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INDIA: THE VIEW FROM PEKING COMMUNIST
CHINA'S STRATEGY TOWARD INDIA

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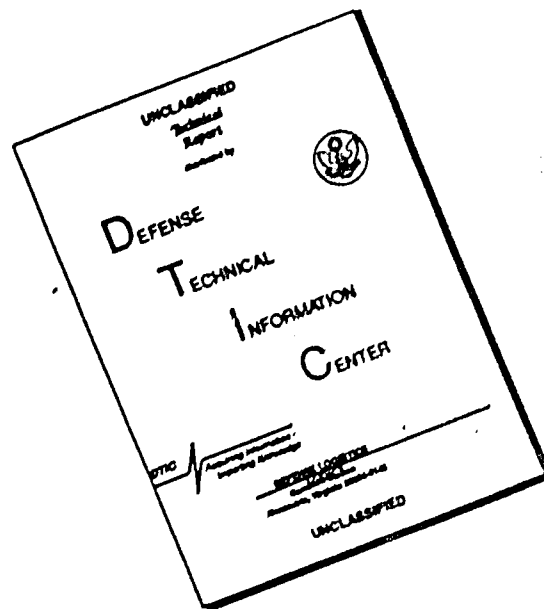
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STUDENT ESSAY

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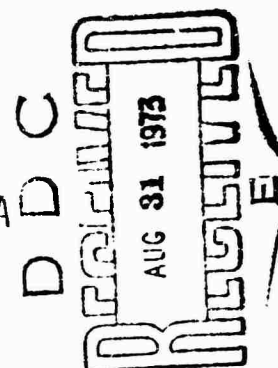
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BY

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USAWC RESEARCH ELEMENT
(Essay)

INDIA: THE VIEW FROM PEKING
Communist China's Strategy Toward India

by

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The basic question is how large a place does India have in China's foreign policy and what will that policy toward India be in the future. Sino-Indian relations have been examined in order to determine the most plausible objectives sought by China's strategy toward India. China's actions in Tibet, Korea and along the Indian border suggest a defensive posture to maintain peripheral security rather than one of aggression. India, in Peking's view, constitutes a link in the Soviet-sponsored encirclement of China; serves as a counterbalance to Peking's influence in the Third World; and is the only nation in South Asia capable of threatening China's Tibetan frontier. Consequently, short of risking war with the Russians, Peking is likely to attempt to weaken India as long as New Delhi serves as an instrument in the containment of China. The United States, with no direct interest in the Indian subcontinent, other than keeping it from becoming a cockpit for great power conflict, has the opportunity to obtain an accommodation with China while the Soviet Union pursues a policy of containment of Peking. The unanswered question is the eventual cost to the United States of abdicating to the Soviet Union the responsibility for the major strategic military role around the periphery of China.

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INDIA: THE VIEW FROM PEKING
Communist China's Strategy Toward India

Less than 10 years ago India and China¹ fought a brief but bitter undeclared war arising out of unresolved differences over their boundary in the remote Himalayas. Chinese troops, with relative ease, penetrated border areas in Ladakh and the Northeast Frontier Agency, some 900 miles apart, before withdrawing and declaring a cease-fire.² This conflict, described as "one of the most dramatic passages of international relations in the mid-twentieth century,"³ threw into sharp focus for all the world to see the tensions and hostilities that have long existed between China and India.

¹For brevity and convenience in this essay, the People's Republic of China is sometimes referred to as "Communist China" or simply, "China."

²The scope of this work does not include a detailed history or account of the Sino-Indian boundary conflict. For the official Chinese view of the conflict see The Sino-Indian Boundary Question, (Enlarged edition), Peking: Foreign Language Press (1962). For the Indian version, see Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged and Agreements Signed Between the Governments of India and China: White Paper (1959-1963). Two recent books on this subject are by Neville Maxwell, India's China War (1970) and Brigadier J.S. Dalvi, Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 (1968). For bibliographic surveys of material written about this conflict see US Department of the Army, Department of the Army Pamphlet 550-9: Communist China, A Bibliographic Survey (1971) and Department of the Army Pamphlet 550-3: South Asia, A Strategic Survey (1966).

³Maxwell, p.11.

