

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF INDIA WITH BHUTAN, SIKKIM
AND NEPAL BETWEEN 1947-1967: AN ANALYTICAL
FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF BIG
POWER-SMALL POWER RELATIONS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

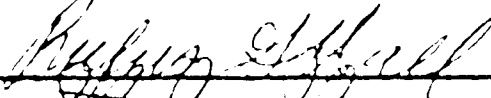
BY
VALENTINE J. BELFIGLIO


Norman, Oklahoma

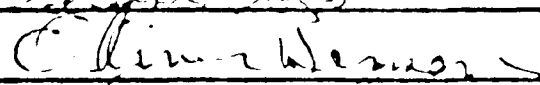
1970

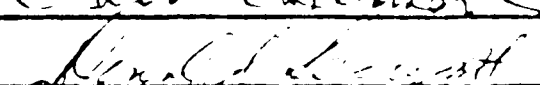
THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF INDIA WITH BHUTAN, SIKKIM
AND NEPAL BETWEEN 1947-1967: AN ANALYTICAL
FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF BIG
POWER-SMALL POWER RELATIONS

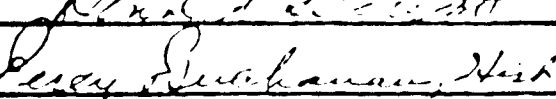
APPROVED BY











DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The example of British policy and British treaties with each of the Himalayan states, has provided a formidable mold from which Indian foreign policy toward Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim has been shaped.

Sikkim

Sikkimese history like that of Bhutan is closely identified with Tibet, and because of that, with China. Definite control of Sikkim by the Tibetans was acquired during the first half of the 17th century when several lamas fled from the Chinese in Tibet. They made Buddhist lamaism the state religion of Sikkim, and in 1642 established a government under a Tibetan king, from whom the succeeding line of Maharajas claimed descent. In the 18th and 19th centuries strife between Sikkim and Tibet, invasions of Sikkim by Nepal and Bhutan, and disputes within Sikkim's ruling family, led the British to intervene in 1826, and again in 1850. Britain had seized the Terai area and some outer hills. The trouble resulting from this matter was settled by a treaty which Britain had forced on Sikkim in 1861. This treaty established British suzerainty over Sikkim, but this was not accepted by the Tibetans who continued to engage in official activities in Sikkim. In 1888, a British military expedition drove the Tibetan army out of Sikkim and pursued it into the Chumbi valley in Tibet. The Chinese suzerains of Tibet ordered their resident in Lhasa to

make peace, but disagreement regarding suzerainty over Sikkim delayed a treaty until 1890, when Sikkim's borders were finally defined, and China recognized British control over Sikkim's internal administration and foreign relations. A convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet was signed at Calcutta on March 17, 1890 by the representatives of the Chinese and British Indian Governments.¹⁰⁸ Articles one and two of the treaty specifically defined the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet and defined Britain's control:

The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gysmochi on the Bhutan frontier and follows the abovementioned waterparting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.

2. It is admitted that the British government, whose protectorate over the Sikkim State is hereby recognized, has direct and exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of that state and except through and with the permission of the British Government, neither the Ruler of the State nor any of its officers shall have official relations, of any kind, formal or informal, with any other country.¹⁰⁹

In a book entitled A Brief History of Modern China, by Liu Pei Hua, a Communist Chinese author, Sikkim is listed as a "Chinese Territory" taken by imperialists "in the old democratic revolution period."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Singh, India and the Future of Asia, pp. 203-204.

¹⁰⁹ "Convention Between Great Britain and China Relating to Sikkim and Tibet (1890)," Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi, 1962, pp. 13-15.

¹¹⁰ Singh, India and the Future of Asia, p. 206.

In 1959 Chinese officers in Tibet proclaimed that they would before long "liberate" Sikkim being wrongfully held by "Indian imperialists."¹¹¹ When the Tibetan Dalai Lama fled Tibet and Civil War broke out in that country, five thousand Tibetans entered Sikkim.¹¹² In 1961, several hundred Tibetan refugees were settled in Western Sikkim.¹¹³ Repeated proposals by Chinese authorities to form a federation of Himalayan states evoked little interest even among Sikkimese opposition leaders.¹¹⁴ On March 22, 1959, the Indian Prime Minister addressed a communication to Chou En-Lai. The note asserted:

"The boundary of Sikkim, a protectorate of India, with Tibet region of China, was defined in the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 and jointly demarcated on the ground in 1895."¹¹⁵

Chou replied in a letter to the Prime Minister of India dated September 8, 1959. The letter said:

"In your excellency's letter, you also referred to the boundary between China and Sikkim. . . . this question does not fall within our present discussions."¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Indian White Paper 11, p. 43.

