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SINO-INDIAN BORDER DISPUTES : SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Introduction

After six rounds of protracted talks for a negotiated settlement to resolve the border disputes peacefully, the Sino-Indian relations suddenly worsened in the summer of 1987. The world press reported mounting tension between India and China and amassing of troops by both countries on the Himalayan border between Tibet and Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. There were speculations as well as apprehensions, specially among the South Asian countries about a new confrontation between the two Asian giants. After nearly 25 years of a brief armed conflict, the two great Asian powers seemed to have come face to face over the same unresolved issues for which the brief and bloody war was fought resulting in casualties of 10,000 soldiers and economic ruins on both sides. The situation stalemated during the post-1962 period; relations between the two countries remained cool with periodic minor skirmishes and diplomatic protests.

The early 1980s witnessed the thawing of the relations beginning with the upgrading of diplomatic relations to ambassador level and subsequent initiative of a process of negotiations through talks. The situation, however, remained far from normal as "a combined total of nearly 400,000 troops remained poised at striking distances."¹

1. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 9, 1987.

Renewed protests and counter-protests began in June 1986 just on the eve of 6th round of talks between the two governments. Tension began to mount from early 1987 and in April, the same year, there were widespread rumours of fighting between the two confronting troops. Both India and China denied any such fighting but according to a Finnish Newspaper, a clash along the border had already taken place. *The Economist* (May 23-29) quoted a well-informed Indian source, "suggesting that something did indeed happen in the Towang Sector of the border, with shots fired in the air".² Reports of large scale troops concentration began to circulate. It seemed that two giant Asian neighbours were once again on the brink of another war. There were apprehensions of replay of 1962 but both India and China seemed to be determined to avoid a full-scale war and steps were taken to ease the tension. But underlying issues remained unresolved as they were 25 years ago.

Why have China and India been unable to solve their border disputes inspite of the fact that both countries are fully aware of the cost of another war? Is it simply a border dispute or more are at stake? Both countries have the potentialities to emerge as major powers by the end of this century. Is it then competition and rivalry between the two countries over the influence and leadership in Asia which are creating actual hindrances to a peaceful negotiated settlement? What factors, then, contributed to the recent developments and tensions to the Sino-Indian border disputes? Is it India's desire to take revenge of 1962 humiliation in view of her protracted defense buildup? On the other side, what were the motives of China? Does China want to impress upon India of her stand on the border as *fait accompli*? Or does she want to use it as pressure tactics to bring India to negotiating-table with 'give and take' spirit? Lastly, what are the problems and prospects of a peaceful negotiated settlement of this issue.

2. *The Economist*, May 23-29, 1987.

After giving a brief account of the historical background of the Sino-Indian Border dispute, the present paper would analyse and discuss the factors which exacerbated the recent tensions. Lastly attempts would be made in the conclusion to answer some of the questions mentioned above.

Historical Background

Peaceful border settlement between two friendly countries is often a routine procedure. Unfortunately, this was not the case between China and India in spite of a close and 'Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai' relationship between the two in the fifties. Although the relationship between the two were friendly in the fifties, factors like national interests and security, rivalry for influence and future leadership in Asia were all at full play below the superfluous honeymooning phase and contributed much to Sino-Indian acrimonies over their Himalayan border disputes in subsequent years. Paradoxically Nehru, the architect of Indian foreign policy was somewhat responsible both for 'Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai' relationship as well as for Sino-Indian hostilities. The Indian public was outraged at Nehru's announcement in the Parliament in September 1959, that all was not well between India and China, that a border dispute indeed existed since 1954 and that China was in actual possession of Indian claimed territory Aksai Chin in the western sector. The patrician trait in Nehru kept him from disclosing the actual border situation to the public and due to the lack of government's plan to educate the people, the Indian public was totally unaware of the situation. The Indian Prime Minister was compelled to disclose these facts after the incidents in Lonju and Kongka La Pass, admitting that "there had been some Chinese intrusions into Indian border areas for the past two or three years and at one place (Askai Chin), the Chinese had built a road and Indian authorities had come to know about Aksai Chin Road in September, 1957".³ Public temper ran high and there were calls for strong actions against the Chinese.