Communist China and India, the world's two most populous states, share one of the longest and least defined international borders in the world, stretching some 2640 miles⁴ from the area of the Karakoram Mountains in Kashmir in the west to Burma in the east. It has been said that:

There are few places more critical to peace yet less well known than the Himalayan boundary regions which separate India from Communist China. The tensions which keep these countries on the edge of conflict are as dangerous as they are inevitable, not only because they bear directly on the future direction of Asia but because they are part of the potentially even more significant problem of Chinese-Soviet rivalry. Chinese actions toward India provide a critical index to the extent to which Peking is willing to risk nuclear war in its drive to extend Chinese power in order to fulfill an imagined destiny. For this reason the history of hostile co-existence which underlies Sino-Indian relations is worth exposing to view.⁵

How large India looms in the foreign policy of Peking and what directions toward India that policy will take may not be known for many years. Nevertheless, some indications of China's strategy toward India may be discovered by examining the past and present course of Sino-Indian relations in order to anticipate the future.

⁴Patwant Singh, India and the Future of Asia (1966), p.188. This distance includes the boundaries of Sikkim and Bhutan with Tibet. The foreign relations and defense of these states are responsibilities of India.

⁵John Rowland, A History of Sino-Indian Relations: Hostile Co-existence (1967), p. ix.

II

When India achieved independence in August of 1947, it inherited an historically unstable northern frontier with Tibet and Sinkiang largely created by British colonial administrations. Along this frontier were boundaries to which no Chinese government, Imperial, Nationalist, or Communist, had ever agreed. How this came to be is told in India's China War:

Following the logic of power, empires in their expansive phases push out their frontiers until they meet the resistance of a strong neighbor, or reach a physical barrier which makes a natural point of rest, or until the driving force is exhausted. Thus, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, British power in India expanded, filling out its control of the peninsular subcontinent until it reached the great retaining arc of the Himalayas. There it came into contact with another empire, that of China. In the central sector of the frontier zone, where lay petty states and feudatories, there began a contest for dominance over these marcher lands that continues to the present day. In the north-west and the north-east where no minor, independent polities existed to act as buffers, the British sought secure and settled boundaries with China: these they failed to achieve, and the failure was to lead in the middle of the twentieth century to the border war between India and China.⁶

⁶Maxwell, p.19. A history of the Sino-Indian border is found on pages 19-64. See also Alistair Lamb, The China-India Border: The Origins of the Disputed Boundaries (1964).

As the British moved into the Himalayan regions they sought commercial and strategic advantages in Tibet. Great Britain saw this remote and sparsely settled plateau as a buffer zone to keep the Russians in the northwest and the Chinese (or Manchus) in the northeast away from the northern approaches to India. Because the Manchus seemed dormant in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the British anticipated no particular threat from a nominal Chinese presence in Tibet. However, reacting to what was perceived as a Russian attempt to exercise influence over Tibet and thereby threaten the Indian subcontinent, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, dispatched the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa in 1903 in order to assert Britain's interest in Tibet. The Russian threat subsequently disappeared in 1907 when Great Britain and Russia both agreed to keep out of Tibet and to deal with it only through the Chinese.⁷ Thus Tibet was set up as a buffer under Chinese suzerainty but not sovereignty.

In the meantime, the Manchus, temporarily infused with new life, reasserted Chinese authority in Tibet

⁷For the text of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 see Alistair Lamb, The McMahon Line: A Study in the Relations Between India, China and Tibet, 1904 to 1914 (1966), pp. 251-257.

and by 1910 were on the way to effective control of the country. However, Chinese power, subsequently enfeebled by a revolution against the Manchus, collapsed in Tibet the next year. Nevertheless, the new Republic of China promptly proclaimed Tibet as well as Mongolia and Sinkiang an integral part of the Chinese state.

The British, still pursuing a buffer policy and aiming to prevent the establishment of any effective Chinese presence in Tibet, pressured a reluctant China to send representatives to the Simla Conference which began in 1913.⁸ At this conference Great Britain tried without success to get China to agree to the partition of Tibet into inner and outer zones. The inner zone would have been administered by the Chinese. The outer zone, while under China's suzerainty, would have been under Tibetan administration. The major outcome of this conference was the McMahon line separating the Northeast Frontier Agency of India from Tibet. The agreement certifying this demarcation was signed only by the British and Tibetan representatives on 3 July 1914. No agreement to which the Chinese would then or now admit to being a party was made. In fact the Chinese denied then as they do to this day that Tibet is other than a region

