

Editorial

1. This year is the 58th Anniversary of the 1962 Sino-Indian war. The war ended in a defeat for India; a defeat that still evokes emotions, recriminations and painful memories. To commemorate this period and in line with the happenings in Ladakh this year, the articles in this issue have focus on China and the 1962 war.

2. China's insistence on the 'return', to China, of the territory constituting Arunachal Pradesh, and even pushing forward into hitherto quiet areas in Ladakh, is a form of repudiation of the McMahon Line and an attempt to deter what Beijing takes to be potentially threatening behaviour by India. In the Chinese mind, this behaviour could range from supporting an inquiry into the Covid-19 spread and Chinese culpability to India's tilt towards the US and the Quad. In addition, the history of Indian support for unarmed and armed Tibetan resistance to Chinese Communist rule of Tibet and continuation of the Special Frontier Force (SFF) makes Beijing fearful that India might again, someday, work to undermine her rule in Tibet. An open territorial dispute serves as a perennial threat to 'teach India a lesson'. This, in turn, conveys to India that edging into a strategic alignment with the US offers security benefits. The intensity of China's implicit threat can be turned up or down by Beijing depending on the circumstances. Keeping the border issue open dovetails with China's continuing entente with Pakistan and may even be based on an understanding between Beijing and Islamabad.

3. The lead article, titled 'Chairman Mao's Road to War and Salvation in 1962', is by the eminent historian Shri Claude Arpi. Going back into history, he writes about the reasons why Mao Tse went to war with India in 1962. Deeply insightful as always, Claude brings out little known facts as well as known diplomatic duelling of that time, both of which have become opaque in official as well as public memory.

4. The next two articles are 'Déjà vu Standoffs in Eastern Ladakh' by Lt Gen Rajan Bakhshi, PVSM, UYSM (Retd), a former GOC of the Corps which guards Ladakh and 'Ostracising the Ghost of Namka Chu—Defending Kameng' by Lt Gen Anil Ahuja, PVSM,

UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM** (Retd) who has consecutively commanded the Division and Corps guarding Kameng. The first clarifies the events in Ladakh and recommends actions for the future. The second recapitulates, in brief, the operations in Kameng and then suggests a contemporary concept of 'offensive-defence'. They weave past and present events together in Ladakh and the Kameng sector of Arunachal Pradesh.

5. Then are two articles about unsung soldiers of the 1962 war. The first is about Hav Shere Thapa of 2nd Battalion the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (2 JAK RIF) whose memorial and place of a last stand were marked by the Chinese and now has become a place to visit. The article, titled 'Shere Thapa's Last Stand and Operations in the Upper Subansiri 1962', by Lt Gen AC Soneja, AVSM**, VSM** (Retd), ex CO 2 JAK RIF, is interspersed with the operations in the Upper Subansiri. The second article is by Lt Gen Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd), Head Editorial Team, who has commanded 2 Mountain Division. It is about Sep Karam Chand of 4 Dogra. He was just an ordinary soldier. His name is one amongst the 326 names on the Walong war memorial. He was 'missing presumed killed' in the war, and rested in an unmarked grave till his remains were found 48 years later at Walong, during the period of the author's command. His story titled 'With Sepoy Karam Chand at the Battle of Walong' is told in autobiographical fiction style merged with facts of the bitter battle at Walong in the Lohit Valley.

6. The next two articles are about the Indian Air Force in the 1962 war, and the Indian Navy, which remained out of the war because the war remained confined to the land frontier. The first by AVM (Dr) Arjun Subramaniam, AVSM (Retd) is titled 'Non-use of Offensive Air Power in 1962 was a Mistake but Does Not Tell the Whole Story'. He elaborates in detail the folly of not using the offensive strength of the Indian Air Force which could have made a difference. In the second article, titled 'The Indian Navy and PLA Navy in 1962', Cdr Subhasish Sarangi writes about the maritime situation in 1962 in the Indian Ocean Region and brings out the strengths of the Chinese and Indian navies at that time.

7. The next article, by Maj Gen RS Yadav, VSM (Retd), is titled 'De-ciphering Chinese Intent Behind 'Unilateral Decision to Change

Status Quo at LAC' should be the Key to India's Military Response and Follow-up Strategy'. It is about the Chinese intrusions in May 2020 and attempts to deduce the PLA's immediate military aim(s) and intent, and suggests India's military response and follow-up strategy. Thereafter, in the backdrop of the ongoing standoff in Ladakh between India and China, Shri Gaurav Kumar, Assistant Research and Editor at the USI, in his article titled 'India-China Border Agreements' elucidates the important details of various confidence building agreements signed between the two nations towards management of activities at the border and provides the links to these agreements to facilitate further research on the subject by those interested.

8. The penultimate article is a Personal Narrative titled 'My Face-off Moment with the PLA' by Lt Gen Baljit Singh, AVSM, VSM (Retd). He reminisces about a patrol he undertook in the Central sector on the eve of the 1962 war and the nature of standoffs at that time. The last article is not about the 1962 war. It covers an earlier war. The article titled 'Winning a Battle Honour: 1 Sikh LI in Pyawbwe, 1945' by Col Harjeet Singh (Retd) is about how 1 Sikh LI earned the battle honour 'Mandalay' in 1944. The article goes back into the exploits of this sterling battalion to show the steel it is made of and which it can display with clear directions. Unfortunately, in 1962 at Sela, the battalion like others suffered due to confused orders which led to a withdrawal without cohesion and control. The fact that the battalion in comparison to others at Se La came out relatively unscathed with 22 killed and 35 wounded is a testimony to its inherent strength.

9. The issue also carries four short book reviews of the following books:

- Failed States: The Need for a Realistic Transition in Afghanistan
By Musa Khan Jalalzai
Reviewed by Maj Gen Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)
- Trials, Tremors and Hope: Political Economy of Contemporary Nepal
By Ram Saran Mahat
Reviewed by Dr Geeta Kochhar

- One Mountain Two Tigers: India, China and the High Himalayas
Ed. Shri Shakti Sinha
Reviewed by Ms Sharanya Rajiv
- Democracy and Authoritarianism in Pakistan: The Role of The Military and Political Parties
By Shiraz Sheikh.
Reviewed by Shri Gaurav Kumar

Wish all readers a reminiscing and educative reading.

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Chairman Mao's Road to War and Salvation in 1962

Shri Claude Arpi®

Abstract

This year is the 58th anniversary of the 1962 war. An angle of the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict that has been insufficiently studied is about Mao Zedong's motivations to go to war. Why did China suddenly decide to humiliate India? The historical sources are still sparse, but going through some available documents one can get a fairly good idea of the Chinese motivations, or more exactly the 'political' compulsions, which pushed the 'Great Helmsman' into this win-win venture. This article attempts to look inside the Great Helmsman's mind, Chinese politics and the global situation at that point of time to get the answers. Readers will find many similarities in the Chinese leadership's behaviour, then and now.

The Great Leap Backwards

The largest man-made starvation in human history began in

China in February 1958 through Mao's 'Great Leap Forward'. By initiating his Leap Forward, Mao Zedong's objective was to surpass Great Britain in industrial production within 15 years. For the purpose, every Chinese had to start producing steel at home with a backyard furnace. In agriculture, Mao thought that very large communes would cater for a many-fold increase in the cereal production to make China into a heaven of abundance. Introduced and managed with frantic fanaticism, it did not take much time before the programme collapsed. One man tried to raise his voice against the general madness and sycophancy. This was Peng Denhai, Defence Minister and old companion of Mao during the Long March. Mao immediately 'purged' old Peng. The Great Leap

Forward was to continue till 1961/1962 and it is today estimated that between 40-50 million died of hunger in China during these three years. At the beginning of 1962, while tension was increasing on the Indian border, did Nehru realise that China was a starving nation? No, very few grasped what was going on in China at that time.

By the end of 1961, Mao was practically out of power because of the Great Leap (Backwards). Dr Zhisui Li, Mao's personal physician recounts how in 1961 Mao was, "...depressed over the agricultural crisis and angry with the party elite, upon whom he was less able now to work his will. Mao was in temporary eclipse, spending most of his time in bed".¹

A year later, at the beginning of the fateful 1962, Mao's situation had not improved and Dr Li noted, "1962 was a political turning point for Mao. In January, when he convened another expanded Central Committee work conference to discuss the continuing disaster, his support within the party was at its lowest".

During the Conference, known as the 7,000 Cadres' Conference, Lui Shaoqi declared, "...man-made disasters strike the whole country". He was targeting Mao. After a month, as the meeting could not conclude, Mao decided that it was enough; he would temporarily retire to stage a comeback against 'left adventurism', and the 'capitalist roaders', later. By the fall of 1962, Mao would return with a bang. The conflict with India will be closely linked with his comeback.

The Three Reconciliations and the One Reduction

In the early 1960s, Wang Jiaxiang was still one of the senior-most leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Wang was appointed first as People's Republic of China's Ambassador to Soviet Union, and then returned to Beijing as the Under Secretary of the Foreign Ministry. In 1956, he was promoted as Commissioner and Secretary of the Central Committee of CCP. During the Lushan Meeting in 1959, he objected to the catastrophic agriculture policy of Mao. In 1959, his close friend, Zhang Wentian² incurred the same fate as Marshall Peng Dehuai, he was purged.

Wang managed to temporarily survive; he even remained for a few months an important voice in foreign policy.

Wang's grand idea was to reconstruct China. For this, it was necessary for the People's Republic to have a 'softer' foreign policy line towards the United States, the Soviet Union, and India. Wang also thought that China should spend less on 'foreign aid', at a time China itself was going through such difficult times. Wang thought that the government should issue a statement defining the general principles of its foreign policy; he believed that peaceful coexistence needed to be stressed. His theory became known as the 'Three Reconciliations and the One Reduction'³. The three reconciliations were with the US, the Soviet Union and India and the reduction referred to unnecessary foreign expenditures.

Wang Jiaxiang spoke with Liu Shaoqi (the boss of the Party in the absence of Mao) and Lui apparently agreed with him. On 27 February 1962, Wang put his thoughts in a letter to Zhou Enlai and other senior leaders. The letter was not sent to Mao. It is greatly helpful to understand China's relations with India, especially at a time when Delhi had adopted a 'Forward Policy' for its Northern frontiers. Wang Jiaxiang challenged, to some extent, the usual Communist "foreign policy route, which was probably the main reason why Mao Zedong later sharply criticised his views. To Mao, a concrete policy may be discussed, but the fundamental theoretical concept should never be questioned". In hindsight, it is evident that the policies the Chinese leaders adopted before the summer of 1962 were in accordance with the strategic principles laid out by Wang Jiaxiang.

The proposal for peace talks on the border issue in the correspondence between the governments of India and China, in the spring and summer of 1962, were probably a direct consequence of this new policy, though by the end of August, the tone changed and threats were added to the proposal for negotiations. However, we shall see that it is mainly the return of Mao Zedong on the centre stage and the 'leftisation' of China's foreign policy which brought the renouncement to the policy of 'peaceful coexistence' and ultimately the armed conflict with India. Because of the changes in the ideological basis, the foreign and

defence policy of China hardened and the conflict with India was the ultimate consequence.

Wang's policies, however, became visible at the World Peace Congress held in Moscow from 9 to 14 July. According to the US scholar MacFarquhar, in his *Origin of the Cultural Revolution*⁴, "[China and Soviet Union] acted with restraint. Though both sides maintained their positions, some agreements were reached". Regarding India, the same scholar explained, "Wang Jiaxiang seemed to be seeking at least a partial revival of the 'Bandung line' of the mid-1950s, according to which non-communist independent nations of the Third World were regarded as allies in the overarching struggle against imperialism. The line had effectively been discarded in the aftermath of the 1959 Sino-Indian border clash, and as a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute. In his argument with Khrushchev, Mao had rejected the possibility of 'peaceful transition' from bourgeois regimes like Nehru's India to proletarian dictatorship and insisted that they would have to be overthrown by revolution".

It seems obvious that the Sino-Indian conflict would have not degenerated the way it did, if Wang Jiaxiang's policies had been followed.

Armed Coexistence, Jigsaw Pattern

Maxwell has argued that the Forward Policy, which began to be operative in December 1961 in the Eastern sector, was the root cause of the conflict between India and China. He quotes particularly the Dhola Post, which the Chinese considered as their territory, while India believed the area was a part of India.⁵ For Maxwell, the Indian action in this area was THE provocation which triggered the war. The policy of the Chinese government in the first months of 1962 followed the motto '*Armed Coexistence, Jigsaw Pattern*'. Practically, it meant that while both Armies were building their positions in the Western and Eastern sectors, the governments of China and India continued to 'coexist', exchanging a voluminous correspondence, sometimes bitter, sometimes more conciliatory. For example, in a note given by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassy of India in China on July 21, the Chinese diplomacy affirms: "The Chinese Government has repeatedly stated that China is not willing to fight with India and the

Sino-Indian boundary question can be settled only through routine negotiations. It has all along exercised the greatest forbearance and self-restraint towards Indian armed intrusions and provocations on many occasions. However, the Chinese Government can by no means sit idle while its frontier guards are being encircled and annihilated by aggressors".⁶ This jigsaw policy (opening new posts and offering negotiations) could have continued longer, at least till the winter, but this is without taking into account the 'return of Mao'.

On the Indian side, there was no unanimity in the Indian Army about holding the 'forward' posts (or creating new ones). Many saw the practical difficulties. Former Indian Chief of Army Staff, General KS Thimayya was one of them: "I cannot even as a soldier, envisage India taking on China in an open conflict on its own. China's present strength in man-power, equipment and aircraft exceeds our resources a hundredfold with the full support of the USSR and we could never hope to match China in the foreseeable future. It must be left to the politicians and diplomats to ensure our security". Unfortunately, Nehru had, till the last day, the absolute certitude that there could be NO war with China. He was comforted in this position by his intelligence Chief, BN. Mullik, who had no clue of what was happening in China.

The 'jigsaw' built-up continued. On 04 August, (two days before the beginning of the Beidaihe Conference⁷), Beijing wrote, "The Chinese Government approves of the suggestion put forth by the Indian Government in its note for further discussions on the Sino-Indian boundary question on the basis of the report of the officials of the two countries. There need not and should not be any pre-conditions for such discussions. As a matter of fact, if only the Indian side stop advancing into Chinese territory, a relaxation of the border situation will be effected at once. Since neither the Chinese nor the Indian Government wants war, and since both governments wish to settle the boundary question peacefully through negotiations, further discussions on the Sino-Indian boundary question on the basis of the report of the officials of the two countries [in 1960] should not be put off any longer. The Chinese Government proposes that such discussions be held as soon as possible, and that the level, date, place and other procedural matters for these discussions be immediately decided upon by consultations through diplomatic channels".⁸ Nehru himself

probably saw the increasingly frequent missives from Beijing as a bluff; the 'Chinese won't attack' remained the leitmotiv, the 'jigsaw' could continue for months, he thought; in three months' time, winter would settle over the Roof of the world and nothing serious could then happen.

South Block answered the Chinese offer: "The Government of India is prepared, as soon as the current tensions have eased and the appropriate climate is created, to enter into further discussions on the India-China boundary question on the basis of the report of the officials as contemplated during the meeting of Prime Minister Chou [Zhou] Enlai with the Prime Minister of India in 1960". Unfortunately, with the return of Mao at the helm of affairs in Beijing in early September, the current situation could not ease.

Some analysts believe that the swift take-over of Goa in December 1961 boosted the morale of the Indian Army; the top brass thought that they could handle the China problem similarly. Could the Portuguese enclave really be compared to the Middle Kingdom and the Portuguese police to the highly trained People's Liberation Army?

As the Chinese ambassador Pan Zili was leaving his post in India, the Indian Prime Minister invited him for lunch. During the informal talks, Nehru confirmed that India was ready to discuss the border issue without precondition. Unfortunately, during a debate in the Parliament, under the pressure of a democratic political dispensation, the Prime Minister had to back-track about the preconditions; this probably helped Mao to prove that nothing could be expected from the Indians.

Fire will Eventually be Consumed by Fire

Mao's physician remembered, "In the summer of 1962, [Mao] emerged from his retreat. ...I knew that his counter offensive was about to begin". The timings of the Sino-Indian conflict coincided exactly with the beginning of Mao's return to the political stage in China.

In September 1962, at the 10th Plenum of the Party's 8th Central Committee, Mao took back the fate of China into his hands; he denounced 'the members of the bourgeoisie right in the party

ranks'. He even attacked his mild Premier Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi. They were accused to try to rehabilitate the intellectuals and the scientists, "the party has not yet properly educated the intellectuals. The bourgeois spirit hangs like a ghost over their heads".⁹ We should not forget that till the summer of 1962, Zhou and Chen were the two main makers of China's India policy (along with Wang Jiaxiang) and they were in favour of negotiations with the Indian Government on the border issue.

In a Note dated 13 September 1962, Beijing hardened the tone. It quoted six recent incidents where India had trespassed into Chinese territory (in the Ladakh sector), "The Indian Government should be aware that shooting and shelling are no child's play; and he who plays with fire will eventually be consumed by fire. If the Indian side should insist on threatening by armed force, the Chinese border defence forces are duty-bound to defend their territory and thereby arouse their resistance; it must bear the responsibility for all the consequences arising therefrom". For China, India's mood was not conciliatory enough. Around that time, Mao said that the Indians had been pressing the Chinese along the border for three years; "if they try it a fourth year then China will strike back", he warned.

Internal Situation

By early October, Mao was again in total control of the events, and the people, in Beijing. He was assisted by his submissive servitor, Zhou Enlai and his new protégé and the heir apparent, Defence Minister Lin Biao. Several other leaders participated in the decision to 'slap' India. Some of the decisive meetings were attended not only by Liu Shaoqi, still Chairman of the PRC but also Deng Xiaoping, and, perhaps more importantly, Marshals Liu Bocheng, He Long, and Xu Xiangqian as well as General Luo Ruiqing, the Army Chief. Lui Bocheng was the main strategic advisor; Lui was against the idea of simply 'throwing out' the Indian troops from North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) by pushing them back after 'breaking up their attack, and surrounding them'; he wanted a more decisive victory.

As preparations were going on in Beijing, the Indian leaders were not too worried. They continued issuing orders to throw the

Chinese out of the Indian Territory. Unfortunately, the Indian Army was not physically ready to implement the politicians' order. Prime Minister Nehru had just left for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London while Defence Minister Krishna Menon went to perorate at the UN in New York. By the first days of October, the Indian Army Chief was nervous; he began to insist to get orders in writing from his political boss who lived in another world. No problem, said the Defence Minister, he would cable them from New York. One historian wrote that the notes exchanged between India and China "combined truculence directed at each other and reasonableness addressed to the outside world".

06 October 1962: China Decides to go to War

According to Chinese historians who wrote the history of the 1962 conflict, a first key meeting was held early October, perhaps on 06 October in the morning. Defence Minister and Deputy CMC chairman, Lin Biao, reported about the situation in the Tibet and the Xinjiang Military Districts; in another words the Western (Aksai Chin-Ladakh) and Eastern (NEFA) fronts. Lin said that the Indians continue to advance and often open fire on Chinese outposts; ten Chinese personnel had been killed or wounded during the last few days. Though the Chinese forces strictly followed the principle of not firing first, the situation in both sectors was fast worsening; the Indian Army had begun to concentrate troops and deploy artillery to both sectors, said the Defence Minister. Even more serious, the Chinese military intelligence had gathered that Indian forces were planning an attack on Thagla Ridge on 10 October. This information was absolutely correct, the Corps IV Commander, Lt Gen BM Kaul had planned to attack in Dhola post area on that day.

Mao then addressed his colleagues, "It seems like armed coexistence won't work. It's just as we expected. Nehru really wants to use force. This isn't strange. He has always wanted to seize Aksai Chin and Thagla Ridge. He thinks he can get everything he desires". As he has always done in his career, Zhou Enlai agreed with his mentor: "We don't want a war with India. We always strove in the direction [of avoiding war]. We wanted India to be like Nepal, Burma or Mongolia, i.e. solve border problems with them in a friendly fashion. But Nehru has closed all roads. This leaves us only with war. As I see it, to fight a bit would have

advantages. It would cause some people to understand things more clearly.”

As often in China, after a few leaders agreed to the direction to take, a larger meeting is called to invalidate the decision and work out the details. The meeting was held in the outskirts of Beijing¹⁰ on 06 Oct 1962. Mao chaired the meeting and informed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) top brass that it has already been decided to go to war with India. “The purpose of bringing all of you together today is to convene a military [tactical] meeting”, he said. The Chairman elaborated, “Our border conflict with India has gone on for many years. We did not want war and originally we sought to solve [the issue] through peaceful negotiations. But Nehru is unwilling to talk and has deployed considerable forces, insistently demanding a fight with us. Now, it seems that to refuse a fight is impossible. If we fight, what should be our method? What should this war look-like? Please everyone contribute your thoughts on these policy issues”. Mao, who quoted Sino-Indian history to bring out their historical connect, stated that, “First, the PLA had to secure a victory and knock Nehru to the negotiating table and second, Chinese forces had to be restrained and principled”. The Chairman then spoke of the possible isolation of China on the world stage. He did not consider this to be a ‘decisive factor’: “China needn't fear isolation as long as the front line troops fight well, we will be in an advantageous position. ...It's better to die standing, than to die kneeling. If China fought successfully, in an awe-inspiring way, this will guarantee at least thirty years of peace”. In some ways, it was true!

On 03 October, Beijing had written to Delhi, “The Chinese Government regrets that the Indian Government has once again refused its proposal for speedily, and unconditionally, holding discussions on the Sino-Indian boundary question on the basis of the report of the officials of the two countries. The Indian Government has also refused the Chinese Government's reiterated proposal that the armed forces of each side withdraw 20 kilometres along the entire border. ...[t]he proposal for each side to withdraw 20 kilometres would obviously hinder the Indian side from carrying out its aggressive activities in the eastern as well as the western and middle sectors”. Delhi did not agree to the ‘unconditional’ negotiations, the ‘occupied’ Indian Territory had to be vacated first.

Regarding the 20 km withdrawal, it was in India's disfavour due to the mountainous terrain on India's side and the flat Tibetan Plateau on China's.

When Mao decided to punish India, had the Communist leadership received the Indian answer to the above communication from Beijing? It is likely that the Communist regime had got Delhi's answer a few hours earlier. India wanted China to vacate the occupied part of the Indian Territory in the Aksai Chin area as a precondition: "The Government of India have repeatedly stated their desire to enter into talks and discussions, first to devise measures to reduce tensions and to create a climate of confidence, and then to undertake purposeful and constructive discussions in the improved climate to resolve the differences between the two governments over the border question. The Government of India's approach in this matter of talks and discussions has been clear and straightforward — preliminary talks to ease tensions and to create the appropriate climate of confidence to be followed by further purposeful talks, after implementation of measures to ease tensions and restore confidence have been taken, to resolve differences between the two governments on the boundary question on the basis of the report of the officials. If there has been any double-dealing or hypocrisy, it is entirely on the Chinese side".

With each side accusing the other of intransigence, a conflict could hardly been avoided. At the 06 October meeting, Lou Ruiqing, the Chinese Chief of General Staff, was authorised by Mao to start 'a fierce and painful attack on Indian forces. If Indian forces attack us, you should hit back fiercely. ...[you should] not only repel them, but hit them fiercely and make them hurt".

The Central Military Commission decided that the main attack will be launched in the eastern sector (NEFA), however Chinese forces in the western sector should 'coordinate' their actions with the eastern sector. It was logical from a military point of view and also 'ideologically' coherent. It was the route that the Dalai Lama had used three years earlier to take refuge in India and it is was the best way to show the connection between the two events. Though this is not mentioned in the Chinese (or Indian) sources, it was clearly an important factor. When Chinese generals started to work on the details of the military operations, they soon realised that the

campaign could not be sustained for a long time. It was, therefore, decided to terminate the war 'with a unilateral Chinese halt, ceasefire, and withdrawal'. Historian Shi Bo¹¹ believes that in view of 'practical difficulties associated with China's domestic situation', the PLA troops 'would quickly disengage and end the fighting as quickly as possible' after achieving their military objectives. 'China's domestic situation' is obviously referring to the power struggle within the party and the return of Mao to the centre stage.

