

## India-China Border Question

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### THE McMAHON LINE

**B**EFORE the Revolution of 1911 overthrowing the Manchu Empire, there was a brief period of resurgence during which Chao-Erh-Feng Warden of the Eastern Marches marched upto Rima in 1910 and placed a boundary stone south of it in the Lohit Valley in present day Arunachal Pradesh. McMahon, the then Foreign Secretary of British India Government, organized a number of expeditions to determine the boundary between Tibet and India east of Bhutan. This boundary was to follow the Watershed of the Himalayas and also the boundary between Burma and China further to the North East. At the same time Chao-Erh-Feng sent a force 2000 strong to Lhasa which reached there on New Year Day of 1910. This was the first time in history that China had sent a force to Tibet without the consent of the Tibetans and as an invading force. Only a few months before, the Dalai Lama had returned to Lhasa after his long exile in Mongolia and China since 1904. He had again to flee on February 13, 1910, and this time he took refuge in India. Side by side with this invasion into Lhasa, Chao-Erh-Feng also spread Chinese control over the Tibetan areas adjacent to India's North-Eastern frontier, in the districts of Zayul, Pome and Pemako. The Chinese now also asserted that Bhutan and Nepal were vassals of China. After the overthrow of the Manchus in 1911 the Chinese forces in Lhasa were expelled and the Dalai Lama returned to proclaim the independence of Tibet as has been reiterated by the present Dalai Lama in 1960 in communication to the United Nations. In 1912, the President of the Chinese Republic issued an order that Tibet was to be "regarded as on equal footing with the provinces of China proper". All this provoked the British into taking some decisive action in redefining the relationship between China and Tibet in order to strengthen their own position vis-a-vis Tibet. The British Minister in Peking presented a memorandum dated 17 August 1912 and although the Chinese were reluctant, they had to accept this as the

basis for negotiation at a tripartite conference between China, Tibet and India for determining the status of Tibet.

The negotiations were held at Simla and Delhi in 1913-14 and are called the Simla Conference at which the McMahon Line was agreed to, as defining the boundary between India and Tibet east of Bhutan. The negotiations turned out to be about the boundary and its definition rather than about the status of Tibet. There was disagreement on the part of the Chinese in respect of the boundary between "Inner" and "Outer" Tibet. This concept was introduced by McMahon on the analogy of the treaty between Russia and Mongolia in 1912 where both an "Inner" and "Outer" boundary were laid down. Whereas in "Outer" Tibet, there was to be no Chinese control, "Inner" Tibet consisting of areas further to the east and inhabited by people of Tibetan stock was to be subject to Chinese control. These alignments were accepted and initialled by the Chinese delegate on 27 April 1914 but were not confirmed by the Chinese Government. In fact even as the Simla Conference was going on the Tibetans had had to maintain a force of 10,000 in Eastern Tibet and the Chinese had attacked one of the provinces to be included in "Inner" Tibet.

On 3rd July 1914, the British and Tibetan delegates signed the agreement regarding the boundary between Tibet and India east of Bhutan, since known as the McMahon Line. The Chinese refuse to accept the agreement though they never have objected to the boundary line itself. British help in maintaining Tibetan independence took the form of sending British Army personnel to train and organise the Tibetan Army. In 1921, an agreement was also concluded between Tibet and Britain for the import of 10 Mountain guns, 20 Machine guns, and 10,000 rifles with ammunition. By 1933, all this material had been supplied.<sup>1</sup> Between 1912 and 1934 there were no Chinese officials in Tibet, but the death of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933 prompted the Chinese to take advantage and they sent a General at the head of a mission to offer religious tribute and condolences of the Chinese Government. Having come for this purpose the General insisted on staying on as a permanent representative but was forced to leave. Two of his liaison officers however remained behind. Following this the British requested for a similar office and the British Mission in Lhasa dated from this time. When the 1939-45 World War was under way Tibet refused to allow any facilities to the

1. "Great Britain, China and Tibet, 1914-21", C. Christie, in "Modern Asian Studies" C.U.P., October 1976.

allied forces to survey a route through Tibet for a supply line from India to China. When India became independent in 1947 China enquired from the new Indian Government whether the treaty rights and obligations between British India and Tibet had been assumed by the new Government. On their part, the Tibetan Government resolved to send a delegation to China when the Communists took over in 1949. Such was the position prior to China's invasion of Tibet in 1950.