⁸A complete examination of the Simla Conference is beyond the scope of this essay. See Margaret W. Fisher, Leo E. Rose and Robert A. Huttenback, Himalayan Battleground: Sino-Indian Rivalry in Ladakh (1963), pp. 73-78 and Maxwell, pp. 47-50

of Greater China.⁹

With the exit of British military and diplomatic power from the subcontinent in 1947, newly independent and nonaligned India was left to face China across an unsettled boundary with an uncertain buffer in the high Himalayas. The arrival of effective centralized authority in China with the establishment of the Communist government two years later created still another difficulty between these Asian giants. This was the barrier of ideology and outlook which would soon cause collision and conflict.

III

With the resurgence of China in the form of the People's Republic coming about soon after the departure of the British from India, the balance of power that had kept China from effectively asserting its authority in Tibet was no more. As early as September, 1949, the Chinese Communists announced the coming "liberation" of Tibet and said that "the Chinese people will not permit

⁹According to Maxwell, p.49, Ivan Chen, the Chinese representative at the Simla Conference denied that Tibet had a sovereign identity and said that China would not recognize any bilateral agreement between Tibet and Britain. The Chinese minister in London made the same contention to the British Government there.

any part of Chinese territory, however small, to remain outside the Chinese People's Republic."¹⁰ Unlike the Nationalists, who saw their mission expelled from Lhasa in mid-1949, the Communists had the power to enforce China's claim of sovereignty over Tibet. On 7 October, 1950, Peking began to do so by force of arms. That the Chinese intended to regain territory which they had long claimed to be a part of China was once again made clear in response to India's protest against the use of force to settle Peking's relationship with Tibet.¹¹ Peking, in a note of 16 November 1950, reminded the Indian Government that:

The Central People's Government of the Republic of China...has repeatedly made it clear that Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory....The Chinese People's Liberation Army must enter Tibet, liberate the Tibetan people, and defend the frontiers of China. This is firm policy.¹²

India had warned Peking on 21 October 1950 that military action against Tibet would give support to those who opposed the new government's admission to the United Nations¹³ and followed this with an angry protest

¹⁰ Sudhakar Bhat, India and China (1967), p.21.

¹¹ Maxwell, p.70.

¹² Indian Views of Sino-Indian Relations, No.1, Appendix I-E, quoted in Rowland, p.60.

¹³ Bhat, p.10-11.

when it was announced that the Chinese Army had moved into Tibet.¹⁴ From the Chinese point of view, India's criticism of their actions toward Tibet was probably motivated by a desire to keep Tibet at least semi-independent so that it eventually could be brought under Indian influence¹⁵ presumably to continue to serve as a buffer against China.

In addition to a desire to regain "lost" territory and national pride, Peking no doubt recognized the strategic importance of Tibet to China's security in the nuclear age. In the hands of a potentially hostile power, the Tibetan plateau could serve as an ideal location for the deployment of nuclear missiles and bombers targeted toward China.¹⁶ Although India possessed no nuclear warheads and few, if any, bombers, China entertained grave doubts about New Delhi's nonalignment and began at once to consolidate her power in Tibet. To accomplish this, time was needed for there was much to do. There were no airfields nor paved motor roads nor adequate communications in Tibet and China was also engaged in the Korean War.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁵Maxwell, p. 71. In support of this point the author of India's China War quotes a writer in the People's Daily who asked in September 1949, "Since the Indian Government has announced its suzerainty over Bhutan and declared that Tibet has never recognized Chinese suzerainty, will it not declare suzerainty over Tibet?"

¹⁶Rowland, p.73.

IV

In response to China's occupation of Tibet, India began to build up her own defenses in the Himalayas. Nehru moved troops into the Northeast Frontier Agency and claimed the McMahon Line from Bhutan eastward as the boundary between India and Tibet. Responding to a parliamentary question in November, 1950 he said the McMahon Line was fixed by the Simla Convention in 1914 and added that the frontier from Ladakh in the west to Nepal "was defined chiefly by long usage and custom."¹⁷ This apparent adoption of British colonial policy must have reinforced Chinese mistrust of Nehru's government in spite of the fact that India was the second nation to extend diplomatic recognition to the new China and urged its admission to the United Nations. Another reason for Communist China's approach to India from 1949 until 1952 lay in Peking's initial hostility toward so-called nonaligned nations. In their ideological rigidity, the Peking regime regarded the leaders of India and other newly independent states as "agents of Western imperialism" and in 1949 had harshly labeled Nehru as a "running dog of imperialism."¹⁸ However, in response to Stalin's

¹⁷Maxwell, p.75.