3. S.M. Burke, *Mainsprings of Indian and Pakistani Foreign Policies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1974, p-162,

“After the Kongka La Pass clash of arms”, Nehru declared, “the border issue with China had now become a military issue and would be dealt with by the army”.⁴ Nehru’s inflexible personality trait, his almost evangelistic conviction of the correctness of the alignment of India’s norther border and his trust in Chinese government in resolving the underlying border issues, as pointed out in his letter of December 10, 1958 to Chou En Lai, made India complacent on the whole situation.⁵ Subsequent developments led Nehru in the direction of taking stronger measures against its powerful Asian neighbour. A “Forward Policy”, was adopted along the northern border to counter the alleged Chinese threats in September, 1959—a policy which culminated into a full-fledged war between the two countries.

The basic fact was that the Himalayan border between China and India was never delineated and demarcated on the ground. In the eastern sector 700 miles long McMahan Line had been drawn by the expansionist British at the Simla Conference of 1913-14. The Chinese have always contested the validity of McMahan Line arguing that it was imposed on “weak” dynastic China and was consistently denounced by successive Chinese governments—it could be, according to China, recognised as an International border. The bone of contention in the 1000-mile long western sector was strategic Aksai Chin, a desolate part of Ladakh area of Indian-held Kashmir. China constructed a motorable road during 1954-57 alongside an ancient caravan route in Aksai Chin area which connects the Sinkiang province of China and western Tibet. This was done without the knowledge of the Indian government. The area is vitally important to China for strategic and security reasons since it provides a dependable and reliable connection between Sinkiang and Tibet. The location of impassable Gobi desert in the northeast of Tibet makes this connection extremely important to China. The claim of this sparsely populated area by both sides is difficult to prove either way due to the lack of

4. *ibid*, p-163.

5. N.B. Menon. “Laying Down the Line”, *Frontline*, August 8-21, 1987.

historical evidences as it remained largely undefined during the British Raj. According to Alstair Lamb, "the line on the Simla Convention Map (McMahan Line), at its northwestern extremity turns precisely where Aksai Chin would be if it were marked. This would place the Aksai Chin in Tibet, in any event, and not in Kashmir."⁶ China also pointed out that the area must have been outside the jurisdiction of Indian administration since the Indian authority was unaware of Chinese building a road. India, however, claims the whole area of Aksai Chin as part of Indian territory.

In any event, China was in *de facto* possession of Aksai Chin when the border dispute became public. According to Indian government the only disputed area between the two countries was 14,000 sq. miles of territory in the Kashmir-Ladakh area. The Indian government made Chinese withdrawal from Aksai Chin as a pre-requisite for any future negotiation though Nehru recognised that 35,000 kilometer-long India-China border had never been demarcated. Chinese, on the other hand, demanded *status quo* pending negotiation and renouncement of force in settling the issues as adopted at Bundung Conference in 1955. In his letter of September 8, 1959, Chou made it absolutely clear to India his government's total rejection of British imposed McMahan Line and charged India of allegedly occupying 90,000 sq. kilometers of land in the Tibet region of China south of the McMahan Line. Nehru's reply to Chou on September 26, 1959 slammed the door for a negotiated settlement. The Conference between the two leaders was held in New Delhi in April, 1960 as suggested by the latter in a letter which was presented in Lok Shaba on February 15, 1960. The Indian Prime Minister's hands were tied and there were little room for compromise in the face of mounting public pressure and Nehru's preceived view that "Chinese assertion of authority on the boundary question as undermining India's dream of becoming a dominant Asian Power"⁷ made the compromise more difficult.

6. "Sino-Indian Border Dispute", Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad 1984, p-7

7. *ibid*, p-11

“Nothing could be more thoroughly unacceptable to this country,” wrote the *Times of India*, “than the suggestion that the *status quo*, which is the product of Chinese aggression, should be one of the guiding principles of a final solution.”⁸ The political impasse was clearly evident in the joint communique issued at the end of the talks between the two leaders as well as by the reports of the meeting of the officials of the two countries. Further difficulties were created when China, during the official meetings, refused to accept the boundary of west of Karakoram Pass between China’s Sinkiang Province and Kashmir”. Thus making the Kashmir issue open which became a source of irritation to India.⁹ Failure to reach a compromise and India’s ‘Forward Policy’ made the impasse complete. The border policy established by Prime Minister Nehru remains valid till today. India’s northern border, according to this policy, is well known and established. No sectional examination of the border is admissible—maps or no maps—Himalayas were the international border between India and China as spelled out in the Constitution of India.¹⁰ The prospect for a negotiated settlement on ‘give and take’ spirit seemed to have been lost.