#### THE MIDDLE SECTOR, NEPAL AND BHUTAN

South of Ladakh lies Spiti and curving east along the Himalaya mountains lies the region of Kinnaur. Both these regions formed part of Ladakh and were given to the youngest son of King Skydie Magnon in the 10th century. In the 17th century Kinnaur became part of the Rampur Bashahr Kingdom. An important trade route from Rampur Bashahr lies via Shipki Pass. The British attempted to divert the wool trade from Gartok through this route to Ludhiana. The British thus attempted to break the monopoly of Kashmir traders over this wool trade; this was also one of the reasons why Zorawar Singh in 1841 invaded Western Tibet.

The Himalayan borderlands east of Rampur Bashahr comprise the northern Garhwal and Kumaon regions, today called Uttarkhand and forming the source of the Rivers Yamuna and Ganga. The Uttarkhand borderlands, also known as Bhot, contain the largest number of passes from India to Tibet. There were several trading marts of Bhotiya merchants in the Kailas, Manasarower region on the Tibetan side of the passes. The more important passes used by these traders are, from west to east, Nilang, Mana, Niti, Kingri Bingri, Unta Dhura and Darma. Between the rivers Sutluj (Shipki Pass) and the river Kali (Nepal border) the border with Tibet was well defined since the time of Katyuri dynasty contemporaneous with Gupta dynasty, and their successors the Chands and the Shahs. Infact Raja Raj Bahadur Chand (1638—78) marched into Western Tibet and defeated the Huniyas (Tibetans), virtually destroying the fortress of Taklakot in Tibet. People on both sides, apart from trade, had frequent contact by way of using pasturelands on either side of the border. After the British occupation of the area in 1815 (except Tehri Garhwal) occasional border disputes with the Tibetans had been settled more or less amicably by local officers. For instance in 1888 the Tibetans came to Bara Hoti near Niti Pass and had to be driven away by British troops. To safeguard the local population the British posted officials at Garbyang, Pithoragarh and Champ-avat.

## NEPAL

For a length of 540 miles extending eastward of Uttarkhand lies the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. The first King of unified Tibet had invaded Nepal during the 7th century and married a Nepalese princess. In the middle ages, the Kathmandu valley became the epi-centre of flourishing cultural and commercial contacts between Tibet and India. During the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama (17th century) two Nepalese Kings, Rama Shah of Gorkha (1606—33) and Pratap Malla of Kathmandu (1624—77) seized the border passes through which flowed most of the trans-border trade between India and Tibet. The Newar Merchants of the Kathmandu valley gained control of the Tibetan border towns of Kuth and Kerong and extended their activities right upto Lhasa. In 1773, the Gurkhas of Rajput ancestry conquered all the other smaller kingdoms to the unified kingdom of Nepal and thus made it into a major military power. Nepal invaded Tibet in 1788 and seized the border areas. Again, in 1791 they marched to Shigatse and looted the Tashi Lun-po monastery of the Panchen Lama. A Chinese army marched across Tibet into Nepal, but due to Malarial conditions it suffered a setback, incurring heavy losses in the battle of September 1791. The concluding treaty in 1793 bound the Nepalese king to send a mission every five years to China.

Now Nepal turned her energies southwards to India and between 1803—9 expanded her control to the neighbouring areas of Western Sikkim, Gorakhpur, Garhwal and Kumaon. This brought Nepal into conflict with the East India Company and Ochterloney's invasion of Nepal in 1814-15 got bogged down and he had to make peace. By the peace treaty of Sanjauli, the British gained the territories of Kumaon, Garhwal and Gorakhpur.

During the middle of the 19th century the ruling dynasty of the Shahs lost control of the kingdom to their "Mukhtiyar" Jang Bahadur Rana who established the Rana dynasty, allied himself with the British and invaded Tibet in 1855. (He first discontinued the five yearly mission to China). "The resultant treaty between Nepal and Tibet was as between two independent states and direct diplomatic relations were established on their pre-1793 basis".<sup>2</sup> The Nepalese merchants acquired Special rights by this treaty in Lhasa. However, in 1883 there was a riot against the Nepalese merchants in Lhasa, and thus their virtual monopoly of trade with Nepal and India came to an end. Now only Rice and Salt trade was left in their hands.