¹⁸Norman D. Palmer, South Asia and United States Policy (1966), p.252.

line of peaceful co-existence promulgated in October of 1952, Peking began to shift to a more conciliatory policy toward India and other developing nations. The Chinese even announced that "countries with differing social systems and ways of life can co-exist peacefully."¹⁹

Taking advantage of this apparent relaxation of Chinese policy, India sought to obtain clarification of its rights and privileges in Tibet which had been inherited from the British. An agreement was signed in April of 1954 which contained provisions regulating Indian trade, travel, and markets in "the Tibet region of China."²⁰ By accepting the phrase "the Tibet region of China," New Delhi recognized China's sovereignty over Tibet and thus brought to an end the concept of that land as a semi-autonomous barrier to the Indian sub-continent. In spite of the fact that India saw its rights in Tibet virtually eliminated and was forced to eliminate that area from its defense calculations, the Chinese were able to get Nehru to rely on Sino-Indian friendship for the security of India's northern frontier.²¹

¹⁹New China News Agency, 12 October 1952, quoted in Rowland, p.83.

²⁰The text of the Agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India, signed at Peking on 29 April 1954 is given in Chanakya Sen, Tibet Disappears (1960), pp.82-85.

²¹P.C. Chakravarti, India's China Policy (1962), p.38.

This was accomplished by including in the 1954 agreement "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence" or "Panch Sheel." These principles are mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual nonaggression, mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence. The boundary question was approached only to the extent that certain passes between India and Tibet were allocated for use by traders without designating their ownership.

The next four and one-half years were known as the "Honeymoon Period" in Sino-Indian relations during which the phrase "Hindi Chini bhai bhai"²² expressed the mood of New Delhi. Nehru no doubt impressed the Chinese by his continued nonalignment and his championing Peking's right to the China seat in the United Nations. He worked hard to end the Korean conflict and to prevent a war between China and the United States. He also denounced the Western actions in Suez in 1956 and the Anglo-American intervention in the Middle East two years later.²³ Nevertheless, Nehru's transformation in Chinese eyes from a "running dog of imperialism" to a "friend of China and

²²"Indians and Chinese are brothers."
²³Maxwell, p.262.

an opponent to the imperialist policy of war and aggression"²⁴ began to appear less credible to Peking in 1958 as a result of India's claim to territory known as the Aksai Chin in Ladakh. The Chinese had built a military highway across this plateau between Sinkiang and Tibet in 1956-1957, although India had not become aware of this until 1958. In his January, 1959 response to Nehru's claim that this area was a part of India and incredible impression that there was no major boundary dispute between India and China, Chou En-lai maintained that "the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited," and claimed the Aksai Chin as Chinese territory. Chou characterized the McMahon Line as "a product of the British policy of aggression against the Tibetan Region of China" and said that it "cannot be considered legal." He added that the McMahon Line "had never been recognized" and made it clear that "border disputes do exist between China and India."²⁵

In March of 1959 the Tibetans revolted against the Chinese, who put down the insurrection within a few days.

²⁴Ibid., pp.262-263.

²⁵Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Notes, Memoranda, and Letters Exchanged and Agreements Signed between the Governments of India and China, 1954-1959 (September 1959), pp.48-56, as quoted in Palmer, pp. 258-259.

However, the Dalai Lama escaped to India across the McMahon Line on 31 March and was granted asylum by New Delhi.

These events, together with various outbursts of indignation against China by the Indian people, brought an end to the concept of "Hindi Chini bhai bhai" and India was for all practical purposes reconsigned by the Chinese to the camp of the "imperialists."

V

In the next two years the Sino-Indian boundary problem came sharply into focus and exploded into open warfare in late 1962. Nehru's insistence that China generally accept the McMahon Line and the frontier from Ladakh in the west to Nepal as defined by "long usage and custom" made clear to Peking that New Delhi was not interested in negotiating more than minor variations in what India claimed to be the Sino-Indian border. In addition India was demanding that China withdraw from the Aksai Chin plateau where it had built the strategic military road connecting western Tibet with western Sinkiang. This road was built by the Chinese Army because Khampa guerrillas had threatened Chinese communications with Tibet from the east one or two years earlier.²⁶

²⁶Harold C. Hinton, Communist China in World Politics (1966), p.235.