The Final Decision

Apparently Mao had still some doubt. Politically he could not afford to have a semi-victory, a triumph was necessary to assert his newly recovered position as the head of the Communist State. However, according to the PLA's calculations, China was militarily far superior to India (Indian forces were not prepared and their strength was 1/6th of the Chinese troops). Beijing anticipated some negative reactions from Washington and the Western world in general (and perhaps even from Moscow), but the long-term benefits of a severe, but limited blow, would compensate and ultimately bring peace for several years between the neighbours. Till the last minute, Mao had some questions:-

- Should China permit Indian forces to advance a bit further into Chinese Territory under the 'Forward Policy' to show the world that China acted in self-defence?
- What should be the main objective of the attack against India?
- Should the attack focus on the Aksai Chin in the West, the main bone of contention between India and China?
- At a military point of view, an attack in NEFA had better chance to succeed as larger formations could concentrate in the area which was more accessible with easier lines of communication and supplies.
- To prove Nehru's stubborn and hegemonic attitude, NEFA was ideal as Nehru would then be compelled to agree that the McMahon Line was not an 'established fact', but a disputed border and only negotiations could

achieve a lasting peace and the settlement of the border issue.

- Further, winter was approaching fast so should the operations be postponed for a few months (July-September was the best period for military operations)? The Tibet Military District had warned that the snow in winter could trigger 'great difficulties' in moving supplies and reinforcements across the high passes.
- The Army intelligence informed the leadership that presently [in October 1962] the military balance tilted heavily in China's favour. It might not be the case in a few months' time.

Considering all these points on 17 October, the Central Military Commission¹² met and issued the formal order to 'exterminate the 'Indian aggressor forces'. It termed a 'self-defensive counter-attack war'. What happened on 20 October on the slopes of Thagla Ridge is history.

Endnotes

¹ Li Zhisui, Dr, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (London: Arrow, 1996)

² Also one of the '28 Bolsheviks'

³ *san he yi shao* in Chinese. Eric Hyer, *China's Policy of Conciliation and Reduction and its Impact on Boundary Negotiations and Settlements in the Early 1960s*; see: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/cwihp_wp_85_hyer_china_boundary_negotiations_1960s.pdf

⁴ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Volume III (New York, the Columbia University Press, 1997). Chapters 12 and 13, (Mao changes the Signals and War in the Himalayas, Crisis in the Caribbean) are particularly enlightening.

⁵ Maj Gen. DK Palit who was DMO during the conflict and is the author *War in High Himalaya* wrote about the doubts regarding the alignment of the McMahon in this area: "Later, almost as an afterthought, Niranjana [Maj. Gen. Niranjana Prasad, GOC, 4 Infantry Division] told me about the incident of the Dhola post and about his doubts regarding the alignment of the McMahon Line in the area west of the Nyamjang-chu. He said that whereas all the way from the Burma border to the Nyamjang valley the McMahon Line, as marked on the quarter-inch scale Survey of India map

sheet, coincided with the Himalayan Crestline, westwards from Khinzemane the Line was marked as lying well to the south of the main Thag-la ridge. (The extent of the area between the Thag-la crestline and the McMahon Line marked on the map was about 60 sq km.)

A patrol had set out across the Nyamjang River in mid-July to establish an Assam Rifles post near the Bhutan border. The political officer's representative accompanying the patrol had insisted that the Thag-la ridge itself was the watershed border and that was where our post should be. The patrol leader, a regular army officer, disregarded this advice because his map clearly showed the McMahon Line as passing well south of the ridge. Accordingly, he established a post on the southern bank of the Namka-chu, a stream flowing along the lower slopes of Thag-la ridge. He called it Dhola post, though in actual fact the site was known as Tsedong. Actually Dhola was a pass on the ridge 3 km to the south.

HQ 4th Division had referred the doubt about Thag-la ridge to HQ XXXIII Corps, asking for clarification on the exact alignment of the McMahon Line west of Nyamjang-chu. Niranjana had also suggested in his letter that if indeed the border lay along Thag-la ridge, he would like to establish his post tactically on the crest of the ridge, rather than in the valley below. In the month that had since passed he had received no reply and now, he added, the Chinese had beaten him to it because they had occupied Thag-la ridge. He told me that he would still like a clarification of the correct alignment of the border and asked me to have the reply expedited from Army HQ."

⁶ Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, July 21, 1962; *Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged and Agreements Signed Between the Governments of India and China, 1954-1959*, White Paper 7 (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 1962).

⁷ A conference is held in Beidaihe, a seaside retreat for the CCP in Qinhuangdao City, Hebei Province every year. Beidaihe is regarded as the summer capital of China, because it is an occasion for the leadership of the Communist Party to exchange views and sort out issues.

⁸ Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 26 July 1962, White Paper 7, op. cit.

⁹ Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 13 September 1962, White Paper 7, op. cit.

¹⁰ To this new meeting held at Xishan (Western Hills) were present Mao Zedong; Premier Zhou Enlai; Foreign Minister Chen Yi; Defence Minister

Lin Biao; Marshal Liu Bocheng; Marshal Ye Jianying; Chief of Staff General Lou Ruiqing; Vice Chief of General Staff Yang Chengwu; General Shao Hua, the head of the PLA General Political Department; General Qiu Huizuo, the head of the General Logistic Department, Lt Gen. Zhang Guohua, the Commander of the Tibet Military District and He Jiachan, the Commander of the Xinjiang Military District.

¹¹ Shi Bo, editor, *Zhong yin da zhan jishi* (Record of events in the big China-India war) Beijing: Da di chubanshe, 1993

¹² Mao, Zhou, Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, Lo Ruiqing, and Marshals Liu Bocheng, He Long and Xu Xiangqian participated in the final meeting.

©**Shri Claude Arpi** has authored books on Tibet, China and French India. He regularly writes on Tibet, China and Indo-French relations.

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Déjà vu Standoffs in Eastern Ladakh

Lieutenant General Rajan Bakhshi, PVSM, UYSM (Retd)®

Abstract

This article is derived from contents on the blog of the author titled 'Cavalier's Take' which was also carried on the USI of India's Strategic Perspectives as a shorter article titled 'Catching up With the Dragon: A Personal Account'. The author gives details of the nature of standoffs in Eastern Ladakh based upon his intimate knowledge of the terrain and handling the 2013 standoff in the Depsang Plains area. He explains the terrain, the Chinese intent and gives recommendations for the future. He ends by stating that in wake of the current standoff, which saw more violence than ever before, China should be aware of the reality that India's China policy is increasingly confident to meet the challenges, posed by the Dragon, on its own.

Introduction

At close to mid-day on 15 April 2013, the author, who was then

General Officer Commanding (GOC) 14 Corps at Leh, was informed about the Chinese transgression at Raki Nala in the Depsang sector. No sooner had all the immediate military counter measures and reporting drills been done that the full weight and glare of the Indian media was focussed on the area. Since the area of the transgression was located in the 'No Thoroughfare' zone for civilians, media was not permitted to go beyond Leh. Many reporters, who arrived at Leh despite knowing this, had to be picked up at the airport itself and lodged in hotels. This in no way mellowed their enthusiasm, zeal and zest. Soon the media started claiming live coverage from forward areas which were otherwise out of bounds for them. They were showing old video clips of army convoy movement including artillery guns being staged forward etc. Fast forward to 2020, as soon as reports on the Chinese

transgression in the Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley and Hot Spring areas had been confirmed, the reporting on the existing operational situation in the Galwan Valley by our media started on similar lines as it had done in 2013. So many variations of the terrain dynamics were given by anchors from various TV channels that comprehension for the lay person became extremely difficult. This article attempts to give a clearer picture.

Chinese Chequers

Contrary to popular belief, 'Chinese Chequers' is not a Chinese game. It is a game of German origin called 'Sternhalma'—renamed to 'Chinese Chequers' as a marketing ploy in the USA. The ploy worked. The Chinese, intrigued by the name, also learnt it calling it 'Tiaoqi' (Jump Chess). The game involves moving all your 10 pieces fastest to the opposite side jumping over opposing pieces where possible. This is not too different from the mobilisation that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) practises, moving formations over long distances on their well-developed road and rail infrastructure in Tibet. This is what the Chinese did in 2020. Reportedly, they stepped up two Mechanised divisions from closer areas and two more from as far away as 2000 km.¹ It may not be out of context to state that the Chinese are capable of starting a conflict with reasons and logic that suits them. Therefore, most are kept guessing on their motives and intentions in this game of Chinese Chequers. Whatever be their aim for the present adventure, they apparently have a far bigger agenda this time around. The simultaneous transgressions in a number of areas bear witness to this fact.

The standoff in 2013, however, was localised with limited troops. There was no aggression from either side, despite soldiers from the two armies standing guard merely 50 meters apart by day and by night at an altitude of approximately 16000 ft above mean sea level. The author can state with personal knowledge that our troops fared far better — mentally, emotionally and physically. Unlike the PLA, the Indian Army never had men falling sick with cold, cough and fever. Nor did they exhibit fear of being ambushed at night, unlike the PLA who would use search lights which lit the sky for most part of the night.

In the 2013 standoff, the professional courtesy at the battalion level between the two armies was heartening and reassuring. The battalion commanders could ask for a meeting at the Border Personnel Meeting (BPM) hut at any time of the day or night and it was always honoured. One night during the standoff, there was a call from Delhi that something urgent was required to be known from the Chinese side. This call came at 2.30 am and the requirement was conveyed to the Chinese battalion commander immediately. Needless to state that our request was honoured with the desired urgency. This time, the Chinese intent is definitely more malicious. The multiple transgressions, large strength of troops, weapon resources, creation of infrastructure including defence works at various places and, above all, the brutal physical offensiveness was glaring and disturbing. It may be prudent to deduce that this time the Chinese motive is an amalgam of military and diplomatic issues. The Chinese wanted to coerce India over infrastructure development and force accretion in Ladakh. They also intend to convey their displeasure on our stance on the Belt and Road Initiative (RI); statements with regard to Aksai Chin post abrogation of Article 370, and supporting the move to hold China accountable for suppressing information of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The Areas of Conflict

There are distinct areas in Eastern Ladakh which can be exploited by the Chinese with offensive intent. All these avenues commence from the Western Highway (NH 129), located further east of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). To the extreme North lies the Sub Sector North (SSN) which includes Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) and the Karakoram Pass.

Depsang Plains is a high-altitude plateau with average height of 16000 feet, yet it is conducive for the employment of mechanised forces. The area South of Depsang Plains and North of Pangong Tso is characterised by narrow ingress valleys along small rivers / *nalas* which meet the Shyok. These include Galwan, Raki etc. The confluence of Galwan with Shyok is vital and needs to be held with adequate strength, failing which the Darbuk-Shyok-DBO (DSDBO) road can get threatened by ready domination and may, thus, cut off the land route to SSN through the Shyok valley. Thus, the Sasoma - Murgo road across the Karakoram Range becomes vital and needs to be completed at the earliest.

In the area Pangong Tso-Lukung, Fingers 1 to 8 are located on the Northern banks of the lake and the road along this bank starts from Finger 5 and runs eastwards to meet the Western Highway.



Map 1 - The Depsang Plains- Galwan Valley Area²



Map 2 - The Galwan – Shyok Confluence³



Map 3 - Area Fingers, Chushul, Dungti and Demchok⁴

The Chinese had come with requisite preparations in the above area and now seem to have attained their tactical objectives at the Pangong Tso, leaving them with no hurry to restore status quo ante. Sirijap, located further east of Finger 8, was lost by us in 1962 but now they are claiming till Finger 5. Even after extensive disengagement talks, as of writing of this article they yet remain on Finger 5. Such salami slicing has been the hallmark of Chinese aggressiveness.

The area north of the lake is sensitive to them due to the ingress routes coming to these areas along roads and tracks emanating from the Western Highway; an Indian presence could interdict it. This time they have fortified their defences, sited on dominating Finger heights. Evicting them by using force would mean paying rather heavily for favourable results, thus, the situation could well result in a new status quo / realigned LAC. The Dragon has now got used to defying the laid down rules of engagement involving international protocols, thereby keeps changing its stance unilaterally even in cases where formal negotiations and agreements had been reached. Galwan, for instance, had never been disputed earlier and they are now claiming it to be theirs. It is high time that we put an end to such deplorable behaviour, unmindful of the cost.

Recommended Actions

Infrastructure Development. We should continue with our infrastructure development as planned. DSDBO and Sasoma - Murgo roads are lifelines for our troops in SSN and must be completed soonest. Feeder roads going towards the LAC could always wait for a while. Vital road axes which are vulnerable to interdiction should be provided the requisite protection, even if certain areas have to be physically held. The criticality lies in the timely induction of our forces earmarked for SSN, including mechanised forces. Building up own forces in other areas of Eastern Ladakh is not as challenging as the one for SSN.

Intelligence. Unified intelligence inputs are essential for such formations, including aerial, space and ground-based resources which complement the desired area coverage, for timely decision making. We may need to review our operational philosophy to

include the desired force levels to be maintained for physical occupation of vital areas and these should be placed on the order of battle (orbat) of these formations.

Quid Pro Quo (QPQ). It may not be prudent to necessarily fight the enemy every time you encounter him. At times, it may be better to exercise the QPQ option. Therefore, QPQ can be undertaken in pre-selected options in Eastern Ladakh, or even in the other sectors, to pressure their vulnerabilities in response to such adventurism.

Economic Measures. Chinese rise towards superpower status is premised on its economic strength. Considering that the Chinese are creating turbulence for many nations around the world, it may be time for a collective economic boycott which should accrue overwhelming consequences for her. This would need widespread cooperation around the globe since the Chinese economy is the second largest in the world and growing.

Status Quo Ante. Finally, we must settle for the status quo ante as it existed in late April 2020. During this standoff, one is proud to notice the national unity, fervour, steadfastness, and the offensive intent. We must not forget the political constraints, and allied compulsions, in a democracy as compared to the communist system of governance. The Chinese must be conveyed in persistent and unequivocal terms on the requirement for a mutually acceptable border delineation or else to maintain status quo ante.

Conclusion

It is quite possible that the situation in Eastern Ladakh may not attain status quo ante even after the onset of winters. Even if it does, such 'incursions', 'transgressions', and clashes are déjà vu along the disputed Sino-Indian boundary. The border agreements of 1996 and 2005⁵, between India and China, prohibiting the use of firearms during face-offs seems to have been seriously eroded post the current tensions. Consequently, the chances of a future armed clash escalating have since risen, unless new bilateral military confidence-building measures (CBMs) are put into place with a new agreement. At the moment that seems unlikely. China's India policy is slowly becoming more aggressive to stymie India's rise. It, however, has to keep in mind that its aggressiveness, which is also

a consequence of improvement of Indo-US strategic relations, could drive India deeper into a strategic alliance with the US. China should also be more aware of the reality that even on its own, India's China policy is increasingly confident to meet the challenges posed by the Dragon.

Endnotes

¹ Mandeep Singh Bajwa, "Chinese order of battle in Aksai Chin: What are we up against?", The Indian Express, Jun 11, 2020. Accessed Aug 10, 2020 from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/chinese-order-of-battle-in-aksai-chin-what-are-we-up-against-6500207/>

² Blog *Cavalier's Take*, "Blow Hot, Blow Cold for Mech Forces", Accessed Aug 11, 2020 from <https://cavalierstake.wordpress.com/>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Salient details of these agreements are given in a subsequent article in this issue of the USI Journal.

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Ostracising the Ghost of Namka Chu — Defending Kameng

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Abstract

This article briefly recapitulates the 1962 war operations in the Kameng Sector to bring out the suggested manner in which operations should be conducted against the People's Liberation Army (PLA), should a need arise in the present time. Such threat from the PLA is very real keeping in mind present tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Introduction

The violent stand-off between the Indian Army and the PLA in

Eastern Ladakh, since May 2020, has once again revived the memories of the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict. The PLA, in violation of all bilateral agreements and confidence building measures (CBMs) in place since nearly three decades, is trying to push the LAC to its 1960 Claim line. Chinese approach is of expansionism and outright domination, not accommodation or co-existence.¹ These developments rule out the possibility of an early border settlement and foreshadow continued tension along the LAC. This calls for a strong border management posture, with a doctrine of offensive-defence, especially in the Kameng Sector of Arunachal Pradesh. While the focus of current stand-off is Ladakh centric so far, the possibility of this extending to other sectors cannot be ruled out. After all, China continues to claim nearly 90,000 sq km of territory in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Tawang in the Kameng Sector stands out as a prominent objective, militarily as well as for the battle of perception.

The Kameng Sector

Kameng Sector of Western Arunachal Pradesh comprises of the districts of West Kameng (HQ at Bomdila), East Kameng (Seppa) and Tawang. Kameng River, from which the sector derives its name, emanates in the upper reaches and flows into the Brahmaputra in the plains of Assam, near Tezpur.



Map 1 : Kameng Sector²

Significance of Tawang. Tawang, a 'natural watershed and shortest route to Tibet'³, remains significant to India due to its strategic and military salience. It is also the key to the defence of the entire sector: from Tawang to Tezpur in the Assam Plains, through Se La, Bomdila, and Tenga. It also secures the Eastern flank of Bhutan, where China stakes claim over areas of Sakteng Sanctuary, in Trashigang Dzongkhag (District) of Bhutan.⁴



Map 2 : Location of Sakteng Sanctuary in Eastern Bhutan⁵

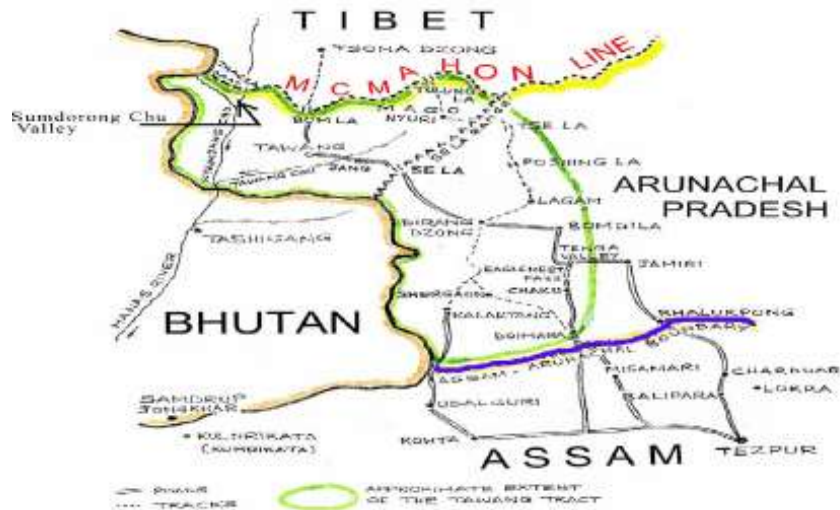
Besides its strategic significance, Tawang also has immense religious significance. Tawang is home to a monastery (*known in Tibetan as Gaden Namgyal Lhatse*), founded in 1680 – 81, which is the only important Tibetan Monastery outside the control of Lhasa (and China). It is also the birth place of the 6th Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso. Chinese fear that this monastery in Tawang can once again play an important role in Tibetan religious affairs, particularly when the time comes to choose the next Dalai Lama.⁶

As the stand-off continues to persist in Ladakh, with little likelihood of restoration of *status quo ante*, it would be appropriate to look back to the Chinese offensive of 1962, in this sector, to draw on the lessons learnt and to prepare ourselves to ensure that, this time, the offensive is carried back into the Chinese Territory, to 'ostracise the haunting ghost of Namka Chu' (and perhaps even of *Sumdorong Chu*)⁷.

Order of Battle (ORBAT) and Outline Plan of PLA Operations in Kameng Sector (October – November 1962)

Indian Deployment - October 1962. The tiered Indian deployment as it emerged progressively, post adoption of forward posture and in the run-up to the 1962 conflict, is summarised below:

- **Border Posts.** Posts established along the border, as part of the 'Forward Policy', were held by the Assam Rifles. These included Dhaula and Bumla in the Kameng Sector.
- **Namka Chu and the Zimithang Sector.** 7 Infantry Brigade (Ex 4 Infantry Division) with four infantry battalions, a Heavy Mortar Battery (less a troop) and a Troop of Para Field Battery.
- **Tawang.** Ad-hoc Brigade of two battalions, under Commander Artillery, 4 Infantry Division.
- **Se La.** 62 Infantry Brigade of 4 Infantry Division, having five infantry battalions supported by a field regiment and a troop of heavy mortars, with other combat support elements deployed in general Area Se La – Senge Dzong (Between Se La and Dirang to the South).
- **Dirang Dzong – Nyukmadong.** 65 Infantry Brigade of 4 Infantry Division with two infantry battalions and other administrative elements.
- **Bomdila La – Thembang (Northeast of Bomdi la).** 48 Infantry Brigade of 4 Infantry Division having three infantry battalions with a field battery.
- HQ 4 Infantry Division with HQ 4 Artillery Brigade and other administrative elements having a total strength of approximately 5000 troops were re-deployed in general area Dirang Dzong, after the fall of Tawang (25 October onwards).
- 67 Infantry Brigade was located at Misamari as reserve.



Sketch 1 - Kameng Sector and Rough Layout of Tawang Tract⁸

Chinese Force Level opposite Kameng Sector⁹

The operations were undertaken and coordinated by the Tibet Frontier Military Region. Following PLA formations were employed for operations:

- 55 Infantry Division with 163, 164 and 165 Infantry Regiments (Brigade equivalent), under command.
- 11 Infantry Division with 32 and 33 Infantry Regiments, and possibly a battalion ex 31 Infantry Regiment, under command.
- Tibetan Division (TD) / Force 419 with 154, 155 and 157 Infantry Regiments, under command.
- Four infantry companies from Shannan Military Sub-district (SMS).
- Three Artillery Regiments (306, 308 and 540).

- 136 Engineer Regiment (five companies).
- Other services elements.

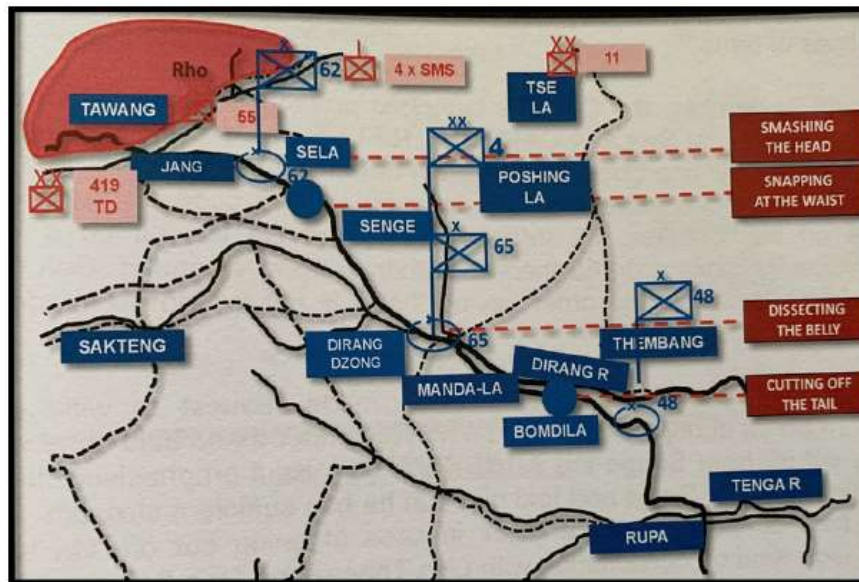
PLA Plan of Operations: Se La - Bomdila ¹⁰

According to the Chinese accounts, the main thrust was to be in the Eastern Theatre (NEFA). The PLA forces in the Western Theatre (Ladakh) were to 'coordinate' operations. The offensive (*called counter-attack*) was aimed at 'evicting' Indian troops from the areas north of the '*traditional and customary boundary*' (i.e. China's Claim Line) at the Southern foothills of the Himalayas in Brahmaputra Plains.

The concept of operations was to: advance along multiple axes, envelope (outflank) Se La and Bomdila, and reduce these subsequently. The plan was as follows:

- 55 Infantry Division (comprising three infantry regiments and three artillery regiments) was to advance along Axis Tawang – Se La and launch the main attack against Se la. The division was given the task of '*smashing the head*'.
- Simultaneously, 419 Tibetan Division (three infantry regiments) was to advance from the West, through the narrow corridor between Se La and India-Bhutan border, to assist in the capture of Se La from the South and capture Dirang Dzong in concert with troops of 11 Infantry Division advancing from the East. This was aimed at '*dissecting the belly*'.
- Four companies of SMS were to carry out an outflanking move from the East and position themselves North of Dirang Dzong along the road to Se La; their task being to '*snap at the waist*'.
- In coordination with the attack against Se La, 157 Infantry Regiment ex 419 Tibetan Division was to carry out a further outflanking move (from the West) to capture Senge Dzong (South of Se La and North of Dirang) and link-up with four infantry companies of SMS which were carrying out a similar outflanking move from the East, in order to cut-off the Road Se La – Dirang completely.