2. Leo-E Rose, "Nepal—Strategy for Survival"—1971.

## SIKKIM

Sikkim lies east of Nepal and at one time included the Chumbi valley, which forms a wedge south of the main Himalayan range and through it runs the main route to Tibet. Bhutan and Nepal had both invaded Sikkim in the late 18th century occupying east and west respectively of the river Tista. In 1792, Chinese invasion of Nepal also resulted in the annexation of the Chumbi valley to Tibet. Again in 1803 Nepal also annexed eastern Sikkim. However, after the Anglo-Nepalese war the British restored this area to Sikkim and reinstated the Raja but under British suzerainty. In 1830, the British took on lease a tract on the outer Sikkim hills as far as Darjeeling and developed it for tea plantations. The Sikkimese had resented sequestration of their territory. The Sikkimese sought Tibetan help. In 1849 Dr. Campbell and Dr. Hooker who were developing the area were captured by the Sikkimese and released only when the British threatened armed retaliation. Another attempt by the Sikkimese in 1872 to regain the area was also suppressed. The British next signed a treaty with the Chinese Ambassador in Lhasa in 1890 by which China agreed to a delimitation of the border between Sikkim and Tibet and subsequently they also agreed to some regulations regarding trade. But both the treaty and the regulations were repudiated by the Tibetans.

## BHUTAN

In the 7th Century AD, a line of Indian Chiefs ruled over Bhutan, under the tutelage of Kamarupa (Assam). During the 9th Century AD, Bhutan was infiltrated by people of Tibetan stock. By the 17th century the Drukpa sect of Lamaism became the prevailing religion of Bhutan. However the eastern part of Bhutan continued to be inhabited by the indigenous tribes whom the Tibetans called the Monpas.

The Drukpas recognised the spiritual leadership of Lhasa but maintained territorial sovereignty. In 1644, Gusri Khan the Mongol ruler of Tibet sent Mongol troops to Bhutan but they had to retreat. In 1648-9, however, a combined Tibet-Mongol force was sent and was at first successful only to suffer a crushing defeat in 1657.

Tibet got another opportunity to intervene in Bhutan during 1728-30 when there was a dispute over the choice of the Chief Lama of Bhutan. The Bhutanese had to accept an agreement with Tibet to maintain a representative at Lhasa, an arrangement which continued until 1951.

The Bhutanese state was a theocracy till the end of the 18th century. Gradually, however the political power passed into the hands of a "Devaraja" line of rulers who had been originally appointed by the Chief Lama. Bhutan annexed the area of the Duars at this time, but Warren Hastings was able to intervene and restored the area to the Raja of Cooch-Bihar. In 1864-65 the Bhutanese again attempted to take the areas of the Duars and were defeated. Thereafter, the British annexed the Duars and they also took the Kalimpong area from Bhutan in 1895.

The Chinese had laid claim to Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal in 1910. This was repudiated by the British and it also led to the signing of a treaty between India and Bhutan by which the External Affairs and the Defence of Bhutan became the responsibility of the British India Government. This treaty was renewed by the Indian Government in 1949.

#### INDIA, CHINA AND TIBET

Tibet remained isolated because of its geographical position. Access to it from China lay through the Tsinghai region in the North-East and from the Sikang region in the South-East and these routes were obstructed by some of the most fierce tribes inhabiting these inaccessible mountainous areas. As opposed to this, the routes from India were easily traversable. The main route lay through the Chumbi valley, in-between Sikkim and Bhutan. The access from Central Asia into Tibet is relatively easy. This lies through the Aksai Chin region of Ladakh. This route from Central Asia (passing through Sinkiang), is the only all-weather route and had been used by the Dsungar Mongols in 1717 when they occupied Lhasa. Subsequently, at the end of the 19th century F. Younghusband advised the Chinese Amban in Sinkiang to occupy areas South of Kuenlun mountains and it was in response to this that the Chinese claim for the first time to have sent a representative to survey the area. Chinese ignorance regarding this region was demonstrated when in 1885 Carey passed into Tibet, along the route discovered by Kishen Singh (of the Indian survey department). Carey followed this route along the Eastern side of Aksai Chin from Rudok, via Polu to Kiria and surprised the Chinese authorities at Kiria who had not known of the existence of the Polu road to India. Therefore, when the Chinese built the Aksai Chin Highway passing through Indian territory, they had violated Indian territorial sovereignty, in spite of the existence of the alternative Polu route laying east of Aksai Chin. In addition to the Polu route, the China had available to them an easier and longer detour from Kiria to Lhasa via