Despite a meeting between Pandit Nehru and Chou En-lai in New Delhi in April, 1960 and three subsequent meetings between Indian and Chinese representatives, no progress was made.²⁷ India continued her military buildup in the Himalayas by placing patrols and border posts in areas claimed by China. This resulted in the first serious border clashes in 1959 in the Aksai Chin area although some minor skirmishes had taken place as early as 1954.

Nehru's forward military moves and India's unwillingness to negotiate its British-built frontier finally resulted in full-scale Chinese military action across the Sino-Indian border on 20 October 1962. Within a month Chinese troops had overrun Indian outposts in Ladakh and had penetrated into the Northeast Frontier Agency to the foothills of Assam.²⁸ It began to appear that China might subjugate all of India. However, on 21 November the Chinese announced a unilateral ceasefire and promised to withdraw their troops beginning on 1 December to positions approximately 12 miles from the line of actual control on 7 November. This arrangement, previously rejected by Nehru, had been offered in a letter of 7 November to him by Chou En-lai. This move

²⁷For a detailed documented account of this period in Sino-Indian relations, see Maxwell, pp.263-269.

²⁸William E. Griffith, The Sino-Soviet Rift (1964), p.6.

subsequently carried out by the Chinese, left them in control of the Aksai Chin plateau through which the Sinkiang-Tibet highway ran. India was given back Chinese-occupied territory in the Northeast Frontier Agency with what appeared to be tacit acceptance of the McMahon Line by Peking.²⁹

With the end of the war an armed truce settled in over the Sino-Indian frontier. Diplomatic relations, while not broken, were lowered to the charge d'affaires level and trade between India and China came to a complete halt. Thus the Chinese-Indian boundary, though not yet officially settled, was determined by the Chinese military presence in the Himalayas.

VI

Against the background of this historic perspective it can be argued that the motivations behind Communist China's subjugation of Tibet and confrontation with India involved no more than recovery of territory considered to be a legitimate part of China and rectification of boundaries imposed by British imperialism and maintained by Indian intransigence. It can also be argued that China's actions in Tibet and military moves against the Indians reveal a nation bent on aggression against the

²⁹Rowland, p.172. See also Maxwell, pp.417-418.

Indian subcontinent. The fact of the matter is that China's strategy toward India is complex and varied. It most likely encompasses more than the settlement of a border dispute and less than the conquest of South Asia. The objectives sought by Peking in the border war with India in 1962 are vital components of that strategy and are still being pursued today.

The first and perhaps primary objective that has remained constant throughout Chinese history is to ensure the security of Tibet as a part of Greater China against hostile external influences. From the current Chinese viewpoint, India continues to be the primary source of these influences. As the recipient of economic and military aid from the Americans and the Russians, "who have developed a habit of tacit cooperation in relation to China on the Indian subcontinent,"³⁰ India is no doubt perceived by Peking as a "major base in an 'anti-China alliance' fabricated jointly by the United States and the Soviet Union."³¹ A closely related objective is to secure the Sinkiang-to-Tibet highway in the Aksai Chin against Indian probes in Ladakh in order to maintain secure road lines to Tibet.

³⁰Hedley Bull, "The New Balance of Power in Asia and the Pacific," Foreign Affairs, (July 1971), p.670.

³¹Bhabani Sen Gupta, "Moscow, Peking and the Indian Political Scene After Nehru," Orbis, (Summer 1968), p.534.

Another category of Chinese aims relates to the recovery of territories such as Bhutan and Sikkim that are claimed to have been "lost" to the "imperialists." However, it does not appear that Peking will pursue this objective to the extent of its actions in Tibet where there was little possibility of a war with any of the major powers over this remote state. Rather, China will for the foreseeable future continue to seek some sort of hegemony and influence over these semi-independent entities and over Nepal rather than risk a possible conflict with both India and the Soviet Union. Nepal has concluded a border settlement with China and has received economic aid from Peking which included assistance in building a road of great strategic value from the border of Tibet to Kathmandu. So long as Nepal is willing to seek Chinese assistance as a counterbalance to Indian influence, China appears willing to accept its neutrality and position as a buffer state between the two giant antagonists in the Himalayas.³² The Chinese are well aware that their present military positions in the Himalayas and the isolation of India from its traditional buffer states leaves the northern frontier of India

³²For a detailed and comprehensive treatment of the relationship between Nepal and Communist China, see Rowland, pp.144-155.

vulnerable to Chinese invasion should future hostilities arise.