- 11 Infantry Division (comprising two infantry regiments) was to carry-out a wide outflanking move along route Rho – Tse La – Poshing La – Thembang and cut-off Road Dirang Dzong – Bomdi La (*cutting-off the tail*). Thereafter, in concert with 1 or 2 infantry regiments of 419 Tibetan Division, to capture Dirang Dzong, and develop further operations for capture of Bomdi La.
- 164 Infantry Regiment ex 55 Infantry Division was to act as reserve and was tasked to clear the road axis to Bomdi La.



Sketch 2 - Outline Plan of PLA operations against Indian Defences at Se La, Dirang and Bomdila

Conduct of Operations

Phase 1 (20 October to 25 October 1962) up to Capture of Tawang: Battle of Namka Chu (Sketch 1 Refers)

On 8 September 1962, the Assam Rifles post at Dhaula, near Namka Chu (*below the Chinese held Thagla Ridge*), was encircled by the PLA troops. As a result of this, 7 Infantry Brigade was

ordered to move hurriedly to this sector, on the western extremity of the Tawang Sector. Operational actions were ordered, to be taken by 9 Punjab, to support the encircled Assam Rifles troops and to 'make Chinese vacate the Indian Territory'. Following this, 7 Infantry Brigade was deployed to defend Hathung La (Hathonga Ridge) and Tsangdhar (*these two ridge lines are located South of Namka Chu, behind Dhaula Post*), and to capture Thagla Ridge, by 10 October 1962, as part of Operation Leghorn. In a surprise move, however, Chinese attacked forward Indian localities, south of Namka Chu on 10 October halting Operation Leghorn.

The main offensive across Namka Chu was launched by PLA on 20 October 1962 at about 0630 hrs after a heavy preparatory bombardment. Located on the valley floor, and having been totally surprised, the formation was unable to fight a defensive battle. The brigade lost 493 men [besides many injured and taken as Prisoners of War (PWs)]. The troops were ordered to withdraw south to the Hathonga Ridge at approximately 1100 hrs. The cohesion of the formation had completely been broken due to the heavy casualties suffered. The battle of Namka Chu finished the day it began. After this debacle, HQ 4 Infantry Division re located at Tawang by the evening of 22 October 1962.

Battle of Bum La and Tawang. Overall Chinese plan for capture of Tawang entailed move of Force 419 (Tibetan Division) from West (Lumla), a battalion of 31 Regiment from T Gompa, from the Northwest, and 32 Regiment (plus) of 11 Infantry Division from the North through Bum La – Tong Pen La – Mila, across the 'Inner Wall of Tawang (IWT)'; and 33 Regiment was tasked to infiltrate south to the Jang Bridge, to block the withdrawal of Indian troops across the only bridge on Tawang Chu (Sketch 3 refers).

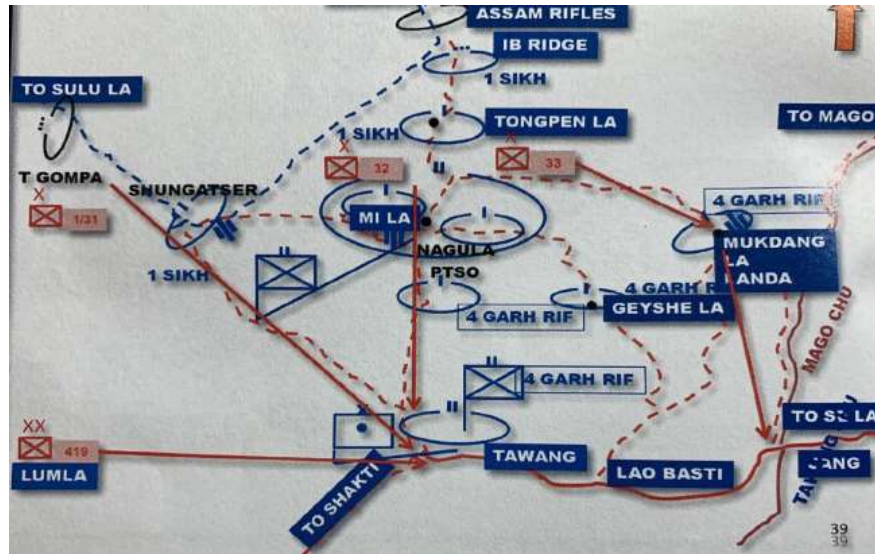
Battle of Bumla (Sketch 3 Refers). The attack was launched on the Assam Rifles post at Bumla, early morning on 23 October 1962. After overrunning the post, PLA contacted a Platoon locality of 1 SIKH at the IB Ridge at approximately 0700 hrs. Fighting till last round, and with only two wounded survivors, the platoon was finally overrun. Subedar Joginder Singh, who was seriously wounded, was taken a PW. He died of his wounds in Chinese custody and was awarded the highest war time gallantry award of Param Vir Chakra (PVC), posthumously. After the capture

of IB Ridge, PLA troops tried to bypass the main defences of 1 SIKH but failed. They then decided to approach Tawang from the West, from Nyamjang Chu Valley and Lumla. At this stage, the options available to 4 Infantry Division were to either give a battle at Tawang or to withdraw South of Tawang Chu and give a fight at Se La and/or Bomdila. Opting for the latter, withdrawal from Tawang started on 23 October and the bridge over Tawang Chu, at Jung, was blown in the face of the enemy. Chinese occupied Tawang unopposed on 25 October 1962. This phase was followed by a period of 'pause' for political messaging / negotiations up to 17 November 1962.

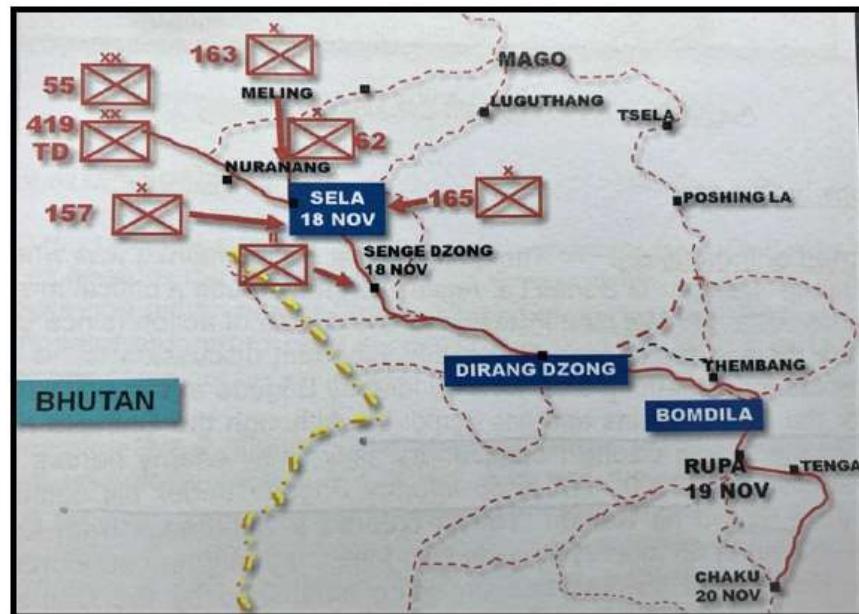
Phase 2 (17 Nov - 21 Nov 1962) - Operations South of Tawang Chu

The PLA troops advanced along four different axes, (refer Sketch 2), and split 4 Infantry Division into three pockets: Se La, Dirang and Bomdila, isolated from each other. Isolation of HQ 4 Infantry Division in the Dirang Valley made the command and control structure completely ineffective.

Operations at Se La (Sketch 4 Refers). On 16 November, the PLA launched probing attacks along Northeast and Northwest approaches to Se La. 4 Garhwal Rifles, deployed at Nuranang as 'Covering' troops, repulsed four successive attacks inflicting heavy casualties. Attack was launched on Se La on 17 November. On persistent recommendations of GOC 4 Infantry Division, 62 Infantry Brigade was withdrawn from Se La, on night 17/18 November, without giving a fight. Se La was, thus, lost to PLA on 18 November 1962.



Sketch 3 - Battle of Tawang



Sketch 4 - Operations at Se La

PLA Advance on the eastern Flank. The advance of 11 Infantry Division, with 32 and 33 Infantry Regiments, was the most audacious and imaginative part of the Chinese offensive which unhinged Indian defences completely. 11 Infantry Division, with 33 Infantry Regiment leading, commenced its advance from its Concentration Area on 10 November and carried out a wide outflanking move from the East, passing through Tse La and Poshing La (also called Bailey's trail). Poshing La was captured on 15 November. The formation moved on man pack basis and was supported by approximately 1000 porters, recruited locally. The Division marched approximately 160 km in six days and nights, and secured Thembang (Northeast of Bomdilla) by last light 17 November. On night 17/18 November, they cut-off HQ 4 Infantry Division at Dirang from the South. While the above manoeuvre was in progress, four companies from SMS, guided by locals, marched for three days, outflanking Se La from the East, and reached Nyukmadong in the early hours of 18 November. They interdicted the road North of Dirang Dzong.

Operations at Dirang Dzong. Having reached the eastern flank of Indian positions at Dirang Dzong – Bomdila, PLA 11 Infantry Division decided to launch an attack on Dirang Dzong on the morning of 18 Nov, coinciding with the attack on Se La. They employed 32 Infantry Regiment to attack from the East and South East. That day, despite availability of approximately two battalions of infantry, a squadron of tanks and a battery of artillery, the Divisional HQ ordered withdrawal towards Mandala. An uncoordinated 'retreat' took place from Dirang. The area was thereafter occupied by 32 Infantry Regiment of PLA, without resistance.

Operations at Bomdila. While the capture of Dirang was underway, 33 Infantry Regiment moved further South to interdict any reinforcements coming from Bomdila. Contact was established with Bomdila defences on the noon of 18 November. The Chinese expected Bomdila to be held strongly and had made extensive preparations for the attack. 48 Infantry Brigade, holding defences at Bomdila, was, however, denuded of approximately two companies of infantry, some tanks and artillery guns to support the Divisional HQ and troops at Dirang. The reinforcing column got ambushed en route. Consequently, the weakened defences at Bomdila fell and



Withdrawal / Pursuit. Having secured Bomdila, 33 Infantry Regiment of PLA, on 19 November, commenced 'pursuit' South towards Rupa and Chaku. While this was underway, HQ 4 Infantry Division ordered two battalions of 67 Infantry Brigade (Reserves) to reinforce Bomdila and to move further North to extricate troops isolated at Dirang Dzong. However, on coming across retreating troops of 48 Infantry Brigade North of Tenga, it was realised that Bomdila had fallen. A strong reconnaissance party was sent to ascertain the situation at Bomdila. This party, however, ran headlong into the leading elements of 33 Infantry Regiment advancing southwards, at about 1230 hrs, on 19 November. A

sharp engagement ensued. Finally, bulk of the reinforcing troops from 67 Infantry Brigade (about 300 men) was surrounded in the valley from all sides without any fire support. They gave a gallant fight and inflicted some casualties on the Chinese. In one such action, the PLA battalion commander was killed. The battle was over by 1500 hrs 19 November 62.

After this short and sharp engagement, the 2nd Battalion of 33 Infantry Regiment resumed 'pursuit' southwards towards Rupa / Tenga Valley and Chaku. Chaku defences were contacted by about 0200 hrs on 20 November and a speedy night attack was launched. The Indian defences were not well organised. The Chinese had also cut-off withdrawal routes to the South. The defences fell by 0700 hrs, 20 November. Subsequently, a unilateral ceasefire was declared by China commencing midnight 21 November 1962.

Salient Points. The operations of 1962 bring to fore two aspects. Firstly, the PLA's expertise in carrying out outflanking moves through very difficult terrain. Secondly, Indian forces not being doctrinally and organisationally prepared to hold ground if in danger of being bypassed. The succeeding part of this article examines this in the present context.

Evolving Contemporary Concept of 'Offensive-Defence'

Planning Offensive-Defence. India raised two additional divisions (56 and 71 Infantry Divisions) in 2009-2010 to strengthen posture against China in the Northeast, in Arunachal Pradesh.¹¹ The limitations of terrain, altitude, extreme cold climate which preclude use of high technology weapon systems, precision munitions and restrict the use of air power, give rise to the temptation to commit increasingly large number of troops on ground for border management. The lesson of 1962 should be lesser troops to hold ground and more reserves to be applied as operations develop, especially through perceived low threat areas. The development of infrastructure, enhanced tactical mobility and fire power now facilitates a change in doctrine from the antiquated positional

concept of holding ground, fighting a battle of attrition, and launching counter attacks to regain lost territory. The requirement is to change to the concept of offensive-defence, where Quid Pro Quo (QPQ) / riposte / counter offensive operations are conducted to make the attacker recoil and commit his reserves prematurely.

Reserves. For conduct of offensive-defence, there is a requirement of reserves from within available resources, which are positioned appropriately, supported by medium lift helicopters (Chinooks, MI-26, MI-17V), additional fire power resources in form of Ultra-Light Howitzers (ULH), Tanks, Infantry Combat Vehicles (ICVs) (where required), Attack Helicopters and armed UAVs (suited for high altitude) to manoeuvre and turn the flanks with agility or alternatively stop and evict enemy troops trying to outflank our defences. Employment of Special Forces (SF) and Arunachal Scouts would have a force multiplier effect in interdicting offensive forces. These troops could be employed to operate effectively in areas with sparse surface communication and population from where the PLA troops infiltrated in 1962, such as Bailey's Trail. These areas, placed under effective surveillance, should serve as the 'chosen killing grounds' without physical deployment.

Employment of Long-Range Vectors. Certain limitations of terrain in deployment of long-range vectors, tactical medium range missiles and Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRLs), are progressively being overcome with the development of better infrastructure. Employment of these weapon systems by selection of suitable deployment areas, in conjunction with air, will be extremely useful for conducting degradation and depth battle opposite Kameng Sector.

Strategic Deterrence. The conventional defence of this area needs to be complemented with operations in strategic domain for the deterrence to be effective. While China professes minimum deterrence and No First Use (NFU) unless attacked, it retains doctrinal leeway for 'launch on warning' or 'use under attack'. Military commanders along the Sino- Indian border need to incorporate this threat in doctrinal thinking. Further, to counter it, India needs to develop full spectrum deterrence by synergising conventional and strategic response. The resolve can be signalled

by clearly indicating red-lines, which in Kameng Sector would be 'well forward'.

Cyber and Electronic Warfare (EW). Operations in cyber and EW domain, though conducted in support of the operations of theatre or Corps, would be part of integrated cyber and EW operations at national level executed through the Cyber Agency (or Command, when raised). Appropriate target lists would need to be prepared akin to the lists for degradation operations. The formations would be required to prepare themselves to switch from cyber to physical conflict domain should the situation so develop. These aspects would need to be incorporated in the operational directives and operating procedures.

Battle of Perceptions. Border States like Arunachal Pradesh are prone to being targeted by inimical neighbours in battles of perception (Information Warfare). This can be done by generating a perceived sense of discrimination / deprivation. There are many issues related to infrastructure, employment, tribal status etc. which can be exploited to lower the faith in government. It is, therefore, imperative for the government and local formations to lay adequate emphasis on the aspect of 'battle of perceptions' (Information Warfare), more during peace than actual conflict.

Conclusion

From the ongoing stand-off between the Indian Army and PLA in Ladakh it is evident that China is signalling its geopolitical intent to restrain and intimidate India by forcible alteration of the LAC. Recent developments also rule out an early border settlement and suggest prospects of continued tensions. Spilling over of this to the Eastern Theatre, where Kameng Sector presents most significant politico-military objectives, is a distinct possibility. This calls for revisiting the past which has left permanent scars on India's 'national psyche' (perspective towards China). This article suggests that the Indian posture in this sector is adequate not only for its defence but to even carry the offensive back into the Chinese territory, ostracising the Ghost of Namka Chu, and perhaps even of Sumdorong Chu.

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Shere Thapa's Last Stand and Operations in the Upper Subansiri

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Abstract

Legends in the military are born in martyrdom and adversity. In the isolated and desolate spots where soldiers serve, the melancholy quiet and deepening shadows of late evenings create illusions which bring to life the spirits of dead warriors. Soon shrines get created at such places to honour them. If the shrine is on a road, passers-by stop and pay obeisance. If it is off the beaten track, the martyr's memory lives on in local folklore. In Arunachal Pradesh, the first category is Rifleman (Rfn) Jaswant Singh of 4th Battalion, the Garhwal Rifles. In the second is Havildar Shere Thapa of 2nd Battalion, the Jammu & Kashmir Rifles. The author tells the latter's story intertwined with operations in the upper Subansiri in November 1962.

The Beginning

It is well known that we, as a nation, in 1962 were neither prepared

nor motivated or equipped to fight a war with the Chinese. We did not have proper winter clothing, equipment, weapons or adequate ammunition. The Indian Air Force (IAF) was ostensibly better, but as per writings we did not have the will or strategic foresight to use it. It was under these circumstances that we were pushed into war with China. There was gloom in the entire country. The Chinese were able to create a fear psychosis in the minds of our leaders and the public. A speech by the Prime Minister (PM) during that period of conflict was termed as a farewell speech to the people of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Though the public willingly donated jewellery and cash, and volunteered to enrol in the Army in

large numbers but it was too late. Our leaders suddenly realised that nations can be defended only by well trained and equipped Armies and a whole of the nation approach. During the preceding decade and a half, we had seen action in J&K, Junagarh, Hyderabad and Goa, but all these operations were one-sided and nothing in comparison with what was to follow in October and November 1962 on the Indo-Tibetan border. The civilian leadership did not understand the concept of 'training'. They felt that large numbers of troops in cantonments were unutilised manpower and orders were passed to use troops as labour in construction activity in new cantonments. The result was obvious in 1962 when confronting a serious enemy.

Despite loss of face and vast tracts of land, both in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh, there were undoubted spurts of bravery displayed by many of our troops and units. Havildar Shere Thapa's bravery in Subansiri Frontier sub-division and Rfn Jaswant's action along the northern slopes of Sela Pass are examples. Performance of two battalions of J&K Militia composed of Ladakhis, which later became the Indus and Karakoram Wings of the Ladakh Scouts, was particularly remarkable; Shaitan Singh and Rezangla also became legends.

Prelude to War

The year 1962, up to March, saw the 2nd Battalion of the Jammu & Kashmir Rifles (2 JAK RIF) at Palampur concentrating for training for jungle warfare in preparation for its field tenure in the North East. However, as the tensions on the Sino-Indian border mounted, orders were received for its move to the present-day Arunachal Pradesh. Training switched over to mountain warfare. The unit left Pathankot on 25 April 1962 and reached Jorhat after eight days, on 03 May 1962. Arunachal Pradesh (NEFA) had five administrative frontier divisions as shown in the map.



Map 1: Frontier Divisions NEFA 1962

The battalion was tasked to defend Subansiri Frontier Division. They were to relieve the 1st Battalion of 5th Gurkha Rifles at Daporijo which was over 100 miles to the North of Jorhat. Reaching there itself was a very tough exercise. Long foot marches were involved. Most hills that the unit had to traverse had an eighty to ninety degree climb to negotiate. One wrong step could lead a man down to sure death thousands of feet below.

The Battalion, less two companies (B & C Companies), were to defend Daporijo landing ground. They were also asked to be prepared to move to Taliha for its defence. Alpha and Delta companies were to be located at Taksing and Limeking respectively. Bravo company was to guard the approach Limeking — Taliha, while Charlie company was to defend Ziro landing ground. From 08 September onwards, reports started coming in regarding the build-up and ingress of Chinese opposite 7 Infantry Brigade in Kameng Sector. This was opposite Tawang which is known for its beautiful monastery. Notwithstanding various constraints, Alpha Company, under Major Balwan Singh, was ordered to move forthwith to Limeking from Taliha on 18 September 1962. This column moved out on a man packed basis. Simultaneously, Battalion Tactical Headquarters, along with D company, left Daporijo for Taliha on their way to Limeking on 21

September. Alpha Company on arrival at Limeking on 02 October was ordered to further proceed to Taksing. They completed their concentration on 07 October. On 21 September, Major Bishamber Singh (the future CO) arrived at Limeking and took over as Company Commander of Delta Company. While Alpha and Delta Companies were preparing their defences at Taksing and Limeking, the Chinese invasion started on 28 October in Kameng Frontier Division opposite 7 Infantry Brigade sector.

Struggle at Subansiri

Charlie Company 2 JAK RIF moved from Ziro to Daporijo by air on 03 October and further moved to Taliha on 23 October. While readjustments of defences at Taliha were in progress, the battalion, less one company, was again ordered to take up defences at Daporijo and not at Sippi.

On the morning of 23 October, the Chinese attacked opposite 2 JAK RIF in the areas of Longju and Lung using a PLA battalion group.¹ Under the weight of Chinese pressure and likely bypassing of their defences, the Assam Rifles post at Maja was asked to withdraw. During their movement they were ambushed at Redding. On the same day, i.e. 23 October, the Chinese attacked the Assam Rifles post at Asafila. Only 08 men could return to Taksing. The Taksing garrison was asked to withdraw to Limeking since threat to Glensenyak appeared imminent.



Map 2: Operations in the Upper Subansiri Valley

On 24 October, many Assam Rifles stragglers had re-joined at Taksing. Alpha Company, under Major Balwan Singh, conducted the withdrawal of the remaining garrison including the political staff, civil employees and refugees. Towards the end of October, as part of general reorganisation and with the induction of 192 Infantry Brigade, the area of responsibility was redefined. 5 Brigade was assigned the responsibility for Subansiri sector, named as Sector 1, with effect from 13 November. The brigade was to occupy a cohesive brigade defended sector. Another battalion, 1st Battalion of 4 Gurkha Rifles ex 192 Brigade was also allotted to 5 Brigade.²

Major Bishamber Singh was appointed Commander at Limeking on 01 November 1962. The defences were reorganised along the main approach to Glensenyak–Limeking by occupying Rio Bridge area which was in any case demolished.

By 14 November, the Chinese managed to reach the area of Rio Bridge. On the same day, a patrol from Delta Company under 2nd Lieutenant, now Major (Retired), MR Kishore spotted the



Chinese and fired at them. They were able to cause some casualties. As per Chinese accounts, they claimed one Indian killed and six casualties on their own side.³ Major Kishore, now in his 80s, still remembers the day and the encounter of 14 November 1962 and states that his patrol had suffered no casualties.⁴ Meanwhile, the strength of the protective patrol at the Rio Bridge was increased by another section. Captain

Amir Singh of Alpha Company was in command of the patrol with Subedar Sher Bahadur (not to be confused with Havildar Shere Thapa) as his second in command. After 12 November, this patrol was being turned over every 24 to 48 hours between Alpha and Delta Companies. As the position was in a rocky area next to the stream, it was bitterly cold and no fires were lit. With only Angola shirts and Olive Green jerseys, this turnover was unavoidable. On 18 November, the patrol was of Alpha Company. At about 1500 hours, Chinese were seen approaching the area of the protective patrol. As soon as the Chinese came in the effective range of the 2 JAK RIF troops, the Indians opened fire with light machine guns, 2 inch mortars and rifles. The Chinese were taken by surprise and suffered very heavy casualties in dead and wounded. As per reports, there were 70 to 150 enemy casualties.⁵ Subedar Major (Hony Captain) Rattan Chand (Retd), who was a young soldier at that time, recounts that the Chinese climbing down a vertical slope on the other side of the Ngo nullah were “falling like ripe mangos”.⁶ A figure of 70 is also stated in the first official history of the Jammu & Kashmir Rifles.⁷ The patrol withdrew to Ging only when their entire ammunition had been expended and only some LMG ammunition was left. The LMG was initially being manned by Rifleman Inder Singh but when he got injured, he was evacuated and Havildar Shere Thapa took over the LMG.

