of the McMahon Line was handed over to the Army soon after the Longju clash, this did not make any difference to the military position on the border as no deployments took place immediately. Two months later, after further clashes on the border, the IV Infantry Division was ordered to move into NEFA from its peacetime station at Ambala.⁵⁰ The XXXIII Corps under which the IV Division was put, was responsible for Sikkim, the Bhutan boundary, NEFA and the McMahon Line, East Pakistan and Nagaland.⁵¹ The IV Division itself was given responsibility for the entire McMahon Line from Bhutan to Burma (Map 3).

The transfer of the Division began immediately and the Headquarters was established at Tezpur by the end of 1959. Further movements into NEFA proper were seriously handicapped by both the onset of winter and the generally deficient logistical support infrastructure that existed in the NEFA. These difficulties were so formidable that only one company of troops from one of the constituent battalions of the Division could reach Bomdi La in the Kameng sector of NEFA by January 1960.⁵² In March, another company reached

50 K.C. Praval, History of the Fourth Division of India (New Delhi, 1983) p.174.

51 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 174.

52 The NEFA comprised of five administrative Divisions - the Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. Only the first four were contiguous to the Tibetan border. Praval, n. 50, p. 179.



MAP 3. THE NORTH EASTERN FRONTIER AGENCY

Towang.⁵³

Since the mountainous terrain of NEFA presented few ingress routes for any invading force, the initial Indian military planning revolved around the defence of these ingress routes by preparing to hold specific, tactically advantageous points along these routes. The most important and vulnerable of these routes was through the Kameng Division of the NEFA.⁵⁴ Therefore, ^{the} Indian Army's concentration in the NEFA was primarily in the Kameng Division. Towang, in the Kameng Division was ordered to be held at all costs.⁵⁵ The symbolic importance of the Towang monastery and the tactical importance of the dominating heights of Towang were the primary considerations behind this order.

Despite the lack of sufficient logistical infrastructure, one battalion had concentrated at Towang by August 1960 and Towang was made the battalion headquarters. Bomdi La, another major defensive feature further to the south-east of Towang, was made the Brigade Headquarters of 7 Brigade. This Brigade was responsible for the defence of the Kameng Division. Two battalions of the 7 Brigade were deployed in the Tenga

53 Ibid., p. 182; Maxwell, n. 4, p. 182.

54 Praval, n. 50, p. 181.

55 Ibid., p. 182.

Valley and Bomdi La area.⁵⁶ The battalion deployed at Towang was also part of the 7 Brigade.

Of the other two brigades of the IV Division, the 11 Brigade was allotted the defence of the area east of the Se La in the Kameng Division, while the 5 Brigade was given the responsibility for the defence of the rest of the NEFA border. The former, however, was almost immediately diverted to Nagaland to strengthen the Army's existing counter-insurgency forces there and its area of responsibility was entrusted to one of the battalions of the 7 Brigade.⁵⁷

The 5 Brigade, responsible for the rest of the NEFA established its Brigade Headquarters at North Lakhimpur. But its further forward deployment was experiencing great difficulty due to the lack of roads and other logistical support infrastructure in its area of responsibility.⁵⁸

Early contingency planning by the Indian Army did not envisage the holding of the McMahon Line in the event of a full scale Chinese invasion.⁵⁹ In an exercise held in January 1961, it was estimated that three Infantry Divisions would be needed to defend the NEFA - two of them on the line and

56 Ibid.; Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 181-2.

57 Praval, n. 50, p. 193.

58 Ibid., p. 183.

59 For details of these contingency plans, see Kavic, n. 12, p. 88.

one in reserve. For contingency purposes, the units allotted to the plan were the IV Division, the 'Naga' Division of approximately 14 battalions, which was then deployed for counter-insurgency operations in Nagaland, and the V Division from Punjab which would act as reserve. The operational plans called for the concentration of the active defensive units in the vicinity of Bomdi La which was to be made the main bulwark. This defence line would be strengthened by the induction of light tanks and artillery drawn from units stationed at Calcutta and Agra etc. As the logic of the Indian deployment of force became increasingly subservient to a purely political objective of holding the McMahon Line these contingency plans were effectively overturned.

The government had, as noted earlier, already set out a directive against use of force except in self-defence. Reflecting this directive, the Army Headquarters in November 1959 told the Eastern Command to make clear to all ranks that "actual conflict" with the Chinese should be avoided and that no patrol should approach closer than two miles of the McMahon Line except in those places where posts had been set up on the Line itself.⁶⁰ The chances of such clashes were slight nevertheless, since no actual Army unit was till then deployed anywhere near the McMahon Line. The posts on the border were

/this

⁶⁰ For/directive as well as the Army Headquarters order to the Eastern Command see, Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 129 and 199.

still being held by the Assam Rifles, al beit, under the operational command of the Army.

Lack of proper logistical support infrastructure remained a constant cause for worry to the Indian Army. Though the process of building road into the NEFA had been stepped up after the establishment of the Border Roads Organization in January 1960,⁶¹ its progress was slow. The NEFA could not be serviced by an all-weather road throughout the period under study. After a considerable amount of effort, a one-ton fair weather road had been laid from Tezpur to Towang through Se La, Dirang Dzong, and Bomdi La and this formed the major logistical link between the strong points within the Kameng area of NEFA and between Kameng and the plains.

Air supply was the second major source of logistical support for the troops deployed in the forward posts. However, the weather and the general topography of the region made this, at best, an uncertain link. Though the government had taken a number of measures like buying new aircrafts specifically for the purpose of air supply,⁶² the capabilities

61 Mullick, n. 3, p. 284.

62 A variety of aircrafts, both fixed wing and rotary, were bought during this period specifically for service in the North East and a new Air Force Eastern Command was established in 1959. These aircrafts included 29 C-119G transports, 8 S-62, 6 Bell 47-G-3 helicopters from the US, and Mi -4 helicopters and II-14 and An-12 transports from the Soviet Union. See Kavic, n. 12, p. 105.

continued to remain poor.

The Indian Army's orders continued to reflect the importance of the defence of Towang. This was mainly because further forward deployment or defences were beyond the logistical capabilities of the Army but also reflected the belief that there were no serious military threats to the NEFA during this early period. In fact, the tasks allotted to the 7 Brigade, which was responsible for Towang, were in the order of priority, as follows:

- (i) The defence of Towang - the primary role
- (ii) The prevention of penetration of the McMahon Line
- (iii) The establishment of Assam Rifles posts, and
- (iv) Rendering assistance to Assam Rifles posts.⁶³

Deployments in the NEFA reflected these operational priorities. By November 1960, further support units, including a Mountain Battery and Engineers, had reached Towang. By April 1961, the Brigade Headquarters of the 7 Brigade was moved up from Bomdi La to Towang. Active preparations were also taken for the defence of Towang. These deployments to a smaller extent also reflected the relatively improved logistical capability in the region. Further evidence of the primacy

63 Brigadier J.P. Dalvi, (Retd), Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 (Bombay, 1962), p. 118.

attached to the defence of Towang was the decision taken in July 1962 to relieve the 7 Brigade of its responsibility to man the lines of communication up to Towang so that it could concentrate on its primary task.⁶⁴

In December 1961, reflecting the governmental directive to the Army to be in effective occupation of the entire frontier wherever possible, the Eastern Command was asked to set up posts as far forward and close to the McMahon Line as possible to assert Indian claims over the entire NEFA area.⁶⁵ 'Operation Onkar', a programme started earlier to expand the number of Assam Rifles posts on the McMahon Line, was to be vigorously implemented.⁶⁶ The location of these posts and their strengths were specified by the IB, evidently because the Army was, by itself, unable to pick out suitable areas for the establishment of such posts.⁶⁷ 'Operation Onkar' was started in April with Assam Rifles posts being set up all along the McMahon Line.

64 Ibid., p. 144.

65 Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 222-3.

66 'Operation Onkar' was to begin in 1960 but lack of sufficient number of Assam Rifle troops had delayed it till early 1962. See Mullick, n. 3, pp. 323-4.

67 Ibid. See also B.M. Kaul, The Untold Story (Bombay, 1967), p. 318.

Since these were small posts of company or platoon strength, they would have been hard put to defend themselves in the event of a determined Chinese assault. In order to be able to come to their assistance faster in case of such exigencies, the 7 Brigade was ordered to implement a limited policy of re-siting of regular troops locations and establish additional localities forward of Towang and closer to the McMahon Line.⁶⁸ These re-sitings were to be done in two sessions: the first to be completed by 30 November 1962, while the second would be taken up in 1963. By September 1962, both battalions of the 7 Brigade that were at Towang - the 1 Sikhs and the 9 Punjab - were well into the process of establishing these additional forward localities.⁶⁹

The Chinese reacted to these Indian forward re-deployments on 8 September, when a force of some sixty Chinese troops appeared on the Thagla Ridge opposite a forward Indian post, called the Dhola Post.⁷⁰ Since India had been considering

68 Dalvi, n. 63, p. 143.

69 Ibid., pp. 143-4.

70 In the Western extremity, McMahon could not find any watersheds to guide him in drawing his line and he therefore choose what he thought was the highest ridge as the boundary feature. But India later found that the highest ridge in this region ran further to the north of the McMahon Line. This ridge, called the Thagla Ridge, had therefore been considered by India as the boundary feature. Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 292-3. Mullick claimed that the Indian interpretation had been accepted by the Tibetan authorities. Mullick, n. 3, pp. 328-9.

the Thagla Ridge as the boundary feature, the presence of Chinese on the Ridge was considered to be the long awaited Chinese move against NEFA in retaliation for Indian moves in the Western sector. Believing that either a weak response or, worse, no response would encourage the Chinese to make further incursions in the NEFA, the government ordered the Army to evict the Chinese from the Thagla Ridge.⁷¹

III

Diplomatic Measures in the Indian Response

Indian diplomatic efforts to contain China followed two broad streams. While bilateral diplomacy with China was used in a search for a common ground for negotiations, India also tried to ensure against the failure of this effort by enlisting the informal support of the two Super Powers. Simultaneously, other diplomatic efforts were launched in the immediate neighbourhood to both preempt the emergence of new flanks of concern and contain the existing one on the western border.

71 Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 302-3.

Bilateral Diplomacy: September 1959-September 1962

Direct communications between the Prime Ministers; broken off during the Tibetan revolt, were resumed after the Longju clash when Premier Chou En-lai replied to the earlier letter from Prime Minister Nehru.

Chou En-lai's reply to Nehru revealed a considerably hardened Chinese position as regards the border.⁷² The letter reaffirmed the basic point made earlier by China about the Sino-Indian border being not delimited, much more serious from the Indian point of view was the fact that China had now given up its earlier position on the McMahon Line and now claimed all the territory between the McMahon Line and the foothills - an area of about 90,000 sq. kms.

Chou En-lai also asked for an overall settlement of the border question and proposed that till then "the two sides should maintain the long existing status quo on the border and not to seek to change it by unilateral action, even less by force".⁷³ These two proposals, taken together seem to point to a compromise arrangement by which China would maintain its claim to Aksai Chin while India would get the territory

72 Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru, 8 September 1959, White Paper II, pp. 27-33.

73 Ibid., pp. 27-28. Emphasis added.

under the McMahon Line. The long existing status quo presumably was the Chinese way of equating their claim to the Aksai Chin with the Indian claim to NEFA while the proposal for an overall settlement denoted the resulting compromise by both sides on their respective claims.

India's assumption till then about the border problem /the being one of a legal nature with/ problem itself resulting from either misunderstanding of the Indian position and/or a question about relative legal merits of the two cases - which was evidently why Nehru's letter of 22 March 1959 set forth in such detail the Indian case -- was not therefore shared by the Chinese. Instead the Chinese were proposing that India recognize the reality of the Chinese presence in the Aksai Chin and come to a political compromise.

This proposal was seen by India as patently unfair since it tried to equate the Indian administrative control over NEFA with the status quo that China gained by making encroachments in Aksai Chin in the previous few years. The six-month delay that Chou took in replying to Nehru's letter was seen as a deliberate one, made so that China could move its patrols and posts into Aksai Chin to give substance to its claims.⁷⁴

74 Mullick, n. 3, pp. 238-9.

Nehru's reply sought to funnel the negotiations on to grounds that were considered to be more favourable to the realization of Indian claims.⁷⁵ Thus the letter was lengthy and elaborate, seeking to dispute Chinese claims, especially the claim that the border had not been formally delimited ever. Nehru also set down the Indian view on what constituted the status quo on the borders even more elaborately than in the past. Thus, he proposed that not only should "both sides ...respect the traditional frontiers and neither party should seek to alter the status quo in any manner", but also that "...if any party has trespassed into the other's territory across the traditional frontier, it should immediately withdraw to its side of the frontier".⁷⁶

India thus refused to recognize any long-existing Chinese authority on the Aksai Chin and claimed that the "long-existing status quo" that Chou En-lai mentioned in his letter had actually been disrupted by the Chinese themselves. In operational terms, this meant that the Chinese "...should withdraw their personnel from a number of posts...at Spanggur, Mandal and one or two other places in Eastern Ladakh..." Further, "No discussions can be fruitful unless the posts on

75 Prime Minister Nehru to Premier Chou En-lai, 26 September 1959, White Paper II, pp. 34-52.

76 Ibid., p. 45.

the Indian side of the traditional frontier now held by the Chinese forces are first evacuated by them and further threats and intimidations immediately cease."⁷⁷ India also expressed willingness to discuss particular points on the border, though the entire border could not be renegotiated.⁷⁸

With the basic postures of both countries as regards the border set out in great detail, the diplomatic efforts moved on to ensuring ways of avoiding clashes on the border while at the same time legitimizing the respective claims. Thus the next letter from Chou En-lai proposed that both countries should pull back their respective forces 20 kms from the border in order that they might not come into contact and therefore eliminate the chances of clashes.⁷⁹ This proposal was at least as much designed to legitimize the earlier Chinese claim to Aksai Chin as to prevent clashes, especially since the proposal clearly mentioned that only armed personnel should be pulled back and that civilian would continue to remain - and Indian decision-makers were not unaware of the implications.⁸⁰ Therefore, though no Indian

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid. See also Nehru's note to senior officials in the Ministry of External Affairs, 13 September 1959, cited in Sarveppalli Gopal, A Biography of Jawaharlal Nehru vol. III (New Delhi, 1984), p. 98.

79 Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru, 7 November 1959, White Paper III, pp. 45-46.

80 Mullick, n. 3, pp. 251-2.

soldier was within the 20 kilometer withdrawal area (making any Indian withdrawal purely an academic exercise) India refused to accept the proposal.

The Indian refusal was contained in a counter-proposal that Nehru offered.⁸¹ Since "an agreement about the status quo would...be meaningless as the facts concerning the status quo are themselves disputed", he proposed that "the Government of India should withdraw all personnel to the West of the line which the Chinese Government have shown as the international boundary in their 1956 maps....Similarly, the Chinese Government should withdraw their personnel to the east of the international boundary which has been described by the Government of India in their earlier notes and correspondence and shown in their official maps."⁸² This proposal would have resulted in the Chinese evacuation from all the territory they had set up posts in, as also the Aksai Chin road.⁸³

The Chinese imperative in coming to a political settlement of the problem was further exhibited in Chou En-lai's

81 Prime Minister Nehru to Premier Chou En-lai, 16 November 1959, White Paper III, pp. 47-51.

82 Ibid., p. 50.

83 Nehru proposed to allow the Chinese to use the road for civilian purposes. Maxwell, n. 4, p. 138.

proposal that the Prime Ministers meet immediately to work out a solution.⁸⁴ Nehru rejected this,⁸⁵ both because of the immediacy attached to the meeting and because of the Indian unwillingness to come to a political settlement rather than a legalistic one.

Nehru's acceptance of the proposal for a Prime Ministerial summit later in April 1960 is also understandable in this light. The Chinese Government had replied to the earlier Indian legalistic claims to the border with their own claims - an elaborate note that they sent to the Indian Government on 26 December 1959 put forward their case in great detail.⁸⁶ Nehru's decision resulted from his view that India and China now had^a basis for discussion - more importantly the basis was one which India had sought.

Such Indian beliefs were proved to be unfounded as the summit failed to resolve anything. Continued Indian efforts to find a solution based on the legality of its claims were evidently behind the proposal for a meeting of the officials of the two countries to codify the known facts

84 Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister Nehru, 17 December 1959, White Paper III, p. 56.

85 Prime Minister Nehru to Premier Chou En-lai, 21 December 1959, *ibid.*, p. 58.

86 Note to the Government of India, *ibid.*, pp. 60-82.

regarding the respective claims. This also failed, mainly because of the continued Chinese belief in a political compromise to resolve the crisis. The meeting, nevertheless, convinced Nehru about the legal validity of Indian claims. The belief that this weakened the Chinese case and would make them more amenable to a solution was the rationale behind sending the Secretary-General of the Ministry of External Affairs to Peking in July 1960.⁸⁷ The Chinese evidently were still not prepared to come to anything other than a political solution which would have involved some compromise by India. Considering the universal belief among Indian decision makers, especially Nehru, about legal strength of the Indian case, it is not surprising that such a compromise was not forthcoming.

Though the diplomatic exchanges were not getting anywhere due to incompatibility of the respective framework for discussion, Nehru did not wish to let this carry on to other aspects of the relationship and therefore rejected suggestions that the Chinese trade agency at Kalimpong be shut down.⁸⁸ This restraint could not be maintained for much

87 See, for instance, Nehru's explanation in the Rajya Sabha on 22 August 1961; FMSIR, vol. 1 (11), p. 7.

88 Nehru's note to the Foreign Secretary, 8 January 1961, cited in Gopal, n. 78, p. 204.

longer and in early 1962 India allowed the Agreement with China on trade and intercourse in Tibet to lapse.⁸⁹ By this time, the forward deployment of troops on both sides had picked up and tensions gradually rose as both sides protested intrusions. Around this time, Nehru also tried to use confidential channels to get across a message to the Chinese Government. The Burmese Premier, U Nu was authorized to pass on a message to the Chinese that India would not insist on a physical withdrawal by the Chinese but that the Chinese should take a "helpful approach".⁹⁰ This was a substantial concession and it denoted a qualitative change in the Indian position from legal claims to political compromise. The Chinese did not respond⁹¹ and India reverted back to the former posture.

In July, Defence Minister Krishna Menon met the Chinese Foreign Minister and Army Marshall Ch' en Yi at Geneva and reportedly arrived at a formula for negotiations -

89 Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 234-5.

90 Cited in Gopal, n. 78, pp. 290-10.

91 Considering the persistent Chinese advocacy of a political solution, this lack of response seem at the least surprising. One possible explanation is that the Chinese needed a more substantial and/or public retraction by Nehru of India's former negotiating posture.

but for reasons unexplained, this breakthrough did not materialize.⁹² The same month India made a further concession by making a differentiation between the Chinese 1956 and 1960 claim lines and asked that the "Chinese local forces should not go beyond their own claim line confirmed by Prime Minister Chou En-lai".⁹³ India seemed prepared to negotiate with the Chinese if they at least showed some inclination to withdraw from Indian territory.⁹⁴ The Chinese reply revealed, however, that China had not taken the hint and India subsequently reverted back to its earlier position.