Tengsi Nor (Lake) which had been followed in 1724 by the Chinese-Tibetan forces in pursuit of a rebel prince of the Quosot Mongols who had fled via the Kiria-Kotal pass into Turkistan.<sup>3</sup> The independent status of Tibet becomes abundantly clear when we examine Tibetan historiography. Tibet was united by King Son-Tsan Gampo under the banner of Buddhism. He invaded China and peace was restored when a Chinese princess was given in marriage to him. Prior to this a Nepalese princess was given in marriage thus recognising the might of Tibetan power and her sovereignty. Charles Bell<sup>4</sup> has quoted the texts of two stone pillars in Lhasa, the first regarding a Sino-Tibetan peace treaty concluded in the first half of the 8th century, and the second referring to Tibetan conquest in Western China in 763 A.D. The Chinese presence was for the first time required when the Tibetans asked for Chinese help to drive away the Dsungar Mongols in the early 18th century, after which the Chinese posted two Ambans (Magistrates or Ambassadors) at Lhasa unilaterally. These Ambans exerted authority and interfered in Tibetan affairs, with interruptions, until the collapse of the Manchu dynasty in 1911. Similarly Indian representatives were posted in Tibet from 1904 to 1954 when they were withdrawn.

Tibet's boundary with Ladakh was first delineated by King Skydie Magnon who ruled Western Tibet and Ladakh during the early 10th century. He divided his Kingdom among his three sons, the eldest being given the area of present-day Ladakh, the second the area of Western Tibet, and the third Spiti, Lahaul and Zaskar, the southern-most province of Ladakh district. In this manner the Ladakh-Tibetan border was defined as early as the 10th century. This boundary was confirmed in 1684 after the war between the King of Ladakh and Tibetan forces of the 5th Dalai Lama and "The borders then set stood unchanged even after the Dogra conquest".<sup>5</sup> Infact they were confirmed by the treaty concluded in 1842 between Tibet and China on one hand and the Dogras and Sikhs on the other. Finally the Ladakh-Tibet border was surveyed and delineated by A. Cunningham and the other British officers appointed under the treaty of Amritsar, 1846. The report of these boundary commissioners revealed, that, "the boundary is well defined by piles of stones, which were set up after the last expulsion of the Sokpo or the Mongol

3. See L. Petch, "China and Tibet in the Early Eighteenth Century" 1950.

4. Charles Bell "Tibet Past and Present" Appendices I and II.

5. L. Petch, "A study on the chronicles of Ladakh", p. 158.

hordes in 1687 A.D."<sup>6</sup> It is also clear, "that the alignment made by the Indians in 1960 was known and accepted nearly a century before"<sup>7</sup> by the above mentioned Boundary Commission.

Examining the boundary question between Ladakh and Sinkiang, we find the frontier areas of Kashmir and the mountains to the north of them are a conglomeration of some of the highest peaks, plateau and desert regions. The plateau of Ladakh is separated from the Tarim Basin to the north by the Kuen-lun and the Kara Koram ranges. In between these ranges are the Raksam Valley in the west and the source region of the Yarkand and Karakash rivers to the east. Further to the east are the Lingzi Tang salt plains and Aksai Chin area. The fertile Raksam valley is about a hundred miles long bounded on the west by the Taghdumbash Pamirs. The Pamirs are the top of this gigantic mountain system and comprise the Pamir, the little Pamirs and the Taghdumbash.

The Russians had begun to explore and occupy the Pamirs after the agreement of 1885 with the British, fixing the border of Afghanistan from Hari Rud on the Persian border to Khwaja Saleh on the river OXUS. The upper reaches of the river Oxus and the Pamirs upto the Sarikol range were a vacuum. The British while unable to go into this area themselves were keen that the Russians also should not occupy it, fearing that the passes across the Hindukush and the Kara Koram would then become accessible to them. The British first attempted to induce Afghanistan and China to occupy this area from West and East respectively, but neither was willing to take on this responsibility in the face of Russian advance. In view of the Russian advances into the Pamirs in 1891 and 1892 under Lanov, a settlement with the Russians became urgent and both sides agreed to set up the Pamir boundary commission which completed its work in 1895. This allowed the Russians to annex the Pamirs, except the Taghdumbash. Afghanistan agreed to hold the Wakhan corridor as a narrow wedge between the two Empires and this was enough to lay at rest the spectre of Russian advance into India. This left Sinkiang as the only area of possible conflict between the two powers. China was not strong enough to withstand the pressure from either of them to maintain the independence of Sinkiang. Sinkiang was incorporated into the Chinese empire in 1758 but it was "lost four times and gained five times by the Chinese".<sup>8</sup> The last reconquest of Sinkiang was after