As the patrol withdrew, Havildar Shere Thapa volunteered to stay back to cover the withdrawal. Havildar Shere Thapa was well covered and concealed in a natural rock sangar and held up the enemy for long till his ammunition ran out and he fell. His action and the destruction of the bridge at Rio (Rihuye in Chinese accounts) delayed the Chinese for nearly 72 hours.⁸ The mortal remains of Shere Thapa were buried by the Chinese at the same spot where he laid down his life. The Chinese, in a show of magnanimity, wrote a small note of appreciation of his bravery on a piece of wood. All over, wherever they could, the Chinese buried the Indian dead, especially where they felt a soldier deserved credit. Whether they did it genuinely or with an aim to project a benign Chinese image or to make the Indian humiliation more pronounced is a matter of conjecture. This author feels that the aim was the last one. The author is aware that when the war ended, the Chinese returned every single item that they had captured or recovered, including sewing needles.⁹

Despite a gap of 58 years, many of the locals still remember the brave action of the NCO and that of other soldiers of 2 JAK RIF.^{10,11,12} The hill feature overlooking the place where his mortal remains lay buried till cremated has been very aptly named after him as also the present bridge at Rio. In 2 JAK RIF all formal unit functions end with a unit regimental song which includes a line immortalising the bravery of Havildar Shere Thapa.

By 18 November, the deployment of 5 Infantry Brigade was as under:

- Headquarters at North Lakhimpur.
- 1/4 GR at Daporijo and the battalion less two companies at Taliha.
- 2 JAK RIF with a tactical headquarter and two companies at Limeking.
- MMG Platoon ex 6 MAHAR less a section at Taliha, with a section at Limeking.
- 69 Heavy Mortar Battery at Taliha.

The Chinese continued their advance. On 20 November, they managed to reach a point about a 1000 yards ahead of village Ging where they encountered a two-section ambush. The ambush later withdrew without any casualties. Having occupied Ging, the Chinese moved further and encountered another section position at about 1600 hrs on 20 November. By this time, the Chinese had reached approximately thousand yards short of Limeking. On 20 November 1962, while the Chinese were pressing hard to take Limeking, orders were received from Headquarters 5 Mountain Brigade for withdrawal. Major Bishamber Singh planned an orderly withdrawal, including destruction of stores and heavy equipment. Thinning out started the same evening and before the daybreak the next day the complete garrison had cleared off from Limeking. Soon after the last troops came out of Limeking, the Chinese occupied the position and started shelling the withdrawing column with heavy mortars. 2 JAK RIF was, however, fortunate and got out of Limeking without further casualties.

On the next day, the Chinese unilaterally declared cease fire with effect from midnight 21/22 November 1962. Meanwhile, our troops reached Taliha by 25 November. Major Bishamber Singh was awarded "Mention-in-Despatches" for his handling of the battalion less two companies involved in operations. After reaching Taliha on 25 November, the battalion was ordered to occupy a position at Sippi, near Daporijo, which they occupied by 22 November. After the war, in January 1963, the battalion was concentrated at Sippi for rest and recuperation, training and administration.

Conclusion

The war that started in the last week of October 1962 suddenly stopped with effect from midnight of 21/22 November. Our humiliation was complete, particularly so in the area of Kameng Frontier Division where we lost an over 200 km stretch from the Thagla Ridge to Tawang, Jang, Sela and Bomdila. In hindsight, one can say that even Limeking went without a fight when we had enough strength and resources to hold it even if bypassed. The senior military and political leadership came in for a lot of opprobrium. But gallant heroes like Havildar Shere Thapa made us proud by their valour, bravery and sacrifice. The locals of Taksing

still remember the sacrifice by Havildar Shere Thapa. The folklore praising him continues. His memorial, till date, draws a lot of respect and honour from every passing soldier and civilian alike. Guides take the occasional trekker there (as can be seen on videos on youtube¹³) and narrate the legend pointing out the bullet scarred rock face at the spot where Havildar Shere Thapa made his last stand. The military lives through its heroes. Heroes inspire them to do more. The noted American psychologist Brian Wansick of Cornell University states¹⁴ that profiles in heroism can help us better understand leadership in crisis situations. Operationally, these profiles may aid recruiters of future soldiers [...] by knowing what characteristics in potential [soldiers] might best reflect the potential for heroic leadership. They also offer insights as to how training can develop heroic potential.

Endnotes

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With Sepoy Karam Chand at the Battle of Walong

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“A nation that does not prepare for all the forms of war should then renounce the use of war in national policy. A people that do not prepare to fight should then be morally prepared to surrender. To fail to prepare soldiers and citizens for limited, bloody ground action, and then to engage in it, is folly verging on the criminal.”

- T. R. Fehrenbach,

This Kind of War: The Classic Military History of the Korean War

Abstract

In July 2010, the Border Road Task Force (BRTF), while working on road improvement near Walong, uncovered a grave with the remains of a jawan of 4 Dogra who had died in the 1962 war. The battle of Walong occurred in the second phase of the 1962 war during the offensive in the Lohit valley. A bitterly fought battle, it was the only one in which the Indian and Chinese casualties were comparable. Interspersed with some autobiographical fiction, this article gives the account of a part of the battle of Walong where the only counter attack of the 1962 war was launched and the only planned withdrawal took place.

Introduction

Fifty eight years ago, India suffered its worst military defeat

leaving a gaping wound in our national psyche and showing how unprepared India was, militarily and politically. On the 58th anniversary of the Chinese invasion, this article is about an ordinary jawan. We don't know his feat of bravery, whether he was actually brave, and how exactly he died. Like many others, he was

unsung till 2010. He was Sepoy (Sep) Karam Chand of 4th Battalion of the Dogra Regiment (4 Dogra).

In July 2010, while the author was commanding 2 Mountain Division, the BRTF informed that while repairing a part of the road in the area between the Yapak Ti (Stream) and Walong Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) — which had caved away towards the Lohit River — they had found the remains of a person. Fully aware that this was a 1962 war battlefield, extreme care was taken to exhumate the remains, which were of almost an intact body. Found with the remains were what we call ‘dog tags’ or identity discs with the name Karam Chand and personal number 3950976. There was also a silver ring, a ball point pen, an empty dilapidated wallet or pay book and a few rounds of ammunition. We presume the burial of Karam Singh must have been done by the Chinese because both dog tags were with the body.



The Lohit Brigade (82 Mountain Brigade) got the name checked from the war memorial at Walong, where the names of all the 364 soldiers who were martyred in this battle are inscribed.¹ There were two Sepoy Karam Chands of 4 Dogra on the memorial; the personal number of one matched the one on the dog tag. When the army checked the war records, they could ascertain that the disc belonged to which Sepoy Karam Chand of the 4 Dogra. The Colonel of the Regiment of the Dogras, Lieutenant General Jasbir Singh was contacted, who then located the next of kin of the martyr. There were no close relatives. His parents were long gone and he had been a bachelor. The Regiment then collected the remains and a fitting funeral was given to the forgotten soldier at his native place in Himachal Pradesh.² For 48 years, Sepoy Karam Chand had slept in eternal sleep, on the banks of the Lohit, in a manner immortalised in a poem on the cenotaph at the Walong ALG by Bernard Dougal, the District Commissioner of Lohit District, after the war. The poem titled ‘Asleep in the Mishmi Hills’ goes:

*“The Sentinel hills that around as stand,
bear witness that we loved our land.
Amidst shattered rock and flaming pine,*

*We fought and died on Namti plains.
O Lohit gently besides us glide,
Pale stars above softly shine,
As we sleep here in sun and rain”*



Map 1 : The Walong Sector

Phase I (21-22 Oct 1962)

The first phase of the war in the Lohit Valley was fought at Hill 100 on the Western Bank of the Lohit River and MacMohan Ridge (now called Madan Ridge — after a martyred defender of 2 Assam Rifles) on the Eastern bank. The defenders were a Company of 6 Kumaon and two platoons of 2 Assam Rifles. 6 Kumaon was the only infantry battalion in the Lohit Valley in phase 1 of the war and were part of 5 Brigade, with its Headquarters (HQ) in faraway North Lakhimpur. Attacked by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), 153 Regiment³ and a reinforced Battalion from the Chengdu military sub area⁴, the Kumaonese and five platoons of 2 Assam Rifles fell back to Walong, occupying a position (Ashi Ridge) between the Nam Ti and Tilam Ti.

Phase II (23 Oct to 14 Nov 1962)

2 Mountain Division (Mtn Div) was hurriedly raised, for the Subansiri, Siang and Lohit sectors, on 28 Oct 1962 with the Tactical HQ at Tezu and the main HQ at Dinjan. Major General Mahindra Singh Pathania, General Officer Commanding (GOC) 23 Infantry Division, which was deployed in Nagaland, was moved to set it up with a skeleton staff drawn from HQ 23 Div. As troops were hurriedly flown/marched in, a mix of units were inducted. 4 Sikh, 2/8 Gorkha Rifles (GR), (later replaced by 3/3 GR), and 4 Dogra, under 181 Brigade and later under 11 Brigade. The build-up also made the Chinese induct additional troops in the form of 130 Division with three Regiments (388, 389 and 390) with an Engineer Regiment, Artillery Battalion and an Anti-aircraft Battalion. 130 Division formed the attacking troops, with the original 153 Regiment maintaining contact and providing the firm base.⁵

4th Dogra Enters the War

As 6 Kumaon fell back to Walong, additional troops were rushed in either on foot or by a stream of tireless Otter aircraft which could bring in only 10-11 men with equipment at a time.⁶ The first company of 4 Dogra arrived on 14 Nov and was immediately sent to reinforce the Tri Junction area where 6 Kumaon was embroiled in a life and death struggle.

Fictionalised Narrative through Karam Chand's Eyes

We took off from the rough Airstrip at Tezu on 14 Nov early in the morning at first light — which was at 4 AM — and landed at Walong ALG after covering the 90 kilometres, as the crow flies, in 25 minutes. I was told that if we had walked it would have taken us five days, so one felt elated at having avoided that drudgery. It was only the second time that I had ever flown in an aircraft. The first time was a few days before, when we were flown in a Dakota aircraft from Dimapur.⁷ We quickly unloaded the aircraft as it still had to do many more trips before the afternoon, when the winds would make flying impossible. A number of Otter aircraft were ferrying the battalion so there was an unending stream of landings and take offs. As soon as the company had disembarked and fallen in, we were asked to move out. Before we knew it, we were in the war.



Map 2 : The Battlefield at Walong

The Chinese had secured the Green Pimple spur to the west of Walong on 06 Nov. A further advance along this spur could mean the fall of the Walong airstrip. It also threatened and overlooked the Brigade defences. Green Pimple was dominated by Yellow Pimple, which in turn was dominated by Tri Junction, a high point where three ridgelines met. Tri Junction was, thus, correctly appreciated as vital ground. This if held, would enable 11 Brigade to roll down to Ashi Hill which dominated the easiest axis to Walong along the right (west) bank of the Lohit River. Ashi hill had been captured by the enemy before they tried to cross the Nam Ti, where they suffered major casualties.. By 10 Nov, the Brigade Commander, Brigadier NC Rawley, had appreciated that the enemy was building up for an attack on Walong from the Green

Pimple area. He came to the conclusion that it was essential to secure Green Pimple through Tri junction to spoil the enemy attack. The whole of 6 Kumaon was concentrated on the western flank. It was tasked to retake Green Pimple and then hold the complete area from Green Pimple to Tri Junction. On the morning of 14 Nov 1962, led by Captain Mathur of Alpha Company, with Second Lieutenant (2/Lt) Khetri with the leading platoon, 6 Kumaon set off to launch the only attack made in any sector of the war. At 0850 hrs, to the cries of *Kali Mata ki Jai*, they attacked. In spite of sustained Chinese mortar and machine gun fire, the Kumaonese managed to force the forward Chinese posts to retreat and secured Tri Junction. They, thereafter, started firming in for the attack on Yellow Pimple which would lead to the final objective, Green Pimple. The attack was launched but by mid-day mounting casualties and shortage of ammunition slowed down progress. Brigadier Rawley ordered Alpha Company of 4 Dogra, which was at the ALG, to immediately move up to support 6 Kumaon and also get them ammunition. In addition, Delta Company of 4 Dogra was also ordered into the battle.

Fictionalised Narrative through Karam Chand's Eyes

The distant sound of gunfire and artillery seemed ominous as we moved up. It was still daylight but swiftly the shadows were lengthening. I was told that a guide from 6 Kumaon was leading us. I was in No 3 Platoon at the tail end of the column. Besides our own weapon and ammunition, we were carrying at least 20 kgs of additional load of ammunition and water for 6 Kumaon. Grunting with the effort, we kept on climbing. As it became dark and we came closer to the frontline, one could hear almost a continuous thunder of gunfire. The noise was absolutely deafening. The night was lit up as if it was Diwali.⁸ As my adrenalin surged, the harsh realisation stuck in; Diwali had been over on 28 Oct 62, this was war. Our forward platoon had to fight through Chinese troops who had surrounded the Kumaonese. They then got embroiled in creating a defence line on the flank. When we managed to reach the Kumaonese, we were only a platoon strength. The Kumaonese were overjoyed with the supplies and the hope that the rest of 4 Dogra would now come up. But that was not to be. We had no respite as we started distributing the ammunition and water and then were given a part of the defences to hold. The Chinese had

again sealed the gap through which we got in. Early in the morning, amidst a fusillade of fire, Major KJS Grewal and part of Delta Company fought their way in.⁹

At 1 AM, the Chinese, after (as per their accounts) having faced nine Indian attacks, attacked with what Brigadier Rawley appreciated was a Regiment.¹⁰ The determined Chinese attack, in overwhelming numbers, forced a retreat. This was also the only option as even if 6 Kumaon had taken Green Pimple, there would be no ammunition to resist a counter attack. Alpha Company of 6 Kumaon took defensive positions at 11,000 feet along the West Ridge. It was attacked repeatedly by the Chinese and after the 5th attack it was relieved by Delta Company of 4 Sikh. Little did 11 Brigade know that by last light 15 Nov, the 130th PLA division had reached its assembly areas to attack it. At first light on 16 Nov, the full force of the attacking 388 Regiment hit the Walong defences. Having cleared 4 Sikh and 3/3 GR positions, 389 Regiment linked up with 388 Regiment and drove a wedge between 4 Dogra and 6 Kumaon.¹¹ Two months after the cease-fire, when the Indians returned, they found that the Chinese had buried and marked the positions of the dead. In this bitterly fought battle on the mountain tops. Many of the bunkers showed the dead where they had last manned their weapons.

The Martyrdom of Karam Chand

As the brave but ill-timed attack by 6 Kumaon crumbled, 4 Dogra was fed piecemeal into the battle. As a result, the 11 Brigade's western flank was open and the only reserves were two companies of 4 Dogra which were also holding a firm base near the Brigade HQ. In face of the main attack on 16 Nov, as the frontal positions at Ladders held by part of 3/3 GR and Maha plateau held by 4 SIKH crumbled, so did the mix of troops of 3/3 GR and a company of 4 Sikh on the East bank. At 1200 hrs, orders for withdrawal were given. It is again to the credit of 11 Brigade that the withdrawal was planned and conducted as well as could be done in the chaotic situation. The overall plan was as under:¹²

- All troops on the East bank of the Lohit to immediately withdraw along the East bank to Hawaii and join the Brigade column after crossing the suspension steel wire strung there.

- All troops on the West bank to start thinning out at 1400 hrs on 16 Nov.
- HQ 11 Brigade and supporting arms to cross the Brigade Check Point (CP) between 1500 and 1600 hrs. This would be at Yapak Ti – Lohit River junction.
- 4 Sikh to commence thinning out by 1700 hrs and abandon positions by 2000 hrs on 16 Nov.
- Leapfrogging successively would be one company of 4 Dogra, whose initial position would be Area Dropping Zone (DZ), and one company of 6 Kumaon at Yapak ridge.
- All layback troops to be in position by 1400 hrs. The last position to be abandoned would be the 6 Kumaon layback troops at Yapak ridge.
- All troops would be self-contained for four days. All guns to be destroyed /rendered unserviceable.

In execution, the withdrawal was not as smooth. Chinese troops were close at the heels of the withdrawing troops and wherever possible carried out outflanking moves to set up ambushes on the routes of withdrawal. At approximately 1200 hrs, the Brigade Commander ordered one company of 4 Dogra at the mortar position to reinforce the firm base. This company was ambushed west of the firm base at 1300 hrs. However, the company managed to break contact with the enemy and moved along the Yapak Ridge to the Brigade CP.

Fictionalised Narrative through Karam Chand's Eyes

Having shed our loads for 6 Kumaon, we started digging foxholes and preparing our defences. By the next day, our Company had managed to get together. The ensuing night was bitterly cold and we shivered in our limited warm clothing. Intermittent fire continued along the front as enemy patrols probed our defences. On 16 Nov, we came under extremely heavy shelling. Our heavy mortars fired to break the enemy attack. They halted the first attack but then their firing stopped. We were ordered to withdraw to the mortar position. No sooner did we reach there that we were told to move to the firm base. At about 1000 hrs, this

area came under heavy shelling. Our platoon commander Subedar Rattan Chand moved from trench to trench motivating us to hold firm in face of very heavy automatic fire from the enemy on the higher ground above us.¹³ As orders for withdrawal were given, he kept us moving in spite of the casualties we were getting and the wounded comrades we were carrying along. By now, we were in a continuous fire fight with the pursuing enemy. My section was ordered to cover the withdrawal of the rest of the Company. By now, we were only four of us in the section. We found cover in the rocks, took stock of our ammunition and waited for the enemy. I found a dead comrade near me who had two clips of .303 ammunition on his bandolier. I took them and stuffed them in my pockets. For half an hour we waited. By now, our comrades seemed to have gone far away. In any case, the gushing Yapak Ti drowned out all sound. We got up and started moving tactically along the Yapak Ridge. It was getting dark now. We could see the Lohit River below. Suddenly, there was a blaze of gunfire. I saw a comrade fall and rushed towards the Yapak Ti. A stabbing pain made me realise that I too had been hit. I fell into the Yapak Ti... and then there was nothing.

Conclusion

The move of the Brigade column from the Brigade Rendezvous (RV) to Hayuliang was covered by troops holding successive delaying positions. Each of the withdrawing battalions, in spite of the mauling they had suffered, managed to organise successive layback positions effectively. HQ 11 Brigade maintained control throughout. Helicopters were used to drop food to the withdrawing troops.¹⁴ The Chinese followed up to a place called Changwinty, beyond the 90 degree westward bend of the Lohit and about 40 km from Hayuliang. The tail of the Brigade column cleared the covering troops, provided by 82 Brigade, at Hayuliang by 1030 hrs on 21 Nov 1962. The Chinese declared a ceasefire on 22 Nov 1962. However, in all sectors till 26 Nov the Chinese kept on firing on the isolated withdrawing troops.¹⁵ The battle in the Lohit Valley had seen the only attack and the only coordinated withdrawal of the war. A withdrawal operation is one of the most difficult operations of war. The Indian Army, to avoid defeatism, stopped practising it after 1962 to this day. It is a moot point whether this is a good decision.

Epilogue

Of the four Indian Infantry battalions involved, a total of 364 men were killed, 278 wounded and 345 taken prisoners of war. This was 44 per cent of the total strength of the units. As per Chinese accounts, PLA casualties were 198 killed and 554 wounded. As evidenced in the 2020 clash with the PLA at Galwan valley, the Chinese always hide their real casualties. To have admitted a sizable casualty figure in the Lohit Valley operations is a testimony to the known and unknown Indian braves who fought there. In 4 Dogra, of the total strength of 537 which flew into Walong with their CO, Lt Col RS Pathania, 110 were killed, 31 wounded and 74 were taken as prisoners of war.¹⁶ Among the 110 was the unknown, and till 2010 unsung, Sepoy Karam Chand.

Endnotes

¹ Maj Gen PJS Sandhu (Ed), 1962, A View from the Other Side of the Hill. *USI of India study* (Vij Books, New Delhi :2015), p.105.

² PTI, "Sepoy Karam Chand cremated 48 years after his death", *The Times of India*, Jul 15, 2010. Accessed Jul 31, 2020 from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Sepoy-Karam-Chand-cremated-48-years-after-his-death/articleshow/6172388.cms>

³ A PLA Regiment was equivalent to an Indian Brigade.

⁴ Maj Gen PJS Sandhu (Ed). Op cit.

⁵ Maj Gen PJS Sandhu (Ed). Ibid. .

⁶ Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, "In Memoriam: India and its Canadian 'Otters'", *Weekly Voice*, Nov 08, 2019. Accessed Aug 02, 2020 from <https://www.weeklyvoice.com/in-memoriam-india-and-its-canadian-otters/>

⁷ The Gallant Dogras ; The Dogra Regimental Centre (New Delhi, Lancer: 2005), p.118

⁸ This scene was narrated by Brig Rawley in his papers referred to in "1962, A view from the Other Side of the Hill". Coincidentally, Brig NC Rawley in successive ranks commanded 11 Brigade in the 1962 war, 11 Division in the 1965 war and 11 Corps in the 1971 war.

⁹ The Gallant Dogras. Op cit.

¹⁰ Maj Gen PJS Sandhu. P. 101.

¹¹ Ibid. p.102.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. p. 119.

¹⁴ SN Prasad (Ed), PB Sinha and AA Athale, History of the conflict with China 1962. Government of India, Ministry of Defence Historical Division P.376. (Unpublished) Downloaded from internet on May 20, 2020 from Bharat Rakshak <https://www.bharat-rakshak.com/ARMY/history/1962war/266-official-history.html>

¹⁵ SN Prasad (Ed), PB Sinha and AA Athale,

¹⁶ Maj Gen PJS Sandhu (Ed). p. 105.

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Non-use of Offensive Air Power in 1962 was a Mistake but Does Not Tell the Whole Story

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Abstract

The non-use of offensive air power in the India-China conflict of 1962 is among the most discussed issues in the contemporary India-China discourse. There was a complete lack of understanding on the part of the strategic establishment of what offensive air power could achieve in Ladakh and North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Compounding this was a lack of clarity within the Indian Army of the value addition provided by the Indian Air Force's (IAF's) fighter fleet and a diffident approach on the part of the IAF leadership to espouse the use of offensive air power. However, the sterling contribution of the IAF's transport and helicopter fleet during the conflict merits a re-examination.

Introduction

From a military and operational perspective, the 'Forward Policy'

was a poorly conceived and politically driven military posture with almost no coercive potential against a much stronger adversary.¹ Crystallised into a policy directive in October 1961 and incrementally implemented right through the winter of 1961, the strategy was tactically unsound and field commanders like Lieutenant General Daulat Singh, the Western Army Commander, and Lieutenant General Umrao Singh, the top field commander in the East, expressed serious apprehensions about sustaining such a policy. They soon fell in line once General Thapar, the then Army Chief insisted on implementing the directive.² This article will highlight several flaws in risk assessments about air power at the

apex political levels in implementation of this policy. The article will also not shy away from highlighting that decision-making at Air Headquarters too contributed to the final strategic decision of not to use offensive air power during the conflict. The non-use of offensive air power has overwhelmed a largely unheralded narrative of how the IAF's transport and helicopter fleets courageously supported a policy disaster.

Early Support and Hesitation

In the absence of roads and railway lines in areas where troops had to be deployed, the IAF played a pivotal role in translating the Forward Policy into an operational deployment in both the NEFA and Ladakh. Tezpur, Guwahati and Jorhat in the east were the main hubs from where loads were flown by IAF Dakotas and Packets to build up and sustain the garrisons at Khinzemane, Tawang, Sela and Bomdila. The loads were either dropped at Dropping Zones (DZs) close to the garrisons or off-loaded at Tezpur and transported by road and mules thereafter. By mid-1961, Chandigarh, Srinagar and Pathankot airfields became hubs³ from where the Forward Policy in Ladakh was supported. Even with airfield at Leh and airstrips at Kargil, Fukche, Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) and Chushul, numerous forward posts like the ones at Galwan and Shyok Valley, Sirjap-Spangur (around Lake Pangang Tso), Khurnak Fort and Demchok⁴ had to be sustained by air dropping of stores and ammunition at DZs. It is extremely surprising that there is no record of the IAF leadership at any time cautioning the Government of India (GOI) that such an arrangement of supporting the Forward Policy exclusively by air was fraught with danger and unsustainable in the long run.⁵

Other than a widespread strategic naivety and disdain for the utility of the roles of air power other than for supply and maintenance, there can be no other reason for not inducting fighter and reconnaissance platforms into NEFA and Ladakh when trouble started brewing in the late 1950s. If aircraft like the Tempest fighters could actively participate in the Battles of Zojila and Skardu in the 1947-48 conflict with Pakistan, it is mystifying why ten years later aircraft like the Canberra bomber-cum-reconnaissance platform, or Toofani⁶ and Mystere fighter jets were not deployed for regular photo and visual reconnaissance in NEFA, Ladakh and

Aksai Chin Region. Of course, though Srinagar by then was an established air base, fighter operations were not permitted from there under the 1948 United Nations (UN) sponsored ceasefire resolution over J&K between India and Pakistan. Had the GOI been decisive enough, it could have over-ruled that clause citing national security imperatives with respect to China and it is very likely that China's road construction would have been discovered much earlier. More than anything, it would have displayed some intent on part of India. Instead, it was only in 1960 that the long-range Canberra bomber-reconnaissance aircraft of 106 Squadron first flew a few missions to try and investigate the extent of China's build-up in Aksai Chin.