The Search for Support : 1959-1962

By the time the Sino-Indian border problem first came into public light, India occupied "a unique position in the world's affairs, called on as referee, peacemaker or arbitrator from Gaza to the Congo and Korea, listened to with respect and courted for understanding".⁹⁵ India's relations

92 Alan Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence : India and Indo-China (Ann Arbor, 1975), pp. 84-85.

93 Note to the Chinese Government, White Paper VII, p. 4.

94 Prime Minister Nehru admitted as much in his private communication. See his note to R.B. Singh, 26 April 1962, cited in Gopal, n. 78, p. 211. See also Whiting, no. 92, pp. 84-85.

95 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 145.

with both Super Powers were improving steadily and its endeavours throughout the 1959-1962 period were aimed at strengthening these as a counterweight to the growing Chinese antagonism across the Himalayas.

India and the United States : 1959-1962

Indo-US relations by mid-1959 were reasonably good. The turning point in the relations had come with Prime Minister Nehru's visit to the United States in 1956.⁹⁶ American aid in the next two years helped India tide over the food crisis and President Eisenhower promised Nehru that no new weapons would be supplied to Pakistan despite the 1959 Mutual Defence Pact.⁹⁷

The American administration appears to have been privy to the evolving border crisis since at least mid-1959. In May that year, Senator Willy Smith, after visiting India, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Nehru and his close advisers had expressed concern about China.⁹⁸ The thaw in the relationship culminated in President

96 Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, Misperceptions in Foreign Policy Making: The Sino-India Conflict, 1959-1962 (Boulder, 1984), p. 93.

97 G.W. Choudhary, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Major Powers (New York, 1975), p. 95.

98 Cited in Maxwell, n. 4, p. 146.

Eisenhower's visit in December 1959 when tensions on the border "ensured...a welcome of such warmth as he could not have anticipated".⁹⁹ American economic aid also multiplied: while in the twelve years to mid-1959 American aid was about \$ 1.7 billion, in the next four years it amounted to approximately \$ 4 billion worth.¹⁰⁰ Despite the problems with China, military aid does not seem to have been requested mainly due to fears that it would be conditional on concessions to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue and also because it would have implied a weakening of Indian non-alignment.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, President Eisenhower instructed the US Ambassador in Karachi to urge Ayub to respond to India's repeated offers of a 'no-war' declaration.¹⁰²

This improved state of Indo-US relations did not mean an automatic American endorsement of the Indian claims on the northern borders - in late 1959 the US Secretary of State Christian Herter indicated that the US was rather uncertain about the relative merits of Indian and Chinese claims on the

99 Gopal, n. 78, p. 103.

100 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 146.

101 Mullick, n. 3, pp. 285-6; Vertzberger, n. 96, pp. 93-94.

102 Gopal, n. 78, p. 104.

border problem.¹⁰³ While this is understandable considering the extreme complexity of the border problems, there appears to have been a deeper motive also.

Two previous US ambassadors to India, Chester Bowles and Sherman Cooper, had urged upon the US a policy of reticence on the ground that closer US interest and espousal of India's cause would be misconstrued by the Chinese, as also by the world as a whole, as intrusion of the cold war into the Sino-Indian dispute, which would have made the problem all the more intractable and combustible. This early US reluctance to openly express its full sympathy with the Indian position as regards the border appear not only to have been deliberate but also taken with the tacit approval of the Indian Government.¹⁰⁴

The election of John F. Kennedy as the President in 1960 led to anticipation of further improvements in Indo-US relations.¹⁰⁵ In November 1961, Nehru visited Washington where

103 Norman D. Palmer, South Asia and US Policy (Boston, 1966), p. 266.

104 Indian Express, 16 August 1962, cited in *ibid.*

105 This was based on the fact that as Senator Kennedy had been an energetic supporter of India. Many other senior officials in the Kennedy administration were also deeply sympathetic to India. These included: The Ambassador to India, J.K. Galbraith; Under Secretary of State, Chester Bowles; Assistant Secretary of State of Middle East and South Asian Affairs, Philip Talbot; Ambassador at large and later Assistant Secretary on Far Eastern Affairs Averrel Harriman; Assistant to the Special Advisor on National Security, Walt Rostow, etc. Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 94.

he discussed with President Kennedy various matters, which presumably included the border situation. Though the liberation of Goa in December invited American disapproval, this was directed more against the method employed and the timing rather than against the Indian case for Goa. President Kennedy, especially was more upset that Nehru had not warned him while in Washington and indeed gave a misleading impression.¹⁰⁶ The US, in fact, almost immediately reiterated their support for India "with respect to...(the) northern borders".¹⁰⁷ The American position throughout the conflict remained the same. In August 1962, the US Ambassador Galbraith said that the US had "full sympathy for the sombre tasks" India faced on its northern frontiers, while reaffirming American "hope for a settlement and...desire to do nothing that might prejudice it".¹⁰⁸ Indo-US relations while improving had to take into account deeper Indian foreign policy priorities like non-alignment, and this, to a considerable extent restricted India's option of availing itself of American military help in meeting the Chinese challenge.

106 Gopal, n. 78, pp. 199-201.

107 New York Times, 9 December 1961, cited in Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 94.

108 Cited in Palmer, n. 103, p. 267.

India and the Soviet Union : August 1959-September 1962

The Sino-Indian border crisis coincided with the Sino-Soviet polemical battle which symbolized the growing differences within the Communist bloc and led to the eventual split. The Sino-Soviet rift, while having deeper roots in the perception of the mutual power relations expressed in terms of ideological differences, found expression in and was exacerbated by the Sino-Indian border crisis.¹⁰⁹ Though Indian decision makers were unaware of the depth of the actual Sino-Soviet differences or the possible lines of their eventual outcome, they were aware of the fact of the differences themselves.¹¹⁰ Signs of this, especially of increased Soviet consideration for India over China were already available; during the West Asian Crisis of 1958, Khrushchev had suggested talks between the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and India. The inclusion of India and exclusion of China was significant and certain to have been noticed, especially by the Indian decision makers.¹¹¹ Indian belief in Soviet support were further strengthened by the Soviet

109 For a fuller treatment of the Sino-Soviet dispute, see John Gittings, Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute (London, 1968).

110 Gopal, n. 78, p. 141.

111 Ibid., p. 77.

reaction to the disclosure of the Sino-Indian border problem after the Longju clash. The Soviet statement on the incident pronounced it as "certainly deplorable" but refused to take sides between China with which the Soviet Union was "linked by unbreakable bonds of fraternal friendship, based on the great principles of socialist internationalism" and India with which "friendly co-operation...is developing successfully in keeping with the ideas of peaceful co-existence".¹¹² The significance of this statement was correctly assessed in Delhi with Prime Minister Nehru stating it a very fair and unusual statement for the Soviet Government to sponsor which showed that the Soviets were "taking a calm and more or less dispassionate view of the situation".¹¹³

But though the extent of these differences were unknown to the Indian decision makers, this did not come in the way of their efforts to utilize the minimal differences that they were aware of to wean the Soviet Union away from China.¹¹⁴ This was not really as difficult as the Indian decision makers, especially Nehru thought it to be. It was believed that while the Soviet Union and China had differences,

112 See TASS statement, 9 September 1959, cited in Gittings, n. 109, p. 331.

113 PMSIR 1 (1), p. 156; Gopal, n. 78, p. 99.

114 Gopal, n. 78, pp. 141-2.

they still needed each other because of the prevailing international situation. Since both faced a common threat from the West neither would just then do anything to weaken the other.¹¹⁵ But once tensions in the world lessened, the Soviet Union would draw away from an increasingly powerful China. Nehru's efforts in championing Soviet proposals on nuclear disarmament around this time was at least partly motivated by a desire to improve East-West relations.¹¹⁶

Soviet problems with China made India's task easier. The Soviet Union desired improved relations with the Western world and looked upon the Sino-Indian border clashes of late 1959 as proof that China was deliberately aiming "at torpedoing the relaxation of tension" on the eve of Khrushchev's visit to the United States and the Camp David meeting.¹¹⁷ In late September 1959, Khrushchev, on a visit to Peking, personally reiterated that the socialist camp must not "test

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.

117 See Soviet Government statement, 21 September 1983; cited in Gittings, n. 109, pp. 112-13. The fact that the Soviet Union automatically blamed China for the clashes was an indication of both the strained relationship and the resultant lack of trust in China and also their impression that China was actively trying to sabotage the growing detente at the Super Power level.

by force the stability of the capitalist system".¹¹⁸ These differences with China had a positive impact on Indo-Soviet relations. In September 1959, the Soviet Union and India signed an agreement which more than doubled aid so far to India by offering credits worth over US \$ 375 million for India's Third Five-Year Plan. Moscow also put pressure on the Chinese to settle the border issue at India's terms, citing as an example of the Soviet settlement of its border problem with Iran in the 1920s, in which the Soviets had agreed to concessions so as not to be forced into a military confrontation.¹¹⁹ Since the Communist Party of India (CPI) was aware of these Soviet efforts, Prime Minister Nehru was probably not unaware of it either.¹²⁰ Expectations of Soviet neutrality, if not support, made it imperative that India not to align itself with the United States.¹²¹

Khrushchev's visit to Delhi in early 1960 therefore became crucial for both India and the Soviet Union. During the visit, Khrushchev repeatedly emphasized his support for

118 Cited in Gittings, n. 109, p. 116.

119 This was revealed later in Peking Review, 8 November 1963, cited in Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 88.

120 Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 88.

121 Gopal, n. 78, p. 102.

Indian efforts to lessen tension and went to the extent of offering help, presumably military, if India ever needed it.¹²² The improving relations between India and the Soviet Union found expression in Soviet material assistance during this period: Soviet Union agreed to sell equipment for road building in the disputed area,¹²³ and in April 1961, sold to India eight AN-12 transport aircraft, which New Delhi revealed, were intended for use in Ladakh.¹²⁴ The AN-12s were followed by two dozen IL-14 transport aircraft and Mi-4 (Hound) helicopters, capable of lifting men and supplies to altitudes of over 17,000 feet.¹²⁵ Economic and cultural interaction also went up.¹²⁶ More significantly an agreement on ~~_____~~

122 Talking to journalists, he said that if India ever needed help, all it had to do was shout "as we are near, just over the mountains." Cited in Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 86. Though it is difficult to place too much of importance on the contents of the message itself, at a deeper level, the significance of such a settlement cannot be underrated.

123 Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 86.

124 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 285. These aircrafts were accompanied by 40 Soviet pilots, navigators and mechanics. Whiting, n. 92, p. 73.

125 Maxwell, n. 4, p. 285; Whiting, n. 92, p. 73.

126 Between 1959 and 1962 imports from the Soviet Union (as percentage of total Indian imports) went up by four-fold, while exports to the Soviet Union (again as percentage of total Indian exports) grew by 10 times. See Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 87. Similarly, of the ten

nuclear co-operation for peaceful purposes, under discussion since February 1961, was signed in October 1962.¹²⁷ Further, Soviet military aid in the form of supersonic MIG-21 fighter jets, came in July 1962.¹²⁸ Though this deal, unlike the earlier ones for transport aircrafts and helicopters, did not make any material difference to Indian capabilities as it existed in September-November 1962, the symbolism associated with the supply of sophisticated combat weapons cannot be dismissed. Indian efforts at cultivation of Soviet support against the Chinese, as indicated by its results above, were certainly successful. If it did not benefit India during the crucial days of the border war in October-November 1962, that was due to the extraneous intervention simultaneously of the anachronistic confrontation in the Caribbean.

India and the Neighbours : 1959-1962

Among India's neighbours, Pakistan and the Himalayan States of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, were the direct focus of

(footnote contd..)

nations in South and South East Asia with which the Soviet Union exchanged high-ranking delegation, the exchange with India comprised 33% in 1959 and 1960 and 20% in 1961-62.¹ C.B. McLane, Soviet-Asian Relations (London, 1973), pp. 64-67; cited in Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 87.

127 Ibid.

128 According to Kaul, the decision to manufacture the MIG-21 in India could be "a carefully calculated policy decision to secure Soviet association with an important defence project at a time when Sino-Indian tension was at its height". Kaul, n. 67, p. 343.

Indian diplomatic efforts. While India shared an antagonistic relation with Pakistan, Indian relations with the Himalayan states were more or less cordial with the primacy of Indian interests ensured through both the overwhelming disparity in the power equation as well as through mutual agreements (as in the case of Sikkim and Bhutan).

India's continuing preoccupation with Pakistan over the Kashmir issue handicapped Indian ability to militarily react to the Chinese threat. Indian diplomatic efforts vis-a-vis Pakistan were therefore aimed at easing tension on India's western flank so that it could prosecute more easily the military tasks on the Himalayas. Failing that, Indian efforts aimed at the prevention of the emergence of a concerted Sino-Pak diplomatic/military axis against India. An unwillingness on the Indian side to compromise on certain basic issues, especially as regards Kashmir and extra-regional alignments etc. nevertheless limited Indian manoeuverability in its efforts and Indian objectives were ultimately not achieved.

In mid-1959, President Ayub Khan proposed a meeting with Prime Minister Nehru leading eventually to a common defence arrangement between India and Pakistan.¹²⁹ Such

129 Cited in Gopal, n. 78, pp. 91-92.

proposals seem also to have found favour with Washington.¹³⁰ Since the crisis with China was yet to assume grave proportions and more basically because of the fear that any such arrangement would involve concessions on the Kashmir issue, India rejected it.¹³¹

But by mid-1960s, the Indian position underwent a modification and though Nehru was not prepared, still to uproot the basic foundations of Indian policy, agreed to consider, without joint defence, formal or informal agreements on bilateral matters and defence.¹³² Nehru's visit in September 1960 to Karachi to sign the agreement on the Indus canal waters was both an indication of and a cause for anticipation of further thaw in Indo-Pakistani relations. With the border problem persisting, Nehru in mid-1961, publicly proclaimed that the family quarrel with Pakistan should not be compared with India's deteriorating relations with China.¹³³ But glossing over the Indo-Pak differences with regard to

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid.

132 In the Lok Sabha on 31 August 1960; cited in *ibid.*, pp. 142-3.

133 The Hindu (Madras), 19 March 1961.

Kashmir became increasingly difficult, especially considering Pakistani pressures to resolve it on terms disagreeable to India, and the temporary thaw soon deteriorated to the more normal chill. The Pakistani President Ayub Khan's reported statement at a meeting of Editors that Pakistan would take advantage of India's difficulties with China and that in any dispute between India and China, Pakistan would be on China's side set the stage for this reversal.¹³⁴ The communal problem in East Pakistan, Ayub's repeated statements that he would use American arms against India and the Pakistani decision to negotiate with China on the boundary between Sinkiang and 'Azad' Kashmir etc., added to the Indian displeasure and precluded further immediate negotiations with Pakistan.¹³⁵

While India's relations with Nepal had their share of irritants, this was not so as regards the other two Himalayan States, namely, Bhutan and Sikkim. Sikkim was an Indian protectorate and Bhutan had, by mutual agreements, to be guided by the advice of India in its external relations - factors which seriously limited the foreign policy options of

134 Acting High Commissioners for India in Karachi to Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 28 April 1961; cited by Gopal, n. 78, p. 214.

135 Nehru to K. Nkrumah, 25 July 1962; cited in *ibid.*, p. 216.

these States, to the advantage of India in its dealings with China. The situation as regards Nepal was, nevertheless, a cause for concern to Indian decision makers. India had only a Treaty of Friendship with Nepal and the evolving border crisis was sought to be exploited by King Mahendra to ensure an increased level of autonomy in his conduct - both internal and external. Indian diplomatic efforts towards the Himalayan states were primarily aimed at neutralizing Chinese inroads in its political relations which also held considerable military implications since they affected the Indian forward deployment of troops.

The increasing tension across the Sino-Indian border and the simultaneous wooing of Nepal by China, helped King Mahendra lessen his dependency on India and allowed him greater political manoeuverability. This was immediately put to use by making internal changes like the disbanding of the National Assembly and the Nepalese Congress Party in December 1960 - steps which simultaneously increased the power of King Mahendra domestically and reduced significantly Indian influence.¹³⁶ India also had to agree to the cancellation of the link between Nepalese and Indian rupees and to the establishment of a Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu. Nepal also

136 Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 116.

signed a border agreement with China.¹³⁷

Of greater and more immediate military significance was a Sino-Nepalese agreement concerning a road to connect Kathmandu with Tibet, construction of which began in 1962. This created the possibility of the Chinese outflanking Indian military posts in the northern sector. Relations between India and Nepal hit a new low in September 1962 when India applied economic sanctions against Nepal and the Chinese responded by offering support to Nepal in case of an Indian attack.

Nepal's assertion of autonomy of India had implications for the other two Himalayan states also, but with a crucial difference. The agreements that they had signed with India restricted enormously the options that these two States had in utilizing the Sino-Indian differences.¹³⁸ Nevertheless the fact that China refused to accept Indian control over the external relations of Bhutan¹³⁹ forced Nehru

137 Ibid.

138 Bhutan had proponents of the view that while Bhutan was obliged to consult and seek Indian advice on matters relating to its external relations, no such obligation existed on acting by the Indian advice. Ibid., p. 119.

139 China throughout insisted that it would talk with Bhutan about Sino-Bhutanese border alignments and refused to let India include in those sectors of the border in the talks.

to ask the Maharaja of Bhutan to state publicly, at some appropriate time, that Bhutan had asked the Government of India to deal with the question of Bhutanese boundary with Tibet.¹⁴⁰ Since Bhutan was crucial for the defence of the Siliguri sector and the NEFA,¹⁴¹ India pressed for a some kind of mutual security arrangement and the construction of a road linking Bhutan with India.¹⁴² The arrival of refugees from Tibet and continuous Indian pressure finally resulted in the signing of an agreement for the construction of the road and the training of the Royal Bhutanese Army by Indian officers.¹⁴³

140 Nehru to the Maharaja of Bhutan, 11 February 1961; cited in Gopal, n. 78, p. 206.

141 Sikkim was even more crucial to Indian defence because of the Chumbi Valley and its two passes, the Jelep Nathu and Patra. But Sikkim's status as a protectorate had allowed India to station its troops there.

142 In the absence of this road, the link with Bhutan was through the Chenby Valley and Chinese permit was needed. See Vertzberger, n. 96, p. 119.

143 Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE BORDER WAR : SEPTEMBER 1962-NOVEMBER 1962

Introduction

The general Chinese assault across all sectors of the frontier that started on 20 October 1962, was preceded by more than a month of active preparations for hostilities on both sides. This chapter deals with both the interim period between 8 September and 20 October 1962, when use of force was actively contemplated by Indian decision makers as a rational course of policy, and the actual hostilities that started on 20 October and which ended on 21 November 1962.

The chapter is divided into three sections: the first section deals with Indian decision-making during the interim period, the second section deals with the war proper, and the third section is concerned with Indian diplomatic initiatives and postures during the period.

I

Deciding on War : Indian Decision-Making in the Interim Period ; 8 September-20 October 1962

On 8 September 1962, Chinese troops advanced down

the Thagla Ridge,¹ putting under threat a small Indian post set up in the valley below.² This section deals with the reactions of the Indian decision-makers between this first Chinese move - which was considered to be of a completely different nature than any Chinese action till date - (and the general Chinese assault across all sectors on 20 October 1962.)