In addition to pressing territorial claims and enhancing the security of its southern periphery, China sought to discredit India in the eyes of the still unaligned and developing nations as an alternative prototype to China's communist system of government and economics. By making the Indian frontier vulnerable to renewed attacks, China humiliated India militarily and forced New Delhi to choose between being prepared to defend itself or continued progress in the civilian sector of the national economy. Peking's policy made India appear to abandon its nonalignment and neutrality in order to seek help from the United States and from the Soviet Union. Peking also embarrassed the Soviet Union in the international Communist bloc by forcing the Kremlin "to choose between loyalty to its doctrine of peaceful co-existence and solidarity with China."³³ When Moscow chose the former, the Chinese were able to equate the Soviet Union's India policy with the removal of Russian missiles from Cuba as "acts of cowardice in the face of imperialist capitalist provocation"³⁴ and

³³Rcwland, p.185.

³⁴Ibid.

thereby underscored their independence from the Soviet Union.

Perhaps Peking's demonstration of the will to use military force in pursuit of border rectification on its southern periphery was also a warning to the Russians that China would, if necessary, use force to resolve its territorial dispute with them as well.

VII

China's transformation from weakness, humiliation, and impotence into a world power with a nuclear capability and a seat in the United Nations has underlined the fact that it has become a major force in South Asia in the past decade. China's technology and growing military might are factors which nations along Peking's periphery must take into ever increasing account when formulating their domestic and foreign policies. China's potential for primacy in South Asia as well as elsewhere along her frontiers will be further enhanced in the near future when Chinese armed forces achieve a tactical and strategic nuclear weapon delivery capability.³⁵

³⁵A survey of materials written about Chinese nuclear development and the politico-military aspects of this development is found in US Department of the Army, Department of the Army Pamphlet 550-9, pp.27-37.

Communist China's military actions in Tibet, Korea, and in the border war with India have demonstrated a will to use armed force to protect what Peking considers to be its vital interests. In each of these instances China refused to permit what its leaders perceived to be potentially hostile forces in areas contiguous to its frontiers. This appears to be the limit beyond which the Chinese will elect to fight rather than yield.

There are no nations in Asia today that can threaten China individually or in combination without the support of either the United States or the Soviet Union. The only state that has been made stronger in the sense of a threat to China as a result of such assistance is India. Although that assistance has come from both of the superpowers, India has moved closer to the Soviet Union and away from the United States while attempting to continue a posture of nonalignment with either country. On 9 August 1971 this relationship was formalized in a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation between India and the Soviet Union. Under the provisions of this treaty neither nation may enter into a military alliance directed against the other and any attack or threat of attack on one calls for both to immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove the threat and ensure

peace and the security of their respective countries.³⁶

Thus China sees its exposed frontier in Tibet subject once again to potentially hostile influences from India just as when Great Britain controlled the subcontinent. Peking perceives Russia's cooperation and friendship with New Delhi as another link in the Soviet encirclement of China beginning at the Ussuri River and extending westward along the Sino-Mongolian border then south and east along the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian borders.

It appears doubtful that China will try to use armed force against India under the present circumstances of Moscow's involvement with New Delhi. China will remain militarily weak in relation to the Soviet Union for at least the period Peking needs to develop a "second strike" nuclear capability against the Russians. This is not to say that the Chinese will refrain from indirect steps to weaken India especially while the latter is engaged in conflict with Pakistan. The current policy of China in this latest breakout of hostilities in the subcontinent seems to be to maintain its friendship with the Pakistani Government while

³⁶Wing Commander Maharaji K. Chopra, Indian Air Force (Retired), "The Indo-Soviet Treaty and Its Implications " Military Review (December 1971), pp.22-28.

being prepared to support a Chinese inspired and oriented guerrilla war in Bangla Dosh in the event it becomes an independent state or is absorbed by India. No doubt, China will continue attempts to extend its influence and, if possible, to achieve hegemony over Bhutan, Sikkim, and Nepal. China will also encourage insurgencies in these lands if the opportunities come about and appear favorable to Peking.