The Air Situation

In the skies, the IAF was superior to the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) in terms of all aircraft (fighters, transport and helicopters) that could be employed effectively, both in Ladakh and NEFA. Its pilots were considerably more skilled than their PLAAF adversaries because of stringent training patterns that still had the RAF stamp on it.⁷ Several senior pilots in middle-level leadership appointments, like flight commanders and commanding officers, had seen action in the 1947-48 war against Pakistan. However, to be fair to the PLAAF, its fighter pilots too had seen action over the Korean Peninsula in the mid-1950s with some success. Even in terms of transport and helicopter support to army operations, the balance was in favour of India - this was to go on to play a significant role in supporting the Forward Policy and providing casualty evacuation in hostile battle conditions as the conflict progressed. *'Unsung and Unheard: The IAF in the 1962 Conflict with China'* is a well-researched book by an IAF stalwart, Air Marshal Bharat Kumar (Retd), which highlights the exploits of the IAF during the conflict.⁸ The title of the book pretty much sums up how the IAF was seen to have contributed to the conflict. Why offensive air power was not used despite the clear superiority of the IAF, and the availability of bases and aircraft that had the radius of action to operate in the areas of operation, is a question that has perplexed many till now. Tezpur, Chabua and Jorhat in the east, and Adampur and Ambala in the west were airfields which were ready for operations. Had the situation demanded, Srinagar air base could have been activated for fighter operations after over-

ruling the UN restrictions. The reasons for not exploiting the IAF have stirred a widespread debate⁹ and have been widely criticised as a strategic blunder.

Force Levels

This part looks at the availability of aircraft for operational exploitation on both sides and the early attempts by the IAF to provide some inputs regarding the Chinese build up, particularly in Aksai Chin. The first comprehensive aerial reconnaissance mission in the region was undertaken by Canberra reconnaissance aircraft of No 106 Squadron as late as on 14 December, 1959¹⁰, nearly two years after it came to be known to the Indian Government that China had built a road through Aksai Chin. Routeing via DBO and braving bad weather, the single aircraft mission brought back clear pictures of the Tibet-Xinjiang Highway which were seen with great interest by the then Prime Minister Nehru. Air Marshal Randhir Singh, who was commanding 106 Squadron during the tumultuous period of 1959-1962, revealed that he and his flight commander, Squadron Leader Nath, carried out a number of intrusive missions into Aksai Chin and across the McMahon Line in NEFA, bringing back valuable information about troop deployments and the build-up of forces. Sadly, not much of the information was taken seriously by the powers that be.¹¹ Air Marshal Raghavendran, who retired as the Vice Chief of the IAF in 1988, was at the time on the operational staff of Operational Command, which later became Western Air Command. He recollects in his book that Squadron Leader Jaggi Nath, a close friend of his and 'the bravest of the brave Canberra pilots'¹², brought back highly incriminatory photographs of thousands of Chinese troops, fortifications and vehicles in the open. While the Chinese protested at these intrusive missions, India continued to vehemently deny it instead of placing the photographic evidence before the Chinese, or even releasing it to the international media to try to pressurise the Chinese.¹³

With over 22 combat squadrons and around 500 aircraft available, the IAF in mid-1962 had the relatively modern Hunter Mk-56 fighter-bomber aircraft and Gnat interceptor aircraft, older but still potent French-built ground attack aircraft like the Mystere and Toofani, Canberra bomber-reconnaissance jets, and the venerable Vampire trainer cum ground attack jet.¹⁴ Of these, a total

of approximately two squadrons each of Toofani and Vampire jets and a detachment of Canberra aircraft were spread amongst the airfields of Tezpur, Chabua and Bagdogra, and would have been available for operations in the NEFA sector.¹⁵ Approximately 15 combat squadrons, including the Hunter Mk-56, were available in Northern India at the airfields of Agra, Palam, Adampur, Ambala and Halwara.¹⁶ The remainder of the squadrons were deployed at Pune and Kalaikunda. The IAF approach clearly indicated a Pakistan-centric deployment and no major changes, barring a few detachments, were made even after the conflict started. Air Marshal Vinod Patney, the IAF's most highly decorated airman and among its cerebral and operationally proficient commanders, was posted to a Toofani squadron (29 Squadron) at Tezpur during the 1962 conflict. He recollects being quite familiar with the valleys of NEFA where they would regularly train for Close Air Support (CAS) and interdiction missions. He also recollects that joint structures for CAS with 33 Corps were in place in the form of a Tactical Air Centre (TAC) with Forward Air Controllers. While he agrees that effective CAS may have been a difficult proposition once the forces were engaged in a close contact battle, particularly in the narrow valleys of Namka Chu and Tawang, he maintains that the IAF could have created havoc among massed Chinese troop concentrations and logistics lines on the Tibetan side, north of the Thagla Ridge as the terrain on that side was devoid of the dense vegetation that marked the Indian side of the McMahon line.¹⁷ He goes on to reiterate that the terrain in Ladakh was ideal for both CAS and interdiction and that the relatively modern IAF Hunters could have provided effective CAS with the Canberra bombers chipping in with interdiction missions. He also added that the older Toofanis and Mysteres, with external tanks fitted, could also have provided offensive air support from airfields like Adampur, Ambala and Halwara.¹⁸

Poor Advice

Ranged against a professionally well-trained IAF fighter force, the offensive element of the PLAAF was a numerically superior force of obsolete platforms like the MiG-15/17, MiG-19 and medium-range IL-28 bombers, most of which were deployed against Taiwan. The IAF leadership was largely left out of the decision-making loop and barring one, rather tepid, operational assessment by Air

Commodore HC Dewan, the then Director of Operations at Air Headquarters, which cautioned against the use of offensive air power, there were no confident voices from within the IAF that pushed for the offensive employment of air power. In the absence of any sound operational assessment of the PLAAF by the IAF¹⁹, the GOI relied on diverse non-specialist inputs to calibrate its decision about not to use offensive air power against China. Some of these reports indicated that the PLAAF had acquired the MiG-21, considered at that time to be amongst the most sophisticated fighters in the world. Wing Commander Asher Lee, a British air power analyst, reported in 1963 that this was grossly incorrect.²⁰ Others went on to caution the GOI that the use of offensive air power may result in the PLAAF attacking Indian cities like Calcutta and the danger of India not being able to occupy the 'moral high ground' in case of a protracted conflict. No cognisance was taken of the fact that PLAAF aircraft could reach targets in India only if they operated from airfields in Tibet with the high altitudes imposing severe restrictions on their weapon carrying capacity.²¹ On the other hand, IAF fighters would have had the advantage of operating with full weapon loads from airfields in the plains of Assam and Punjab. Nehru and Krishna Menon decided to go by the rather defensive assessment of Blackett, a British Operations Research expert who was advising them on matters of national security.²² Diffidence about using offensive air power would cost India dearly as the war progressed.

The Silent Heroes

As it turned out to be, the helicopter and transport aircrew of the IAF turned out to be the heroes of the 1962 war. The IAF's transport fleet had accredited itself superbly in the 1947-48 conflict with Pakistan, particularly in the sustenance of the Poonch garrison and the relief of Leh. In the years that followed, this capability was sustained as the Leh and Kargil garrisons had to be supported in the winter months by air. However, air activity in NEFA was restricted as there was not much requirement for air maintenance till the Forward Policy came into being. When the crisis snowballed in September 1962, the IAF had 10 squadrons of operational transport aircraft divided almost equally between the Western and Eastern sectors, with several detachments operating in the east to support the Forward Policy in NEFA. Of the 200 plus aircraft, the

mainstays were still the evergreen Dakota (2 Ton payload) and the then recently acquired C-119G Packet aircraft (6 Ton payload), few of which were modified with a jet pack to support high altitude operations in 1961.²³ Complementing these war-horses was a squadron of the newly acquired An-12 (10-12 Ton payload), two squadrons of DH-3C Otter light transport aircraft which were used for operations from remote airstrips like Walong in NEFA and in narrow valleys, and a few Super Constellation aircraft for VIP, communication and troop carrying duties. All these aircraft would perform well beyond expectations during the conflict. The PLAAF transport aircraft fleet was reasonably large and known to have extensively supported the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950-52.²⁴ However, according to British Intelligence and American reports, it numbered only around 200 usable aircraft in 1962 comprising a mix of ageing Soviet platforms like the An-2, IL-12/14/18. Unlike India, China rightly realised that the only way of sustaining operations in Ladakh, Aksai Chin and Tibet was by creating a network of roads, tracks and railway lines, and not relying on air maintenance. This was to prove decisive in the long run.

While China hardly had any operational helicopters, the IAF had built up a fairly diverse mix of helicopters to support operations in jungle and high altitude terrain. The 50 odd helicopters comprised Russian built Mi-4's which were inducted during 1961-62, the older American Bell 47G-3 and S-55s.²⁵ While 107 Helicopter Unit (HU) with Mi-4s was the sole unit in Ladakh, 105 and 110 HUs supported the Tawang and Walong Sectors in the east.²⁶ Aircrew proficiency was high and the rotary wing fleet took on the onerous responsibility of sustaining the number of forward picquets in NEFA and Ladakh in the absence of roads and tracks. Their exploits would unfold as the defensive battle in both sectors turned into fragmented retreats. The helicopters of the IAF would fly tirelessly through the war as they carried out hundreds of casualty evacuation missions and even searched for stragglers as they retreated through the jungles of Bhutan.

Compared to the air effort in the eastern sector, which was fraught with danger in terms of the fickle weather and sub-optimal DZs, the situation in Ladakh was a little better despite the higher altitudes of operation. With airfields at Leh, DBO, Fukche, Thoise and Chushul acting as feeder nodes to induct and sustain troops,

the 'rate of flow' of men and material was quite good during 1961-62. However, the GOI frittered away these advantages by increasing the number of forward posts and stretching the air effort to such an extent that the moment resources from the western sector were diverted to the east, the build-up in Ladakh suffered. Without taking anything away from the workhorse of the IAF, the C-119G Packet, the venerable Dakota and the IL-14, all of which performed magnificently, the single biggest 'air factor' in the west was the newly inducted An-12 with its payload of 9 tons. The An-12 squadron (44 Squadron), unaware that the Chinese had commenced their attack in the DBO sector at 2300 hrs on 19th October and on 20th morning, continued operations to DBO when Squadron Leader Chandan Singh, while attempting to land, was hit by ground fire and had to return to Chandigarh with nineteen hits on his aircraft.²⁷ Other aircraft, including Packets, continued on their dropping missions in the area as Indian posts were overwhelmed one by one. On 21 October, it was one of the Packet aircraft on a forward dropping mission that reported a long trail of Indian troops (5 Jat Regt) trudging across the Shyok River and directed the Mi-4s of 107 HU to commence a stupendous casualty evacuation (casevac) operation in which over 100 troops were evacuated to the closest field hospital.

In Hindsight

The IAF had a dedicated reconnaissance squadron, in the form of 106 Squadron, equipped with the new British built Canberra bomber cum reconnaissance aircraft. Tasked with a few sporadic missions in both the eastern sector and in Ladakh, the squadron could have done much more and acted as the eyes of the Indian Government and complemented the Intelligence Bureau's scanty intelligence inputs. It could also have assisted with building an intelligence picture and mosaic of the disposition and gradual build-up of PLA forces in Tibet and tracked their move forward in both sectors. Not only would it have provided military commanders with what they were likely to come up against but also could have provided Nehru with a reality check of whether he needed to temper his bravado of 'wanting to throw the Chinese out of Indian Territory', sensitise the raucous opposition of what India was up against and accept China's proposal for a composite dialogue based on post-colonial realities.

Air Headquarters did not also contest the exaggerated capability of the PLAAF as conveyed to PM Nehru by the US Ambassador, John Kenneth Galbraith, and chose to go along with the typically restrained political interpretation of the time that air power would be unnecessarily escalatory. With joint army-air force structures in place at the corps level, and Forward Air Controllers with the brigades, it is clear that the IAF brass was timid and diffident about forcefully articulating to both the army and the political leadership that in an asymmetric situation on the ground, offensive air power could play a stabilising, if not a decisive, role. If offensive air power had been used in the east, particularly on the Chinese side of the McMahon line across the Thagla Ridge and while the PLA was concentrating its forces, significant attrition could have been caused. Similarly, if the Indian Army had maintained its fortress strategy at Sela and Bomdila without retreating chaotically, Indian fighter-bomber aircraft could have caused significant attrition on PLA forces as they attempted to either lay siege to these positions, or bypass them as they did. It would be foolish to surmise that air power would have been a game-changer; however, it would certainly have been a face-saver and India's armed forces may have possibly come out of the conflict in both sectors bruised, but not beaten and humiliated.

Endnotes

¹ For a detailed analysis of the Forward Policy see Maj Gen D.K. Palit, *War in the High Himalayas* (New Delhi, South Asia Books, 1992), pp.90-100. Also see Maj Gen Jagjit Singh, *While the Memory is Fresh* (New Delhi, Lancer, 2006), pp.101-110.

² The Indian Army's operational dissent to the Forward Policy is well chronicled by Neville Maxwell, *India's China War*, (Dehradun, Natraj, 2015) pp. 199-205.

³ P.B. Sinha, A.A. Athale, with S.N. Prasad, chief editor, History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, *History of the Conflict with China 1962*, official Indian history of the Sino-Indian War (New Delhi, 1992), pp.343-346.

⁴ Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal, (Ed by Ela Lal), *My Years with the IAF* (New Delhi, Lancer, 1986), pp.100-106.

⁵ The IAF and the Indian Army had calculated that to sustain the Forward Policy in the East a monthly airlift of 2200 Tons was the bare minimum required. Despite their best efforts the IAF could manage an average of only 1200 tons/month on an average. If one factors in the 25-30% loss due to the small size of the Dropping Zones and narrow valleys, the airlift was woefully inadequate. See Sinha & Athavle (1992), p.353.

⁶ A literal translation of its French name of Ouragan.

⁷ Interview with Air Marshal Vinod Patney on 02 June, 2013. The Air Marshal was a young Flying Officer and posted at Tezpur during the conflict.

⁸ Air Marshal Bharat Kumar, *Unknown and Unsung: Indian Air Force in Sino-Indian War of 1962* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2013).

⁹ See R. Sukumaran, The 1962 India-China War and Kargil 1999: Restrictions on the Use of Air Power, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol 27, No.3, Jul-Sep 2003, pp.332-355 –Also see Arjun Subramaniam, 'Clearing the Air' *Indian Express*, New Delhi, October 21, 1963, p.2.

¹⁰ Air Marshal Bharat Kumar, p.39.

¹¹ Telephonic conversation with Air Marshal Randhir Singh in October 2014. He revealed during that interview that he was asked to assume command of 106 Squadron after it had one aircraft shot down over Pakistan in 1959 during a clandestine intrusive mission.

¹² Air Marshal S Raghavendran, *Panther Red One* (New Delhi: KW publishers, 2013), p.141.

¹³ Air Marshal S Raghavendran, p.187.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 83-84. Also see Sukumaran, p.333. Also see S. N. Prasad, Ed, H, *History of the Conflict with China, 1962*, New Delhi, History Division, Government of India, 1992, pp. 356-357.

¹⁵ A detachment of Canberra reconnaissance and bomber aircraft from Agra was moved to Tezpur and worked in close liaison with HQ IV Corps. Also see Bharat Kumar, IAF deployment map, p.95.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Interview with Air Marshal Patney on 02 June 2013.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ An operational assessment from Air HQs sounded extreme caution with regards to Close Air Support in NEFA. However, it is surprising that the same report does not mention that CAS in Ladakh could be a worthwhile proposition. See Sukumaran, p.337.

²⁰ Asher Lee, *The Russian and Chinese Air Forces, Brasseys Annual-The Armed Forces Yearbook* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1963), pp. 97-99. Also see Sukumaran, 335-336.

²¹ Most of the 20 odd airfields in Tibet were at altitudes of above 3500 m, with some as high as 4,500m.

²² Air Vice Marshal A K Tiwary, 'No Use of Air Power in 1962', Indian Defence Review, Vol 21.3, Jul-Sep 2006, at <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/no-use-of-combat-air-power-in-1962/> (accessed 29 November 2014)

²³ Air Marshal Bharat Kumar, pp. 103-110.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 130-133.

²⁶ Sinha & Athale (1992), pp.353-355.

²⁷ Bharat Kumar, p.245

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The Indian Navy and PLA Navy in 1962

Commander Subhasish Sarangi®

Abstract

Though the Indian Navy was not directly involved in the conflict of 1962, it had by then slowly created a significant surface force and had one aircraft carrier but was yet to induct submarines. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), on the other hand, was primarily geared for coastal defence but had a growing fleet of submarines. The sole naval threat from the PLAN was the possibility of deployment of its submarines. Yet, on this anniversary of the 1962 war, it is clear that any future conflict with China will spread to the Indian Ocean through which the great trading power's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) traverse. These SLOCs are the potential targets and obviously require guarding. The growing Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean attests to that. This article attempts to put forth the maritime picture in 1962 so as to induce thinking on the Chinese maritime threat in the future.

Introduction

The Indian Navy was not involved in the conflict of 1962. The

historical account of the Indian Navy for that period devotes only two pages to the Chinese threat. Memoirs of distinguished naval officers mention the conflict in passing only. In 1962, the PLAN was an inconsequential navy and posed no threat. The same is not the case in 2020 when the PLAN is the second largest Navy in the world and slated to become the largest by 2035.¹

The first naval operation undertaken after Independence, 'Exercise Peace', was the landing of Indian Army personnel and equipment to secure Junagadh. Landings were undertaken at

Porbandar on 05 October 1947, Jaffarabad on 17 October 1947 and Mangrol on 01 November 1947.² The Indian Navy saw action in 'Operation Vijay' for liberation of Goa, from 17 to 20 December 1961. INS Delhi operated off Diu in support of land operations. INS Betwa, Beas and Cauvery enforced a blockade off Goa and neutralised the Portuguese sloop Alfonso de Albuquerque in Marmagao harbour. INS Mysore and Trishul took over Anjadip Island.

Growth of the Indian Navy after Independence till 1962

After the partition of assets with Pakistan, the naval fleet of India in 1947 consisted merely of four sloops, two frigates, one corvette, twelve minesweepers, one survey ship and other auxiliary vessels.³ The first proposal for modernisation and expansion of the Indian Navy (Naval Plans Paper 1/47) was brought out as early as 25 August 1947.⁴ Laying out the force requirements for the next ten years, it envisaged two light fleet carriers, three cruisers, eight destroyers, four submarines and other smaller vessels.⁵ This ambitious expansion plan got modified and scaled down in subsequent plans over the next decade. Despite this the Indian Navy grew.

His Majesty's Indian Ship (HMIS), (later Indian Naval Ship (INS), Delhi was commissioned on 05 July 1948 as the first cruiser and reached India on 16 September 1948. His Majesty's Ship (HMS) Avenger, a Landing Ship Tank (LST), was acquired and commissioned as HMIS Magar on 11 April 1949. This was followed by the commissioning of three "R" Class – Rajput, Ranjit and Rana destroyers in 1949. In 1953, there was a further addition of three Hunt Class destroyers – Godavari, Ganga and Gomati. A Fleet Requirement Unit was approved in 1951 and a squadron of Sealand aircraft was procured in 1953. A fleet tanker was purchased from Italy and commissioned as INS Shakti on 20 January 1954. Two inshore minesweepers were commissioned in 1955 and four coastal minesweepers – Karwar, Kakinada, Cannanore and Cuddalore were commissioned in August 1956. On 29 August 1957, INS Mysore, the second cruiser, got commissioned.

Eight new frigates were procured from the United Kingdom during 1958-60. Unlike earlier procurements, they were newly constructed specifically for the Indian Navy. These were three Blackwood Class Type 14 anti-submarine frigates (Kuthar, Kirpan and Khukri), three Leopard Class Type 41 anti-aircraft frigates (Brahmaputra, Beas and Betwa) and two Whitby Class Type 12 surface escort frigates (Trishul and Talwar). The first aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, was commissioned on 04 March 1961. Its integral flight consisted of ten Seahawk fighters, six Alize reconnaissance aircraft and two Alouette helicopters.

On the eve of the 1962 war, the Indian Navy was a fairly competent force. Budgetary allocations in the decade 1950 to 1960 remained 9% to 12% of the Defence budget. By 1960-61, it had dropped to 3% probably because it was felt major acquisitions had been done. Also, the British still maintained a sizable presence east of the Suez and while the Indian Navy envisioned a balanced force with integral air power and submarines, capable of operating in the Indian Ocean, the view from London was that it should primarily focus on coastal defence. This resulted in the United Kingdom being selective in transferring assets to the Indian Navy. The Royal Navy perceived the threat to its interests in the Indian Ocean from submarines of communist nations. Hence, it was agreeable to procurement of anti-submarine warfare (ASW) frigates by India while not allowing transfer of submarines.

Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in 1962

The British influence in the IOR, though ebbing, was still strong in 1962. In the east, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaya and Singapore were independent. It would take a few years more for the nations to settle to their present-day borders. In March 1962, the Burmese military took over the nation and steered it towards socialism. Sri Lanka was still the Dominion of Ceylon. The British controlled defence and external affairs of the Maldives. Mauritius and Seychelles were British colonies. The Chagos archipelago was a part of Mauritius. It would be carved out to become part of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965. The British had military presence in South Arabia (Aden), Persian Gulf (Bahrain, Sharjah and Masirah), Mauritius, Maldives, Malaya, Borneo, Singapore and Hong Kong. In the Maldives, it was in Gan and Hitaddu Islands in

the southernmost Addu atoll. The Royal Navy Far East Fleet was based at Singapore. Singapore had six British military bases of the three Services.⁶

The spread of communism was seen as the greatest threat by the Anglo-American duo. Two alliances were formed to counter it. The Baghdad Pact was founded in 1955 by Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran. It was renamed the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in 1959 after Iraq pulled out of the Pact. Similarly, in 1954, the United States, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan formed the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). Pakistan was the 'link' between these two regional organisations and benefitted from it. Moreover, in 1954, USA signed a Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with Pakistan. In 1956, USA committed to directly supply two destroyers and eight minesweepers, and pay Britain for refurbishing and supplying a cruiser and four destroyers.⁷ By 1959, Pakistan got one cruiser, five destroyers, eight coastal minesweepers and a squadron of Albatross aircraft for antisubmarine patrols.⁸ The flow of military equipment to Pakistan from USA and UK forced Indian naval planners to reassess the threat from Pakistan.