The Indian Government's response was swift. On 9 September it was decided that the Chinese would be evicted from Indian territory at the Thagla Ridge immediately and forcefully.³ The Indian decision to forcibly eject the Chinese from the Thagla Ridge was the result of the following considerations:

- (1) It was believed that the Chinese were reacting to the Indian forward deployments into disputed territory in the Western sector, by similar forward deployments

1 For details of the Indian position on Thagla Ridge, see n. 70, chapter I.

2 This post, called the Dhola Post, was originally to be set up on the Thagla Ridge itself, as part of Operation Onkar during the summer of 1962. But as the Thagla Ridge itself was inaccessible, the post was set up in the valley below, on the southern bank of the Namka Chu river, which ran along the base of the Ridge. Neville Maxwell, India's China War (Bombay, 1970), p. 295.

3 Ibid., pp. 302-4.

into Indian held territory in the NEFA region. The Chinese had threatened to do so as early as in November 1961, in order to counter Indian claims to its right to patrol in the disputed areas in the Aksai Chin,⁴ and the Indian government characterized the Chinese moves south of the Thagla Ride as a "deliberate act of aggression in pursuance of the threat that the Chinese authorities held out as early as 30th November 1961".⁵ As such, the Indian reaction to it had necessarily to be strong, in order to pre-empt further Chinese forward moves into NEFA.⁶

- (ii) It was believed that due to a variety of internal and external problems - the economic crisis and the resulting revolt in the Chinese Communist party itself; the sorry state of the People's Liberation Army, especially of the troops in Tibet; the rift with the Soviet Union; the need for India's friendship, especially in the United

4 India, Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged between the Government of India and China, White Paper VI (New Delhi, 1961), p. 4. Hereinafter referred to as White Papers.

5 White Paper III, p. 119.

6 Maxwell, n. 2, p. 300.

Nations etc. - China was in no position to launch a war against India.⁷

(iii) It was believed that Indian military capabilities in the NEFA region were superior to the Chinese.⁸

These considerations resulted in a predictably logical conclusion. Since the Chinese were unlikely to launch an all out assault - to which Indian vulnerability was recognized and accepted⁹ - India could safely engage in localized action without the risk of escalation. As Indian position in the NEFA were not invulnerable to small scale incursions by Chinese patrols, and as such incursions could not only threaten India's claims to NEFA but also the already tenuous Lines of Communication, some sort of military action needed to be taken to forestall

-
- 7 Yaacov Vertzberger, "Misperceptions in Foreign Policy Making: The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962" (Boulder, 1984), p. 79. See also, Sarvapalli Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, vol. III (Oxford, 1984), p. 219. That China would not go to war and any armed hostilities could remain at the level of small skirmishes or localized assaults was strongly believed by Prime Minister Nehru and he advised his Army Commanders thus. See B.M. Kaul, The Untold Story (New Delhi, 1967), p. 365.
- 8 As late as on 15 October 1962, the Prime Minister said at a Press Conference at Colombo that India was stronger in the NEFA. See G.S. Bhargava, The Battle of NEFA: The Undeclared War (Bombay, 1964), p. 83. According to the Chief of the Intelligence Bureau, this belief was fostered by the Army itself. See B.N. Mullick, My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal (New Delhi, 1971), p. 341.
- 9 D.R. Mankekar, The Guilty Men of 1962 (Bombay, 1968), p. 44.

the threat of a Chinese "forward policy". The perceived Indian military superiority in the Kameng sector ensured a high probability of success for any such Indian military initiative and made the eviction decision not only easier but also desirable.

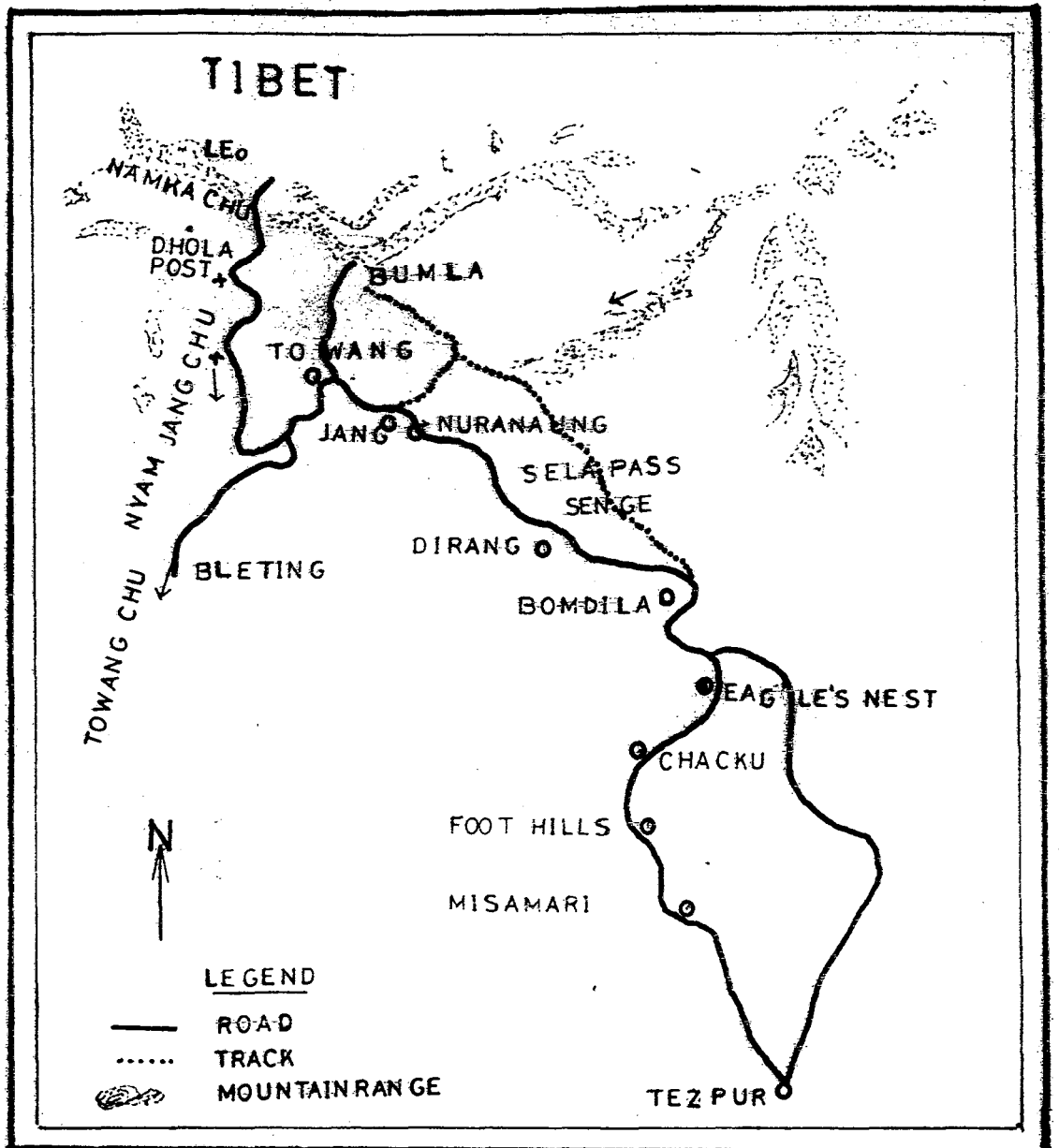
(The government's eviction order was accepted by the Army Headquarters which directed the 33 Corps to move forward immediately some of the forces in the Kameng sector in pursuance of the order.¹⁰ Limited forward deployment of company strength had already been carried out at the Divisional level to re-establish the Lines of Communication to the Dhola Post.¹¹ Now, in response to the Army Headquarters' directive to evict the Chinese, codenamed Operation Leghorn, the 9 Punjab Battalion, till then in charge of the defence of Towang, was ordered to proceed immediately to the Dhola Post; the rest of the 7 Brigade was to follow in 48 hours.¹² (See Map 4)

These first orders - as would many following ones - exhibit a complete lack of awareness on the part of the Army Headquarters and Eastern Command about the strength and

¹⁰ Maxwell, n. 2, p. 304.

¹¹ Brigadier J.P. Dalvi (Retd), Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain - Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 (Bombay, 1969), pp. 169-70.

¹² Maxwell, n. 2, p. 304.



MAP 4. KAMENG FRONTIER DIVISION

dispositions of its own troops in the Kameng Sector. The 9 Punjab Battalion was at half strength¹³ and was deployed in Towang, the defence of which was considered a tactical and strategic necessity. Of the other two Battalions of the 7 Brigade, the 1 Sikh was at Dirang Dzong, south of Towang. Since the defence of Towang was of considerable importance, this Battalion was ordered to move forward and take up the responsibility till then vested with the 9 Punjab.¹⁴ The 1/9 Gorkha Rifles Battalion, the third Battalion of the 7 Brigade, was in transit to their peacetime station in Punjab after three years in the NEFA, and was currently at Misamari. Its replacement would not arrive till mid-October. Thus, in effect, the total strength of the 7 Brigade was barely half a battalion, and the 'rest of the 7 brigade' included mainly the Headquarters staff of the 7 Brigade. The Eastern Command and Army Headquarters also seemed to have little understanding of the logistical capabilities of the Army in the NEFA, and consistently under-estimated the hurdles put forward by the Himalayan terrain.¹⁵ Thus, Lt. Gen. Sen, the General Officer

13 Ibid., p. 306.

14 It may be recalled that the defence of Towang was the primary objective of the 7 Brigade.

15 Which certainly appears surprising - and not just with the benefit of hindsight - since the Army's struggle against these same obstacles in the preceding three years should have been well known.

Commander-in-Charge of the Eastern Command, reported on 11 September that a "Brigade" had been ordered to the Dhola Post and would concentrate in ten days.¹⁶ On 17 September, Sen presented a more detailed, if slightly less ambitious timetable for forward deployment of Army units: the 9 Punjab Battalion which had reached the Dhola post on 15 September, would be joined by another Battalion by the 20th, a third by the 24th and a fourth by the 29th. Giving the Brigade three days to consolidate its position, he expected the offensive operations to begin by about 2 October.¹⁷

These optimistic predictions were not shared further down the Army hierarchy. Lt. Gen. Umrao Singh, Corps Commander of the 33 Corps agreed with his Division and Brigade Commanders the impracticability of taking action against the Chinese considering the disadvantages that the Army faced not only from the terrain but also superior enemy tactical dispositions in the region. In an Appreciation submitted by Umrao Singh on 12 September, he pointed out these difficulties and asked that the troops be withdrawn well to the South of the McMahon Line, and that any Indian deployment be limited to two Battalions. But Sen, the immediate superior officer to Umrao

16 Dalvi, n. 11, pp. 186-7.

17 Mullick, n. 8, p. 346.

Singh, refused to accept this Appreciation and re-affirmed the eviction order.¹⁸ Umrao Singh submitted a similar Appreciation on 29 September setting out a requirement for 580 tons of material to be stockpiled before launching any offensive,¹⁹ which would have in real terms meant the postponement of Operation Leghorn till at least spring 1963.²⁰

Sen again disagreed and this time asked the Army Chief to remove Umrao Singh from his Command.²¹ The schism that appeared between the perceptions of the Officers at the 33 Corps and below and their superiors at Eastern Command and Army Headquarters made the decision-makers in New Delhi believe that the slow pace of Operation Leghorn was the result

18 Maxwell, n. 2, pp. 305-6.

19 Ibid., p. 318. The material included rations for thirty days for the whole Brigade, a battery and half of field guns and ammunition, ammunition for other arms etc.

20 This might indeed have been Umrao Singh's objective. Brigadier Dalvi, who actually prepared the Appreciation was repeatedly counselled prudence by Singh; Dalvi's first draft was rejected by Singh as "too ambitious". He also promised Dalvi that he would try to convince Sen of the impracticability of executing the operation before April 1963. See Dalvi, n. 11, pp. 240-41 and 253.

21 Mullick, n. 8, pp. 355-6. Personal animosity between Sen and Umrao Singh was apparently a major factor in these disagreements and the eventual removal of Umrao Singh from the Command of Operation Leghorn. See Maj. Gen. Niranjan Prasad, The Fall of Towang - 1962 (New Delhi, 1981), pp. 33-34; Maxwell, n. 2, p. 305.

of the lethargy of the officers in the NEFA - a belief that the Army Headquarters actively encouraged.²² Thus, the slow pace of the deployments led not to a reappraisal of Indian options but rather to a reordering of the senior command. Lt. Gen. Kaul, the Chief of General Staff at the Army Headquarters was posted as the Corps Commander of the newly created 4 Corps,²³ which was put in direct charge of Operation Leghorn. Kaul took over command on 4 October and set a new date for the offensive; he undertook to throw out the Chinese or at least "maul them severely by October 10".²⁴

Such optimism reassured the decision-makers in New Delhi but did little to overcome the hurdles that in reality existed in the NEFA. Indian dispositions in the NEFA when Kaul took over were as follows:²⁵

One Battalion, the 9 Punjab, was deployed along the Namka Chu river, along with a company from 2 Rajput Battalion.

At Lumpu, the Headquarters of 7 Brigade was located along with the remaining two companies of 2 Rajputs and the

22 Mullick, n. 8, pp. 355-6.

23 The responsibility of 33 Corps was reduced to just Nagaland and East Pakistan borders.

24 Mullick, n. 8, p. 357.

25 Details taken from Maxwell, n. 2, pp. 330-31.

1/9 Gorkha Rifles. Some other support troops - Heavy Mortar companies, Engineers etc. - were also located at Lumpu.

The defence of Towang had been entrusted to the 4 Artillery Brigade, after the 7 Brigade moved out; under its command were two Infantry Battalions, the 1 Sikhs and 4 Garhwal Rifles.

Two more Battalion, under the 5 Infantry Brigade were spread out over the rest of NEFA in strengths of not more than two Companies; yet another Battalion was on the way to Walong, at the eastern extremity of the McMahon Line.

The Chinese forces opposing this consisted of at least a full regiment, with heavy artillery and mortars.²⁶

Considering the relative strengths and terrain factors, an offensive by Indian forces from the south of the Thagla Ridge was a tactical impossibility, especially in the timetable that Kaul had set. Nevertheless, Indian troops were moved to forward positions for the expected assault under the express orders of the Corps Commander, who was present in person at the forward areas. On 5 October, both the Battalions that were at Lumpu, the 2 Rajputs and the 1/9 Gorkha Rifles, were ordered to the Namka Chu positions, along with the

²⁶ Kaul, n. 7, p. 372.

Headquarters of the 7 Brigade.²⁷ The difficulties facing the Indian troops at Namka Chu were recognized by Kaul as early as 5 October, when he sent a message to the Army Headquarters confirming not only the chances of a "national disaster" but also requesting "as a precautionary measure, offensive air support... to be positioned suitably without delay and made available to me at the shortest notice, if necessary".²⁸ Thus, though the three Battalions making up the 7 Brigade had concentrated at the Namka Chu positions by 9 October, the results of mounting a direct assault would have been disastrous. Recognising this, Kaul ordered a "positional-warfare manoeuvre" - the 2 Rajput Battalion was ordered to move forward across the Namka Chu and occupy the Yumtsola peak, which overlooked the Chinese positions on the Thagla Ridge, and was as yet unoccupied.²⁹ As the Chinese position on the Thagla Ridge overlooked the Namka Chu, the move would have to be undertaken under Chinese observation - and Kaul's field officers protested that it was potentially suicidal since the Chinese were certain to react. The only concession that Kaul made was to agree to send a patrol earlier to

27 Ibid., p. 373. See also Major S.R. Johri, Chinese Invasion of NEFA (Lucknow, 1968), p. 54.

28 Kaul, n. 7, p. 372.

29 Dalvi, n. 11, pp. 285-6.

occupy Tseng Jong, north of the Namka Chu and on the way to Yumtsola.³⁰

This move, completed by 9 October, became crucial for it was designed to outflank Chinese positions on the Thagla Ridge, a fact that the Chinese could not have been and - as shown by their reactions - were not unaware of. The fact that Kaul insisted on such a forward deployment despite being aware of his own utterly disadvantageous tactical situation remains an indication of the power of the political perception that China will not invade India. Both Indian political decision-makers and reflecting that the Military Commanders were absolutely sure about this particular point and they reiterated it regularly.³¹ As late as on 2 October Prime Minister Nehru assured the Chief of Army Staff General Thapar and the GOC-in-C of Eastern Command, Lt. Gen. Sen that

30 Ibid., p. 290. Kaul disagrees that he was party to the decision to send the patrol - but other accounts hold him responsible. See Kaul, n. 7, p. 378. See also Prasad, n. 21, pp. 56-57. Even if Kaul's contention is accepted, he cannot absolve himself of the responsibility for this crucial move, which was taking place while Kaul was present, and which he could have stopped if had thought it unwise.

31 On 14 August 1962, the Director of Military Operation Brigadier D.K. Palit, in an address to Officers at Tezpur "reiterated that the Intelligence appreciation was that there was little or no probability of the Chinese resorting to armed hostilities". Prasad, n. 21, p. 24. See also Maxwell, n. 2, pp. 305 and 321.

"he had good reasons to believe that the Chinese would not take strong action against us".³² The next day, he spoke to Lt. Gen Kaul who had just been appointed as Corps Commander of 4 Corps about the need to take "a strong stand irrespective of the consequences".³³ Moreover, in early October, Defence Minister Krishna Menon seemed more worried about reported Pakistani troop concentrations across the western borders than about the northern borders.³⁴ Kaul's insistence on the forward move to outflank the superior Chinese forces across the Namka Chu seems to reflect his acceptance of the same belief - for it certainly made no tactical sense, considering the risks of a confrontation and the capabilities of the Indian forces to contain it.³⁵

On 10 October the Chinese launched a Battalion sized assault on the Indian patrol entrenched at Tseng Jong, forcing it to withdraw. Though the Chinese suffered at least 100

32 Kaul, n. 7, p. 365 (emphasis in original).

33 Ibid., pp. 367-8.

34 This despite the report being disregarded by the Indian High Commission at Karachi. Y.D. Gundeia, Outside the Archives (Hyderabad, 1984), pp. 214-15.

35 According to Dalvi, "A variety of astonished gazes greeted Kaul's announcement (of the flanking movement)". Dalvi, n. 11, p. 238.

casualties in this assault (as against 6 Indians killed and 11 wounded),³⁶ it convinced Kaul that the Chinese "mean(t) business".³⁷ This led to a reappraisal of Indian military options and on 11 October a political decision was taken to withhold Operation Leghorn. But for the next nine days, i. e. till the Chinese launched their general assault, the exact status of the Operation as well as that of the Indian dispositions on the Namka Chu remained clouded in confusion. The decision to put off the Operation was taken by the Prime Minister on the advice of the Senior Army Commanders.³⁸ But Nehru, questioned by the Press, said the next day that he had instructed the Army "to free our territory" at a time of its own choosing. What Nehru actually meant remains a point of contention.³⁹ The apparent contradiction between the

36 The disproportionate casualties was the result of sound Indian tactics. The Patrol Commander sent a section to outflank the Chinese - without the Chinese being aware of it - which decimated a Chinese unit that was forming up for the assault. Ibid., p. 292.