The concoction of an explosive situation was complete with India’s ‘Forward Policy’ which called for the establishment of small military posts in the Ladakh region area in order to stake Indian claim. From November, 1961 to September, 1962, Indian army continued to make steady progress in the western sector regaining 25,000 sq. miles. The relationship between the two countries deteriorated further and by the summer of 1962, it seemed that a major armed conflict between the two could not be avoided. China warned India of facing the consequences if the latter did not withdraw its “aggressive military posts”. The actual armed conflict did not, however, occur in the western sector. The first scene of 1962 was in the eastern sector at Thag La Ridge

8. Cited in “*India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*” by G.W. Choudhury, the Free Press, New York, 1975, p-172.

9. S.M. Burke, *op-cit*, p-115.

10. “Laying Down the Line”, *op-cit*.

where "platoon-scale skirmishes escalated quickly into battalion and then Brigade operations".¹¹ The point of dispute was a triangle with Bhutan on the West, Than La Ridge on the North and "actual line of control" to the South. According to India, China had crossed the McMahan Line and "infested the Indian post at Dhola". The Chinese maintained that the area in dispute called Sumodurang valley was on their side and accused India to have been intruding since June, 1962. The fact of the matter was that nobody knew the exact location of the disputed area. Irritated, Nehru, impulsively gave order to the army "to throw the aggressor out of Indian soil". On October 20, 1962, the Chinese launched an all out offensive and "when a reeling India, still threatened war, China went on to shatter all armed resistance in the disputed sector in both west and east"¹². In three weeks, China recovered all in the west that India so laboriously regained during its 'Forward Policy' and in the east descended at the foothills of Himalayas threatening to cut off Assam from rest of India. India was in a state of shock when on November, 21, 1962, China unilaterally withdrew and took up positions twenty kilometers behind the 'line of actual control' in all three sectors as it had existed on November 7, 1959 and presented India with a three-point proposal. Since independence, India looked upon itself as an emerging Asian power. More than its allegedly claimed territories, it had lost its face and its pride was deeply hurt. As a result, Chinese three-point proposal was not accepted by India and the *Colombo proposal* remained on paper as well. It insisted on the return of *status quo* that existed on September 8, 1962. India could also realize that the Chinese now wanted the negotiation from the position of strength which was unacceptable to them. India, however, may have been better off to accept Chinese offer of amicable settlement offered since November, 1959. As pointed out earlier, Aksai Chin is important to China and Sumodurang valley is needed by India to buttress its defense of Eastern Command. Both the Asian powers

11. Neville Maxwell, "Towards India's Second China war?" *South*, May 1987.

12. *ibid.*

would have benefitted from such settlement. India, however, kept its rigid stand and there continued a *status quo* which existed on November 7, 1959.

Towards Normalisation

A week-long visit by Indian Foreign Minister, Vajpayee on February 12, 1979 marked the first high-level contact between India and China though there was informal contacts between the two countries since 1973 and it was followed up with resumption of full diplomatic relation in 1976. In spite of normalisation efforts, full diplomatic relations and high level contact, there remained periodic protests and counter protests by the two over border issues and other irritants. The Chinese reaction over the annexation of Sikkim by India in 1974 and protest over India's alleged support to Dalai Lama as gross interference into Chinese internal affairs, which was rejected by India, were two cases in point.

Indian Foreign Minister's visit in 1979 was cut short due to the outbreak of the China-Vietnam war. It was basically an exploratory one but it opened a new phase in Sino-Indian relations. "It was made clear to China that the unsolved boundary questions must be settled if relations of mutual confidence were to be established by India and China".¹³ China seemed willing to do the same. After her return to power, Mrs. Indira Gandhi reiterated Janata government's invitation to Chinese Foreign Minister Hwang Hua when the latter called on Mrs. Gandhi on April 18, 1980 in Salisbury while both were attending Zimbabwe's Independence Day. There was also a meeting between Mrs. Gandhi and Chairman Hua Guo-Feng in May, 1980 in Belgrade during Marshall Tito's funeral.