In addition to Pakistan, there was another naval power growing in the east. From 1956 onwards, Indonesia had started receiving massive military and economic aid from the Soviet Union in response to CENTO and SEATO. In 1960, Moscow provided \$ 450 million with low interest rate for procurement of one cruiser, six destroyers, 12 Whisky Class submarines, seven frigates, eight escort vessels and other smaller vessels.⁹ Between 1959 and 1964, the naval military equipment supplied by the Soviet Union included one cruiser, 18 destroyers and frigates, 12 submarines, 67 corvettes and motor torpedo boats, 12 missile boats, 21 minesweepers, 11 landing ships, six landing craft, four transport ships and four oilers.¹⁰ This, along with strained relations with India, emboldened Indonesia to directly support Pakistan in 1965 though the Indian Navy held its first ever joint naval exercise, outside the Commonwealth, with the Indonesian Navy in July 1960.¹¹ Besides, India was also providing training facilities for a large number of its sailors and officers.¹²

The PLAN and India

The PLAN was officially established in May 1950. The primary worry was an invasion of the mainland by Taiwan or the USA. The PLAN expanded with the support of the Soviet Union. Soviet naval officers were deputed as advisers. The PLAN imbibed the Soviet strategy of countering a larger naval force with smaller and, hence, more manoeuvrable vessels and stealthy submarines.¹³ General Xiao Jinguang, the first Commander of the PLAN, stipulated that the key mission was to accompany the ground forces in war and that the navy should be capable of inshore defence. The basic characteristic of the navy was to be 'light' so as to enable it to be deployed fast.¹⁴ Thus, this 'maritime guerrilla warfare' was sought to be fought with small vessels (fast patrol boats and torpedo boats), submarines and land-based naval aircraft. Doctrinally, the PLAN remained subsumed within the prevailing PLA doctrine of 'People's War'. Technology and weaponry was considered as insignificant compared to the revolutionary fervour of soldiers imbued with Mao's ideology.¹⁵

In April 1950, China captured Hainan from Taiwan. The Korean War brought the US naval fleet into the Taiwan Strait and halted plans of further attacks. The Naval Aviation Wing (PLAN Air force) was formally established in 1952. In 1954, the submarine arm was formed with the transfer of boats from the Soviet Union. Events in early 1960s constrained development of a seagoing navy. Naval modernisation was hampered by the devastating economic failure of the Great Leap Forward. The commencement of Sino-Soviet split resulted in the withdrawal of all Soviet naval advisers from China in 1960.

In 1962, the PLAN was considered as 'not an offensive force' and 'ineffective except for inshore defence'.¹⁶ The principal combatants and submarines of the PLAN in 1962 are tabulated in Table 1.¹⁷ Except for the four Kiangnan Class frigates, all the principal combatants were of World War II vintage. Among submarines, the Whisky Class were the only ones of contemporary construction and capable of operating in the IOR provided logistic support was available in the region. When the conflict broke out in 1962, the combined threat from China and Pakistan was assessed in India.¹⁸ As per Rear Admiral Satyindra Singh, the PLAN had one

cruiser, five destroyers, 16 frigates, 25 submarines, and 400 shore-based aircraft in addition to smaller vessels.¹⁹ He assesses, “Only the submarines could pose a threat to our shipping or ports, as 21 of the submarines could have operated in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. If adequate replenishment facilities were made available, seven or eight Chinese submarines could have operated at one time”.²⁰

Table 1 : Principal Combatants and Submarines of PLAN in 1962

Principal Combatants				
Quantity	Description	Class/Type	Standard Displacement (tons)	Vintage
01	Light Cruiser	Pei Ching	1020	1945. Damaged in 1949 and salvaged. Doubtful operational capability.
04	Destroyers	Ex-Soviet	1657	1936-41.
		Gordy Class		
04	Frigates	Kiangnan Class	1200	1956-57. Chinese construction.
01	Escort	Ex-Japan	940	1945. Repaired after
	Destroyer	Ukuru Class		damage in 1950. Rearmed in 1955.
01	Escort	Ex-Japan	870	1943. Rearmed in
	Destroyer	Etorofu Class		1955.
01	Sloop	Ex-Japan	950	1941. Rearmed in
	(Gunboat)			1955.
06	Corvette	Ex-Japan	745	1944-45. Rearmed in 1955.
01	Corvette	Ex-Canada	1100	1944.
02	Corvette	Ex-Britain	1020	1940-41. Converted from merchant vessels.
01	Gunboat	Ex-Britain	815	1941. Converted from mine sweeper/ merchant vessel.

Submarines

Quantity	Class/Type	Standard Displacement (in tons)	Vintage
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13-17	Soviet Whisky Class	1050	Assembled in Chinese yards between 1956 and 1964.
04	S (Srednaya) Class	780 Series	Series IX-bis (1941-43) and IX-bis 2 (1947-48). Transferred from Soviet Union in 1954-55.
04	Shchuka Class	577	Series V-bis 2 (1933-36). Transferred from Soviet Union in 1954-55.
04	M (Malyutka) Class	283	Series XV (1950-51). Transferred from Soviet Union in 1954-55. Only for coastal operations.
02	M (Malyutka) Class	160	Series VI (1933-34). Used only for training. Not operational.

A final assessment “ruled out the naval involvement of China in the conflict *though the presence of Chinese submarines had been confirmed, both in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal*. The likelihood of Pakistan joining hands with China to pose a combined maritime threat was considered low” (as Pakistan was still in the Western camp).²¹ Consequently, the Indian Navy saw little use in the 1962 war.

Conclusion

After the 1962 war, naval Seahawk and Alize aircraft from the INS Vikrant were deployed to Gorakhpur till October 1963.²² The Indian Air Force had used an Alize to spot Chinese radar stations along the Line of Actual Control.²³ Post 1962, the acquisitions of the Indian Navy moved decisively away from the United Kingdom to the Soviet Union. The Soviet offer of providing submarines paved the way for subsequent Soviet acquisitions. The first submarine, INS Kalvari, was commissioned in 1967. The Western Naval Command, Eastern Naval Command and Western Fleet were formed on 01 March 1968. The Eastern Fleet was formed in 01 November 1971. The Indian Navy’s share in the defence budget also rose gradually to reach 8.2 per cent by 1970-71. India embarked on the path of indigenous ship construction with the Leander project that saw the commissioning of the first ship in 1972. In April 1967, Britain announced its intention to withdraw all British forces from ‘East of Suez’.

In the 1960s, the fear was that the British withdrawal from the ‘East of Suez’ would create a vacuum in the IOR. In India,

submarines from PLAN were assessed as one of the greater threats. There is an analogous situation now. The USA is looking to reduce its international commitments and the perceived threat from the PLAN is much more than just submarines.

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De-Ciphering Chinese Intent Behind 'Unilateral Decision to Change Status Quo at LAC' should be the Key to India's Military Response and Follow-Up Strategy

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Abstract

Ever since 05 May 2020, when the Pangong Tso fracas became public, there has been an unending cacophony of news, views, critiques and suggestions. But after the loss of 20 Brave Hearts at Galwan, on the night 15/16 Jun, the Indian blood has been on the boil ! Recommendations spanning from hard-core punitive military action to soft diplomatic resolution have come forth from the academia and strategists. The Indian Government has since banned numerous Chinese apps, and imposed various economic checks, and the common public too has swung into action to shun everything Chinese. But, from what is gradually emerging, the recent intrusions and face offs, backed up by heavy force levels, are pre-meditated, deliberate, People's Liberation Army (PLA) military actions — with a definite aim. It would, therefore, be prudent that instead of knee-jerk response(s), the 'Chinese Intent' be first ascertained / deduced with sufficient clarity to tailor-make a response which not only thwarts its immediate military designs with minimal efforts but also obstructs its larger strategic goals. The article attempts to deduce the PLA's immediate Military Aim(s) and Chinese Intent, and then suggests India's military response and follow up strategy.

What could be PLA's immediate Military Aim(s) and Chinese Intent?

China, one of the oldest and vibrant civilisations of the world, not being able to digest the century of humiliation (1840 – 1945) suffered at the hands of the British and Japanese, has long harboured a dream to re-emerge as the Middle Kingdom to rule over the world. And, to ensure fruition of this ambition, successive Chinese leaders, commencing from Dr Sun Yat Sen in 1924 to Xi Jinping now, ensured ‘continuity of strategic thought and plans’¹ over the past century to make China reach the penultimate pedestal in world rankings, with the required military and economic muscle, to now make the final push for being the foremost superpower.

As regards India, China’s stratagem based on Mao Zedong’s statement, endorsed by Deng Xiaoping, stating that ‘Tibet is the palm of China, and Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and NEFA are its fingers’², appears to be continuing to guide the Chinese strategy. And in Ladakh, with Aksai Chin and Shaksgam Valley already occupied, and reports of increasing Chinese presence in areas of Gilgit Baltistan in the name of China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China may finally be eyeing whole of Ladakh, or at least Eastern Ladakh up to Indus River, as its western boundary. However, there are some chinks in the Chinese armour.

The Chinese Weaknesses

Any global power needs freedom on land, in sea, air and space to freely project and exercise its military power to secure its strategic and economic interests across the globe. While China has sufficient freedom in air and space, because of its geography, its freedom on land and in sea is highly restricted.

Land Frontier

China has a land frontier of about 22,117 km, the longest any single country has in the world.³ However, the following geographical realities severely restrict the utility of land avenues:

- Out of the 14 neighbours, eight countries are totally land-locked, viz. Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Laos, which naturally cannot provide further access to any desired destination directly.

- The balance six neighbours, viz. North Korea, Russia, Pakistan, India, Myanmar and Vietnam, have access to open seas. Passage through North Korea and Vietnam to sea is not required as these are adjacent to Chinese coastline. Russian access is again of little use as it is largely oriented to Arctic North. That leaves only three useful land neighbours, viz. Pakistan, India and Myanmar.
- Since India has boundary dispute and Myanmar is still not relenting (on Kyaukpyu port), China has had only Pakistan to look forward to and has, accordingly, put everything behind CPEC to make it successful.
- CPEC can be the only alternate access available to China, if it is blocked on its eastern seaboard. However, this corridor suffers a major drawback due to closure of Khunjerab Pass for almost five months in a year, from December to April, due to heavy snow.

Sea Frontier

China has a total sea frontage of about 14,500 km.⁴ However, its freedom for naval operations is again highly restricted:

- The Yellow Sea is almost blocked by the Korean Peninsula in the North and Kyushu Island of Japan in the East.
- The East China Sea is blocked on the East by Japanese Islands of Kyushu and Ryukyu, and in the South East by Taiwan.
- The South China Sea is hemmed in by Vietnam in the West, Philippines in the East and by the Indonesian and Malaysian archipelagos in the South. It is, possibly, for this reason that China wants to secure various natural and artificial islands in this area to create a buffer for its mainland.
- China's most important sea passage to the South suffers a bottleneck at the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar Straits, and then faces surveillance from Indian

Islands of Andaman and Nicobar, before it has clear access to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

- These sea passages, even if secured, would require multiple Logistic Support Bases enroute. Hence the Chinese quest to secure various ports/bases, viz. Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Gwadar in Pakistan and Djibouti in Africa. Its hunt for newer locations, especially in Africa, continues. Only one sea passage for an emerging global power, that too with so many constrictions, is definitely inadequate for its strategic needs.

New Emerging / Anticipated Threats

With India being vocal in its claims to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), Gilgit, Baltistan and Aksai Chin in 2019 (at the time of abrogating Article 370 and subsequent creation and de-lineation of the Union Territories (UTs) of J&K and Ladakh), China would definitely be worried on following two counts:

- **CPEC.** Any physical attempt by India to regain Pakistan occupied areas will directly impact availability and functionality of CPEC.
- **Chinese National Highway (G 219).** G 219⁵ is a lifeline for Tibet from both western (Xinjiang) and eastern (Sichuan) ends. From Karghalik in North to Shiquanhe in South i.e. through its entire stretch in Aksai Chin in between, G 219 is a solitary axis with no alternate connectivity through any other road, and, therefore, its blockage / disruption in Aksai Chin can be a major strategic vulnerability. Moreover, it is from this vulnerable patch of G 219 in Aksai Chin, five westwards lateral roads have been developed to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), viz. to Depsang Plains (areas of PP 10, 11, 11A, 12 & 13), Galwan Valley (PP 14), Hot Springs / Gogra (PP 15 & 17A), Pangong Tso North Bank (till Finger 4) and Pangong Tso South Bank (almost till opposite of Finger 4, and where an additional road from Rutog to Spanggur-Chushul also exists). As per rough estimations from various maps, the length of all these axes is varying

between 100 to 125 km (in addition, Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) itself is only about 10 km west of LAC, and the crow flight distance from DBO to Karakoram Pass is also about 10 km only).⁶ The military capability and sustainability of all these five axes has been well proven by the current Chinese build up to the LAC. Initially (from 1962 to early 2000s), a comparatively weaker India was hesitant to carry out border area developments near the LAC fearing Chinese usage during any hostility. However, now the resolve of a stronger India to develop air and all weather multiple road connectivity to LAC in Ladakh, (especially activation of DBO airstrip, near completion of Darbuk–Shyok-DBO (DSDBO) road and even some of its eastwards connectivity across River Shyok towards LAC), is bound to raise apprehensions in China because they see the roads as a threat and not as long overdue developmental activity.

PLA's Probable Immediate Military Aim(s)

The above mentioned geographical constraints, and related security needs, are pushing China to lay claims in the East China and South China Seas and in areas of Ladakh adjacent to its corridors on land.

The One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, now known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, a venture with masked strategic dimensions⁷, is primarily aimed at securing land corridors with discrete priority accorded for access into the Arabian Sea at Gwadar through Pakistan, and into Bay of Bengal through Myanmar (through Kyaukpyu, whenever feasible). Moreover, with continuing pressures for independence of Tibet, and fresh traction gaining prominence regarding atrocities on Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China would also naturally be concerned about strategic connectivity of these volatile areas at the time of fresh emerging situations. So logically both, security of CPEC and G 219 naturally emerge as strategic priorities. And, since there would be numerous opponents to Chinese claims on the eastern seaboard and it could lead to long drawn hostilities, it makes pure military sense to first secure a backdoor land corridor for sustenance.

An aggressive PLA action in eastern Ladakh could address all concerns and requirements together, viz. give PLA a chance to recce and practice mobilisation into Aksai Chin up to the LAC, study and upgrade defensive and logistic layouts along all five axes, push as far forward astride LAC as possible to lay fresh claims or gain territory, gain vantage positions to overlook DSDBO road to make it redundant during operations, and, in the bargain, secure G 219 and impose caution on India. Pakistan, which is now almost a vassal state of China, too could be easily roped in to facilitate this operation by not only remaining on guard for 'Indian occupied territories' and further facilitating Chinese ingress into Gilgit-Baltistan in the name of securing CPEC, but more importantly to announce to India that hereafter, because of commonality of interests, both China and Pakistan will stand together to militarily defend territorial aspects related to erstwhile state of J&K, raising a spectre of a 'Two Front War' to deter India.

Since 2013, China has been facing an ever-increasing resistance from India to its 'Salami Slicing' tactics. And, with the enhanced pace of border area development by India, and its ever improving international stature, the PLA seems to perceive that only an early operation (of strategic land grab) may succeed. Learning from Doklam that India may use force to resist Chinese designs in future, Chinese PLA has, this time, come well prepared with adequate strength, back up reserves and ready for a long haul. So as step 1, PLA, as per a pre-meditated surprise plan, has moved in at the beginning of the campaigning season under the ruse of an ongoing exercise, unilaterally changed the status quo at LAC abrogating all previous agreements, and has secured areas right up to their perception of the LAC, gaining local tactical advantages all across. Going back on disengagement terms agreed upon during the meeting of 06 Jun 2020, and bringing in special troops in to the Galwan area leading to a face off on night 15/16 Jun, could also be a pre-planned affair to gauge Indian resolve and create an excuse for lengthy negotiation processes to have an alibi for continuing the stay at LAC.

Later, agreeing only for phased disengagement (or just giving its semblance) but retaining / increasing force levels in the rear areas, mobilisation of Pakistani Reserve Forces into Gilgit-Baltistan areas and reports of Chinese aircrafts landing in Skardu including

H-6 bombers in Tibet) reasonably point towards a likely Chinese design (with direct / indirect collusivity of Pakistan) to possibly make a push for securing territory in Galwan and Depsang areas later in the campaigning season. Even if planned operations are somehow not possible to progress this year, largely due to growing international support for India, PLA could remain content with present gains, lie low and launch afresh in Mar / Apr 2021 by when China may be able to dilute the happenings on eastern seaboard and change (or negate) the international sway. This land grab could either be a part of its larger ploy to connect to Pakistan over a wider land corridor (connect Gilgit Baltistan to Aksai Chin) or an initial step to grab entire Ladakh.

The perception in some quarters that China is only undertaking an action of 'Coercive Diplomacy' to make India retract from anti-China actions, viz. declaring new UTs of J&K and Ladakh, laying claims to Aksai Chin, Gilgit, Baltistan and PoK, supporting World Health Organisation (WHO) inquiry on COVID-19, and joining of US led Quad, is a big fallacy. PLA, the world's second largest Army with massive resources, will not undertake a planned offensive posture against India just to retreat later on a verbal assurance from India that it will behave in future. We need to remember that the Chinese, who are so sensitive to Mianzi (meaning 'keeping Face'), may never venture into any empty rhetoric. And, also need to recall that Chinese planning for this operation probably started around 2006 when a Google Image showed a 1:500 Model of Aksai Chin area created in Yinchuan (capital of Ningxia Autonomous Region)⁸ for practice by PLA.

Probable Chinese Intent

By this purported PLA achievement, the following Chinese strategic aims may be facilitated which are in sync with the much talked about Chinese intent of teaching India a lesson and relegating it to a subordinate position in the Asian power structure (thereby enabling China to compete unhindered with USA for the global leadership):

- The CPEC will be secured for posterity as no outside power would ever come physically to fight India's land battles with China and Pakistan, across LAC and Line of Control (LoC) respectively, and India alone will never be

able to militarily win back these areas. It would later also facilitate re-alignment of CPEC to an all-weather route meeting the requirement of China. It would, thus, deny India a major leverage against China in the long run.

- It would secure Gilgit, Baltistan and PoK for Pakistan, and would thereby naturally facilitate a tighter strategic embrace of Pakistan. Even continued occupation of Siachen Glacier by India may then become untenable.
- It would militarily disgrace India, give an image-makeover to PLA, and China would still continue to have strong leverages over India across LAC in the Middle and Eastern sectors.
- If India has to continuously be on the back foot to China, Nepal and Bhutan may, over time, acquiesce to Chinese demands as a fait accompli. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile may also lose faith and momentum.
- Lastly, and most importantly, having lost its main territorial leverage against China in Ladakh and J&K, India may gradually lose its importance from being counted as an important country in the western designs for 'containing China', which could then lead to side-lining of India from both Western and Eastern alliances / groupings.

India's Military Response and Follow-up Strategy

India's Military Response

The Indian Armed Forces, in their current state, can definitely give a bloody nose to the PLA in a short confrontation, in a chosen area. However, considering the challenges of ongoing corona pandemic, a foreseeable economic downturn and the possibility of Pak collusivity, an all-out confrontation could best be avoided. Judging from the PLA activities and response, which has unfolded till now, the following may be the best military response during the ongoing disengagement process:

- Maintain eyeball to eyeball deployment with PLA in Eastern Ladakh and maintain sufficient reserves to thwart any PLA attempt to gain territory towards CPEC.

- Strengthen Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), and build up matching resources wherever PLA or Pakistan Army brings in additional troops and support elements. Also keep track of any PLA and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) move into Pakistan occupied areas.
- Maintain preventive deployment all along LAC and LoC to avoid any loss of territory.
- Maintain sufficient reserves in critical areas of Central and Eastern sectors, viz. Siliguri Corridor, to deny any bargaining chip to China in case of a limited show down. Rather, some plans need to be kept ready for quid pro quo too.
- Make adequate logistic preparations to support forward deployments through the winters, to avoid getting surprised as the same may definitely be maintained by the PLA along LAC and Pak Army along the LoC.
- Utilise the current favourable international opinion for making up all deficiencies and requirements of military hardware on a fast track basis and may create a reserve for a few years as this situation is likely to prevail.

China is known for its 'two steps forward and one step back' policy during negotiations. Therefore, any reneging on reversion to status quo ante, in totality, should be taken as an act of continuing aggression, and dealt with accordingly. Being content with mere disengagement at the face off points will tantamount to accepting and giving tactical ascendancy to PLA in these strategic areas, lowering of morale of Indian Army, and making their positions untenable, and also negating years of efforts taken to develop strategic communications to safeguard our territory.

Conclusion

International relations are always energised and guided by congruity of 'National Interests'. Fortunately today, while facing the Chinese onslaught, India is well placed with US and other major players who too are equally concerned and impacted by Chinese aggressions. Having stemmed the PLA tide in Eastern Ladakh just

in time and with military help now pouring in from all corners, India needs to take concrete, pro-active, steps to stop China from continuing to pursue its' designs. The following are felt to be the minimum essential during the short term:

- Add to military capacity on priority.
- Retain the emerging leverages of threat to CPEC and G 219 (and fan the Tibet leverage too as required).
- Bring to bear all diplomatic and economic pressures (both national and international) at the ongoing parleys with China to insist and force PLA to revert to status quo ante in toto and agree to delineate LAC in an earliest specified timeframe, to acquit itself honourably from the tag of a 'Revisionist and Expansionist Power'.
- Streamline operational responsibility along active borders by placing Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) under operational control of Indian Army).

Peace and harmony on the frontiers is the basic requirement for sustained growth of any nation. Since a powerful China will only respect a strong India, India needs to quickly build capacity in these favourable times and then use all the leverages to bargain for mutual accommodation on equal terms. There is a definite need to stem perpetual 'military confrontations' in the region and change focus to 'development and well-being of masses' by ushering in mutual faith and boosting healthy intra-regional trade.

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India-China Border Agreements

Shri Gaurav Kumar®

Abstract

The ongoing standoff in Ladakh, which started in May 2020, has been the most serious so far in terms of casualties since the Cho La and Nathu La clashes of 1967. The incongruity of the soldiers of two nuclear weapon armed countries, inflicting casualties on each other without use of firearms, came in for much adverse comment. The commentators and the public would have been more informed had they been clear about the confidence building agreements signed between India and China regarding management of and conduct on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This article gives out the important details of these agreements and provides links where the interested scholar can further research the subject.

General

The current standoff between India and China at the LAC has

brought the legacies of past border transgressions and standoffs to the forefront. The issue of the disputed border, exacerbated by the un-demarcated LAC, is once again under contestation. The Sino-Indian border dispute has its roots in the past and the seed of contestation was sown right after communist China annexed Tibet. India accepted the Chinese annexation of Tibet as a *fait accompli*, despite growing fear of Chinese intrusions in the border states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. It was not until 1958 that the western sector figured in the talks on the frontiers. In the middle and western sectors, up to 1959 the extent of actual control by China and India in the main, conformed to the traditional customary line, except at individual places.¹ After the 1962 war, there was a long period of no communication between India and China. But after a thaw took place in December 1988 when the

then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China, the two countries have entered into various confidence building and peacekeeping agreements. Most occurred after transgressions and standoffs, some of which were inadvertent due to the ambiguity on the disputed border. All these agreements aimed to prevent the situation from escalating. The much discussed practice of not using weapons at the LAC flows from such agreements.

The Aksai Chin Challenge

The Chinese activities in Aksai Chin burst into Indian consciousness only in 1959 when, making a statement in the Lok Sabha, the then Prime Minister stated, "Some reports reached us between October 1957 and February 1958 that a Chinese detachment had crossed the international frontier and visited Khurnak Fort, which is within Indian Territory. The attention of the Chinese Government was drawn to this and they were asked to desist from entering our territory. There is no physical demarcation of the frontier in these mountainous passes, although our maps are quite clear on the subject. Thereafter, at the end of July 1959, a small Indian reconnaissance police party was sent to this area. When this party was proceeding towards Khurnak Fort, it was apprehended, some miles from the border inside our territory, by a stronger Chinese detachment. This happened on 28 July".² For long, India was preoccupied with the McMahon Line on its eastern border and the deliberation on the western sector was kept under wrap until the Chinese announced the construction of a road in that area.³ History suggests that post 1959, India failed to persuade China to clarify its stand on the border issue and the confusion helped Chinese prevaricate on its claims. The current dispute, where Chinese have declined to vacate from Finger areas, Dopsang and Gogra, is an attempt by the Chinese to move up to the areas of their 1960 claim line. This is a departure of the LAC agreed upon as a consequence of the 1993 agreement.