In sum, China seeks to consolidate its authority and control in Tibet and in the Aksai Chin area of Ladakh. Peking also seeks at least neutral, if not friendly regimes on China's exposed frontiers to serve its own buffer policy. The only potential danger to the security of the Tibetan frontier is an India which has become increasingly strong as a result of alignment with the Soviet Union. Consequently, short of causing a war with the Russians, China can be expected to keep the pressure on India anyway it can as long as the present alignment is maintained.

VIII

It remains to ask where the national interest of the United States lies in the Sino-Indian confrontation. Broadly speaking, American policy since Indian independence has been to promote a stable and democratic India. The

general assumption behind this policy was that American interests would be best served by the encouragement of India's leadership of the emerging nonaligned Afro-Asian states. This would, it was hoped, help to thwart Soviet and Chinese efforts to gain dominant influence if not hegemony over these countries. It was also believed that economic and social progress under the Indian system of democracy would counter Communist claims of superiority.³⁷

As a result of the political and ideological split between China and the Soviet Union, Moscow also began to extend economic and military aid to India. Soviet policy in India at present aims towards the creation of a compatible area of stability on its southern periphery and towards countering Chinese influence in Asia³⁸ much as the United States has attempted to do by its aid to India.

Since the Soviet Union as well as the United States has demonstrated an interest in stability in the Indian subcontinent by its efforts to persuade India to exercise restraint in the latter's relations with Pakistan, the recent Indian moves toward Moscow may not really be a

³⁷Francis P. Hoerber, et al., Boundary Conditions of the Sino-Indian Conflict (1963), p.12.

³⁸Richard Nixon, President of the United States, US Foreign Policy for the 1970's: Building Peace (1971), pp. 112-113.

loss for the United States. Other than seeking to ensure that the Indian subcontinent does not become an area of great power conflict, the United States really has no vital interests as such in India in the sense that the continued nonalignment or even independence of that country is essential to our physical security. In this context, the United States welcomed Soviet attempts to create an Indian counterweight to China. Professor Liska expresses the calculated risk involved in this policy:

In so doing, the United States was apparently hoping (rather than stipulating) that Soviet manipulation of supplies of arms (in...India) and its soundings for peace (in the Indo-Pakistani conflict as well as in Vietnam) would not open up the way to Soviet political hegemony in South Asia under the cover of barring China's more blatant self-assertion.³⁹

IX

United States policy toward China and India is in the process of flux and change. Peking and Washington are cautiously moving closer to the establishment of normal diplomatic relations. There is a good opportunity for a Sino-American rapprochement now because the American

³⁹George Liska, "The Third World," in America and the World (1970), p.407.

participation in the Vietnam war is hopefully about to end and the United States is in the process of substantially reducing its military involvement around the periphery of China. Peking faces continuing border disputes and tension with the Soviet Union and a struggle with Moscow for influence in Asia which will be heightened as the United States withdraws from that troubled continent. For these reasons and to preclude, in Peking's thinking, the possibility of an American-Soviet alliance against China, the Chinese overture to President Nixon aimed at the normalization of relations and perhaps a general overall settlement in Asia came about.

In order to achieve improved relations with the People's Republic of China, the United States must recognize China's legitimate sensitivity to the security of its borders. Chinese actions to stabilize their border and secure their frontiers in Tibet and Ladakh did not demonstrate "a...drive to extend Chinese power in order to fulfill an imagined destiny."⁴⁰ Rather they were designed to prevent encirclement and isolation and were consistent with a search for the security of Peking's exposed frontiers.

⁴⁰Rowland, p.ix.

It would be in the best interests of both India and China to reach a settlement of their Himalayan boundary dispute. From China's standpoint this would lessen the threat from the only nation in South Asia capable of doing it harm. From India's standpoint an agreement with China could reduce both its need for military expenditures and reliance upon the Soviet Union for protection and assistance. However as long as India remains insensitive to China's legitimate security interests and continues to refuse to negotiate its claims to highly questionable borders, the Sino-Indian confrontation will continue.