37 Ibid.

38 Considerable confusion persists as to who proposed what at this meeting. For the purpose of this study, nevertheless, the undisputed fact of the postponement of the eviction order is sufficient.

39 Opinions are evenly divided on this but the statement did make public what was till then a private government decision. Though newspaper reports had earlier talked about the Government decision to oust the Chinese, these were not officially confirmed. It is beyond doubt that the statement led to confusion among senior Military Commanders and to that extent was harmful.

postponing of the eviction operation and the political imperative not to withdraw from the established position on the Namka Chu river created both confusion and uncertainty. Reflecting the views of his junior officers on the threat posed by the Chinese build-up on the Thagla Ridge, which had now put two Brigades opposite the Indian positions, Kaul on 16 October asked that Indian forward positions, especially at Tsangley,⁴⁰ be withdrawn and Indian troops be allowed to move to more favourable defensive dispositions further south.⁴¹ The next day, the Defence Minister went to Tezpur personally and reaffirmed the government's resolve not to withdraw from the Thagla area.⁴²

Yet another Battalion, the 4 Grenadiers, had also reached the Namka Chu between 12 and 14 October. Since the logistic situation had not improved, this created further difficulties. Confusion as regards the political objectives compounded the problem. The Defence Minister had already declared that it was 'the policy of the Government of India

40 Tsangley lay to extreme west of the Namka Chu river positions and was on the way to Tseng-Jong. It had therefore been occupied in anticipation of the launching of Operation Leghorn. As this position further strained the logistical situation, Kaul's officers had asked that the post be withdrawn.

41 Mullick, n. 8, pp. 368-9.

42 Kaul, n. 7, pp. 388-9.

to eject the Chinese from NEFA⁴³ and 1 November was the date given as the new deadline.⁴⁴ The 7 Brigade was therefore asked to strengthen the post at Tsangley, which led to further thinning out of the Indian forward positions on the Namka Chou. In the event, Tsangley did not make any favourable difference to the Namka Chu battle; the Chinese ignored the position and it could provide no support to the positions on the Namka Chu itself.

II

Employing Force : The Conduct of Hostilities : 20 October-21 November

The Chinese invasion started on 20 October. Conducted in two phases, it ended with the Chinese ceasefire announcement on 21 November. This section is divided into two to conform to the two major geographical foci of the hostilities.

The Eastern Sector

Major hostilities in the Eastern Sector took place at two widely divergent points - one at the western extremity

43 The Times of India, 15 October 1962, cited in Maxwell, n. 2, p. 351.

44 Dalvi, n. 11, p. 330.

in the Kameng Division and the other in the east in the Walong area.

Operations in the Kameng Division

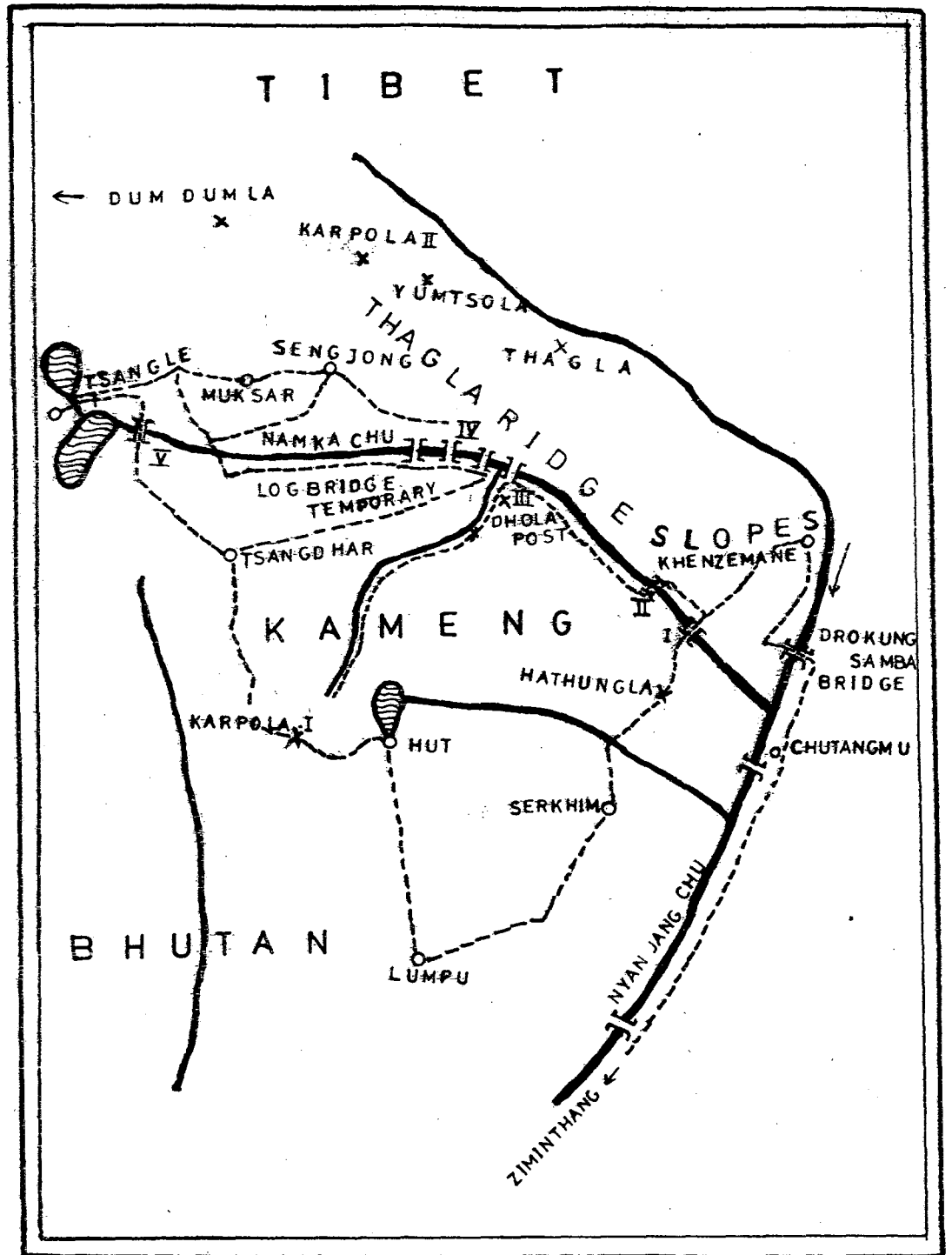
Through the Kameng Division lies the main ingress route to the Assam plains from the Tibetan plateau. Consequently, Indian defences of NEFA involved considerable investment in the defence of Kameng. A substantial chunk of the forces under the 4 Corps, which was responsible for the defence of the entire McMahon Line, was deployed there. Responsibility for operations in the Kameng lay with the IV Division. It had deployed one Brigade (the 7 Infantry Brigade) with four Battalions in the disputed Thagla Ridge area.⁴⁵ Another two Battalions, under the command of the 4 Artillery Brigade was deployed in defence of Towang, south-east of the Thagla Ridge.⁴⁶

The expected Chinese attack came early on the 20 October with a Division-size assault on 7 Brigade positions spread out south of the Nyamka Chu river.⁴⁷ (Map 5) While

45 For details of Indian deployment in the Thagla Ridge area, see K.C. Praval, History of the Fourth Division of India (New Delhi, 1983) p.247

46 Johri, n. 27, pp. 95-96.

47 The details of the operations at the Thagla Ridge are taken from Dalvi, n. 11; Prasad, n. 21; Johri, n. 27; Praval, n. 45 etc.



MAP 5. THAGLA RIDGE AREA

Indian positions on both extreme flanks were kept engaged by artillery and small arms fire, the main assault, in two columns, moved against the positions at the centre of the river line. The Chinese forces successfully exploited the yawning gaps in the Indian defence line to isolate, surround and eventually eliminate the various positions. All communications between Headquarters 7 Brigade and its various units were lost at an early stage. The 7 Brigade could thereafter no longer control the operation and it degenerated into isolated skirmishes in which vastly outnumbered Indian troops fought a losing battle as long as their ammunition lasted. The main Chinese column then moved behind the Indian positions to capture Tsangdhar, the main dropping zone and the Hathung La pass, which the Indian troops would need if they were to withdraw. The Headquarters IV Division at Ziminthang, gave permission for the remaining troops at the Nyamka Chu positions to withdraw. But with the Chinese already in occupation of the rear areas, especially the Hathung La pass, an orderly withdrawal of the troops could not be effected and the Brigade and its battalions disintegrated.

The reasons for the collapse of the 7 Brigade can be traced to the pattern of its deployment, which emphasized the political imperative of preventing small scale Chinese incursions at the cost of the military preparedness for

meeting a full scale Chinese assault. On the ground, this political imperative resulted in the 7 Brigade being deployed on a 20 kilometer long defence line that took five days to cover trekking from end to end.⁴⁸ Though there were four battalions in the Nyamka Chu area, all of them were broken up and generally deployed in small units of company strength or less. Since the Nyamka Chu was at this time considered to be unfordable these units were dedicated to the defence of the various bridges across it. That, and ruggedness of the terrain as well as the lack of sufficient troops, perforce ensured that these positions would be widely spread and unable to provide mutual support. Indian positions at the river line were further weakened by the progressive transfer of its forces to Tsangley, on the western extremity, to cover what was felt to be an important approach. Also, since all the available troops had been ordered to the forward river lines, there was a consequent lack of depth in the defences and even tactically important rear areas were devoid of troops.

In the event, this pattern of deployment proved counter-productive as the political belief implicit in such a deployment - that the Chinese would not launch an all

48 Dalvi, n. 11, p. 360.


out attack - itself was shown to be unfounded. Even local tactical factors betrayed Indian plans - the water level on the Nyamka Chu dropped, allowing the Chinese forces to cross the river at various points, leaving the Indians guarding useless logs at what now became tactically unsound locations. The transfer of forces to Tsangley did not help either⁴⁹ - the Chinese did not use that approach and the troops there could provide no help to the main positions on the river line after the assault started. With the 7 Brigade completely demolished and having no troops of its own to stem the Chinese advance immediately, the tactical Headquarter of the IV Division at Zimingthang was withdrawn to Towang on 21 October.⁵⁰

Towang was defended by two battalions, under the command of Headquarters 4 Artillery Brigade. The Chinese advance on Towang started on 23 October along three approaches. The column that had overwhelmed the 7 Brigade had come through Shakti and was at Lum La and had joined up with a second force

49 It will be recalled that Tsangley was initially occupied to facilitate the launching of Operation Leghorn. The ambiguous state of Operation Leghorn ensured that this position was not withdrawn.

50 Prasad, n. 21, pp. 102-3.

which had come through Khinzemane and down the Nyamjang Chu river. The second major line of advance was opened through Bum La and straight down to Towang,⁵¹ which was thus threatened from the north and the south.⁵² Yet another Chinese column had swung south-east, bypassing Towang to head for Jang.⁵³ That column caused the most worry as it threatened to cut the road route from Towang to the plains. To avoid the loss of another two battalions, the Eastern Command ordered a withdrawal to Bomdi La. The order was subsequently altered to make a stand at Se La.⁵⁴

The decision to evacuate Towang was the result of a number of considerations forced on the Indian military leadership by the strength and speed of the Chinese advance.⁵⁵ The primary Indian military objective at this time was ensuring that the Chinese advance be halted. This defensive objective was sought to be achieved by building up Indian forces 

51 This was an old trade route.

52 Maxwell, n. 2, p. 368.

53 Praval, n. 45, p. 265.

54 Maxwell, n. 2, pp. 367-8; Praval, n. 45, pp. 265-7.

55 The political leadership very scrupulously left military decisions to the Army High Command after the hostilities started. See Maxwell, n. 2, p. 368.

at locales where geography provided sound, tactically defensible positions. Other provisions for a suitable locale included its respective distance from the forward line of Chinese forces and the Assam plains: it had to be as far as possible from the former and as near as possible to the latter, so as to enable easier and faster build up of India's forces before the Chinese reached it and to provide better chances of supplying and maintaining it once hostilities resumed.

Towang was wholly unsuitable for the task. Forward elements of the Chinese forces were already probing around it⁵⁶ and there would be no time to reinforce the garrison before the main Chinese columns struck. It was also too far from the plains and the road link too insecure. Moreover, it could easily be, and was being outflanked by Chinese forces moving along the various trails around it.⁵⁷ Unless the Indian forces at Towang were withdrawn, there was a very real possibility that they would meet the same fate as the 7 Brigade at Nyamka Chu. Extracting the two infantry battalions and elements of the artillery brigade that were at Towang would also be of considerable help in reinforcing any defensive garrison further south. Towang was therefore

56 Prasad, n. 21, p. 122.

57 Ibid., pp. 113-14.

evacuated by Indian forces on 23 October and occupied unopposed by Chinese forces two days later. With that serious hostilities ceased for a few weeks, before resuming again in mid-November.

Major reorganization, with a view to rationalizing the command structures and integrating additional forces into the NEFA region, were carried out between 24 October and 17 November. Lieutenant General Harbaksh Singh took over from General Kaul as Commander, 4 Corps,⁵⁸ and Major General A.S. Pathania took over command of the IV Division.⁵⁹ By 17 November, the IV Division had inducted under its command three brigades (the 62, 65 and 48 Infantry Brigades) with a total of ten battalions to defend the Se La - Bomdi La Sector.⁶⁰ The 62 Brigade with five infantry battalions and artillery components defended Se La; the 48 Brigade with three battalions and artillery - including a few light tanks - was positioned at Bomdi La. At Dirang Dzong, which lay in the valley between Se La and Bomdi La, and where the Headquarters IV Division was situated, was the 65 Brigade with two battalions.

58 Kaul had to be removed to Delhi after he fell ill due to exertions at high altitude. Nevertheless on 29 October he returned as Commander, 4 Corps. Gen Singh was posted as Commander 33 Corps.

59 Praval, n. 45, p. 270.

60 For details of Indian deployment see *ibid.*, pp. 273-6.

The Indian deployments revealed an emphasis on the importance of holding Se La. To that end, half of all the available battalions in the Kameng Division were positioned there, along with a considerable amount of artillery. But the commitment to Se La also involved a commitment to an extended line of communication - the Se La - Bomdi La road which was vulnerable to Chinese forces moving around the Se La pass - and available evidence suggests that this commitment was not suitably recognized.⁶¹ While being aware of the various trails which flanked Se La, it was believed that these would not be able to accommodate the movement of large bodies of troops.⁶² The IV Division estimated that it needed three battalions to plug these trails.⁶³ None were available immediately and therefore the defences of Bomdi La were progressively denuded of troops by piecemeal transfers of half the complement there to deal with such reported incursions. But the fact that the Headquarters IV Division continued to remain in the exposed

61 Only two battalions of the 65 Brigade, were allotted to ensure the security of more than 60 miles of narrow, winding, mountain road from Se La Dirang Dzong - both were guarding important bridges on the road and therefore vast stretches were left without adequate security.

62 The IV Division evidently concurred with the intelligence assessment that not more than a company of troops could move down these trails. Praval, n. 45, p. 278.

63 Ibid.

position at Dirang Valley and that it did not move troops available at Dirang - belonging to the 65 Brigade deployed there - to deal with such movement of Chinese forces along these trails, suggest that these moves were not considered by IV Division to be a serious threat.

In the event, Indian tactical assumptions were again revealed to be faulty as Chinese forces started sweeping forward along these various trails by-passing and out-flanking Se La. One Chinese regiment crossed the Towang Chu river at the Mukto Bridge south of Towang and made for the Dirang valley after negotiating the Se La ridge, south-east of the pass. Another column comprising of a battalion crossed the Se La ridge at the Kya La pass after coming down from Luguthang. While this battalion made for Senge on the Dirang Dzong-Se La road, yet another battalion followed along the same trail to approach Se La from the north.⁶⁴ These columns cut the Se La-Dirang Dzong road at two places, between Se La and Senge and between Senge and Dirang Dzong.⁶⁵ Another force comprising at least two battalions came down the Bailey trail appearing in the Poshing La area. This move was potentially the most menacing as it threatened not only the

⁶⁴ Johri, n. 27, p. 124.

⁶⁵ Mullick, n. 8, p. 415.

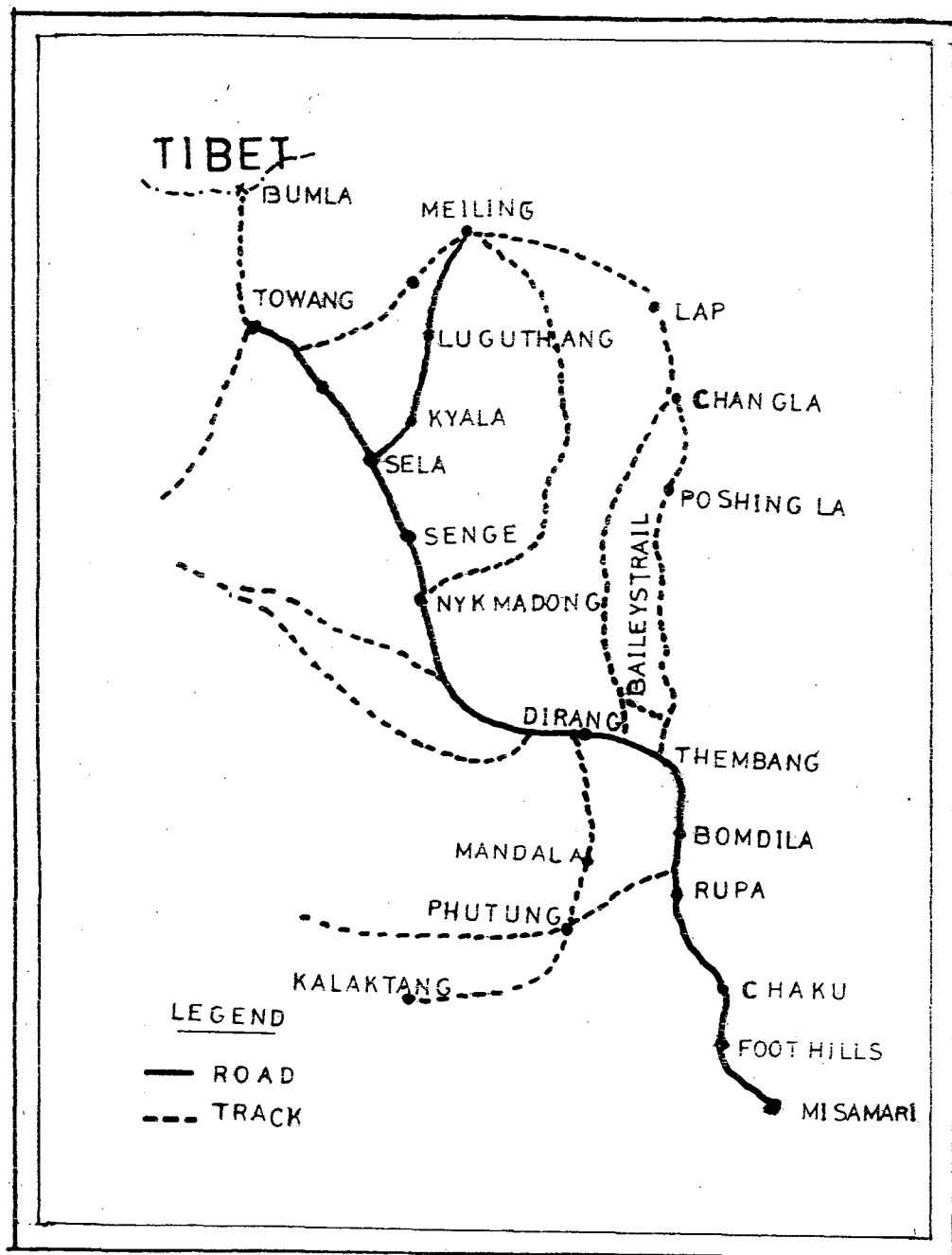
Dirang Dzong-Bomdi La artery but also the Divisional Headquarters, sitting in the exposed Dirang valley.

