

The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence

INDIA AND INDOCHINA

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confidence that "a new way of drawing the boundary" would emerge from surveys "and consultations with the various neighboring countries."²³ Nehru privately rejected this position in a letter to Chou, denying that nine years of PRC rule justified this rationale and insisting "there can be no question of these large parts of India being anything but Indian and there is no dispute about them."

Neville Maxwell's detailed analysis of the subsequent Chou-Nehru correspondence emphasizes: (1) Chou's apparent willingness to concede Indian rule over NEFA while remaining adamantly opposed to the legality of the McMahon Line per se, presumably because accepting the Simla accords would retroactively ratify Tibet's independence; (2) Chou's insistence that Aksai Chin lay in Chinese territory; and (3) Nehru's refusal to acknowledge any basis for contesting the McMahon Line while (4) demanding that China withdraw from all recently occupied territory which India claimed. Maxwell notes that the Nehru position emerged "some twelve months before the boundary dispute became a matter of public knowledge or political agitation in India," terming it a "collision course." If this is so, Chou En-lai either did not perceive it in this way or remained hopeful of changing Nehru's position, since in December, 1959, the Chinese Premier proposed a summit meeting which materialized the following April in New Delhi.

Chou's proposal and trip came after a steady deterioration in Sino-Indian relations during 1959. The revolt in Lhasa that March, climaxed by the Dalai Lama's flight to India, triggered an outburst of public polemics between New Delhi and Peking, with a rising chorus of Indian press and political and public opposition to Nehru's official posture of Sino-Indian friendship. By August, leaked details of the various border disputes, including information on the Aksai Chin road, fed the flames of controversy. This was followed by brief but bloody clashes between Indian and Chinese patrols at both the eastern and western extremities of the border. Few casualties resulted and no substantive changes in position occurred, but the fighting made explicit the threat of war.

In this context, Chou's gesture took on added significance as a possible move to break the impasse. A further indication of willingness to compromise appeared to be the Chinese agreement with Burma that their mutual boundary would follow the McMahon Line in its essentials without acknowledging its specific legitimacy. Following this announcement in Peking in January, 1960, Chou formalized the position in Rangoon en

route to New Delhi in April. His implied that Chinese acceptance of the McMahon Line accompanied Nehru's agreement on P

Nothing in Nehru's comments on Chou's visit signaled the slightest change in Indian policy. The Chinese Minister agreed that individual incidents should be adjusted to avoid such clashes as he insisted that neither the McMahon Line nor Aksai Chin was subject to negotiation. The withdrawal preceded by Chinese withdrawal from the border including all PLA outposts associated with the

Under these circumstances, the possibility of conflict as inevitable. It would be difficult to bring claims and local contacts can be seen as two objections to this view. First, the period 1959 and 1962 when the problem of the significant military buildup by either side steadily advanced its cartographic claims, including to provide defense in depth. The content to document its diplomatic efforts, research and the publication of maps, and diplomatic exchanges.²⁵ Thus no doubt foreshadowed war. Second, the central question: why did the war occur? The major cause of the war as India's expansion into the disputed Aksai Chin region, independent whereby occupation was unprovoked. It itself this is insufficient to explain the Chinese effort to strike a bargain while the Chinese with New Delhi. Indeed, as Maxwell's "forward policy" risked war with China, incremental additions to India's border, tenuously sustained over time, could hardly be viewed as a solution. The question is to be found in Peking's perspective. To set the focus must be extended beyond the negotiation of how other external re-

route to New Delhi in April. His public statements during the Indian visit implied that Chinese acceptance of Indian control of NEFA would accompany Nehru's agreement on Peking's possession of Aksai Chin.²⁴

Nothing in Nehru's comments or in the general atmosphere attending Chou's visit signaled the slightest change in Indian policy. The Prime Minister agreed that individual instances of local disagreement might be adjusted to avoid such clashes as had occurred in the various sectors, but he insisted that neither the McMahon Line nor India's claim to the Aksai Chin was subject to negotiations. Moreover, any negotiations had to be preceded by Chinese withdrawal from the disputed area in the west, including all PLA outposts associated with the Sinkiang-Tibet road.

Under these circumstances, one might be tempted to dismiss the final conflict as inevitable. It would be "only a matter of time" before conflicting claims and local contacts caused major hostilities. However, there are two objections to this view. First, no serious incidents occurred between 1959 and 1962 when the problem remained virtually dormant with no significant military buildup by either side to strengthen its position. Peking steadily advanced its cartographic claims and moved PLA outposts accordingly to provide defense in depth for the Aksai Chin road. New Delhi was content to document its diplomatic position through extensive historical research and the publication of "white papers" containing the ongoing diplomatic exchanges.²⁵ Thus no progressive deterioration of the situation foreshadowed war. Second, the "inevitability" approach dismisses the central question: why did the war occur in 1962? Maxwell identifies the major cause of the war as India's "forward policy" of advancing patrols into the disputed Aksai Chin region, ostensibly following the PLA precedent whereby occupation was used to justify claims of ownership. But in itself this is insufficient to explain Peking's abandonment of many years of effort to strike a bargain while maintaining a firm but cordial relationship with New Delhi. Indeed, as Maxwell shows, Nehru did not believe that the "forward policy" risked war with China, at least during its inception. The incremental additions to India's miniscule military strength along the border, tenuously sustained over lengthy and arduous lines of communications, could hardly be viewed as a strategic threat to China. The answer to the question is to be found in an examination of the problem from Peking's perspective. To set the framework for Chinese behavior in 1962, our focus must be extended beyond Sino-Indian interactions for an investigation of how other external relations affected developments in Tibet and