The Current Impasse

The current impasse has eroded the credibility of the heads of India and China, who during the Wuhan Summit in 2018 had outlined a strategic guideline for the armies to conduct border management. The official press release mentioned, "To this end, they issued

strategic guidance to their respective militaries to strengthen communication in order to build trust and mutual understanding and enhance predictability and effectiveness in the management of border affairs. The two leaders further directed their militaries to earnestly implement various confidence building measures agreed upon between the two sides, including the principle of mutual and equal security, and strengthen existing institutional arrangements and information sharing mechanisms to prevent incidents in border regions⁴.” It also erodes the substance of the 24 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed in 2015 for cooperation in diverse economic and cultural fields.⁵ The Galwan event and the ongoing tension in the Ladakh sector clearly suggests that the compact set by the late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, during his visit to China in 1988 at the invitation of Chinese Premier Li Peng, is nearly finished.⁶

The militaries of the two countries are officially in the process of disengagement. However, Indian officials claim only ‘partial disengagement’ in some spots, such as Patrolling Point 17A in Gogra-Hot Springs and Pangong Lake.⁷ The recent disputes in the Ladakh Region demonstrate that China was not trying to avoid ‘new disputes’ as claimed by her, but was waiting for the opportune moment to settle the dispute on its terms. It compelled India for a stand-off at a time when the world, including India, was reeling from the unexpected onslaught of coronavirus pandemic.

The Future Lies in the Past

The answer to big challenges lies in the previous arrangements for border disputes. The previous arrangements were partially, if not fully, successful to avoid military conflicts in the border region. The countries can formulate new *modus operandi* based on their previous interactions. To understand the old border management, we need to refresh our minds on the previous agreements related to the LAC, which are elucidated below:

- **Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas, 7 September 1993.**⁸ The 1993 Agreement is considered as the foundational agreement between India and China which brought in

long pending, mutually acceptable, terms of engagement on the border areas. It first brought in the term 'Line of Actual Control' (LAC). The Agreement clearly spells out the mode of engagement between the two armies that has been reiterated since then. The Agreement states, "The two sides are of the view that the India-China boundary question shall be resolved through peaceful and friendly consultations. Neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other by any means. Pending an ultimate solution to the boundary question between the two countries, the two sides shall strictly respect and observe the LAC between the two sides. No activities of either side shall overstep the LAC. In case personnel of one side cross the LAC, upon being cautioned by the other side, they shall immediately pull back to their own side of the LAC. When necessary, the two sides shall jointly check and determine the segments of the LAC where they have different views as to its alignment". The Agreement also informs the two parties to keep the troops level at the minimum, to work out through consultations effective confidence building measures, meetings and friendly consultations as preferred measure in case of contingencies, and suggests two parties to take adequate measures to ensure that no air intrusions takes place across the LAC. It is required for the parties on each side of the India-China Joint Working Group on the boundary question to appoint diplomatic and military experts to formulate, through mutual consultations, implementation measures for the present Agreement.

- **Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas, 29 November 1996.**⁹ The Agreement evokes 'five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-

existence' to foster a long-term good-neighbourly relationship. The Agreement is divided into 12 Articles, each specifically dealing an issue. Article I specifically suggests avoidance of use of its military capability against the other side. Article II reiterates determination to seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question. Article III deals with the measures to limit their respective military forces within mutually agreed geographical zones. Article IV provides guidelines for conduct of military exercises. It demands that the two sides should avoid holding large scale military exercises involving more than one Division (approximately 15,000 troops) in close proximity of the LAC. Secondly, if either side conducts a major military exercise involving more than one Brigade Group (approximately 5,000 troops) in close proximity of the LAC in the India-China border areas, it shall give the other side prior notification. Article V deals with preventing air intrusions across the LAC in the India-China border areas and facilitating overflights and landings by military aircraft. Article VI aims to prevent dangerous military activities with hazardous impact. It states, neither side shall open fire, cause bio-degradation, use hazardous chemicals, conduct blast operations or hunt with guns or explosives within two kilometres from the LAC. Article VII promotes mechanisms to strengthen exchanges and cooperation through regular flag meetings and telecommunications. Article VIII deals with the mutual assistance in case of accidental crossing of the LAC. Article IX suggests ways to handle questions or doubts regarding the manner in which the other side is observing this Agreement; either side has the right to seek a clarification from the other side. Article X recognises that the full implementation of some of the provisions of the present Agreement will depend on the two sides arriving at a common understanding of the alignment of the LAC in the India-China border areas, the two sides agree to speed up the process of clarification and confirmation of the LAC.

Article XI and XII chalk out details and issues of ratification of the Agreement.

- **Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China, 23 June 2003.**¹⁰ At the invitation of Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China H.E. Wen Jiabao, Prime Minister of the Republic of India H.E. Atal Bihari Vajpayee paid an official visit to the People's Republic of China from 22 to 27 June 2003. The two sides exchanged views on the India-China boundary question and expounded their respective positions. They reiterated their readiness to seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution through consultations on an equal footing. The two sides agreed to each appoint a Special Representative to explore, from the political perspective of the overall bilateral relationship, the framework of a boundary settlement.
- **Protocol between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Modalities for the Implementation of Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas of 11 April 2005.**¹¹ The Protocol reiterates some of the points agreed during the 1993 and 1996 Agreements. It also mandates few procedures if the border personnel of the two sides come to a face-to-face situation due to differences on the alignment of the LAC or any other reason. The border personnel are suggested to exercise self-restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid an escalation of the situation. The Protocol also suggests of holding two additional border meetings each year at Spanggur Gap in the Western Sector, Nathu La Pass in the Sikkim Sector and Bum La in the Eastern Sector respectively in celebration of the National Day or Army Day of either side. According to the Protocol, the two sides agree in principle to expand the mechanism of border meeting points to include Kibithu-Damai in the Eastern Sector and Lipulekh Pass/Qiang La in the Middle

Sector. The precise locations of these border meeting points will be decided through mutual consultations. It also encourages conduct of exchanges between the relevant Military Regions of China and Army Commands of India, strengthen exchanges between institutions of training of the two armed forces and conduct exchanges between institutions of sports and culture of the two armed forces.

- **Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question, 11 April 2005.**¹² The Agreement highlights desire of both sides of qualitatively upgrading the bilateral relationship at all levels, and in all areas, while addressing differences through peaceful means in a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable manner. The Agreement has 11 Articles which aim to promote mutually inclusive arrangement for facilitation of border agreement. Article I clearly spells it out that the differences on the boundary question should not be allowed to affect the overall development of bilateral relations. It also makes argument for meaningful and mutually acceptable adjustments to their respective positions on the boundary question, so as to arrive at a package settlement to the boundary question. It further states that the boundary should be along well-defined and easily identifiable natural geographical features to be mutually agreed upon between the two sides.
- **India-China Agreement on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, 17 January 2012.**¹³ The Agreement has eight Articles that largely deal with timely communication of information on the border situation, appropriately handling border incidents and undertaking of other cooperation activities in the India-China border areas. The major issues of the Agreement are:

- ✦ The two sides agree to establish a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border to deal with important border affairs related to maintaining peace and tranquility in the India-China border areas.
 - ✦ The Working Mechanism will study ways and means to conduct and strengthen exchanges and cooperation between military personnel and establishments of the two sides in the border areas.
 - ✦ The Working Mechanism will address issues and situations that may arise in the border areas that affect the maintenance of peace and tranquillity.
 - ✦ The Working Mechanism will hold consultations once or twice every year alternately in India and China. Emergency consultations, if required, may be convened after mutual agreement.
- **Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Border Defence Cooperation, 23 October, 2013.**¹⁴ The Agreement was signed by the two sides in order to avoid conflicts in the border areas. The Agreement reiterates the points made under earlier agreements. It asked the either side to avoid use of its military capability against the other side and that their respective military strengths shall not be used to attack the other side. Apart from agreeing to exchange information, including information about military exercises, aircrafts, demolition operations and unmarked mines, the two sides decided to jointly combat smuggling of arms, wildlife, wildlife articles and other contrabands. It also suggested to work with the other side in combating natural disasters or infectious diseases that may affect or spread to the other side. Article III of the Agreement specifically deals with border defence cooperation. The major highlights of the Article are:

- ✦ Flag meetings or border personnel meetings at designated places along the line of actual control in the India-China border areas.
- ✦ Periodic meetings between officers of the relevant Military Regions of China and Army Commands of India and between departments responsible for military operations.
- ✦ Periodic meetings of the representatives of the Ministry of Defence of the Government of India and the Ministry of National Defence of the People's Republic of China.
- ✦ Meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs.
- ✦ Meetings of the India-China Annual Defence Dialogue.

Article IV of the Agreement suggests that the two sides may establish Border Personnel Meeting sites in all sectors as well as telephone contacts and telecommunication links at mutually agreed locations along the LAC. The two sides may also consider establishing a Hotline between the military headquarters of the two countries. Specific arrangements shall be decided upon through mutual consultations between the two sides. Article V highlights the need for joint actions and activities, including each side inviting the other side for joint celebrations on major national or military days or festivals, organise cultural activities, non-contact sports events and small scale tactical exercises along the LAC in the India-China border areas. In addition, the two sides may also conduct joint military training exercises, at Army level, in each other's country on a regular basis. Article VI prohibits the two sides from following or tail patrolling of the other side in areas where there is no common understanding of the LAC in the India-China border areas.

Conclusion

There are ample evidences in the past where China and India had adhered to the principles of the agreements to avoid escalating

tension in the border areas. Similarly, despite the odds in the last few decades, the two sides have reiterated the policy of peaceful coexistence. China needs to be mindful that the current tension has all the elements of escalating into full-fledged war that can adversely affect their respective economies. The Chinese must realise that the economic and geographical size of India, and its standing in the global community, makes its intimidation unlikely and not something that India can acquiescence to. On the other hand, India needs to bridge the growing power asymmetry between the two countries so that a stage should not occur in the future where such undesired acquiescence can be forced upon it. Knowledge of the past agreements can be a prelude to future engagement. Almost all these agreements had come up in the wake of serious tensions on the border. It is hoped that the events of May 2020 in Ladakh will lead to even more robust mechanisms to prevent repeat of such incidents and pave the way to an ultimate border settlement exorcising the ghosts of historical legacies and misperceptions.

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My Face-off Moment with the PLA

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Abstract

For India the year 2020 will be remembered for Covid-19 and Chinese intrusions in Ladakh. However, such transgressions and intrusions have occurred in the past also. This personal narrative is about the establishment of a Post at the Bara Hoti plains region of India. The author gives an enthralling account of the race against time six months before the war broke out which enabled checkmating a Chinese move to seize an important grazing ground.

Except for a few bureaucrats and fewer officers of the Army

and Air Headquarters in New Delhi, none else would have heard of the place named Rim-Kin, in the 'Disputed' Bara Hoti plains region of India, in February 1962. Happily, it had fallen to my lot to venture out and explore a plausible route for establishing an army post in the vicinity of Rim-Kin, to oversee and checkmate attempts of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) from intruding across the Sino-Indian border. I had barely settled into my second 'Field' tenure in J&K, when I was summoned by my Commanding Officer Major Shivdev Singh who looked agitated and without ado queried angrily, "Have you pulled strings for transfer to a 'Peace Station'?" But before I could gather my wits, he ordered, "Report to Headquarters 9 Infantry Brigade at Lucknow forthwith. Be sure to take the Officers' Bus to Pathankot tomorrow morning".

So in the last week of February 1962, Brigadier Bisheshwar Nath (a burly six foot something with a walrus moustaches) showed me a signal from the Army Headquarters marked 'Top Secret and Personal for the Commander' directing him in nutshell; (i) to occupy a Company Defended Locality at Rim-Kin the soonest but not later than 15 May 1962 and; (ii) Captain Baljit Singh would command the

Special Task Force (STF) till the Rim-Kin perimeter-defence was effectively established.

Next, the Brigadier led me to an adjoining room and on a wall covered with maps he placed his index finger on one spot and said, *"This is the Bara Hoti Grazing Ground (BGG) which the Chinese threaten to usurp from India. I have personally handpicked one Company of the fittest and highly motivated soldiers of 14 Rajput Battalion, to constitute the STF. Your task lies in inducting them from Joshimath onwards, either en-bloc or in dribblets, across the Chor Hoti Pass, approximately 16,000 feet above sea level (ASL). You have a carte blanche sanction from the Army Headquarters to hire/purchase specialised equipment, mountain guides, etc., and travel any-where in the country, to do so"* (words to that effect). Noticing my stricken looks and becoming empathetic, the Brigadier mentioned, "Young man, I have been informed that you are a fresh graduate from the Basic and Advanced Mountaineering Courses under Mr Tenzing's tutelage and have requisite knowledge and skills to tackle this assignment. So cheer up and get a terrain briefing from Lieutenant Colonel KM Pandalai (KMP) of the 14 Rajput who has just returned from Joshimath".

What I learnt next was anything but reassuring. Firstly, that there was just one single-lane, 560 km road from Lucknow to Joshimath (last 300 km stone-paved), which under favourable weather was a three-day journey for cargo-laden light trucks. Thereafter, a well beaten 80 km pony track to Ghamsali (10,000 feet ASL) and thence pristine, mostly untrodden, 40 to 60 km terra firma to Rim-Kin! Wisely, the Colonel had already commenced shipment of 30 days commodities for the STF to Joshimath.

What KMP informed me next was the most worrisome aspect of the STF's capabilities that they had no previous experience of living and soldiering at high altitudes. If it was a matter of few soldiers to be attuned to operate in high altitude environment, I could have handled it by myself. But given a large body of 120 and limited time, this vital task was best entrusted to the High Altitude Warfare School (HAWS), Gulmarg. The Brigadier agreed readily, organised airlift to Srinagar, and exposed STF to a compressed ten days training capsule. He also agreed to establish a forward logistics dump at Ghamsali as an urgent priority. I departed for

Darjeeling by the next train and with Tenzing Sahib's help, hired four 'B' grade Sherpas, purchased such accessories as charting a route over the Chor Hoti Pass may require, and together with the Sherpas, set out for Joshimath.

We preceded the STF by four days for a fast foray to Rim-Kin and back. The approach to Chor Hoti Pass lay through a narrow horse shoe, with 10 to 15 feet deep snow pile. Once the sun touched the area, the ascent was very exhausting even for seasoned climbers. The descent on the far side was down a near vertical rock face and we set to fix a Manila-hemp rope for 240 feet on the steepest stretch. The going beyond for about three km was over an almost level snowed up plateau, ending at a wet and dangerously slippery rock ledge. Here again, two rope hand-rails were fixed for 250 feet, ending close to the spine of the Rim-Kin ridge, our ultimate goal post! We bivouacked for the night, unarmed and taking comfort that the Brigadier did not expect the PLA to show up before mid-May.

Meanwhile, as planned, Captain RS Taragi, (Rajinder), had moved to Ghamsali with the STF and commenced stocking 10 days' worth rations at Kala Zabar (12,600 feet ASL), about 10 km en route Chor Hoti. We decided to make the first push with 30 soldiers, leaving Kala Zabar at 2300 hrs on April 21, each carrying personal kit and two days survival rations. The snow on the approaches to Chor Hoti was firm and compacted by night but laden with 30 kg, the going was slow and laboured. At 0400 hrs on 22 April, all of us were atop the Chor Hoti saddle. The descent using fixed ropes was a new experience for the soldiers and almost all of them had to be led by us in relays, one by one. In the event, the last man reached Rim-Kin at 1845 hrs on 22 April 1962 and, in so doing, consolidated India's claim on BGG. In truth, I must admit that the soldiers were so exhausted after the 12 to 16 hour long very demanding day (a few even hallucinating '*kiya hum Tibet pahunch gaeya Saab*') that they could have been taken hostages without a murmur, at the mere asking.

We were given a radio set of American origin with independent power source, which had to be cranked manually by two men for the duration of the transmission. But it worked! We communicated the code of having touched base at Rim-Kin and air-

drop of tentage, fuel and basic food. At this stage, I got into a huddle with Rajinder, the Sherpas and two radio operators to organise our soldiers into three groups of ten each, prod them to erect the ten two-men tents we had carried and generally keep them moving about. The Sherpas also lit three stoves and set about brewing three *langar-degchis* of extra sweet tea! Half a mug of warm brew and '*shakkar paras*' helped lift spirits all around and avert looming disaster from dehydration etc. There was no acknowledgement of our radio message but on 24 April, we were awoken by the drone of aircraft over Rim-Kin. In the next 20 minutes, two Dakotas dropped cargo, creating a cloud of floating white parachutes. The 'drop' had spread several hundred metres all around which, combined with the fatigue factor and parachutes merging with the snow, resulted in us detecting and retrieving only about 20 per cent of cargo.

The Sherpas and I now guided the second batch of fifty STF soldiers from Kala Zabar to Rim-Kin. Accompanying this batch were also 15 Constables of the UP Armed Constabulary, who were to set up a Revenue Collection Post (RCP) from the graziers in BGG. In time, the STF 'Defended Locality' was sited about two km ahead of Rim-Kin, on a flat ridge, with a commanding view over BGG right up to the International Border (IB). And on 29 April 1962, the Indian National Flag was hoisted at the RCP with full military symbolism including a bugle-call and smart salute by the STF! Henceforth, the Tricolour was unfurled at Reveille every morning.

The BGG is a gigantic amphitheatre about 26 square kms at 13,500 feet mean elevation, with ridges one to three thousand feet higher than the BGG plateau-floor. But its North East rim which forms the IB with Tibet (China) is barely 500 feet higher than the BGG, making Tun Jan La (14,500 feet ASL) a convenient gateway to Bara Hoti Plains for the PLA.

On 12 May 1962, our Observation Post (OP) reported men and ponies descending Tun Jan La, about two hours walking time from us. At last, here was the PLA detachment of 20 soldiers, with 30 laden ponies, on course to Rim-Kin. We had time to deploy our six light machine guns (LMGs), two medium machine guns (MMGs) and assemble the remaining 65 soldiers, with bolt action rifles,

fixed bayonets and charged magazines, near the RCP in a show of strength. No one had given us any orders to follow in the event of a show down and, far flung as we were, our strength lay in instinctive actions. The eyeball to eyeball moment occurred at 1045 hrs when the PLA detachment's repeated attempts to bypass the RCP was physically blocked by us, all the while drawing their attention to the fluttering Tricolour. After a few minutes of heated gesticulations, and noticing our numbers, they retreated by about 100 metres and pitched their tents inside an abandoned stone walled enclosure of the graziers. We offered them a kettle of hot tea but they refused it out of hand. Sadly, for the RCP the 30 ponies of the PLA were the only livestock that pastured in the BGG and they **refused** to pay the revenue!

The Tun Jan La is also the origin of a stream which flows past Rim-Kin and ultimately drains into the Dhauli Ganga near Malari (midway Joshimath en route Ghamsali), thus, leaving no doubt that Tun Jan La is the watershed ridge, per se. The Sherpas and I walked down this stream for about four kilometres and felt that a mule track (ultimately a motor-able road) linking Rim-Kin to Malari may be possible and, thus, provide an all year access to Rim-Kin by avoiding the Chor Hoti obstacle altogether in future. When a month later, I was debriefed by Major General DK Palit, the then Director Military Operations, he accepted and got implemented my recommendations of road to Rim-Kin as also parachutes in Red and Orange colours for use in snow bound areas.

On 14 May, the STF hosted the Sherpas and me to '*Lunch Bara Khana*' and waved us off with full throated war cry of the Rajputs, '***Bol Bajrang Bali Ki Jai!***' We had hoped to spend time at Ghamsali¹ for a bath and change of clothes, the first in six weeks, but found seven ponies and a note to reach Joshimath, two days hence. Brigadier Bisheshwar Nath and Colonel KM Pandalai broke with Officers' Mess protocol, ushered the Sherpas and me in the same clothes to a sit down dinner and, in warm bonhomie, gifted me a Rajput Regiment memento with a touching inscription: "*....for his immemorable service in establishing Rim-Kin, 20 April 62*".

As I recall the mission, I get goose bumps. What if the radio set had got damaged or weather prevented air drop of food and tentage? We were simply lucky!! I was awarded the Chief of Army Staff Commendation Card for gallantry and distinguished service

for the task at Bara Hoti. It is easily among the most prized, hard earned and memorable awards of my service.

Endnotes

¹ Ghamsali had first seen Indian Army boots back in 1952 when Major General Harold Williams, the E-in-C had conceived and led a Sapper Expedition to Kamet (25,446 ft) and put Captain ND Jayal with two Sherpas on the summit. The E-in-C superannuated as Lieutenant General Sir Harold Williams and Major Nandu Jayal became the first Principle of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling. However, Kamet was first summited by a Swiss, Frank Smyth in 1931 and who on the return to Ghamsali decided to explore the surroundings and literally stumbled upon the since famed 'Valley of Flowers'.

[@]**Lieutenant General Baljit Singh, AVSM, VSM (Retd)**, is an Artillery Officer served with distinction in the Indian army between 1956 & 1992. A keen sportsman, accomplished writer, and noted environmentalist, he is an active promoter of Nature Conservation within and by the Armed Forces.

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Winning a Battle Honour: 1 Sikh LI in Pyawbwe, 1945

Colonel Harjeet Singh (Retd)®

Abstract

Pyawbwe was captured in a three-brigade envelopment by 17 Indian Division. It was stoutly defended and after its capture some 1,110 Japanese dead and 13 guns were counted. The official history describes the fight as 'the only large action in the Battle of the Rangoon Road' and says that it 'finally shattered [the Japanese] 33rd Army'. The Imperial War Museum, London is digitising their collection of World War II newsreels. Among those is one of 1 Sikh LI in action at Pyawbwe in Burma, on 11 April 1945, filmed by an Indian Public Relations cameraman, Lieutenant H Benjamin. A copy of the video, with the dope-sheet, is now with the USI. The video is muted so it does not have any background sounds or narrative, but it does give an insight to the Pyawbwe operations. This account covers the story of 1 Sikh Light Infantry (1 Sikh LI) and their earning the battle honour of Pyawbwe, in addition to other honours. The article aims to provide context to the battle.

Preparations in India

After its raising at Jullundur on 01 October 1941, 1 Sikh LI

moved to the Jungle Training School at Raiwala, near Dehradun, in March 1944 to prepare for a move to the Arakan in Burma for operations. These orders were changed in late April and the Battalion moved to Ranchi in May 1944, where it joined 99 Infantry Brigade, in readiness to join 17 Indian Division who were then fighting at Imphal. The Battalion was moved to several different camps in the Ranchi area, including Lohardaga, Dipatoli

and Namkun, during this period, living in tents or makeshift bashas. The monsoon made this very trying.

In late September 1944, Lieutenant Colonel W H Barlow-Wheeler assumed command of the Battalion. Training started with 255 Indian Tank Brigade consisting of 5 (Probyn's) Horse and 9 Royal Deccan Horse, both with Sherman tanks and 16 Light Cavalry with armoured cars. This involved a lot of live ammunition firing with the tank regiments, the troops going in against simulated bunkers as close as ten yards; the tanks would switch from 75mm High Explosive (HE) shells to solid anti-tank shot for the last few yards. This was wonderful training and the liaison with tank commanders was excellent.

Changes in organisation were made to suit the projected role of the Battalion. A carrier platoon was formed and equipped; and then disbanded. The 3" mortar platoon had mule transport. The Animal Transport Platoon (mules) was sent on ahead of the Battalion, when the Division moved from Ranchi, so that it could be held in the Imphal area, with the rear Divisional echelons, to join the Battalion at Meiktila later. In fact, it was not until 1 Sikh LI had got to the Shan States in June 1945 that the animal transport platoon actually re-joined the battalion.

99 Brigade was ordered to move to the Imphal area, in January 1945, for unspecified action as part of 17 Division. All Divisional signs were removed and preparations for the move were completed very quickly. The Battalion moved from Ranchi to the Imphal Plain (Wangjing) in January 1945 after a somewhat eventful trip. It set off by train to Dimapur, the railhead for Imphal. It crossed the Brahmaputra River at Gauhati by ferry and reloaded on a metre-gauge railway line for the run to Dimapur. At Wangjing, in February 1945, 99 Brigade prepared for its next task — an air-transported move to Meiktila. For reasons of security, 1 Sikh LI was not told the Divisional task of attacking Meiktila while 99 Brigade remained in the Imphal area until the capture of the Thabukton airfield, 12 miles from Meiktila. 99 Brigade was then to fly in with no transport other than two jeeps and trailers for a whole battalion which would then rely on local bullock carts and any motor transport that 17 Division could make available. The Brigade had 21 Mountain Regiment (3.7" guns with jeep transport) in support.