(Map 6)

Nevertheless, the seriousness of the threat was not appreciated by the IV Division till as late as 15 November. Only one company had been ordered to Poshing La to cover this approach, and their reports of Chinese forces moving in strength down the Bailey trail were disregarded by IV Division until the company itself was almost wiped out in an encounter with numerically far superior Chinese forces on 15 November. IV Division now ordered another two companies to Thembang, where they were attacked by the Chinese on 17 November. In the face of superior enemy strength and with their ammunition running out, the Indians withdrew, the unit eventually breaking up. With that, the Chinese forces were astride the Dirang Dzong-Bomdi La artery.

Simultaneously with their attack on Thembang on 17 November, Chinese forces also started advancing on the Se La positions. This advance, carried out by the crack 55 Division,⁶⁶ came up against a determined screen force

66 This Division had been freshly inducted from Sining. Mullick, n. 8, p. 414.



MAP 6. SELA - BOMDILA: ROADS & TRACKS

deployed in the Nuranaung valley and was temporarily halted. After withstanding repeated assaults, this screenforce was - according to plan - withdrawn to the main defences around Se La in the evening.⁶⁷

With the Chinese now astride the Dirang Dzong-Bomdi La road and apprehending a threat to the Divisional Headquarters, the IV Division requested permission from the 4 Corps to pull the 62 Brigade at Se La back to Dirang Dzong. The request was granted after repeated representations.⁶⁸ The IV Division had already asked the 62 Brigade to prepare for a withdrawal from Se La, despite the Brigade Commanders protestations that he could hold out in Se La. Due to local tactical factors - the screen force from Nuranaung valley had not completed

67 This action, by the 4 Garhwal Rifles Battalion was one of the few well-conducted operations on the Indian side during the conflict in NEFA.

68 The first request was reportedly made on the afternoon of 17 November itself. See Maxwell, n. 2, p. 400. Initially, permission was withheld as the Corps Commander was not present at the Headquarters and other senior officials present - which included Chief of Army Staff, General Thapar, Army Chief of Eastern Command Lieutenant General Sen, and Director of Military Operations Brigadier Palit - were unwilling to take responsibility. The order that was finally issued by the Corps Commander delegated responsibility to the Divisional Commander. For the full text of the order, see Kaul, n. 7, pp. 413-14. Early the next morning (18 November) however, Kaul personally granted permission for the Se La garrison to be withdrawn. See Kaul, n. 7, pp. 415-16.

their withdrawal to Se La and another screen force covering the approach from the Kya La pass was yet to be withdrawn - the withdrawal from Se La was scheduled to start on the night of 18-19 November.⁶⁹

On the night of 17-18 November, the 62 Brigade Commander ordered the screen force at Kya La - which was to withdraw to Se La the next day - to withdraw immediately.⁷⁰ This order, which was probably meant as a tactical re-deployment at Se La itself, however created confusion within the Se La defences as other units manning the main Se La defences also started withdrawing from their positions.⁷¹

69 Maxwell, n. 2, pp. 401-2.

70 This controversial decision was taken, according to Maxwell, under pressure from General Pathania. See Maxwell, n. 2, p. 404. Other accounts differ, however. According to Mullick, the Brigade Commander at this point 'lost control' over the withdrawal, which resulted in the confusion. See Mullick, n. 8, p. 417. According to Praval, the move was ordered by the Brigade Commander himself as the enemy build up opposite Kya La foreshadowed an attack on Kya La at first light and he did not want the Battalion to get involved in a battle as a withdrawal under fire would have been difficult. See Praval, n. 45, pp. 288-9. The last explanation is the only one that makes any tactical sense.

71 Like most other events that crucial night this general withdrawal without orders remain to be explained. The most likely one is that as communications within the Brigade were far from adequate, the units manning the main defences were not informed of the redeployment of the screen force from Kya La and they started to withdraw in the belief that a general withdrawal was on the cards.

Forward elements of the Chinese assault column following closely the withdrawing Indian screen force, now started assaulting the main defences further adding to the prevailing confusion. With control over his Brigade threatening to be completely lost, the Brigade Commander ordered a withdrawal to Senge early on 18 November.⁷² Retreating along the main road, the Brigade was halted by an ambush by Chinese forces which had earlier bypassed Se La. The main Chinese force also struck at the rear of the now halted Brigade. With all control lost, the Brigade disintegrated.

By early morning of 18 November, the Divisional Headquarters at Dirang Dzong had lost all contact with the Se La and Bomdi La garrisons.⁷³ Evidently believing that the forces he had under his command, which totalled approximately 3,000 troops, were insufficient to withstand a Chinese assault, the Divisional Commander, along with his senior officers, withdrew.⁷⁴ The troops at Dirang Dzong were left with neither

72 Praval, n. 45, p. 289.

73 Ibid., p. 292.

74 The strength of the Chinese forces threatening Dirang Dzong was put at roughly two battalions plus; but the troops at Dirang Dzong had not even come into contact with this force when Dirang was abandoned.

orders nor higher command. A few junior officers tried to retrieve the situation by organizing the troops into an assault column built around tanks to force their way to Bomdi La. But these efforts did not succeed and the entire 65 Brigade disintegrated with the troops making for the plains in small groups.

By noon of 18 November, Bomdi La south of Dirang Dzong was the only Indian stronghold left in NEFA. It was defended by the 48 Brigade with two battalions under it. However, due to the progressive transfer of the forces from Bomdi La, only one battalion strength of troops remained.⁷⁵ Moreover, earlier in the day, still unaware of the collapse of the IV Division Headquarters, the 4 Corps ordered another two companies of the remaining six to be sent to force a way through to Dirang Dzong and restore the Lines of Communication.⁷⁶

The Chinese advanced on Bomdi La along three main axes - one column came through the Manda La pass to the west of Bomdi La while another column, advancing after cutting off the Dirang-Bomdi La road near Thembang, made for Rupa, south of Bomdi La. Another similar advance approached

75 Praval, n. 45, pp. 294-5; Maxwell, n. 2, p. 406.

76 Kaul, n. 7, p. 418.

Bomdi La from the north.⁷⁷ The Chinese assault on Bomdi La began within minutes of the relief column moving off down the road to Dirang Dzong. With the garrison now under threat, the relief column was ordered back to Bomdi La.⁷⁸ Putting the two tanks that were available, as well as the artillery complement, to the fullest use, the 48 Brigade stood its ground for more than two hours, and then began an orderly withdrawal to Rupa. 4 Corps, however, ordered them to withdraw further down to Foothills; the order was subsequently altered again to make a stand at Rupa, after the Brigade had vacated Rupa.⁷⁹ The attempt to retake Rupa failed, with the Chinese forces occupying the vantage heights around Rupa ambushing the column. The Brigade soon lost cohesion and collapsed, ending all Indian organized resistance in the Kameng.

Operations in the Rest of NEFA

The rest of NEFA was under the responsibility of the 5 Brigade which was directly responsible to the 33 Corps. It had five battalions spread out over its area of responsibility

77 Johri, n. 27, pp. 183-4.

78 Maxwell, n. 2, p. 407.

79 Praval, n. 45, pp. 296-7.

in posts that were generally of the strength of one or two companies.⁸⁰ Major hostilities took place in the eastern extremity in the Lohit Division around the Walong area. Most of the posts in the other areas of the frontier were withdrawn before they could come into contact with the Chinese forces.⁸¹

The Walong area was defended by two infantry battalions, with some of their companies deployed further forward at Kibithoo. The Chinese assault on Kibithoo started on 21 October. Under intense pressure, Indian forces at Kibithoo were ordered to fall back to Walong on 22 October. Chinese forces following up behind the withdrawing Indians assaulted the main Walong positions on 25 and 27 October, without much success. After that, in concert with the general trend of the Chinese assault, major hostilities ceased till the second week of November. In the lull, major command alterations were made on the Indian side. A new Division, the II Division, was formed with three brigades (the 5, 11 and 192 Brigades, responsible for the Subansiri, Lohit and Siang Divisions respectively).

80 Maxwell, n. 2, p. 295.

81 For a more detailed narration, see Johri, n. 27, pp. 244-54.

By early November, the Indian build up at Walong resulted in the deployment of three infantry battalions along with some Assam Rifles platoons.⁸² Chinese forces at Rima, just over the McMahon Line, were put at a Division.⁸³ The Indian forces were well entrenched with reasonable artillery support. Due to both the ruggedness of the terrain and the relatively equivalent build up of forces on both sides, major offensives did not take place immediately. On 6 November, in order to strengthen the main Walong defence area, Indian forces attempted to capture a dominating feature north west of Walong. Attacking in insufficient strength against well entrenched enemy and without the benefit of any artillery support, this local offensive failed.⁸⁴ Another Indian assault, on the same positions, took place on 14 November. Despite the relatively greater strength of the offensive and artillery support, this offensive also failed. In a counter-attack, the Chinese threw back the weakened Indian forces and penetrated the main defences of Walong, forcing the Indians to fall back to Hayuliang.

82 Maxwell, n. 2, pp. 392-3.

83 Ibid.

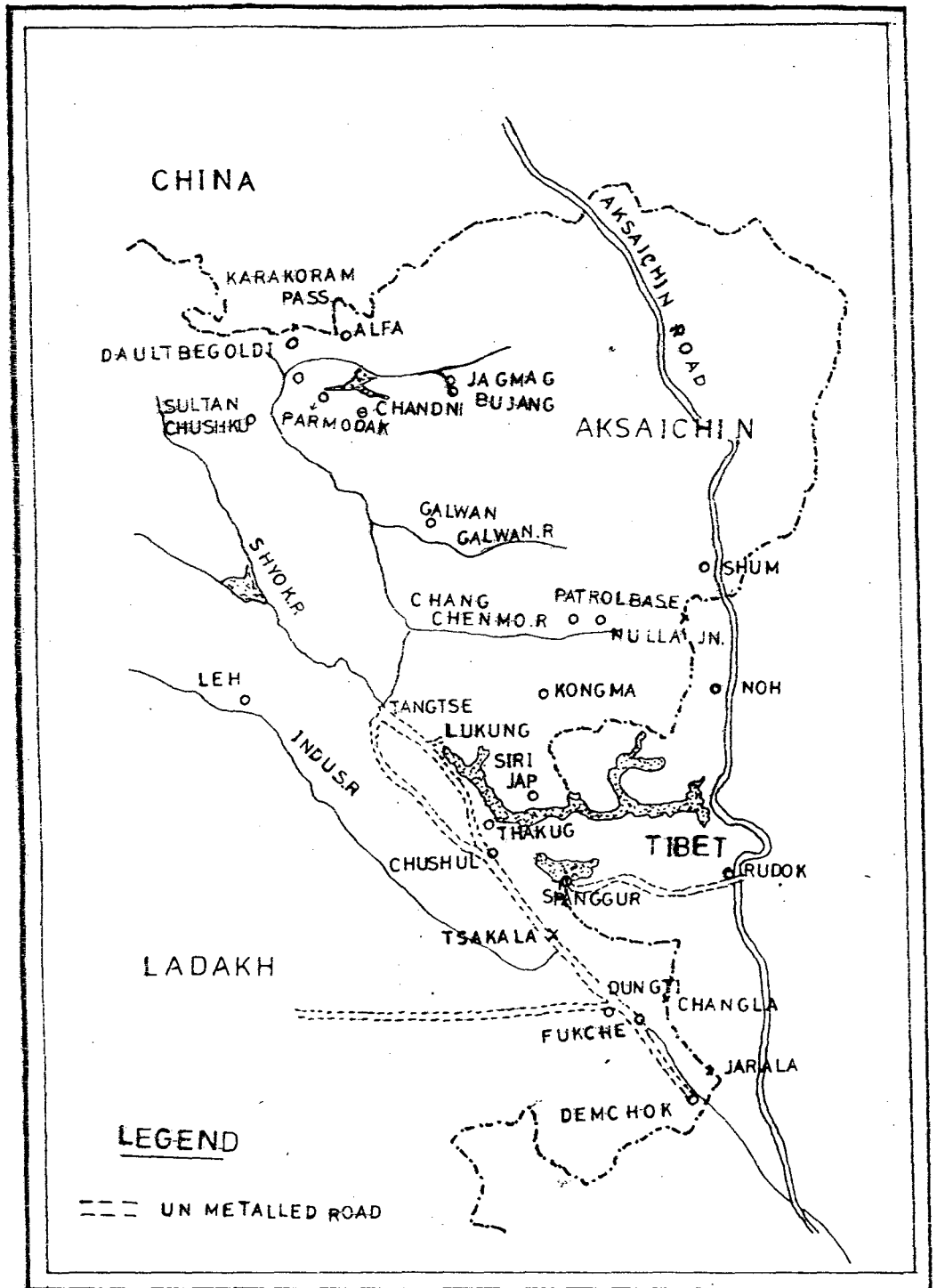
84 Johri, n. 27, p. 216.

Operations in the Western Sector

The Western sector of the Sino-Indian border extended from the northern reaches of Ladakh near the Karakoram Pass to the Sino-Indian-Nepali tri-junction in the south (see Map 7). Major hostilities took place in the Ladakh region with the Chinese forces moving westward to bring under their military control all the areas behind the claim line that they had put forward during the officials meeting of 1960. In the process, they over-ran a number of Indian forward posts.

Militarily, the Ladakh region came under the Headquarters Western Command at Simla. The defence of Ladakh was the responsibility of the 15 Corps. Under the 15 Corps was the 114 Infantry Brigade with five battalions (7 and 14 Jammu and Kashmir Militia Battalions, 1/8 Gorkha Rifles, 5 Jats and 13 Kumaon Battalions).⁸⁵ Indian deployments in the western sector, as in the eastern sector, were determined primarily by the political consideration of legitimizing Indian title to disputed territory. The extremely hostile

85 These details are from Major General Jagjit Singh (Retd), The Saga of Ladakh : Heroic Battles of Rezang La and Gurrung Hill 1961-62 (Delhi, 1983), p. 55, and Major S.R. Johri (Retd), The Chinese Invasion of Ladakh (Lucknow, 1969), pp. 5-8.



MAP 7. LADAKH

nature of the terrain ensured that there would be a distinction between this objective and the active defence by military means of the area so claimed. As hostilities more serious than occasional skirmishes were not anticipated, the contradiction inherent in the above distinction was not well appreciated at the political level.⁸⁶ On the ground, this resulted in the dispersal of almost five battalions of troops in isolated pickets and posts that were difficult to maintain in peacetime and absolutely indefensible in the face of a determined assault. While the legitimization of Indian claims by the use of military force did not in principle preclude the establishment of an effective defence and deterrent posture in this area - all considerations, military as well as political, would have in fact actively encouraged it - the prevailing state of Indian logistical capabilities, worsened by the obstacles presented by the hostile terrain, made it all but impossible. This resulted in the dilution of the effective strength of the total force that India could bring to bear, thereby precipitating a rout that was hardly proportionate to

86 So strong was the belief at the political level that China would not launch a full scale assault, that it over-rode the military warnings that if such an invasion does materialize, the Indian Army was in no position to defend successfully the area under its control. See for instance, the warnings by the Army Commander of Western Command to Army Headquarters and the response, pp26-27 above.

the military balance across the Himalayas as represented by numbers.

The operations in the western sector are subdivided into four sectors: the northern sector, the central sector, the Chushul Sector and the southern sector.

The Northern Sector

Lying along the north-eastern portion of Ladakh, this comprises the Chip Chap basin, the Depsang plains, Lingzithang and the Aksai Chin.⁸⁷ The 14 Jammu and Kashmir Militia was responsible for the establishment and defence of posts in this area.

The Chinese assault started on the night of 19-20 October with artillery bombardment against most of the Indian posts set up to the west of the main post at Daulet Beg Oldi. With neither artillery support, nor adequate strength to withstand prolonged assaults, these posts were singled out and annihilated. By the afternoon of 22 October, of the 18 posts set up in this sector, only two including the main garrison at Daulet Beg Oldi remained intact, with survivors from other posts assembling at Daulet Beg Oldi.⁸⁸ With reports of massive

87 Johri, n. 85, p. 60.

88 Jagjit Singh, n. 85, p. 58.

Chinese troops concentration in the vicinity of the remaining posts, they were ordered to be withdrawn by the Brigade Headquarters on 23 October.

The Central Sector

Lying south of the northern sector, it is bordered by the Galwan valley in the north and the Spanggur lake in the south.⁸⁹ Responsibility for the defence of this sector was primarily with the 5 Jat Battalion along with elements of 1/8 Gorkha Rifles Battalion.⁹⁰ This sector lay to the west of Chushul and was supplied by Chushul which had the only airfield in the area.

The major Indian posts in this sector were the ones at Galwan, Kongma and Hot Springs. The Chinese assault in this sector started with the initial attacks being launched against the post in the northern extremity - the Galwan post. Surrounded by Chinese forces in superior strength and without hope of any support from the rear, the post was wiped out after barely a day's fighting. Moving further south, Chinese forces then surrounded and wiped out the post at Kongma. With its

89 Johari, n. 85, p. 97.

90 Jagjit Singh, n. 85, p. 55; and Johri, n. 85, p. 99.

position becoming increasingly precarious, the post at Hot Springs was ordered to be withdrawn on 24 October. There was no hope of supplying and supporting these posts and further delay in evacuating them could have cost the troops there dear.⁹¹ With that, all Indian forward posts which fell within 1960 Chinese claim line in the northern and central sectors had been removed.

The Chushul Sector

The Chushul sector included and was bound by the Pangong and Spanggur lakes. The defence of this sector rested with the 1/8 Gorkha Rifles Battalion. The major posts set up in this sector were the Srijap and Yula Posts on the northern and southern banks of the Pangong Lake. The number of Indian troops at these posts were about 80 at Srijap and 40 at Yula.⁹² They were spread out in small pickets around the main post. On 20 October, after the Chinese forces had started assaulting the Indian posts in the northern sector, some of the pickets along the Pangong Lake were ordered to withdraw to Chushul. With the Chinese assault on these pickets commencing simultaneously on 21 October, the order could not be carried

91 Johri, n. 85, p. 118.

92 Ibid., p. 131.

out.⁹³ Under heavy artillery bombardment, some of these pickets later nevertheless managed to withdraw to the main posts in the area. By the evening of 21 October, after repeated infantry assaults on the post failed to break the defenders, the Chinese brought in light tanks to assault the positions at Srijap, which they subsequently captured and occupied on 22 October. By then, the Yula post had also fallen.