6. Dorothy Woodman, "Himalayan Frontiers", 1969, The Cresset Press.

7. Dorothy Woodman, "Himalayan Frontiers", P. 42

8. C. P. Skrine, "Chinese Central Asia", London, 1926.



the death of Yakub Beg in 1877 and occupation by the Chinese in 1878 when the present name of Sinkiang was given, meaning "New Dominions". During the rule of Yakub Beg the British had been keen to explore the various routes leading from Ladakh to Sinkiang. In this regard they had signed a treaty with Kashmir to explore the route via the Chang-Chenmo valley. The Kashmir Government had established a fort at Shahidulla before the time of Yakub Beg. This lay north of Lingzi-Tang plains which include Aksai-Chin as a part. In 1890, Younghusband met the Amban of Yarkand and told him that the Viceroy of India had been led to believe that the Chinese considered their frontier extending only as far as the Kilian pass, and that the intervening territory was a tract of "no man's land"<sup>9</sup>.....This showed the Russophobia tendency of the British India Government and thus led them to encourage China to extend its boundaries South of the Kuen-lun. Although China occupied Sinkiang, it had not claimed areas south of Kuen-lun mountains. In 1892, however, they made forward moves into the trans-Kuen-lun areas and took the fort of Shahidulla and also set up a pillar on Kara Koram Pass. It was at this time also that they claim to have sent their representative to survey Aksai Chin area for the first time. In 1897 "Johnson's Atlas" published by the Government of India showed Aksai Chin as a part of Kashmir. The Chinese Tao Tai in Sinkiang received a copy of this Atlas and when it was shown to the Russian Consul General Petrovsky, he immediately asked Tao Tai to protest to the British representative Macartney regarding the inclusion of Aksai Chin in Kashmir. However, the Tao Tai, did not at any rate regard it as a part of Sinkiang as China was to claim after 1950. As far as can be ascertained from Chinese sources, the areas south of the Kuen-lun mountains were never claimed as part of Sinkiang. In the earliest maps published during the reign of Emperor Chien Lung (1735-96), and in the later maps of the Emperor Tao Kuang published in 1821 and 1824, the Kuen-lun had continued to be the boundary. As late as 1890, when the Chinese Minister Hung Ta-Chin had furnished a map to Macartney at Kashgar, both Aksai Chin and Lingzi Tang, had been shown south of the boundaries of the "New Dominions" (Sinkiang).

#### THE STATUS OF TIBET

For seventeen years after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933, the Government of Tibet was in the hands of an interim

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9. Quoted in G.N. Rao's 'The India China Border' P. 35.

regime approved by the Kashag. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama having been born in 1935, was too young to govern.

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed and the Communists became the rulers of China. The Tibetan Government resolved to send a delegation to China in 1949 after the Communists take over. Even before the Communists had made a formal proclamation, the Peking Radio had broadcast on September 10, that the People's Liberation Army (P.L.A.) was ready to "liberate" Tibet. On September 16, the Communists occupied Sinkiang. On November 24, Peking Radio broadcast a message of Mao Tse-Tung exhorting the people of Tibet to overthrow the Dalai Lama.

The invasion of Tibet in 1950 raised the question of the status of Tibet for the Indian Government. The British India Government had entered into a boundary agreement with Tibet in 1914 and this was being acted upon by both sides in respect of the border between the two countries east of Bhutan, called the McMahon Line. Ever since the expulsion of the Chinese from Tibet in 1911, Tibet was an independent state, conducting its own external and internal affairs. The British had arranged a truce between Tibet and China in 1918 terminating the war in Szechwan. India had established diplomatic relations with Lhasa in 1921 when Charles Bell was posted there. He was followed in 1936 by Basil Gould. However, Prime Minister Nehru declared in Parliament on 6 December 1950, that China's suzerainty over Tibet notwithstanding, Tibet's autonomy should remain unblemished. But even this enunciation of Tibet's status was denounced by China. What had changed in 1950 was not Tibet's status since 1911, but the power of China and its determination to impose its will over Tibet.

Since 1904 India had trading and political facilities under the treaty signed by F. Younghusband. Soon after their arrival in Lhasa in 1952, the Chinese terminated these facilities. Again, India did not make an issue of it and when the Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-Lai suggested to the Indian Ambassador Panikkar that the Political Agency at Lhasa should be transformed into a Consulate General in exchange for a similar Chinese office in Bombay, India fell in line and an announcement was made on September 15 marking this change of status of the Indian representative at Lhasa.