The United States must bear in mind that while Chinese strategy toward India encompasses more than border rectification and territorial consolidation, Peking has shown no signs of further military action against India since solidifying its frontier in the Himalayas some ten years ago. The Chinese have proceeded with caution in all of Asia despite their frequent warlike words so as not to provoke a general or nuclear war with either the Soviet Union or the United States. Peking's military moves in the past suggested a defensive posture rather than one of naked aggression. Communist China's future role in the Indian subcontinent will be one of response to

opportunity rather than one which would risk a direct military confrontation with one or both of the super-powers.

In the meantime, America's relations with India are showing increasing deterioration over New Delhi's response to the revolt of East Pakistan. As a result of this India may move even closer to the Soviet Union in the near future. Nevertheless, the current state of Soviet-Indian relations is not incompatible with any American interest in India as a counterbalance to Peking in the so-called Third World. In the event of the highly unlikely "worst case" of a massive Chinese invasion of India, the United States and the Soviet Union would presumably be on the same side. Consequently, with the Russians in effect "holding the fort" in South Asia, the United States is free to explore the possibility of renewed friendship with China. Thus, in this context, the United States should be wary of making any commitment to India which would imperil the possibility of improving relations with China. In the event we fail to achieve a detente with Peking, only the future will tell what price the United States must pay for having abdicated to the Soviet Union the responsibility for the major military role in the containment of China in Asia.

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CHINA-INDIA FRONTIER AREA

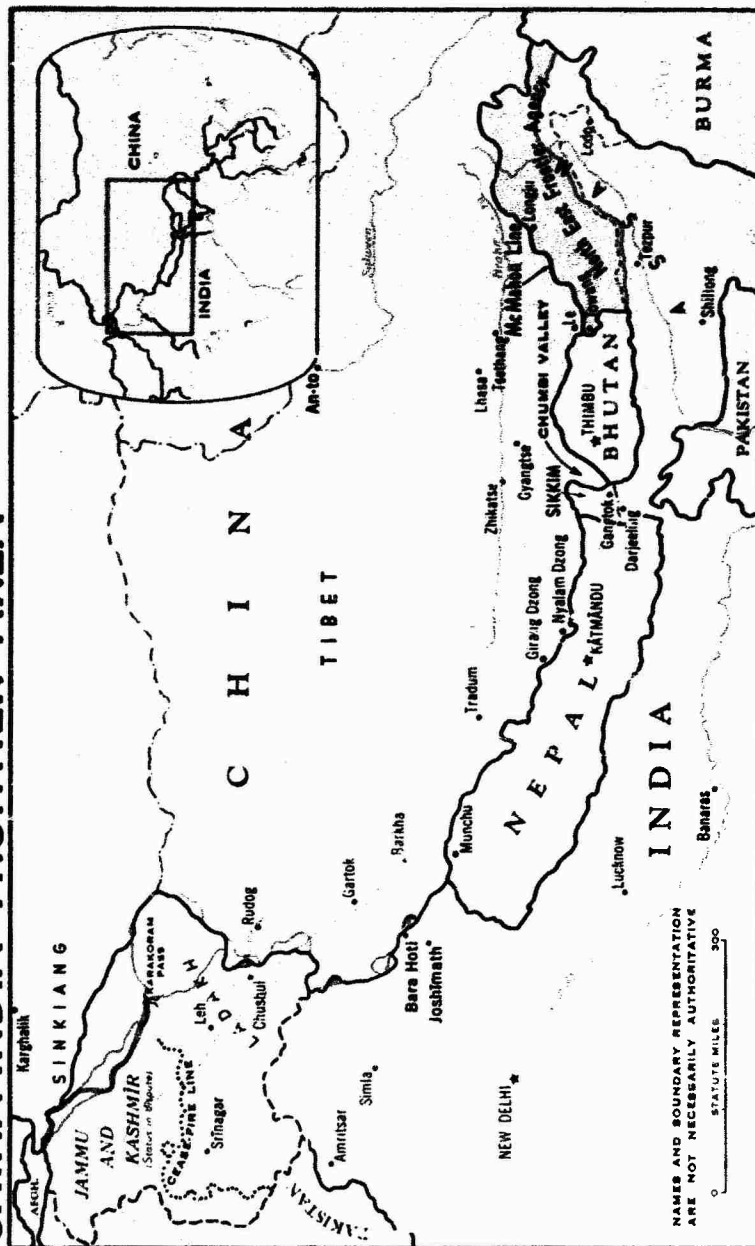


Figure 1



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