The Demchok Sector

The Demchok sector formed the southern part of Ladakh and was bounded by the Indo-Tibetan boundary in the north, east and south. The main Indian posts in the region were at High Ground, Chang Pass, and New Demchok. The operational orders for the troops, unlike in some of the other sectors did not order a 'last round, last man' stand. With the benefit of the experience of the capability of the Chinese forces to concentrate superior strength at any point to overwhelm the isolated Indian posts, the troops at these posts were ordered to delay the Chinese as far as possible before withdrawing to rear garrisons at Dungal and Tsaka La.

93 Ibid., p. 132.

The Chinese attack started on 27 October with simultaneous attacks on the Chang Pass, Jara La, High Ground and New Demchok. Within hours, these posts were withdrawn to the rear garrisons. With that the Chinese forces were in occupation of most of the areas that they claimed in 1960. The only Indian posts that remained inside this claim line were the ones west of, and guarding the main Indian garrison at Chushul.

Attention was now focussed on Chushul, the defence of which was considered vital to the defence of Leh. With barely one battalion strength of troops made up mainly from those who had withdrawn from the forward posts and facing a Chinese force estimated to be of at least one brigade strength, the situation was precarious. In response, and taking advantage of the lull in the hostilities, the 15 Corps inducted two more infantry brigades, along with two squadrons of light tanks, one Field Artillery regiment and Engineers into Ladakh. A new Division, the III Infantry Division had been formed on 26 October. Of the two newly inducted brigades, the 70 Infantry Brigade (with three regular battalions and the 7 Jammu and Kashmir Militia Battalion) was deployed in the Demchok-Dungti sector. The 163 Infantry Brigade was deployed in the Leh sector. The area of responsibility of the 114 Infantry Brigade was reduced to just the Chushul sector, with areas north of it coming directly under the operational command of Headquarters

III Division. Under the 114 Brigade, in defence of Chushul were four infantry battalions along with two tank troops and artillery components.⁹⁴

The main approaches to Chushul were from Tsaka La in the south, via Thukung in the north and via Rudok in the east. Indian deployments to defend Chushul anticipated an attack along the Spanggur gap. The Chinese had built a road up to the eastern side of the gap and therefore would be able to bring their heavy artillery to bear on the defences of Chushul without much difficulty. Though a motorable road existed along the southern approach also, this approach was considered unlikely to be used as Chinese forces would not only have to cross over into territory that was indisputably Indian, but also because they would have to capture Dungti first, involving a major battle with the 70 Infantry Brigade deployed there. The Indian deployments therefore concentrated on denying the Spanggur gap to any potential infiltration by strengthening the posts that had been set up to dominate it.

The Chinese attack started early on 18 November with assaults on two Indian posts - the Rezang La and Gurrung Hill posts which dominated not only the Spanggur gap but also the

94 Jagjit Singh, n. 85, p. 67.

low lying Chushul area to the east. Despite heavy artillery bombardment, neither of these positions could be taken in the initial Chinese frontal assault. After about five hours of fighting the Chinese captured these posts after enveloping them from the flanks and the rear.⁹⁵ According to plan, the surviving troops withdrew to Chushul to strengthen the defences of this crucial garrison. But the Chinese forces did not press their attack on Chushul itself, except for stray artillery bombardment.

III

War and the Indian Diplomatic Response

With the general Chinese assault commencing on 20 October 1962, and the consequent shattering of the political belief underlying the Indian employment of force, diplomatic avenues were sought to retrieve the situation. The search became more urgent after the Chinese launched the second phase of their assault around 17 November. This section studies the Indian diplomatic initiatives at two levels, the bilateral negotiations and posturing vis-a-vis China, and the more

95 Ibid.

general exploration of new options, especially concerning a radically different politico-military understanding with the Western world.

Bilateral Negotiations : October-November 1962

On 16 September, the Chinese Government in a note to the Indian Government protested against the Indian Army setting up positions in the Thagla Ridge area.⁹⁶ The Indian positions on the Nyamka Chu had been set up in June, the Chinese had come down the Thagla Ridge to occupy positions opposite to and commanding the Indian positions on 8 September. The presence of the Indian position in the Thagla area was therefore known to the Chinese at least two weeks before they registered their protest. Again, the fact that they submitted the protest more than a week after initiating military moves against the Indian post indicates that the Chinese were not so much protesting the 'intrusion' as setting the stage for further diplomatic and military action.

Taken together with the other Chinese notes submitted to the Government of India, a clearer picture emerges of the Chinese posture at this point. In a note submitted on

96 White Paper VII, p. 34. The Chinese referred to it as the Che Dong area.

13 September,⁹⁷ referring to the Indian position about the need to restore the status quo on the border before negotiations could begin, they claimed that it was the Indian troops who were disturbing the status quo and that if the status quo was to be restored, Indian troops would have to go back.⁹⁸ The position became even clearer when they submitted another note on 3 October, which forcefully rejected the validity of the McMahon Line and served notice that repeated Indian claims to restoring the status quo in the west would be countered with the Chinese claim for restoration of the 'traditional' boundary in the east.⁹⁹

The Chinese equation of the Indian presence in NEFA with that of the Chinese in Aksai Chin had serious implications for the entire Indian diplomatic posture. If such an "east-west" linkage could be established, then India would be tied down to legitimizing Indian claims to NEFA - in other words, the onus of 'proof' would be on India. Indian posture of delinking the eastern sector from the western sector and concentrating purely on "restoration of the status quo" in the latter was designed for exactly the opposite, putting the onus

97 Ibid., pp. 69-70.

98 Curiously enough, though this note was sent nearly a week after China had militarily challenged the setting up of the Dhola Post, no mention was made either of tensions or of the Indians crossing the McMahon Line.

99 White Paper VII, pp. 96-98.

of legitimizing their presence in disputed territory on the Chinese. Moreover, if an equation of the eastern with the western sector was successfully established by the Chinese, it would have pointed the way to a political solution along lines unpalatable to India. This would have meant an acceptance of the prevailing realities in both sectors or in other words exchanging their respective claims. Indian position throughout had depended on a claim backed by legal evidence and since India was believed to have the weight of such evidence on its side, coming to a political solution would have involved a substantial concession by India for no apparent quid pro quo. Thus both as regards the legal validity of the respective claims and proceeding from that, the utility to India of a legal as opposed to a political solution, the Indian posture demanded that any linkage between the eastern and western sectors be opposed.

Therefore, the first Indian response to the Chinese claim that India had crossed the McMahon Line was to reject it, while warning China to "restrain its forces from crossing the border and attempting to intrude into Indian territory".¹⁰⁰ Secondly, referring to the Chinese proposal to begin talks on 15 October onwards first in Peking and later in New Delhi,

100 Ibid., p. 75.

India, while agreeing to the proposal, called for talks to "define measures to restore the status quo in the western sector which has been altered by force in the last few years and to remove the current tension in that area".¹⁰¹ Moreover, India stated that the details of the discussions would be worked out "after the Government of China indicate their acceptance of the proposals (that India put forward)"¹⁰² - in other words, negotiations would not take place if China introduced the eastern sector also. Consistent with the earlier stand, India also rejected the Chinese proposal for a 20 kilometer withdrawal as "it leaves the aggressor...in possession of the fruits of his aggression".¹⁰³

The Chinese reply which came on 3 October not only equated the eastern sector with the western sector (as already noted) but went much further. It categorically stated that "the eastern sector being the most pressing question at present ...during the discussions questions concerning the middle and eastern sectors of the boundary must be discussed as well as those concerning the western sector".¹⁰⁴ Moreover, neither side

101 Ibid., p. 78, **Emphasis added.**

102 Ibid., **Emphasis added.**

103 Ibid.

104 See Chinese note of 3 October 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 96-98.

should refuse to discuss any question concerning the Sino-Indian boundary that may be raised by the other side.

Realizing that the tensions across the Nyamka Chu were being used to open the eastern sector also for discussion, India threatened to withdraw from the discussions: as the Chinese Government, the Indian reply on 6 September said, "was now arguing, on the basis of tensions created by their deliberate aggression, that the Eastern sector being the most pressing question at present, should also be discussed...India will not enter into any talks or discussions until the Chinese intrusion is terminated first".¹⁰⁵ India also rejected the Chinese proposal for a discussion without restrictions as "no useful talks or discussions can take place in the absence of a precise agenda" and characterized the Chinese proposal as being specifically aimed "at creating confusion regarding the proposal for starting talks and discussions merely as a cover for their aggressive and expansionist activities along the India-China border". For good measure, the note also quoted extensively the earlier Indian note of 25 September on what should be the agenda for talks: "to define measures to restore the status quo in the western sector which has been altered by force in the last few years".

105 Indiannote of 6 October 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 100-2.

The Indian response clearly attempted to delink the two sectors. The first posture that India would not agree to discussions unless the Chinese withdrew from the Thagla Ridge area, was aimed at removing the central issue in the Chinese proposal by escalating it to jeopardize the talks regarding the entire border problem. The proposal presented China with a choice of either pulling its troops back from the Thagla Ridge area - in which case tensions in the eastern sector would cease and it would no longer need to be discussed - or risking the termination of the entire border negotiations. This posture was further strengthened by the next two Indian positions - that there could be no talks without an agenda, which removed the possibility of China introducing the eastern sector into the discussion, and the proposal of an agenda which limited the talks to the western sector. The Indian posture was thus not only sharply focussed but by threatening withdrawal, deliberately escalatory.

The full scale Chinese assault started on 20 October. Four days later, after the first phase of the invasion was over, Prime Minister Chou En-lai proposed, in a letter to Prime Minister Nehru, ceasefire along the "line of actual control" and a mutual withdrawal 20 kilometers behind this line followed by discussions at the level of the Prime Ministers.¹⁰⁶ As this

106 Letter from Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister of India, 24 October 1962. White Paper 8, p. 1.

did not specify what the line of actual control was, India proposed that Chinese forces return to positions they were in before 8 September 1962 and discussions thereafter be conducted to "arrive at agreed measures which should be taken for the easing of tensions and corrections of the situation created by the unilateral forcible alteration of the status quo along the India-China boundary".¹⁰⁷ There was no mention of the discussions being confined to just the western sector of the border. Considering the vehemence of the Indian insistence on this point less than three weeks earlier, this can only be termed as a concession.

The Chinese side nevertheless refused to accept the Indian proposal to return to the 8 September positions. Instead, in a reply by Prime Minister Chou En-lai on 4 November, he proposed that both countries return their forces to the positions that they were occupying on 7 November 1959.¹⁰⁸ This position was defined by Prime Minister Chou En-lai as coinciding "in the main with the so-called McMahon Line (in the eastern sector), and in the western and middle sector, it coincides in the main

107 Letter from the Prime Minister of India to the Prime Minister of China, 27 October 1962, in *ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

108 Letter from Premier Chou En-lai to the Prime Minister of India, 4 November 1962, in *ibid.*, pp. 7-10.

with the traditional customary line which has consistently been pointed out by China".¹⁰⁹ Such a position would have resulted in conceding to China all their claims to the Aksai Chin in return for what appeared to be a Chinese concession to Indian claims in NEFA.

Prime Minister Nehru, in his reply of 14 November, though agreeable to a withdrawal to 7 November positions, disagreed on where these positions were.¹¹⁰ As defined by India, in the western sector it was "along the line connecting their (the Chinese) Spanggur Post, Khurnak Fort, and Kongka La and then northwards to the main Aksai Chin road". In the central and eastern sectors, it coincided with the Himalayan watershed ridge, which meant that the Chinese forces would have to withdraw north of the Thagla Ridge.¹¹¹ This position conceded even more to China than the earlier Indian proposals, especially in the western sector, where the major portion of the Aksai Chin, including the main Chinese road across it, would have remained with China. This was the last direct communication between the two sides till the Chinese called for a ceasefire on 21 November.

109 Ibid., p. 8.

110 Letter from the Prime Minister of India to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962, in *ibid.*, pp. 10-17.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

The Search for External Support : October-November 1962

Indian diplomatic initiatives concerning third parties during the period of hostilities had two major objectives : (i) ensuring political support for India's position vis-a-vis the Chinese, and (ii) obtaining military assistance to counter-balance the clear weakness in force capabilities. These two objectives, by the very nature of their requirements, necessitated focus on two different sets of countries. India's search for political support to its position was focussed mainly on the developing world - the focus reflecting both the confidence in the automatic support for India from the Western alliance as well as the apprehension about the neutral stand that most of the developing countries were taking. The search for military assistance similarly focussed mainly on the United States and Great Britain since they alone had the military capability and the political will to provide it.

The search for the support of the non-aligned world began overtly when the Chinese note of 3 October 1962 made an unprecedented reference to "the Asian countries and all peace loving countries" in what was clearly an open appeal to other countries to view the reasonableness of the Chinese proposals.¹¹²

112 See the Chinese note of 3 October 1962, White Paper 7, p. 97.

The Chinese also launched a propaganda offensive which unambiguously sought the support of the "world public opinion".¹¹³ Indian apprehensions about the political support for its case increased with the outbreak of hostilities as most non-aligned countries took a neutral stand.¹¹⁴ Openly supporting the Indian position were just four countries - Cyprus, Ethiopia, the United Arab Republic[§] and Yugoslavia.¹¹⁵ In the belief that such a "non-aligned reaction" was mainly the result of

113 The reference to world public opinion is from an editorial in the People's Daily on 10 October. Other publications like the Peking Review also stepped up the polemic with articles under such title as: "Chinese and Indian stands: A Glaring Contrast"; "Who is Attempting Blackmail?"; "Who is using Threat of Force?" etc. for a detailed study of this Chinese campaign, see Allen S. Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence : India and Indo-China (Ann Arbor, 1975), pp. 114-18.

114 Characteristic of an extreme forum of this neutrality was the reaction of Nkrumah of Ghana, who wrote to the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan regarding the British offer of military assistance to India that "whatever the rights and wrong of the present struggle between India and China, I am sure that we can all serve the cause of peace best by refraining from any action that may aggravate the situation". Cited in Maxwell, n. 2, pp. 364-5.

115 President Nasser of the United Arab Republic[§] proposed a withdrawal of forces to positions as on 8 September 1962. This was the only serious proposal made by third parties that found favour with the Government of India, mainly because, as Prime Minister Nehru explained, they "were largely in conformity with our proposals". The Chinese, of course, rejected it. India, Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations, vol. I (in Parliament), Part II (New Delhi, 1962), p. 150. Hereinafter referred to as PMSIR.

Chinese propaganda and that the India case was not being adequately heard, the Government of India approached the United States for help.¹¹⁶ On 23 October, a senior Indian official indicated to the American Ambassador in New Delhi that India might have to request substantial American military aid.¹¹⁷ This followed the open and unstinting American and British support for India, extended immediately upon the outbreak of hostilities.¹¹⁸ But the political implications implicit in requesting and receiving military assistance from

116 John Kenneth Galbraith, Ambassador's Journal : A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years (London, 1969), p. 472.

117 Ibid., p. 431.

118 In the United States, the State Department on 21 October declared that the United States was shocked at the violent and aggressive action of the Chinese communists against India and that any Indian request for aid would be considered sympathetically. Prime Minister Macmillan of Great Britain ordered an immediate shipment of small arms and ammunition to India as a gesture of support. Michael Brecher, "Non-Alignment Under Stress : The West and the India-China Border War", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver), vol. 52, no. 4, winter 1979-80, pp. 612-30. At least in the case of Britain, the official reaction did not reflect the actual feelings. The British Prime Minister drew the attention of the Queen to the "transformation of Nehru from an imitation of George Lansbury into a parody of Churchill". Harold Macmillan, At the End of the Day - 1961-63 (London, 1973), p. 228.

abroad was well recognized. Seeking to reduce the certain negative impact, India expressed the hope that the United States "would not force them (India) into an alliance or impose security inspection procedures for arms received which would be inconsistent with their (India) sovereignty".¹¹⁹ American assurances on both counts were crucial in allowing Indian decision-makers to draw a distinction between the receipt of military aid and direct membership of military alliances - the former was not considered to be incompatible with non-alignment, the latter was.¹²⁰

Further discussion about the modalities of the supply of arms were conducted on 25 October.¹²¹ Two days later, the American Ambassador issued a statement which said that "the McMahon Line is the accepted international border and is sanctioned by modern usage. Accordingly we regard it as the

119 Galbraith, n. 116, p. 431.

120 Prime Minister Nehru made this distinction in Lok Sabha on 10 December 1962 saying: "We have long followed a policy of non-alignment and, I believe firmly that this was a right policy. It means our not joining any military bloc for military purposes....But we must take all necessary measures to defend our motherland and take the help of our (sic) friendly countries who are willing to assist us in this sacred task". PMSIR, vol. I, part (ii), p. 205.

121 Galbraith, n. 116, p. 435.

northern border of the NEFA area".¹²² An indicator of the increasingly cosy relationship was the military contact between officers of the Indian Army and the Army Attache of the United States Embassy, who was being regularly briefed on the developments on the border.¹²³

While India's relationship with both the United States and Great Britain were on the upswing, the unfolding missile crisis in the Caribbean robbed India of Soviet support. As early as on 13 and 14 October, Khrushchev is reported to have told the Chinese Ambassador that the Soviet information about Indian preparation to attack China was similar to China's, and that if they were in China's position, they would have taken the same measures as China had. More importantly, they asserted that if China were to be attacked, the Soviet Union would not remain neutral, as that would be "an act of betrayal".¹²⁴ The changing stance of the Soviet Union was

122 The Hindu, 28 October 1962, cited in Brecher, n. 118, p. 439. The United States had till then not explicitly recognized the McMahon Line in ~~reference~~ reference to the wishes of their Taiwanese allies - indeed almost as soon as the statement was out, "frantic" Taiwanese protests poured in. Galbraith, n. 116, p. 439.

123 Galbraith, n. 116, p. 443.

124 This information was provided in an editorial titled, "The Truth About How the Leaders of the CPSU have Allied themselves with India against China", in The People's Daily, 2 November 1963. Reproduced in part in John Gittings, Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute (London, 1968), pp. 178-9.

first revealed to New Delhi when a letter from the Soviet leader Khrushchev to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, delivered a few hours after the Chinese attack started, stated the hope that the conflict would be solved by peaceful means on a mutually acceptable basis in the interests of the Indian and Chinese peoples while warning that the taking up of arms to settle the border problem was a "dangerous path".¹²⁵ The Soviet Union also informed the Indian Government that it might not be able to fulfil its commitment to supply the MiG-21 fighters because of the "serious international situation".¹²⁶ That Moscow was not very comfortable with this posture is revealed by a slight modification later made by Khrushchev himself when he told the Indian Ambassador in Moscow that while the Soviet Government would provide arms to neither side, existing contracts with India for such items as transport planes and spare parts and training etc. would be fulfilled. For good measure, he also added that India had no greater or more sincere friend than the Soviet Union.¹²⁷ Such an ambivalent Soviet position revealed that their retraction of support for

125 Kuldip Nayar, Between the Lines (New Delhi, 1969), p. 152.

126 Galbraith, n. 116, p. 448.

127 Ambassador T.N. Kaul's telegram to Prime Minister Nehru, 9 November 1962, cited in Gopal, n. 7, p. 226.

India was made more - as the Chinese later charged-"out of considerations of expediency",¹²⁸ rather than out of genuine sympathy with the Chinese case. Logically, therefore, India could expect the Soviet Union to revert to the original stance of neutrality - which actually supported India - once the Cuban missile crisis ended. Therefore, maintaining the non-aligned stance and making a careful distinction between receiving military assistance and joining military blocs was necessary, indeed, essential.¹²⁹

Nevertheless, on 19 November in the face of what was felt to be the beginnings of a Chinese invasion of the plains and under stress,¹³⁰ Prime Minister Nehru made two appeals for massive but indirect American military intervention in the war, in the form of "the immediate delivery of fourteen squadrons of U.S. fighter planes to protect northern Indian

128 "The Truth About....", People's Daily, 2 November 1963; Gittings, n. 124, p. 179.