To work out a new agreement between India and China vis-a-vis Tibet, formal talks were begun on 31st December 1953 in Peking. The agreement as completed in May 1954 was important for what it

stated but even more so for what it omitted to state. It omitted any reference to Tibet's independent status, and declared it as part of China. It also omitted any reference to the boundary question, although Chinese maps showed large parts of India's northern territories as parts of China, and when the boundary question was raised, the Chinese refused to discuss it, saying that it was an agreement about trading rights only. The agreement made no reference to the existing Indian rights in Tibet since 1904 and was worded as if the trading rights in Tibet were being agreed to for the first time and on a reciprocal basis for Chinese trading markets to be set up at Kalimpong, Siliguri and Calcutta. Thus the Chinese obtained entry into Calcutta port through which they moved goods, arms, as well as personnel, to and from Tibet. The Chinese were also allowed to open branches of "Peoples Bank of China", through which they financed their operations in India and Tibet. The point that was highlighted the most about the treaty, however, was the doctrine of "Panchsheel" which was enunciated in it as governing the Indo-Chinese relations. The treaty also named six passes in the Middle Sector through which trade could be carried out between India and Tibet (China). The Indian Government was guided by its desire to achieve Indo-Chinese amity when it gave up India's special relationship with Tibet, and did not stand up for Tibet's status which was that of an independent nation since 1912, when the 13th Dalai Lama had announced his country's independence.

#### BORDER AGGRESSION 1954—62

In October 1954, Prime Minister Nehru made a goodwill visit to China and raised the question of Chinese maps which showed northern territories of India as a part of China. Chou En-Lai evaded the issue by stating that "inaccurate boundary alignment between India and China (on Chinese maps) were merely reproductions of old Kuomintang maps and that the present government had not had time to revise them".

The non-aligned conference at Bandung in April 1955 gave China an opportunity to make friends with the non-aligned countries of Asia and Africa. When Chou En-Lai established contact with the Prime Minister of Pakistan he is reported, according to L. Rushbrook Williams, to have given the hint that all was not well with Indo-Chinese relations. The Indian visit of Krushchev and Bulganin in the same year when Krushchev had made a statement in favour of India's case in Kashmir and also offered to set up a

million-ton steel plant, further brought Pakistan and China together. The Chinese countered the above by inviting the Prime Minister of Pakistan to Peking, a visit that took place in October 1956.

China's intrusions in the Middle Sector began soon after the Indo-Chinese agreement of 1954. In July 1954, they complained that Indian troops had crossed Niti Pass into Tibet at Wuje. Actually it had been a Chinese intrusion into Bara Hoti, south of the pass. In April 1956, Chinese troops crossed over the Nilang Pass and in September over the Shipki Pass. All these passes (Niti, Nilang and Shipki) had been mentioned in the agreement of 1954 as among the six routes over which trade was to pass between India and Tibet. There was, therefore, no question of any misunderstanding. A deliberate flouting of the 1954 agreement took place and the points of intrusion chosen were those near which there had been local disputes earlier. China kept playing the double cards of reconciliation and encroachment simultaneously. In November 1956 during Chou En-Lai's visit to India, he informed Nehru that the Government of China had accepted the formalization of the McMahon Line in Burma and proposed to recognise it in the case of India also. At the same time they built, according to their own case, a motor road from Yarkand to Gartok, "of which a section of 180 K.M. runs through this area,"<sup>10</sup> ie, the disputed area of Aksai Chin. The construction of this road was known to Indian authorities from intelligence reports, and in 1958 one of the two Indian patrol parties sent to survey the roads built by the Chinese in the Aksai Chin area was captured by the Chinese. Further Chinese inroads were accelerated in Ladakh, where Chinese troops crossed into Indian territory along the Pangong Lake in July 1958 at Khurnak Fort. This was a place of former dispute with Tibetans in 1924 when the latter had accepted that the area was outside their territory.

In July 1958, the Chinese magazine "China Pictorial" published a map showing 50,000 sq-miles of Indian territory as Chinese. Prime Minister Nehru protested and Chou En-Lai replied after a delay in January 1959 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 the matter". Evidently they needed the time in order to continue their advance into Ladakh. The Indian Patrol parties had reported that the Chinese had been extending their surveys

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10. "The Sino Indian Boundary Question," Peking, 1962.

further west of Aksai-Chin road to the depth of 70 to 80 miles within Indian territory, south of Haji Langar and west of Lanak La".<sup>11</sup>

In March 1959, the Dalai Lama took refuge in India and the violent Chinese reaction in the form of a propaganda tirade ended all fiction about China following the Panchsheel. The tempo of Chinese advance in Eastern Ladakh gained momentum. In July 1959, they advanced near Khurnak Fort which they had occupied the previous summer, and captured an Indian Patrol party near Spanggur. In response to Indian protest they replied that both Khurnak Fort and Spanggur were within Chinese territory. In August they occupied a hill overlooking Chushul further south and near an Indian Supply Air Field.