¹¹² Harrison E. Salisbury, Orbit of China (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 102.

¹¹³ Karan, The Himalayan Kingdom, p. 78.

¹¹⁴ Foreign Affairs Studies Division, The American University, "U.S. Army Area Handbook for Nepal (With Sikkim and Bhutan)," p. 387.

¹¹⁵ Indian White Paper (1954-1959), p. 55.

¹¹⁶ Indian White Paper 11 (September-November, 1959), p. 30.

Chou assured the Indian government that China was willing to live together in friendship with Sikkim and has always respected the "proper relations" between Sikkim and India.¹¹⁷ In a letter from the Prime Minister of India to the Prime Minister of China dated September 26, 1959, Prime Minister Nehru asked the Chinese to clarify what they meant by the statement that "the boundary of Sikkim did not fall within the scope of discussions." The letter repeated assertions made in an earlier March 22, 1959 letter that the Chinese Government recognized as far back as 1890 that the Government of India "has direct and exclusive control over the internal and foreign relations of that state. . . . there is thus no dispute regarding the boundary of Sikkim with that of Tibet."¹¹⁸

In a note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China to the Embassy of India in China, dated December 26, 1959, the Chinese Government stated: "The boundary between China and Sikkim has long been formally delimited and there is neither any discrepancy between the maps nor any disputes in practice."¹¹⁹

The Government of India in a February 12, 1960

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 41.

¹¹⁹"Boundary Question," Peking Foreign Languages Press, November, 1962, p. 88; Indian White Paper III (November 1959-March 1960), p. 77.

note to the Chinese Government welcomed the assurances of the Peking regime that they would not encroach on the territory of Sikkim.¹²⁰

Indian-Sikkimese Defense Strategy

In response to Sikkimese demands for more responsibility for border defenses, India agreed in the summer of 1961 to allow the Himalayan nation to create a separate militia of 280 native Sikkimese to be commanded, trained and equipped by the Indian army.¹²¹

In 1962, when the Chinese invaded Indian territory, Indian troops in Sikkim were increased to 25,000-30,000 men to guard the passes from Tibet. (In 1949, there had been only 130 Indian troops in Sikkim.) Particular attention was given to the Natu La and the Jelep La passes, about 25 miles northeast of Gangtok in view of recurring reports of reinforcements arriving at a major Chinese Communist military post maintained at Yatung, China, only ten miles from the passes. Civil defense measures, such as the installation of air raid sirens in Gangtok, and the organization of "village defense committees" were announced by the Indian press.¹²²

¹²⁰ Indian White Paper III, p. 93.

¹²¹ Pradyumna P. Karan, The Himalayan Kingdoms (New York: 1963), p. 77.

¹²² Foreign Affairs Studies Division, The American University, "U.S. Army Area Handbook for Nepal (With Sikkim and Bhutan)," p. 388.

The Chinese Consuls in Sikkim were also expelled, and Sikkim's trade with Tibet terminated. Sikkim had previously depended upon Tibetan trade for a steady supply of animals, wool, hides, and meat.¹²³

Sino-Indian Confrontation over Sikkim

On October 27, 1962, the Chinese Mainland Press charged that the Indian ruling circles headed by Nehru were preserving the legacy of the British colonial rulers with regard to Sikkim. The report stated:

India is the only country in Asia that has a protectorate. The Indian ruling circles have used every means to interfere in the internal and external affairs around India, to control their economy and trade, and demand their absolute obedience.¹²⁴

In the mid-1960's Pulitzer Prize winner Harrison E. Salisbury, managing editor for the New York Times newspaper, visited the kingdom of Sikkim. He reported upon returning that:

They (the Indians) did not bother to conceal their wish that Sikkim be incorporated into India. They looked with hostility and suspicion on the Chogyal's (Maharaja's) determination to maintain Sikkim's independence, and to increase, if possible, her area of sovereignty. Sikkim, they said, was too small, too poor, too backward to handle its own affairs. It was hinted, a possible security risk as well. After all, there are well-known links of the Sikkim ruling house to Tibet.¹²⁵

¹²³Harrison E. Salisbury, Orbit of China (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 102.