Deng Xiaoping told an Indian journalist on June 21, 1980 that Sino-Indian border could be solved in a "package deal" whereby China would recognise the McMahan Line in the eastern sector and India would not challenge the *status quo* in the western sector. Deng's

13. T. S. Murty. *Paths of Peace*. ABC Publishing House, New Delhi, p. 132.

proposals were not very different from what Chou offered to Nehru in 1960. But the political significance of Deng's offer was that it was made public for the first time since the 1962 border conflict (war). Moreover, Deng made a substantive departure from the Chinese stand on Kashmir by declaring it to be a "bilateral problem" between India and Pakistan. The Chinese departure from their previous policy of backing Pakistani demand for "self determination" in Kashmir was obviously meant to please India. Indian Foreign Minister Narashima Rao expressed India's reaction by reiterating India's stand on the eastern sector. It was evident that while both sides wanted a peaceful settlement of Sino-Indian border issues, neither side was prepared to give up its original claim. The relationship between the two further improved with the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Hwang Hua to New Delhi in June, 1981 which resulted in an agreement to hold discussions on border issues and explore other ways to improve relations in various fields.

On the basis of agreement reached between the two countries during Hwang Hua's visit to talks on the border problem began in Beijing in December, 1981. Since then seven round of talks were held without any tangible success. Difference of perception by both sides existed and no major breakthrough has yet been achieved. Some piece-meal progress, however, was made during the third, specially, during fifth round of talks when China agreed to negotiate the border dispute on a sector-by-sector basis, an approach favoured by India. China, thus showed flexibility and there were speculations as well as expectations. But the developments in the Himalayan region which began in June 1986, once again cast ominous shadow over this long standing border dispute between the two countries.

Towards New Confrontation?

Just on the eve of the seventh round of Sino-Indian border talks, a strong protest was lodged by an official of External Affairs Ministry of India accusing China of "Fresh intrusion in the disputed Sumodurong

valley in the eastern sector".¹⁴ According to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh and External Affairs Minister's deputy, K. P. Narayan, the Chinese intrusion in the above mentioned area within 7 kilometers south of McMahan Line was indeed correct and added that "the intruding Chinese troops, now estimated about 200 had perched tents and built a helipad".¹⁵ The Indian government, however, maintained that in spite of the alleged intrusion the border question should be settled peacefully and through negotiation. The Chinese promptly rejected the allegation and asserted that the area in dispute was on their side of 'line of actual control'. The *Beijing Review* of September 1986, made it quite clear that the question of intrusion by China did not arise at all since 'Sumodurong valley is located not only in the north of traditional Sino-Indian border and 'line of actual control, but also north of illegal "McMahan Line"'.¹⁶

Both Thag La Ridge and Longu region (the first scene of 1962 clash) have been most sensitive and disputed areas since 1962. This was acknowledged even by Colombo Proposal. It was agreed that both India and China would avoid clashes in these disputed pockets and settle the differences through negotiations. Any move by India in the area would be considered provocative by China after the unilateral withdrawal of the Chinese troops in 1962.¹⁶ An Indian official pointed out that disputed area though strategically important to India is mostly a grazing land where regular monitoring was resumed only since 1977. An Indian summer post was opened in 1984 in the Sumodurong valley which was not apparently challenged by China. In the summer of 1986, the Chinese personnel moved in the area before the post-winter return of the Indians.¹⁷ The confusion is further aggravated because of the precise positing of McMahan Line which the Chinese do not accept and the fact that Sumodurong river has been changing its course. The accusation of alleged Chinese intrusion and Chinese rejection of

14. *The Statesman*, July 16, 1986.

15. *The Statesman*, August, 7, 1986.

16. Article by Mira Sinha Battacharjea, *Sunday Mail*, New Delhi, 1987.

17. *ibid.*

the charge and counter accusation of Indian attempt "to further nibble Chinese territory and create new areas of dispute" resulted in rising tension between the two countries. The Indian press considered the incident serious and concluded that the alleged Chinese support to insurgents in Nagaland were part of Chinese grand design to bring pressure on India and that any settlement of Sino-Indian boundary would require concession by India in the eastern sector.¹⁸ Prestigious *Statesman* in its July 17th, 1986 political commentary echoed similar sentiment.

The resulting tension was, however, contained. The seventh round of border talks took place in the shadow of alleged Chinese intrusion and it, therefore, failed to produce any progress in Sino-Indian border dispute. According to a New China Agency report of July 24, 1986 "the talks had enhanced mutual understanding without any substantial progress." The seventh round of talks held in July, 1986, was in fact a setback in the border negotiation. It may be recalled here that in the fifth round of talks held in 1984, the Chinese were reported to have agreed to India's suggestion that border dispute should be settled on a sector by sector basis. But at the seventh round of talks, Chinese reversed their position and went back to the original proposal made by Chou in 1958-59 reaffirmed by Deng in 1980.