First blood was drawn by the Chinese when they attacked an Indian Post at Longju near Migyitun in Arunachal Pradesh and killed three men of the Assam rifles on August 25, 1959. In Ladakh, Chinese road building activity had been intensified and a second road south of the one through Aksai-Chin had been built. Along it the Chinese sent troops to Chang-Chenmo Valley and Chinese troops ambushed an Indian Patrol at Kongka Pass, south of the Chang Chenmo range on October 21, and 9 Indians were killed including their leader Karam Singh. The place of the incident was 40 to 50 miles west of the traditional boundary but the Chinese asserted that the Indians had "unlawfully intruded into the Sinkiang territory south of Kongka Pass".

The Chinese Premier proposed on 7th Nov. 1959 that armed forces of both sides should withdraw from the line of the actual control as on that date but they continued to advance until 1962. According to Prime Minister Nehru, the Chinese had within 3 years "constructed a large network of military roads and posts west of Aksai Chin road.. ...At certain points the network of military posts were more than 100 miles west of Chinese positions in 1959".<sup>12</sup>

The final conflict, known as the 30 days' War began at Dhola, where on 4th June 1962 the Assam Rifles had set up a post near the tri-junction of India, Bhutan and Tibet. On 20th Sept. the Chinese made a surprise attack on the post and "settled into positions near and dominating the post"<sup>13</sup>. They made a massive attack on

11. BN Mullik, "The Chinese Betrayal".

12. Vide Annexure to a letter from PM Nehru to PM Chou-En-Lai dated 14 Nov., 1962.

13. Neville Maxwell "India's China War"

October 20, 1962 as part of a full scale operation on India's Northern borders both in the North-East as well as in Ladakh on the Western Sector.

#### BORDER CLAIMS OF CHINA AND INDIA

The Chinese case on the border dispute with India is contained in the book "The Sino-Indian Boundary Question", published in 1962. The Chinese had avoided making any commitment till 1959 when they put forward the claim that "The Eastern Sector of the traditional customary boundary seen (lies) along the southern foot of the Himalayas, the Middle Sector along the Himalayas, and the Western Sector along the Kara Koram range". The area under dispute was stated to be 90,000 sq kms in the Eastern Sector, 2000 sq kms in the Middle Sector and 33,000 sq kms in the Western Sector. The evidence produced by China in support of her claims was as follows :—

#### THE WESTERN SECTOR

The disputed area always belonged to Hotien of China's Sinkiang\*\*. Regarding Aksai Chin, they claimed that the (disputed) area has always served as the traffic artery linking Sinkiang with Ari area in Tibet. The Kirghi and Uighar herdsmen of Sinkiang "are in the custom of grazing their cattle here".

#### THE MIDDLE SECTOR

The Chinese claimed that "the local authorities of Tibet region have kept the land conferring documents or land deeds concerning these places issued in the past five centuries".

#### THE EASTERN SECTOR

The area between the so-called McMahon line and the boundary line at the southern foot of the Himalayas has always belonged to China, and was until recently under Chinese jurisdiction. In particular, the Chinese claim about Tawang (east of Bhutan) was that "by the beginning of the 18th century, the local Government of Tibet region unified the whole of Monyul ..... used always to appoint officials of the administration organs ..... collect taxes and exercise judicial authority". Regarding the Mishmi territory in the N.E.

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\*\*But the Chinese TAO TAI of Kashgar had called it as part of Tibet and had not regarded it as coming within his jurisdiction, see page 327 *ibid*.

corner, the Chinese claimed that "In Loyul and Lower Tsayul, upto 1946 ..... the people continued to pay taxes and render corvee to the Lhasa authorities".

We may note that the Chinese claim in respect of actual possession or line of control much less than the above noted claims. They did not contest that India was in possession of the disputed area in the eastern and middle sectors but they contended that the Indian possession was only since 1950. In respect of the Western Sector they asserted their own continuous possession and stated that "beginning from 1961" India Set Up "43 Strong points encroaching on Chinese territory".