¹²⁴Chou En-Lai, "The Sino Indian Boundary Question," pp. 97-98.

¹²⁵Salisbury, Orbit of China, p. 102.

By 1963 most of the refugees from Tibet had been interrogated and passed into India,¹²⁶ and Sikkimese sentiments toward Communist China appeared to become more cordial. At a news conference at the Overseas Press Club in New York in September 1964, the Maharaja of Sikkim voiced confidence in the relations between Sikkim and Communist China. The Maharaja also related that this country was attempting to export silver, woodwork, tents, and clothing.¹²⁷ However, the mood was soon to change for on September 28, 1964, the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China sent a note to the Indian Embassy in China protesting alleged intrusions by Indian troops crossing the China-Sikkim border. The note asserted that Indian troops had time and time again intruded into China's territory across passes on the China-Sikkim boundary and listed the following specific examples:

1. . . . as early as September 1962 Indian troops intruded into the Chinese side of Natu La pass and up to now have unlawfully entrenched themselves there and refused to withdraw. . . .
2. Up to August 1964, Indian troops crossed Tungchula pass and intruded into China's territory. They have built 18 aggressive military structures on the Chinese side of the pass on the boundary line.
3. Indian troops intruded into China's territory on August 12, 1964, at Tagi Pass and on August 14, 1964, four Indian soldiers crossed the Peilunga Pass

¹²⁶"U.S. Army Area Handbook for Nepal (With Bhutan and Sikkim)," p. 388.

¹²⁷"Sikkim Ruling Couple Voice Confidence in Red China," New York Times, Vol. CXIII, No. 38,953, September 17, 1964, p. 2.

(West of Tagi Pass) and intruded into China's territory for reconnaissance."¹²⁸

In addition to charging the Indian government with border intrusions Peking accused Delhi of "groundlessly slandering China as "concentrating troops," building bases along the China-Sikkim border, and penetrating deep into Sikkim. Peking urged India to put an immediate stop to its "aggressive activities" and withdraw its troops which "are unlawfully entrenched on Chinese territory."¹²⁹ A Chinese threat to Sikkim occurred on September 17, 1965. On that date, a Chinese ultimatum demanded that India demolish structures allegedly built by that nation on the Tibetan side of the Sikkimese border. India replied that if any structures were found on the Tibetan side of the Sikkimese border, there would be no objection to their being demolished. The Indian note offered:

joint inspection of those points of the Sikkim-Tibetan Indian frontier where Indian personnel are alleged to have set up military structures in Tibetan territory. The Government of India on its part is prepared to arrange such an inspection as early as possible.¹³⁰

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a note

¹²⁸"China Strongly Protests Against Indian Troops' Intrusion into Chinese Territory," Peking Review, Vol. VII, No. 41, October 9, 1964, p. 18.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 18.

¹³⁰Singh, India and the Future of Asia, p. 195.

of May 4, 1966, to the Indian Embassy charged that India had not only stationed large numbers of troops in Sikkim, but had constantly crossed the delimited China-Sikkim boundary to intrude into Chinese territory and provoke conflict. The Chinese government accused India of imposing a protectorship on the people of Sikkim, and "inheriting the mantle of aggression from British imperialism." The note went on to say:

"Frankly speaking, such unequal relationship in which a big country bullies a small one and encroaches upon its sovereignty, has long been spurned by the people of the world. . . . Talking about military pressure on Sikkim, it is not China that applies it, but precisely India, who is tightening her military control over Sikkim on the pretext of defense."¹³¹

On September 12, 1967, the Chinese began an artillery barrage at Natu La pass in Sikkim in an attack that lasted intermittently until October.¹³² China charged in a broadcast monitored in Tokyo that India "attacked Chinese forces to get more U.S. aid."¹³³

The first clash started when the Chinese fired upon Indian troops as they were erecting a barbed wire barricade on the border. On October 1, 1967, Indian

¹³¹"India Slanders Cannot Cover Up Its Intrusions into Chinese Territory," Peking Review, Vol. 9, No. 21, May 20, 1966, p. 43.

¹³²Joseph Lelyneid, "India Asks China for Sikkim Truce," New York Times, September 13, 1967, p. 14.

¹³³Bernard D. Nossiter, "Shots Traded Again on Sikkim Frontier," Washington Post, September 14, 1967, p. 26.