129 Prime Minister Nehru told an American interviewer who asked him about the Soviet attitude that he imagined it was because of developments in Cuba and expressed the hope that the Soviets would return to their former positions once the crisis was resolved. Cited in Maxwell, n. 2, p. 367; see also Gopal, n. 7, p. 225.

130 The fear of a Chinese invasion of the plains was expressed to Michael Brecher in an interview by a former cabinet minister. The point about stress was made by the former Cabinet Secretary. See Brecher, n. 118, p. 618.

cities, and three squadrons of bombers, which would enable the Indian Air Force to attack the Chinese communication lines".¹³¹ Around the time the appeal was made, the Chinese informed the Indian Embassy in Peking that China was proposing a ceasefire followed by a withdrawal to their 7 November 1959 positions.¹³² Though further discussions on the modalities of military assistance to India between India and the United States and Great Britain took place in the succeeding weeks,¹³³ no major efforts in this direction were forthcoming as India could not agree to the Western insistence on coming to an agreement with Pakistan over Kashmir before military assistance was provided.

131 Chester Bowles, Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life (New York, 1971), p. 474; Galbraith, n. 116, p. 486.

132 There was a delay of over 24 hours in the transmission of this proposal to the Government of India. The appeal for Western military aid appears to have been made during this time interval. Whether the appeal for aid would have been made if this delay had not occurred is an issue that has yet to be settled. No proper reason is yet available for this delay in transmission.

133 In the days after the ceasefire, two delegations, one led by Duncan Sandys from Britain and the other led by Averell Harriman from the United States, visited India and held high level talks on issues relating to military assistance to India. The only major outcome was a joint air exercise held to test Indian air defences. On Western insistence about "a compromise over Kashmir", see Macmillan, n. 118, pp. 230-1; and Galbraith, n. 116, p. 497.

CHAPTER III

ISSUES IN THE INDIAN RESPONSE

Domestic Pressure and Policy Response

Years after the border war of 1962, former Defence Minister, Krishna Menon, in a conversation with Michael Brecher stated that "on our side, inside the Congress and in the country, public opinion had become aroused so that it was no longer possible to talk in terms of negotiations".¹ This account, as do some others, tend to confirm the widely held belief that public pressure² was to a considerable extent, if not wholly, responsible for the politico-military posture that India adopted.³ Following from that it is proposed that if such a constituency was not present, New Delhi, could have

1 Michael Brecher, India and World Politics : Krishna Menon's View of the World (London, 1968), p. 149.

2 "Public pressure" in this context should be understood to mean the opinions - expressed through either or both the national non-governmental media and the Parliament - of a narrow set of urban, politically conscious elite.

3 See for instance two well documented studies on this aspect, Nancy Jetly, "The Parliament and India's China Policy, 1959-1963", International Studies (New Delhi), vol. 15 (1976), pp. 229-60; Yaacov Vertzberger, Misperceptions in Foreign Policy Making : The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962 (Boulder, 1984).

adopted a more flexible response and prevented the war. Even the deployment pattern of the Indian Army is blamed on the pressure created by the aroused public opinion, which necessitated a thin, forward defence line in tactically disadvantageous terrain rather than the militarily more option of trading space to ensure fighting on terrain that would be tactically advantageous to the Indian Army.⁴

Public opinion, as revealed through pronouncements in the media and the Parliament, was strongly critical of the Indian Government's handling of the border crisis.⁵ But there is no evidence to indicate that the government was so responsive to such criticism as to go to the extent of altering the policy to suit its critics. Indeed, available evidence points in exactly the opposite direction - that public opinion in no way determined either the overall politico-military strategy adopted by the Indian Government, or its implementation, or - where the government felt such a need - the changes made to this

4. According to Krishna Menon, India could not adopt a deep defence strategy because "public opinion would not stand it...the nation wanted the Chinese to be prevented from entering (Indian territory)". Brecher, n. 1, pp. 154 and 162. Such deep defense strategy is discussed in Lorne J. Kavic, India's Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947-1965 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 87-88 and 95-95. See also Neville Maxwell, India's China War (Bombay, 1970), pp. 390-1.

5 See Maxwell, n. 4, pp. 114-16.

policy. In other words, public pressure was not a major input into Indian decision making during the crisis - assuming of course that such input, if made, would be reflected in the Government's actions.

The basic posture that India adopted throughout its negotiations with China can be reduced to the following points:

- (i) There exists a boundary between India and China which is clearly defined.
- (ii) This boundary is as officially represented by India.
- (iii) While India would thus not discuss the validity of these boundaries in its entirety, it would be willing to negotiate particular points of dispute on the boundary, like Longju, for instance.
- (iv) The Chinese presence inside this boundary is aggression and should be vacated.

These positions were adopted by the Government of India much before the dispute became public, in the initial exchange of letters between Prime Ministers Nehru and Chou En-lai in late 1958 and early 1959. India continued to maintain these same positions even after the dispute became public knowledge and the subject of heated debate in the Parliament. The Indian stand on the border dispute, therefore, could not conceivably have been determined by public pressure.

The debate in the Parliament and the Press from September 1959 onwards spawned a number of immediate and military solutions to the problem.⁶ The government did consider and employ force in its dealings with China, but in a manner wholly contrary to the advice tendered in the Parliament. India's actual employment of force was - relatively - considerably modest in both conception and intent. Indian decision-makers were on the whole realistic enough to accept that forcing the Chinese out of Indian claimed territory militarily - even after the build up - was beyond India's capability.⁷ Thus, despite calls for immediate military action, the Government did not allow itself to be stampeded into either a premature or a preponderant employment of force.

6 These ranged from obliterating the Aksai Chin road by aerial bombardment to raising an Army of four million Hindus in six months to throw out the Chinese. *Ibid.*, p. 242. See, India, Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations : In Parliament - Part I (New Delhi, 1961), p. 99.

7 On the surface, Operation Leghorn appears to contradict this assertion. But it must be remembered that Operation Leghorn, even though offensively oriented, was strictly a local assault - the belief that it will not spread to other sectors was one of the primary arguments that the decision-makers used to convince a sceptical Army. See Maxwell, n. 4, p. 313; see also B.M. Kaul, The Untold Story (New Delhi, 1967), p. 365. The decision-makers acceptance of the Army's position that it would be incapable of halting a full scale Chinese assault on Ladakh is further testimony to the realism prevalent in New Delhi in these matters. See D.R. Mankekar, The Guilty Men of 1962 (Bombay, 1968), pp. 41-42.

Negotiations with the Chinese were an integral part of the overall Indian strategy and served two purposes: (i) to persuade the other side to accept the Indian approach to the border problem, and (ii) to buy time for a military build-up to back up India's claims with force. India's approach to the border problem laid stress on the legal aspect - a position that grew out of considerable trust in the legalistic merit of the Indian case. Such an approach was reflected in India's official communications to the Chinese Government about the border problem, which tended to be long and factual, with evidence presented to back up Indian claims in the different sectors. The Chinese side, on the other hand, emphasized a political approach, with an acceptance of the prevailing realities as the starting point and seeking a compromise between the two claims. Prime Minister Nehru turned down Premier Chou's proposal for a summit in late 1959 primarily for this reason. In fact, despite being applauded in parliament for his decision, he insisted that India was ready to negotiate "and negotiate to the bitter end".⁸ That the refusal to meet Premier Chou En-lai had little to do with domestic pressure is conclusively proved by the retraction of

8 PMSIR I (1), p. 263.

this barely a month later. This retraction can be traced to the belief that the Chinese now accepted the validity of the Indian approach to the border problem as expressed in a lengthy note which was delivered to the Government of India on 26 December, and which presented the Chinese side of the case.⁹ The changes in the Indian stands had little parliamentary or press sanction, where it was severely criticized.

Further, in early 1962, the Government of India withdrew from the position it had till then maintained regarding Chinese withdrawal from Indian-claimed territory. India had till then maintained that negotiations could only take place after the Chinese withdrawal - but now, in more than one communication to the Chinese Government, it withdrew from this position and agreed to negotiations without prior Chinese withdrawal.¹⁰ India returned to its earlier stance within

9 Prime Minister Nehru explained the reversal thus: "When Premier Chou En-lai invited me to meet him within a week or so at Rangoon...I reacted against this proposal - I did not like it - for a variety of reasons...above all the invitation to the meeting was contained in a document, in a letter which laid down the Chinese viewpoint, and it wanted some principles etc. settled so as to meet to discuss some principles....I was not going to him with that document, because I did not agree with that document, and I wanted to wait...for a subsequent longer letter in reply to my letter of September 24". Ibid., pp. 311-12.

10 See pp. 44-45 above.

weeks of public^{ly} withdrawing from it - but that was determined by the lack of Chinese response rather than sensitivity to domestic criticism. That the government could publicly withdraw from one of the basic, repeatedly affirmed, and popular policy stance speaks volumes for its confidence and ability to formulate policy which conceded little to public pressure. This confidence and ability are revealed in the other instances/mentioned above also and disprove the not contention that public pressure played a substantial role in determining the government policy in the crisis.

The International Determinant : The Impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis

The Soviet stand on the Sino-Indian border problem underwent a crucial, and for India a disastrous reversal for a couple of weeks from 13 October 1962 onwards. Considering the Soviet stand prior to, during and after this period, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that the reversal was the direct result of the Cuban missile crisis.¹¹

11 See pp.120-22 above. One curious element of chronology remains. The United States learned of the missiles in Cuba only on 14 October and it became a public issue between the Super Powers only on 22 October. So why did the Soviet Union change its position as early as on 13 October? Two explanations seem possible: (i) since it was only matter of time before the missiles

This reversal, which India became aware of only on 20 October, signalled the Soviet Union's inability to either prevent the Chinese from utilizing their military option or help India in any way meet the Chinese attack. While this much is clear and unambiguous, the more pertinent question of whether the Chinese attack was directly related to the Soviet policy reversal - and thus to Cuban missile crisis - or whether the two events were purely coincidental, has remained a contentious issue in the literature on the Sino-Indian border war.¹² The

(footnote 11 contd.)

were detected, the Soviets might have decided to canvass Chinese support before the issue became public, or (ii) the Chinese might have learned of the missiles through their own independent sources and therefore left the Soviets no alternatives. In both cases, since the Soviets would have been aware of the violent American reaction - American leaders including President Kennedy had repeatedly warned the Soviets on this matter - they would have had no choice but to bury their differences, at least temporarily.

- 12 Maxwell makes the clearest case for the "coincidence theory": "It is impossible to be certain but to the writer it appears that the timing of the October 20th attack is adequately explained by the development of the Sino-Indian dispute and such local factors as the water level in Namka Chu. It is easier to believe this, at any rate, than that Chinese Intelligence and pre-science (about the extent of the American reaction to the presence of missiles in Cuba) was sufficient to enable them to time their attack so exactly." Maxwell, n. 4, p. 367. (footnote): The other side of the case is/by K. Subrahmanyam: "But for the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 the Soviet countervailing support might have been available to India in full measure to restrain

/made

analysis attempted here supports the view that the Cuban missile crisis played a major, even crucial, role in the development of the Sino-Indian border hostilities.

By mid-1962, China had established a conflictual relationship with the United States and a potentially conflictual one with the Soviet Union. The conflictual relation with the United States needs little elaboration: as late as June 1962, China and the United States almost came to blows over Taiwan.¹³ Sino-Soviet relations were also visibly deteriorating at the same time. This deterioration helped India establish a deterrent relationship vis-a-vis China by improving Indo-Soviet relationship. While an elaborate study of Sino-Soviet relations is not attempted here, what is important is the credibility of India's deterrent posture, which would require Sino-Soviet relations to be so bad that actual hostilities with the Soviet Union are not beyond active contemplation by China. In summer of 1962, across the Sinkiang boundary between the Soviet Union and China, the

(footnote 12 contd.)

China in the fateful months of October-November 1962".
See K. Subrahmanyam, "Nehru's Concept of Indian Defence",
Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses Journal (New Delhi),
vol. 5, no. 2, October 1972, p. 203.

13 Alan Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina (Ann Arbor, 1975), pp. 67-72.

relations had reached just such a level.¹⁴ More importantly, the threat from Indian military moves in the Ladakh region was seen in consonance with perceived Soviet hostile activities across Sinkiang.¹⁵

In such a situation, it is impossible to visualize China not taking into consideration the possible Soviet reactions to any Chinese military initiatives against India. Such considerations would have seriously inhibited, if not removed, the option of using force against India as a viable policy. After 13 October, however, the Cuban crisis ensured that the Soviet reaction need no longer be a determining factor in Chinese policy options. The chronology of events makes it all the more certain that the Soviet reversal of position was a crucial element in the Chinese calculus: the Chinese forces launched their attack exactly one week after they were informed of the Soviet reversal.¹⁶ This also

14 Ibid., pp. 32-34 and 74-75.

15 Ibid., p. 74.

16 Chinese actions during the crisis have been noted to conform particular periodic cycles. Two have been noted (i) A one-month cycle involving major decision, (ii) a weekly cycle within this. See *ibid.*, pp. 212-16.

disputes the contention, made by Naville Maxwell for instance, that Chinese "Intelligence and prescience" would not have been sufficient to give them an exact picture of the development of the missile crisis on which they could base their war plans. This contention overlooks the essential point of whether such a forecasting was necessary: for Chinese decision makers, the neutralization of the Soviet deterrent would itself have been sufficient to make use of force a viable policy option.

The arguments developed above also disprove another 'coincidence theory' contention: that as the Cuban missile crisis and the border war did not follow a common course, they really had nothing to do with each other.¹⁷ But this overlooks the basic point: the importance of the Cuban missile crisis was in removing the Soviet Union as a major determinant of Chinese policy options. Once this was achieved, the course of the war proceeded on the basis of local tactical factors without any relation to the progress of the missile crisis. This also offers a hypothesis of how the Chinese could launch their second assault at a time when the missile crisis was almost over - the Soviet Union would have been

¹⁷ This argument is used by Whiting. See *ibid.*, p. 152.

unable to back up their deterrent posture against China so soon after their debacle in the Carribean.

The Chinese calculus of American response can also be conjectured with reasonable confidence. A variety of factors explained the Chinese complacency on this aspect. The United States, unlike the Soviet Union, did not have a common boundary where they could create tensions to check Chinese behaviour. The possibility that they could go directly to NEFA or Ladakh to help the Indian Army was very remote. The Taiwanese strait was a major area of worry for the Chinese but in summer they had received an assurance from the United States on removing tensions there, and the Chinese were doing everything they could not to provoke the Americans.¹⁸

What is asserted here is not that the Cuban missile crisis was the only issue that determined the Chinese decision to use force to settle the border problem. The decision to employ force depended on a host of factors including the politics within the Chinese communist party,¹⁹ irritation with what was perceived to be Indian intransigence on the

18 Ibid., pp. 68-69.

19 Ibid., pp. 156-7.

border problem etc. China already had its forces on the border regions since at least the summer of 1962. But it is doubtful whether the Chinese would have launched their assault because of just these factors. The chronology of events presented in this analysis establishes with sufficient certainty the crucial role that the Cuban missile crisis played in precipitating the Chinese assault.

....

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In late 1958, India realized that it had a serious border dispute with China on its hands. Though India had been aware of such a possibility since at least 1951, and had discussed the issue with China in 1954, the focus was mainly on the legal validity of the McMahon Line. These preliminary discussions were not pursued further because India was already in occupation of most of NEFA. The passage of time would only have strengthened the Indian claims. Further, should the matter come to a test of strength, India would have longer time to prepare itself.¹

In late 1957, India realized that China had claims in the Ladakh region also. Preliminary exploration of the issue through exchange of notes and letters confirmed that

1 In Prime Minister Nehru's words: "From the very first day and all the time this problem came before us, about our frontier. It is not a new problem. The question was whether we should raise it in an acute form at that stage...why should we go about asking China to raise this question when we felt sure about it? Why invite discussion about a thing on which we had no doubt?...we felt that we should hold by our position and that the lapse of time and events will confirm it, and by the time perhaps, when the challenge to it came, we would be in a much stronger position to face it." In the Rajya Sabha, 9 December 1959. See, India, Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations : In Parliament Part I (New Delhi, 1961), pp. 249-50.

China was now staking claim to large areas there. The problem was made more acute by the fact that the Chinese were already in occupation of substantial chunks of the territory they claimed while existing Indian military capabilities precluded any immediate military countermeasures.

India, at this point, had two alternatives: (i) It could come to a political settlement on the lines that China wanted. This would involve an acceptance of the status quo leaving China in control of the territory they claimed in Ladakh and India in control of NEFA, or (ii) it could attempt to retrieve the Chinese occupied territory, by negotiations, or use of force, or a combination of both.

For a variety of reasons, the primary one being a strong belief in the validity of Indian claims, India opted for the latter course of action. Translated into national policy measures, this involved the employment of both force and diplomacy in a carefully orchestrated manoeuvre. The fact that China was already militarily occupying a major chunk of the disputed territory and using such military presence to legitimize political control and also pushing further forward constantly necessitated the employment of instruments of force by India. Emulating the Chinese tactics, the Army was asked to move forward and occupy territory to

legitimize the Indian claims. Diplomacy, in this strategy was used to achieve three ends: (i) as an instrument to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement with China, (ii) to canvass support from external powers, and (iii) to act as an escalation moderator.

The bilateral diplomatic posturing with China was used to clarify constantly the Indian perception of the problem and its possible solution. The former was characterized as one arising out of China's disturbance of the long prevailing status quo on the border. This contention was sought to be established by backing it up with extensive documentation of previous Indian control of the disputed territory. India's idea of a logical solution was clear in its characterization of the problem itself - since it was a disturbance of the status quo that led to the problem in the first place, the solution was to restore the status quo, which would involve China vacating those areas in the disputed territory that it had already occupied. India's diplomatic posturing thus stressed a legalistic approach to the problem as opposed to the political approach favoured by China.

India's search for external support proceeded directly from the overall non-aligned stand that India had already adopted. This stand required the maintenance of close

relationships with both Super Powers and an alliance with neither. The existing state of Sino-American relations and the progress of Sino-Soviet rift allowed India to establish a deterrent relationship with China by arriving at an informal and thus non-contradictory alliance with both Super Powers. This does not appear to have been a deliberate policy initiative by India as India could not have been aware of the extent of the Sino-Soviet rift, which was the crucial element in such a calculus. Rather, this deterrent posture was one that India drifted into, and whose potency China appreciated more than India.