India's stand on the validity of McMahan Line remained firm in spite of disappointing progress at the seventh round of talks. Tension between the two countries got further impetus when on December 8-9, 1986, Indian parliament granted a bill approving the upgrading of the Union Territory of "Arunachal Pradesh" to the level of statehood. The Chinese immediately reacted and a spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC (People's Republic of China) on December 11, 1986 reaffirmed China's stand in the eastern sector by stating that the 'newly formed state of Arunachal Pradesh is located on Indian occupied Chinese territory and warned India of facing serious consequences of legalizing "its occupation of Chinese territory through

18. *India Today*, August 31, 1986.

domestic legislation.¹⁹ Finally, when Arunachal Pradesh became the 24th Indian state on February 20, 1987, there were more intense and harsh reactions by the Chinese. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman termed it as an illegal act and "gross violation of China's sovereignty and territorial integrity" and that "Chinese people's feelings have been deeply hurt" by such act. The act only complicated the early settlement of Sino-Indian border dispute through friendly consultation. "It simply will not work for the Indian side to demand unilateral concession from the Chinese side and attempt to impose on the Chinese people the illegal McMahan Line concocted by the colonists"²⁰. Unfortunately the harsh language used by China did not help minimize India's fear but "even Indian sources admit that it became harder to strike a border deal when it granted statehood to Arunachal Pradesh".²¹

There were a number of factors behind the creation of the new state. It was done at the initiative of Prime Minister Rajiv's office which was opposed by a section of Indian diplomats including former Foreign Secretary Venkateswaran who advocated an early settlement with China and thought that such act of India was unnecessarily provoking China.²² Domestic factors, response to last years alleged Chinese intrusion in Sumodurong valley as well as Russian goodwill seemed to have led Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to take such decision. According to a Pakistani interpretation creation of Arunachal is a part of a grand strategy to strengthen Indian hold along China underbelly bordering on India ... a look at the map shows a pincer closing round China with close collaboration of the Soviet-Indian strategic aims in the region.²³ This move, however, was needed not only to strengthen India's diplomatic and strategic positions but to ease public sentiment.

19. Statement by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, December 11, 1987.

20. *Beijing Review*, March 20, 1987.

21. *Asiaweek*, May 10, 1987.

22. *ibid.*

23. *The Pakistan Times*, August 31, 1987.

A period of accusation and counter accusation continued but soon Indian Government seemed to have realized the need for a new approach to Sino-India relations. In the meantime, attempts were made to improve Sino-Soviet relations which always have an impact on Sino-Indian relations. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi felt the need for a negotiated border settlement with China. *The Times of India* on March 4, 1987, published the appointment of Mr. K. P. S. Menon as Foreign Secretary and it was decided that fresh initiatives were to be taken by Mr. N. D. Tiwari (the then External Affairs Minister) to resume official level bilateral talks with China to lessen the tension.

But soon reports of concentration of troops along the Himalayan border began circulating. BBC, on April 16, 1987, quoted the Press Trust of India, that both India and China were reconcentrating troops along the border specially in Tibet region. China, on April 23, 1987 accused India of amassing troops along Chinese-Indian border, forcefully occupying unspecified territory and creating tension in the region"²⁴ The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Mr. Ma Yuzhen denied the report by the Indian Press of concentrating Chinese troops in Tibet and charged India of further "nibbling" at Chinese territory and recently conducting a large military exercise near the border. The External Affairs Minister Mr. N. D. Tiwari denied Chinese accusations, he however, did not deny "operation chequerboard" and did not officially charge China and amassing troops in Tibet, Mr. K. C. Pant, Indian Defense Minister, however, tacitly admitted to Indian troops concentration in the Himalayas when speaking in Lokshaba on April 27, 87. He said that Beijing's objection to the granting a statehood to Arunachal Pradesh and intrusions in the Sumodurong valley had "made it obligatory for India to take appropriate measures for the defense of the border."²⁵ It may be pointed out that the Chinese protests have been the bitterest since last many years and for the first time reported Indian "occupation" in the disputed Sumodurong valley.

24. *The International Herald Tribune*, April 23, 1987.

25. *The Times of India*, April 28, 1987.