Intensive training for the air move began and jungle training was forgotten as the fighting was to be in the open paddy fields of Central Burma. Time was short but spirits high. 21 Mountain Regiment impressed on the importance of infantry getting as close as possible to the fall of the rounds from the supporting guns. During the training, the battalion got to within fifty yards of the fall of shot. It suffered one casualty but learned a lesson and gained confidence which stood them in very good stead later.

The Offensive into Central Burma

The offensive opened on 03 December 1944, when XXXIII Corps crossed the Chindwin River at Kalewa and Mowlaik, and IV Corps at Sittaung. By 15 February 1945, 7 Indian Division of IV Corps had seized a bridgehead over the Irrawaddy in the Pagan-Nyaungu area near the roads leading to Meiktila. Over the next few days, 17 Indian Division (less 99 Brigade and 21 Mountain Regiment), with 255 Indian Tank Brigade under its command, crossed the Irrawaddy River and assembled in this bridgehead. The intention was that 17 Indian Division, strongly supported by close tactical-support aircraft, move rapidly to capture Meiktila and hold that town against all counter-attacks. En-route to Meiktila, 17 Division had to capture Thabutkon airstrip to allow for the immediate fly-in of 99 Brigade group.

The battle for Meiktila began by attacking from four directions and by nightfall on 28 February the town was surrounded. The Japanese resisted tenaciously, but were worn down by coordinated assaults by air, tanks and infantry. After fierce fighting, the town eventually fell on 03 March.

Flying to Thabutkon

99 Brigade Group began flying into Thabutkon airstrip on 28 February. The Brigade consisted of 6/9 Jat Regt (Div Recce Regt), 6/15 Punjab, 1 Sikh LI, 1/3 Gurkha Rifles, a company of 9/13 Frontier Force Rifles (MMGs), 88 Anti-tank Battery, 21 Mountain Regiment, Tehri Garhwal Field Company (Engineers) and other units. Conditions on the airfield were hectic; it took a total of 353 sorties to land the brigade, totalling some 4,350 men plus weapons and stores. Luckily there was very little opposition. 1 Sikh LI flew out from Palel, on 28 February, in American Air Force transport

aircraft — a mixture of C-47s (Dakota) and C-46s (Commandos). For most of the men it was their first flight in an aircraft and many suffered of air sickness, not helped on at least one aircraft where the friendly American crew made coffee on a primus stove in the cockpit and offered it around — without many takers.

The flight from Palel to Thabutkon, about 200 miles, took two hours. The air strip was a mass of dust as plane after plane landed at a few seconds' interval, pulled to the side for five minutes to unload and then took-off back for the next load. To top-off all the hectic activity, there was a very large air-drop of petrol, ammunition and rations going on, a few hundred yards north of the airstrip, for the remainder of the Division. There was, in fact, so much activity in the neighbourhood that the roar of battle at Meiktila, a few miles further east, did not make much impression and everyone got on with deploying and digging-in on the perimeter of the strip. The soil was good for digging trenches and the temperature pleasantly warm after a very hot day. Once landed, the infantry moved to positions in and around Meiktila.

After the capture and clearance of Meiktila, 17 Indian Division was organised to meet the inevitable Japanese counter-attack. 99 Brigade established a series of mutually supporting *harbours* and *keeps*. 1 Sikh LI provided the garrisons for A, B and C keeps, 6/15 Punjab for D keep, 6/7 Rajput (under command of 99 Brigade) for E keep and 1/3 GR for F keep. This enabled the two motorised brigades to be available for more fluid operations with 255 Tank Brigade. On 15 March, 9 Brigade of 5 Indian Division was flown in. This provoked the final desperate Japanese attempt to retake the town but the siege of Meiktila was over. The battle of Meiktila from February to April 1945 does not form part of this account though 1 Sikh LI did earn the Battle Honour for '*Defence of Meiktila*'.

Pursuit on the Rangoon Road

17 Indian Division and 255 Tank Brigade began the IV Corps advance, on 06 April, striking from all sides at the remnants of the Japanese 33rd Army, under Lieutenant General Honda, at Pyawbwe, while a flanking column of tanks and mechanised infantry cut the main road behind them and attacked their rear. This was the last determined stand by the Japanese before the race to

reach Rangoon ahead of the monsoon. Pyawbwe lay 25 miles south of Meiktila. It was the most decisive battle in Central Burma where 33rd Army was shattered completely. The task of 1 Sikh LI in the battle was to take the high ground at Hminlodaung, South-East of Pyawbwe, which came to be known as 'Pagoda Hill' as there was a pagoda on this ridge about 700 feet above the plain ground.

Late in the night on 03 April 1945, 1 Sikh LI received orders for the advance on Pyawbwe. Its role for the first day was to push on ahead and seize the villages of Kweinge and Kokkogaing, some six miles south of Pyintha. This was done without opposition, except for a small action at Kweinge. The Battalion moved into harbour in Kweinge and spent a quiet night. A sad note was the death of Lieutenant Jones who was bringing canteen stores and had borrowed a jeep and set out despite warnings that the roads were mined. He died when his jeep was blown up.

The Attack

When 1 Sikh LI launched its attack, it had only three rifle companies, one rifle company having been wiped out at Meiktila. The plan was that A Company, under Captain DW Blois, was to take the first portion of the ridge followed by C Company taking the area of the Pagoda. The objective itself was tricky as there was a hump where the Pagoda was. The approach was difficult and the surrounding area broken, which hampered armour deployment. There was artillery in support, no doubt, but any movement on the approach was under enemy observation.

During the Battalion move, it was found that the village of Kokkobauk some 800 yards to the right was the target for the Divisional artillery followed by a tremendous volume of tank supporting fire. It was clear that the enemy resistance was strong. 'Overs' began to whistle overhead in ever-increasing numbers, and then just as the forward company began to dig in, our tanks mistook them for the enemy and it came under fairly heavy machine gun fire plus the odd 75mm shell. Luckily, it was rapidly getting dark and no damage was caused. The main concern, however, was a sudden cloud-burst soon after dark; the Battalion was without any protection from the rain of any sort (it had not seen

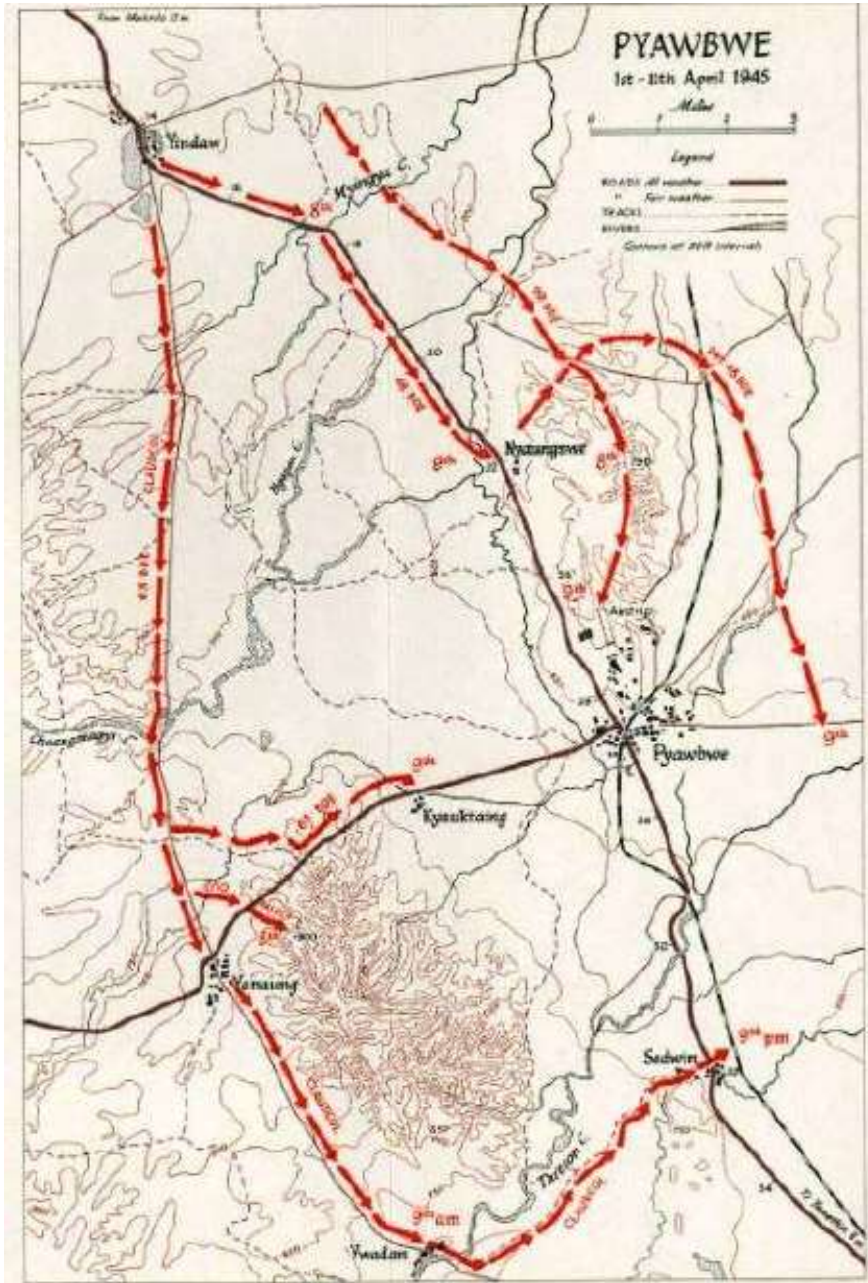
ground-sheets, mosquito nets or blankets for three weeks) and the trenches were filled to the brim within half an hour. It was a cold and sleepless night for all.

On 09 April, A Company advanced with great determination against heavy enemy fire and continuous shelling. The Japanese gunners scored a direct hit and Lieutenant WPJ Cooper, the Intelligence Officer, died. Captain Blois too was hit by enemy machine gun fire and paid for his dash and courage with supreme sacrifice. Subedar Major Bachan Singh, MC took over command of A Company after Captain Blois was killed. The first objective was captured but the leading section, under Havildar Bishen Singh, was wiped out. In spite of all efforts, no further progress could be made to capture the second hump on which was the prized 'Pagoda'.

The Japanese counter-attacked to regain the position but their efforts were repulsed. Next day, under the second-in-command Major JD Maling DSO, MC, the Battalion attacked and captured the 'Pagoda Hill' on which the enemy had been heavily lodged. The attack was successful and the enemy, leaving its dead, ran away. About 200 enemy dead were counted in the area. A lot of enemy arms and equipment was captured. 1 Sikh LI casualties in the attack were also very heavy.

Aftermath

The Battalion then took part in 17 Division's mechanised dash towards Rangoon in response to the brief Corps order, *'Tally-ho! On to Rangoon!'* Japanese resistance was crumbling but the monsoon was breaking. Every form of motor transportation was pressed into service, and 1 Sikh LI was frequently moved on tank transporters when the tanks themselves were fighting ahead. Air supply was also hampered by the weather. For several weeks the Battalion was on half rations so that the supply, all by air, could be maintained for petrol and ammunition.



Map 1: Pyawbwe

The Roll of Honour for the war was a lengthy one. Of the 16 officers, five were killed and six wounded, with one evacuated sick. Six Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs) were killed, together with 86 Other Ranks (ORs), and a large number were wounded. A very heavy toll indicative of the heavy fighting the Battalion was involved in. 1 Sikh LI earned two Distinguished Service Order (DSO) (Lieutenant Colonel WH Barlow-Wheeler and Major JD Maling, MC); one Indian Order of Merit (IOM) (Subedar Basant Singh); one Bar to Military Cross (MC) (Major DJ Ewert); four MCs (Captain Ata Mohammed, Captain DJ Ewert, Subedar Major Bachan Singh, Subedar Mohinder Singh); three Indian Distinguished Service Medal (IDSM) (Subedar Major Jiwan Singh, Havildar Char Singh and Sepoy Ginder Singh); seven Military Medals (MMs);, seven Mention-in-Despatches and four Certificates of Gallantry during their time in Burma. In addition, it earned the battle honours of '*Defence of Meiktila*'; '*Rangoon Road*'; '*Pyawbwe*'; and '*Sittang 1945*'. It was also awarded the theatre honour of '*Burma 1942-45*'. All this in a period of five months!

Colonel CH Price was then in Bareilly as Training Battalion Commandant and was anxiously awaiting news of how the battalion he had raised was faring in Burma. He knew heavy casualties had been suffered. It was a proud moment for him when he received a personal letter from the Commander-in-Chief, India which read:

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DO No. 83/M-4/11

From
Commander-in-Chief in India
New Delhi

11 April 1945

My dear Price,

I have been more than delighted to hear very good accounts of your 1st Battalion from Gen Messervy.

He writes,

'I thought you would like to know how wonderfully well the 1st Sikh LI have done in battle. The Div Commander is delighted with them; he says he has never seen better infantry — they have shown tremendous dash and enthusiasm and their spirit is magnificent. Yesterday they killed 264 Japs in a series of difficult village actions. They are rather low in numbers now, both in officers and men. I hope they will be able to be kept up to strength, to carry on the good work they are doing.'

Yours sincerely

Sd/-

C J E Auchinleck

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Short Reviews of Recent Books

Failed States: The Need for a Realistic Transition in Afghanistan. Edited by Musa Khan Jalalzai, (Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, Delhi, March 2020), Page 497, Price Rs. 1650/-, ISBN: 978-93-89620-19-1

Musa Khan Jalalzai is a noted journalist and has written extensively on Afghanistan. This voluminous compendium on Afghanistan though is essentially a compilation of research papers by others. It consists of 13 articles of merit written over the years – some as far back as 2006 – by noted scholars of international fame. This *pot-pourri* of articles on Afghanistan cover the gamut from challenges to be overcome to Taliban, Al-Qaeda, corruption, inefficiency, opium trade, data surveillance, Afghan local police, gender violence, and judicial review to CIA backed night raids by US troops resulting in summary executions. These essays, while illuminating many problems inherent in a land locked, war ravaged nation, also point to the myopic vision of nations intervening in Afghanistan. The introduction itself is an indictment of the US – how it has operated in Afghanistan and how the grip of Taliban/Daesh remains.

A state can be defined as weak or failing when it lacks the capacities to penetrate society, regulate social relationship, extract resources and use them for the good of the state. State failure points to a collapse of systems. While the strong states are competent, resourceful and reformed, the weak states have low capacity to deliver the desired goals. Unfortunately, the strong states of the coalition who went in to reform Afghanistan did not fully take into account various parameters of fragile infrastructure like poverty, unemployment, social disobedience, corruption, nepotism etc. As a result, the ruling cadre in Afghanistan have, over the years, increasingly oppressed and harassed the majority of their own compatriots while privileging a narrowly based party or clan (Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks or Pashtuns).

Basically, Afghanistan is a warlord state where, traditionally, power is channelised through patronage system. An emaciated and corrupt Afghan government is teetering on the brink. Daesh in

North and East Afghanistan and Taliban's influence in the South imply the government's failure to bring stability. As these well-reasoned articles clearly bring out, institution building is a long and a laborious process. As suggested by some scholars, perhaps hybrid governance – weak state institutions with strong personalities – could be an interim option. On the other hand, the need for grass root democracy vis-à-vis a superficial formal democracy, imposed by the international community, is strongly recommended by other writers. However, the majority of writers opine that ensuring safety of people and providing efficient local administration is critical. Equally, strategic management of international aid is vital else there is a huge mismanagement of resources. Curiously enough, as various writers argue, state building which requires founding modern institutions has been neglected by the international community.

In addition to an Index, the editor has given over eighty pages of copious Notes. An interesting book about a nation that has been in trauma for over 40 years. Sadly, a peaceful end to the Afghan imbroglio still seems elusive in the immediate future.

Maj Gen Ashok Joshi, VSM (Retd)

Trials, Tremors and Hope: The Political Economy of Contemporary Nepal. By Ram Sharan Mahat, (Adroit Publishers, New Delhi, 2020), Page 242, Price Rs. 795/-, ISBN: 978-8187393757

At a time when Nepali Congress is struggling with leadership decay and the ruling Nepal Communist Party is having inner-party tussle due to failed economic policies, Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, who has been the Finance Minister of Nepal many times and was the leading architect of Nepal's economic reforms after 1990s, comes out with this new book. It is a comprehensive account of the historical evolution and development of political economy of Nepal.

In a well-travelled historical time-line, the author engages in the past practices, highlights the problems, and offers future challenges that need to be given due consideration. The book is written in the pre Covid-19 era when the economic growth rate of Nepal was hovering above six per cent. Hence, the author premised the work on a robust economy of Nepal that had potential

and was running with efficient government committed to rule of law. All this seems challenged under the current developments in the political, economic, social, as well as geopolitically changing scenario.

The book is divided into 12 chapters ranging from broader global discourses on socialism, linked to Nepal's internal debates and the geopolitical situation, to the economic policies of the past and present, and future suggestions. Mahat specifically devotes a lot of space to the flaws of civil war, and the economic consequences of it. He dwells on 'socialism' as the key element of discussion, precisely because it is directly relevant to the 2015 new constitution's declaration of 'socialism based on democratic norms and values'. He opines that communism and democracy are two dominant strands of socialism: democrat and revolutionary. Nepal is now facing the biggest challenge to choose between the two global political ideological tussle with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and US Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) projects. Mahat derives the conclusion that there is convergence of socialist and capitalist systems based on the social and economic imperatives in the world and Nepal should walk this middle path.

Mahat's narration is an elaboration of communist model of China that he regards as market-oriented. In his view, it is only the nature of market that is the decisive force defining the future path, the path where market does not dominate but orients. He stresses on having abundance of production before distribution, which he thinks is essential for Nepal. Mahat advocates a pragmatic approach to economic policies, which is an amalgamation of Stalin style centralised planning and free market economy. In that sense, Mahat propels a neo-reformist approach. Much of his argument proposes Deng Xiaoping's 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics', which feeds on pragmatism and market in a cage of state-orientation. Mahat reverberates Deng's notion that 'poverty is not socialism'; and proposes strengthening of governance, rule of law, strong institution building, merit-based, rather than politically affiliated, bureaucracy, and rational thinking.

Mahat stresses that BP Koirala's socialism meant bringing in equality, but shies away from elaborating on the new contradiction between equality and equity. Hence, his vision is to spread the

cake of prosperity to all areas through inclusive approach and rural modernisation, but is unable to suggest how the principle contradictions of capitalism and socialism be negotiated.

Mahat also gives due emphasis to Nepal's hydro-energy projects with a word of caution, as he believes that delay can make it less competitive. Mahat also factors the challenges of two big neighbours - India and China - and cautions of distancing from India. A chapter is also devoted to remittance economy which Mahat believe helps Nepal. His suggestions conclude with greater industrialisation and privatisation of state-controlled sectors in moderate manner, however, the challenges in the post-Covid world may be different.

The book is an interesting read and suggested for researchers to have comprehensive knowledge of Nepal's economic and political changes; yet it lacks proper references to statistical information and offers analytical statements without acknowledgement. However, the coverage of the knowledge base is exhaustive and it offers a vision for economic orientation of Nepal.

Dr Geeta Kochhar

One Mountain Two Tigers: India, China and the High Himalayas. Edited by Shakti Sinha, (Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2020), Page 201, Price Rs. 795/-, ISBN: 978-93-900951-00

The spectre of an aggressive China has always loomed large in New Delhi's foreign policy and strategic calculus. While the turbulent nature of India's ties with China ensures that this relationship always stays in the limelight, it also makes it all too easy to focus on the details and miss the big picture. On the heels of the latest standoff between the Indian and Chinese armies in Ladakh, Shakti Sinha's book attempts to provide a panoramic view of this bilateral relationship, situating the boundary dispute in history and current geopolitics. The book is an edited volume of long essays which, taken together, seek to explore why China has chosen a path of hostility and provocation. While there are some overlaps among the chapters, the book roughly explores four broad aspects.

The first is history. In chapters 1 to 6, the authors cover a wide period of time from the ancient to the modern. The first three chapters trace the political, economic and cultural history of engagement among the civilisations that have straddled the Himalayan boundary between modern India and China, with a focus on Ladakh and surrounding regions including Tibet, Kashmir and Xinjiang. In doing so, the authors trace the roots of the modern boundary dispute to historical competition between Ladakh and Tibet for territory.

The subsequent three chapters examine the modern history of the boundary dispute and military conflict between India and China. Chapter 4 serves as primer on Chinese and Indian perceptions of their border, with a focus on the colonial legacy of the undemarcated Ladakh-Tibet boundary and India's historical claims over Aksai Chin, Shaksgam Valley, and Minsar, now under Chinese control. Concluding that it would be difficult for India to wrest back control of these territories, the chapter, nevertheless, emphasises India's historical and legal position on the boundary dispute. Chapter 5 and 6 turn to more tense moments in the recent history of the boundary dispute, mainly India-China war of 1962 and subsequent military conflicts. By revisiting the causes and trajectory of each conflict, the chapters provide the reader with food for thought - how are circumstances today different from the past?

The second aspect the book examines is the question of military preparedness. With today's India being different from that of 1962, how should the country prepare to meet China's military challenge? In chapter 7 and 8, identifying the clashes in the Galwan Valley as a point of no return for India-China relations, the authors explore what explains China's recent aggressive behaviour? They also recommend measures that will help India navigate this new normal. They touch upon various issues from border management and infrastructure to India's military and diplomatic options. While these complex issues merit further discussion, these chapters will help the interested reader appreciate the sheer number of questions that must be considered while thinking about the future.

The third aspect is the role of external powers, including the United States, Pakistan, Taiwan, and others, in the Indo-Pacific

Region. Chapter 9, 12 and 13 take a step back from the India-China relationship to explore this larger geopolitical context since the Cold War.

The final aspect that the book addresses is the non-military bases of the India-China relationship. Chapter 10, 11 and 14 examine the influence of their respective leadership styles, economic and power asymmetry, and differing approaches towards soft power. The book concludes with a summary of the key domestic and strategic challenges in China that help explain its aggressive actions.

Despite its comprehensive approach, this book could have benefitted from a more in-depth study of the economic relationship between India and China, specifically how it limits or expands India's options. In addition, including extensive bibliographies and reference lists for the chapters on the historical linkages between Xinjiang and India, India's military preparedness and the Indo-Pacific would have added value to the book. While analysing what factors could explain Chinese behaviour and how India should respond, the book emphasises that there are no easy answers.

Ms Sharanya Rajiv

Democracy and Authoritarianism in Pakistan: The Role of The Military and Political Parties. *By Dr Shiraz Sheikh, (KW Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2020), Page 393, Price Rs. 1460/-, ISBN: 978-9389137248*

The book is a product of exhaustive research on the elements and nature of democratic and authoritarian regimes in Pakistan and the role of military. There is an abundance of books that have discussed in detail about the role of military in shaping the political landscape of Pakistan, purely in terms of strategic and security angle; this book, however, has overwhelmingly concentrated on the shifts in the landscape through a more unique interdisciplinary perspective.

The author has given a comprehensive conceptual framework, and correlation of the theoretical and empirical aspects of authoritarianism and democracy, before placing his arguments. The concepts and theories provide conceptual understanding and

interlinkages regarding its definition and context, which have received relatively little treatment in the past. As the author himself claims that the book is analytical and descriptive in nature, it helps him to transcend the common practice of generalisation or giving general broad sweeping arguments.

The book is divided into 7 chapters including conclusion. The flow of the chapters appears natural and collaborative. Despite some shortcoming, each chapter has been able to do justice to the topic discussed. Chapter 5-Political Parties and the Two Civilian Interludes, is an excellent read as it has been able to capture, identify and describe trends, variations, factors and arguments behind political transition in Pakistan.

At times, the strength of the book — the theoretical and expository nature — becomes its weakness. The reader, particularly with non-academic bent of mind, might find itself momentarily disconcerted, e.g. many models of civil military relations. Secondly, at places, the author could have avoided going in detail considered at the periphery of the subject-centred perspective like demographic account of Pakistan and its provinces.

Students of security and strategic affairs would have liked to read more in detail about the Pakistan Army's obsession with India, and often reiterated prism of existential threat from India. What is considered as 'the normative underpinnings of Pakistan's Military', Pakistan Army's pathological obsession with India and how it shapes the civil military relations could have been a chapter in itself. Of course, books by various other authors have touched the topic, but the author of this book could have given his perspective to add a crucial dimension to his excellent book.

Finally, the book is an insightful read for all with a literary taste of political science and international affairs.

Shri Gaurav Kumar