In its third role, diplomacy acted as an escalation moderator for India's employment of force. As the possibility of escalation is inherent in any employment of force, and as India was the weaker of the two sides, India had to be all the more cautious in its employment of force. The care taken in this regard encompassed both military measures and diplomatic. In the western sector, the Army was initially told to set up posts well away from Chinese posts and troops in all sectors were given strict instructions on avoiding hostilities. Where escalation was threatened, as at the Galwan post in July 1962, a flurry of diplomatic notes were despatched and the incident itself highlighted in order to restrain Chinese moves.

This careful orchestration of force and diplomacy reached a high point in July-August 1962, with Indian forward deployment of troops effectively stopping the advance of Chinese forces, while stopping short of being threatening enough for the Chinese to escalate to full scale hostilities. With one major goal achieved, Indian diplomatic posture softened. India withdrew more than once from its stand that Chinese troops should withdraw from the Aksai Chin before negotiations could begin.

India's deterrent posture collapsed when the Soviet Union temporarily buried its differences with China, in order to get Chinese support during the Cuban missile crisis. Worse, India did not realize the collapse of its deterrent. The Indian Army whose deployments reflected the political belief in the improbability of full scale hostilities with China, suffered a fate that was as predictable as it was disastrous. Even where the Indian troops had a chance to fight the Chinese to a standstill, like in the Se La-Bomdi La sector, the ineptitude of the local commanders ensured a rout. But that was anyway a footnote to the larger issues. The collapse of the Indian policy was signalled by the start of the hostilities and not by the defeat of the Indian Army.

....

APPENDIX I

TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION PASSED ON 14 NOVEMBER
1962, AT THE LOK SABHA

"This House notes with deep regret that, in spite of the uniform gestures of goodwill and friendship by India towards the People's Government of China on the basis of recognition of each other's independence, non-aggression and non-interference, and peaceful co-existence, China has betrayed this goodwill and friendship and the principles of Panchsheel which had been agreed to between the two countries and has committed aggression and initiated a massive invasion of India by her armed forces.

"This House places on record its high appreciation of the valiant struggle of men and officers of our armed forces while defending our frontiers and pays its respectful homage to the martyrs who have laid down their lives in defending the honour and integrity of our motherland.

"This House also records its profound appreciation of the wonderful and spontaneous response of the people of India to the emergency and the crisis that has resulted from China's invasion of India.

"It notes with deep gratitude this mighty upsurge amongst all sections of our people for harnessing all our

resources towards the organisation of an all-out efforts to meet this grave national emergency. The flame of liberty and sacrifice has been kindled anew and a fresh dedication has taken place to the cause of India's freedom and integrity.

"This House gratefully acknowledges the sympathy and the moral and material support received from a large number of friendly countries in this grim hour of our struggle against aggression and invasion.

"With hope and faith, this House affirms the firm resolve of the Indian people to drive out the aggressor from the sacred soil of India, however long and hard the struggle may be."

....

APPENDIX II

STATEMENT BY THE DEFENCE MINISTER REGARDING NEFA
ENQUIRY

The Defence Minister, Mr Y.B. Chavan, made the following statement in both Houses of Parliament on September 2, 1963:

1. Sir, I wish to inform the House of the results of the enquiry to investigate our reverses in the operations occasioned by the Chinese aggression across our northern borders during the months of October-November 1962.

2. Though the officers appointed to enquire into these reverses were asked to examine the operations with particular references to the Kameng Division of NEFA, they quite rightly came to the conclusion that the developments in NEFA were closely co-related to those in Ladakh and their study of NEFA operations had to be carried out in conjunction with developments and operations in the Ladakh sector. Thus, the enquiry made and the conclusions emerging from it are results of study into the entire operations on our northern borders.

3. As I had informed the House on April 1, 1963, in reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, with my approval the Chief of Army Staff had ordered a thorough investigation to be carried out to find as to what was wrong with

- (i) our training;
- (ii) our equipment;
- (iii) our system of command;
- (iv) the physical fitness of our troops; and
- (v) the capacity of our Commanders at all levels to influence the men under them.

4. While conveying to the House the terms of reference of this enquiry, I had made it clear that the underlying idea in holding this enquiry was to derive military lessons. It was meant to bring out clearly what were the mistakes or deficiencies in the past so as to ensure that in future such mistakes are not repeated and such deficiencies are quickly made up. Consequently, the enquiring officers had to study in great and intimate detail the extent of our preparedness at the time, the planning and strategic concepts behind it and the way those plans were adjusted in the course of operations. This also necessitated the examination of the developments and events prior to hostilities as also the plans, posture and the strength of the Army at the outbreak of hostility. In the course of the enquiry a very detailed review of the actual operations in both the sectors had to be carried out with reference to terrain, strategy, tactics and deployment of our troops.

(5) The conclusions drawn at the end of the report flow from examination of all these matters in great detail. In

these circumstances, I am sure, the House would appreciate that by the very nature of the contents it would not be in the public interest to lay the report on the table of the House. Nor is it possible to attempt even an abridged or edited version of it, consistent with the consideration of security, that would not give an unbalanced or incomplete picture to you.

6. I have given deep thought to this matter and it is with great regret that I have to withhold this document from this august House. The publication of this report which contains information about the strength and deployment of our forces and their locations would be of invaluable use to our enemies. It would not only endanger our security but affect the morale of those entrusted with safeguarding the security of our borders.

7. Before I turn to the main conclusions of this enquiry, may I bring to the notice of the House that I had already made clear that this enquiry is the type of enquiry which the Prime Minister had in mind when he promised such an enquiry to the House in November 1962, into the state of military unpreparedness to meet Chinese invasion? I would like to assure the House that we had at the outset made it clear to those who were entrusted with this enquiry, and they in turn made it clear to the persons whom^s they found necessary

to examine, that our main intention was to derive lessons to help in our future preparedness and not in any way undertake a witch-hunt into the culpabilities of those who were concerned with or took part in these operations. This was absolutely essential to get a full, factual picture of the situation as it obtained in October-November 1962. I may specially mention this to remind the House that in considering these matters, we should never miss the proper sense of perspective or say or do things which could only give heart to the enemy and demoralise our own men. I have no doubt that the House would wish to ensure this spirit to be maintained.

8. The enquiring officers submitted their report to the Chief of Army Staff on May 12, 1963. After obtaining some complementary information the Chief of Army Staff submitted this report along with his comments to me on July 2. Considering the enormous mass of details that had to be gone into with meticulous care by the enquiring officers, as I have myself seen, I would consider that the report has been completed with commendable speed.

9. The first question in the terms of reference was whether our training was found wanting.

The enquiry has revealed that our basic training was sound and soldiers adapted themselves to the mountains adequately. It is admitted that the training of our troops

did not have orientation towards operations vis-a-vis the particular terrain in which the troops had to operate. Our training of the troops did not have a slant for a war being launched by China. Thus our troops had no requisite knowledge of the Chinese tactics, and ways of war, their weapons, equipment and capabilities. Knowledge of the enemy helps to build up confidence and morale, so essential for the jawan on the front.

10. The enquiry has revealed that there is certainly need for toughening and battle inoculation. It is, therefore, essential that battle schools are opened at training centres and formations, so that gradual toughening and battle inoculation can be carried out.

11. It has also revealed that the main aspect of training as well as the higher commanders' concept of mountain warfare requires to be put right.

12. Training alone, however, without correct leadership will pay little dividends. Thus the need of the moment, above all else, is training in leadership.

13. The second question was about our equipment. The enquiry has confirmed that there was indeed an overall shortage of equipment both for training and during operations. But it was not always the case that particular equipment was

not available at all with the Armed Forces anywhere in the country. The crucial difficulty in many cases was that, while the equipment could be reached to the last point in the plains or even beyond it, it was another matter to reach it in time, mostly by air or by animal or human transport to the forward formations who took the brunt of fighting. This position of logistics was aggravated by two factors:

- (i) The fast rate at which troops had to be inducted, most from plains to high mountain areas; and
- (ii) Lack of properly built roads and other means of communication.

14. This situation was aggravated and made worse because of overall shortage as far as vehicles were concerned and as our fleet was too old and its efficiency not adequate for operating on steep gradients and mountain terrain.

15. Thus, in brief, though the enquiry revealed overall shortage of equipment, it has also revealed that our weapons were adequate to fight the Chinese and compared favourably with theirs. The automatic rifle would have helped in the cold climate and is being introduced. The enquiry has pinpointed the need to make up deficiency in equipment, particularly suited for mountain warfare, but more so to provide means and modes of communication to make it available to the troops at the right place, at the right time. Work on these

lines has already been taken in hand and is progressing vigorously.

16. The third question is regarding our system of command within the armed forces. The enquiry has revealed that there is basically nothing wrong with the system and chain of command, provided it is exercised in accepted manner at various levels. There is, however, need for realisation of responsibilities at various levels, which must work with trust and confidence in each other. It is also revealed that during the operations, difficulties arose only when there was departure from accepted chain of command. There again, such departures occurred mainly due to haste and lack of adequate prior planning.

17. The enquiry has also revealed the practice that crept in the higher Army formations of interfering in tactical details even to the extent of detailing troops for specified tasks. It is the duty of commanders in the field to make on-the-spot decisions, when so required, and details of operations ought to have been left to them.

18. The fourth question is of physical fitness of our troops. It is axiomatic that an unacclimatised army cannot be as fit as one which is. The enquiry has revealed that, despite this, our troops, both officers and men, stood the rigours of the climate, although most of them were rushed at

short notice from plains. Thus, in brief, troops were physically fit in every way for their normal tasks, but they were not acclimatised to fight at the heights at which some of them were asked to make a stand. Where acclimatisation had taken place, such as in Ladakh, the height factor presented no difficulty. Among some middle-age group officers, there had been deterioration in standards of physical fitness. This is a matter which is being rectified. The physical fitness among junior officers was good and is now even better.

19. The fifth point in the terms of reference was about the capacity of the commanders at all levels during these operations to influence the men under their command. By and large, it has been found that general standard amongst the junior officers was fair. At unit level there were good and mediocre commanding officers. The proportion of good commanding officers and not-so-good was perhaps the same as obtained in any army in the last world war. At Brigade level, but for the odd exception, commanders were able to adequately exercise their command. It was at higher levels that shortcomings became more apparent. It was also revealed that some of the higher commanders did not depend enough on the initiative of the lower commanders, who alone could have the requisite knowledge of the terrain and local conditions of troops under them.

20. Apart from these terms of reference, the enquiry went into some other important aspects pertaining to the operations, and I would like to inform the House about this also. This relates to the following three aspects:

- (i) Our intelligence;
- (ii) Our staff work and procedures; and
- (iii) Our "higher direction of operations".

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

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

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

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

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

26. Now about our staff work and procedures. There are clear procedures of staff work laid down at all levels. The enquiry has however revealed that much more attention will have to be given, than was done in the past, to the work and procedures of the General Staff at the Services Headquarters, as well as in the Command Headquarters and below, to long-term operational planning, including logistics as well as to the problems of co-ordination between various Services Headquarters. So, one major lesson learnt is that the quality of General Staff work, and the depth of its prior planning in time, is going to be one of the most crucial factors in our future preparedness.

27. That brings me to the next point which is called the higher direction of operations. Even the largest and the

best equipped of armies need to be given proper policy guidance and major directives by the Government, whose instrument it is. These must bear a reasonable relation to the size of the army and state of its equipment from time to time. An increase in the size or improving the equipment of army costs not only money but also needs time.

28. The reverses that our armed forces admittedly suffered were due to a variety of causes and weaknesses as stated above. While this enquiry has gone deeply into those causes it has also confirmed that the attack was so sudden and in such remote and isolated sectors that the Indian Army as a whole was really not tested. In that period of less than two months last year, only about 24,000 of our troops were actually involved in fighting. Of these, those in Ladakh did an excellent job even when overwhelmed and outnumbered. In the eastern-most sector, though the troops had to withdraw in the face of vastly superior enemy strength from Walong, they withdrew in an orderly manner and took their toll. It was only in the Kameng sector that the Army suffered a series of reverses. These battles were fought on our remotest borders and were at heights not known to the Army and at places which geographically had all the disadvantages for our troops and many advantages for the enemy. But such initial reverses are a part of the tides of war and what matters most is who wins the last battle.

29. Before I end, I would like to add a word about the famous "Fourth Division", which took part in these operations. It is indeed said that this famous Division had to sacrifice its good name in these series of reverses. It is still sadder that this Division during the actual operations was only "Fourth Division" in name, for it was not fighting with its original formations intact. Troops from different formations had to be rushed to the borders to fight under the banner of the "Fourth Division", while the original formations of the Division itself were deployed elsewhere. I am confident, and I am sure the House would share with me that the famous "Fourth Division" would live to win many more battles if there is any future aggression against our country.

30. Before I conclude, I would like to mention that we have certainly not waited for this report to be in our hands to take corrective action. The process of taking corrective action had started simultaneously with the institution of this enquiry and the House would recollect that I had informed it of the same.

31. What happened at Se La and Bomdi La was severe reverses for us, but we must remember that other countries with powerful defence forces have sometimes suffered in the initial stages of a war. The aggressor has a certain advantage,

more especially when the aggression is sudden and well-prepared. We are now on the alert and well on the way of preparedness, and this enquiry while bringing home to us our various weaknesses and mistakes would also help to strengthen our defence preparedness and our entire conduct of such operations.

Note: The enquiry was conducted by Lt. Gen Henderson Brooks and Brig. Prem Bhagat. In the eastern sector, under the Corps Commander, Lt. Gen. B.M. Kaul, there were two Major Generals, M.S. and A.S. Pathania. The latter was in charge of the defence of the Kameng Division.

....

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

India, Government of, Ministry of External Affairs, Notes Memoranda and Letters Exchanged Between the Governments of India and China: White Papers 1-8 (New Delhi, 1959-1963).

India, Government of, Ministry of External Affairs, Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations : 2 Volumes (New Delhi, 1961-1962).

SECONDARY SOURCES

Books

Allison, Graham T., The Essence of Decision : Explaining the Cuban Missiles Crisis (Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1971).

Barnds, William J., India, Pakistan and the Great Powers (London: Pall Mall Press, 1972).

Bhargava, G.S., The Battle of NEFA : The Undeclared War (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1964).

Bowles, Chester, Promises to Keep : My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969 (New York: Random House, 1971).

Brecher, Michael, India and World Politics : Krishna Menon's View of the World (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

- Brines, Russell, The Indo-Pakistani Conflict (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968).
- Choudhury, G.W., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Great Powers (New York: The Free Press, 1975).
- Dalvi, J.S. (Brigadier, Retd), Himalayan Blunder : The Curtain Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1969).
- Dutt, S., With Nehru in the Foreign Office (New Delhi: Minerva Publications, 1977).
- Eekelen, W.F. Van, Indian Foreign Policy and the Border Dispute with China (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).
- Galbraith, John Kenneth, Ambassador's Journal : A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969).
- Gittings, John, Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- Gopal, Sarvepalli, Jawaharlal Nehru : A Biography, vol. III, 1956-1964 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).
- Hinton, Harold C., China's Turbulent Quest (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
- _____, Communist China in World Politics (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).
- Indian Army, History of the Regiment of Artillery (Dehra Dun: Palit & Dutt, 1971).

- Jetly, Nancy, India-China Relations, 1947-1977 : A Study of Parliament's Role in the Making of Foreign Policy (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1979).
- Johri, Major Sita Ram (Retd), Chinese Invasion of Ladakh (Lucknow: Himalaya Publications, 1969).
- Johri, Major Sita Ram (Retd), Chinese Invasion of NEFA (Lucknow: Himalaya Publications, 1968).
- Kaul, B.M. Lt. Gen (Retd), Confrontation With Pakistan (New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971).
- _____, The Untold Story (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1967).
- Kavic, Lorne J., India's Quest for Security : Defence Policies, 1947-1965 (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1967).
- Kennedy, Robert F., Thirteen Days : A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969).
- Khera, S.S., India's Defence Problems (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1968).
- Longer, V., Red Coats to Olive Green : A History of the Indian Army, 1600-1974 (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1974).
- Macmillan, Harold, At the End of the Day, 1961-1963 (London: Macmillan, 1973).
- Mankekar, D.R., The Guilty Men of 1962 (Bombay: The Tulsi Shah Enterprises, 1968).

- Maxwell, Neville, India's China War (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1970).
- Mullick, B.N., My Years with Nehru : The Chinese Betrayal (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1971).
- Nayar, Kuldip, Between the Lines (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1969).
- Prasad, Major General Niranjan, The Fall of Towang - 1962 (New Delhi: Palit & Palit, 1981).
- Praval, K.C., Red Eagles : A History of the Fourth Division of India (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1982).
- Rao, P.V.R., Defence Without Drift (Bombay: Popular Prakasham, 1970).
- Rowland, Jim, A History of Sino-Indian Relations : Hostile Co-existence (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1967).
- Saigal, J.R. (Lt. Col), The Unfought War of 1962 : The NEFA Debacle (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1979).
- Singh, Major General Jagjit, The Saga of Ladakh : Heroic Battles of Rezang La and Gurung Hill, 1961-62 (Delhi: Vanity Books, 1983).
- Thorat, S.P.P. (Lt. Gen. Retd), From Reville to Retreat (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1986).
- Vertzberger, Yaacov, Y.I., Misperceptions in Foreign Policy-making : The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962 (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984).

Whiting, Alan, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence : India and India-China (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1975).

Woodman, Dorothy, Himalayan Frontiers (New York: Praeger, 1969).

Articles in Journals

Brecher, Michael, "Non-Alignment Under Stress : The West and the India-China Border War", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver), vol. 52, no. 4, winter 1979-80, pp. 612-30.

Friedman, Edward, "Comment : Some Political Constraints on a Political Science : Quantitative Content Analysis and the Indo-Chinese Border Crisis of 1962", The China Quarterly (London), vol. 63, September 1975, pp. 528-38.

Hoffmann, Steven A., "Anticipation, Disaster, and Victory : India, 1962-71", Asian Survey (Berkeley: California), vol. 12, no. 11, November 1972, pp. 960-79.

Jetly, Nancy, "Parliament and India's China Policy, 1959-1963", International Studies (New Delhi), vol. 15, no. 2, April-June 1976, pp. 229-60.

Liao, Kuang-Sheng and Whiting, Allen S., "Chinese Press Perception of Threat : The U.S. and India, 1962", The China Quarterly (London), vol. 53, January-March 1973, pp. 76-77.

Sinha, Mira, "China : Making and Urmaking of Nehru's Foreign Policy", China Report (New Delhi), vol. 15, no. 2, March-April 1972, pp. 51-64.

Subramanyam, K., "Nehru and the India-China Conflict of 1962" in B.R. Nanda, ed., India's Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years (New Delhi: Vikas, 1976), pp. 102-130.

_____, "Nehru's Concept of Indian Defence", Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses Journal (New Delhi), vol. 5, no. 2, October 1972, pp. 196-211.

_____, "Neville Maxwell's War", The Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses Journal (New Delhi), vol. 63, no. 2, October 1970, pp. 268-91.

Vertzberger, Yaacov, "India's Strategic Posture and the Border War Defeat of 1962: A Case Study of Miscalculation," Journal of Strategic Studies (London), vol. 5, no. 3, September 1982, pp. 370-92.

....