An Indian publication of 1963 "The Chinese Threat" gives the Indian case, which may be summarised as follows :—

#### EASTERN SECTOR

(a) The British Indian Government which succeeded the Ahom rulers exercised administrative control over the tribals living in this area. That these areas always belonged to India is clear from the Indian legislative enactments. In sharp contrast the only document that the Chinese could adduce "indicated ecclesiastical connections which cannot be confused with exercise of authority".

#### WESTERN SECTOR

(b) From 1957 onwards the Chinese were gradually taking possession of the areas subsequently claimed by them and had been setting up military posts further west, and in doing so they came into conflict with Indian Border personnel. They extended their posts and communications till they occupied the so-called area of actual control as on 7 November 1959, though they actually occupied it by 1962. The Indian side claimed that the southern limits of Sinkiang never extended south of the Kuen-lun-ranges and furnished documentary evidence "that the people of Ladakh had used the Aksai Chin and other areas as of right of trading, hunting, grazing, salt collecting", and evidence pertaining to regular administration, revenue settlements, and legislative enactments and touring of officials was furnished in respect of the disputed areas".

#### MIDDLE SECTOR

(c) In regard to the middle sector the Indian case was supported by histories of local kingdoms and also referred to administrative records which they claimed "mirrored an unbroken and continuous exercise of normal governmental authority down till today."

## CONCLUSION

China accepted the McMahon Line on the border treaty with Burma in 1960. After the 1962 conflict with India, they also withdrew beyond the McMahon Line. In negotiations with India prior to the conflict Chou En-Lai kept saying to Nehru that the Chinese Government would not contest the borderline as drawn along the Himalayan watershed in the area, but he was anxious that India should concede to the Chinese the area in Ladakh where the Chinese had advanced gradually, first around the road passing through Aksai Chin which they built, and later on, the area further to the west of it. In respect of the latter, the fact that the Chinese kept shifting and expanding their claims showed clearly that they were not in possession of any area in Ladakh, and the frequent border clashes since 1956 showed that they kept advancing in the face of Indian occupation.

India's case that the traditional customary boundary lay along the Himalayan watershed was not in fact contested by the Chinese. They denounced the boundary drawn by the British but they accepted that the Himalaya provided the traditional customary boundary as of old. However, Chou En-Lai wanted to legitimise the occupation of Aksai Chin and therefore advanced the case for the Kara Koram instead of the Kuen-lun mountains being the boundary in Ladakh.

The Chinese never had any claim to this area South of the Kuen-lun range. In fact it was after the visit of Francis Younghusband to the Amban in Sinkiang in the 1890's that the Chinese were encouraged to venture into the area south of Kuen-lun. The Chinese claim to have sent a surveyor to the Aksai Chin who, they say, went south to the Chang Chenmo river and then came back to Golwan river, i.e., went through Aksai Chin. A number of Historical Chinese maps showing Sinkiang drew the boundary as along the Kuen-lun range. The Chinese's claim to the area is therefore less than flimsy. When the Chinese found that India was not going to accept a negotiated settlement on this basis, they kept occupying still more territory in Ladakh till they occupied practically the whole of the area north of the Chang Chenmo river in the south and to the Chip Chap river in the north. Presumably they did this in order to strengthen their bargaining position. A so-called Line of Actual Control as on 7 Nov. 1959 was stated to be in existence but this was never spelt out and eventually claimed to cover nearly all the area they came to occupy by their continuing encroachments right till the conflict of 1962.

The Colombo Powers suggested that the Chinese should withdraw to a line 20 km behind what they claimed to be the line of 7 Nov.



1959. But even this the Chinese did not fully accept as they, subsequent to their withdrawal, set up a number of military posts to the west of it. In the eastern and middle sector however the Chinese withdrew to the north of the Himalayan watershed. Any settlement with the Chinese must reckon with the persistent refusal which China has displayed with regard to vacating the lands taken by the aggression in Ladakh.

The Chinese claim that the Aksai Chin Highway is the only all weather road into Tibet and therefore of strategic importance to China. The fact that other routes into Tibet existed and which have been enumerated earlier, clearly brings out the falseness of the Chinese claim. However, in the present context settlement of the disputed boundary question is of utmost importance and even if the Chinese wish to keep the area through which the Aksai Chin Highway passes, then they should be willing to settle for an exchange of territory. For India the Mt Kailas and Mansarowar region is of importance and three of the main rivers of India take their origin in this region (The Indus, Brahmaputra and the Sutluj). Besides, the above region holds a religious and mythological sanctity for all Hindus, but for the Chinese the above region is of no such value. An exchange of this nature must come from the political leadership of both countries if it is to take any concrete shape.

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