As already pointed out, the situation in the Himalayan border became explosive with the report of Chinese concentration of troops along Tibetan side of the border, a report denied by China. But according to western intelligence sources and eyewitnesses report, "a sizable reinforcing of troops have been going on in the Tibet since last April."²⁶ *The Economist*, 20-26, June, 1987 reported the concentration of Chinese troops in Tibet and along the Sino-Indian border adjoining Tibet creating an "eyeball-to-eyeball" situation on the ground. There were apprehensions of another Sino-Indian border war though both countries denied troops concentration along their Himalayan border and reiterated their stand on a peaceful and negotiated settlement. During a visit to China in May, 87, the present author had extensive discussion with Chinese foreign policy makers about the risk of a new war between India and China. She was, however, repeatedly assured by the Chinese that China would never start a war. It would only take steps for its self-defense. Notwithstanding amassing of the troops by the two sides, both China and India tried to keep the negotiation open. A Chinese Foreign Office spokesman reiterated China's stand on the resolution of border dispute by saying that it should be solved "through friendly consultation in a spirit of mutual understanding and mutual accommodation," whereas Indian External Affairs Minister Mr.N.D. Tiwari said that "India was ready to go for eighth round of talks with the Chinese so that border issue could be amicably solved". There was also a report that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was trying to use the good offices of Mr. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, General Secretary of CPI who had earlier paid a visit to Beijing and had a meeting with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping.²⁷

In spite of official statements by both governments for a negotiated settlement, there were reports of border skirmishes. As pointed out earlier, a Finnish Newspaper reported that a border clash occurred a few days earlier which was heavy and was more than a skirmish. Both

26. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 4, 1987.

27. *Dawn*, May 1, 1987,

China and India denied the border clash though the former put the "responsibility for the prevailing tensions" on Indian side and on 23 May 1987, confirmed troops deployment in Tibet in response to Indian air and ground intrusion into disputed territory between Tibet and Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh and Indian violation of Chinese air-space adding fuel to already rising tension on Sino-Indian border.

Before two Asian giants were embroiled into a full-scale war, steps were taken to ease the situation. The Indian External Affairs Minister Mr. N.D. Tiwari announced that he would visit China in June, 1987, to hold talks with his counterpart Mr. Wu Xuepian. There were also talks to consider the possibility of raising Sino-Indian dialogue from official to political level.

A visiting Chinese Politburo and military official Yan Shangkum told the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, a civic group, that the tension in the Sino-Indian border would not escalate into a full-scale war.²⁸ It seemed that both countries realized the futility of another full-scale war. Though India would, no doubt, like to avenge its 1962 defeat she realized that the outcome of another war with China might not only be costly but uncertain. China is too big a neighbour for them to swallow. China on the other hand, is at present preoccupied with its modernisation and reform programmes and would not like to jeopardize the trend of improvement in Sino-Soviet relations which started with the talk of normalisation with Moscow in the wake of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's new Asian policy announced in July, 1986. *The Times of India* in its political commentary advocated skillful, scientific and long-term policy towards India's most powerful neighbour. It went on to point out to take into consideration China's sensitiveness in order to create an atmosphere conducive for mutual trust. Both sides showed restraints in order to avoid the repetition of 1962 scenario. Neither Indian press nor Chinese official media played upto a point of hysteric phobia.

28. *ibid*, May 28, 1987.

In order to lessen the border tension, Mr. N.D. Tiwari, as decided earlier, made a stopover in Beijing on his way home from Pyongyang in June, 1987. This was the first visit by an Indian Foreign Minister since 1979. Mr. Tiwari held discussion with Chinese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Liu Shuqing, both reaffirming their stand on peaceful negotiated border settlement and maintain peace and tranquility in the border until the disputes were settled. Both agreed to hold eighth round of talks sometimes in late 1987 but the Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs told that before the talks on delineating the border began, both India and China should strictly observe the 'line of actual control' drawn in the border region in 1959, "the only way to avoid unpleasant incidents and ease the tension along some sections of the border was for India to withdraw its military personnel who have crossed the 'line of actual control'.²⁹

The situation further improved when Sino-Indian border dialogue was raised to political level with Mr. N.D. Tiwari's second visit to Beijing in August, 1987. The ground for such visit was laid during Mr. Tiwari's discussions with Chinese acting Prime Minister Mr. Wanlee and, the acting Foreign Minister Mr. Liu Shuqing during his stopover in Beijing on June 16, 1987. Mr. Tiwari in his earlier visit had indicated further expansion of trade and economic relations between the two countries. China welcomed the recent trade agreement and advocated for further strengthening of bilateral relations. Mr. Tiwari's visit was to be followed by eighth round of talks to be held in New Delhi.

The withdrawal of troops by China and India began on 14 August 1987. It was "a part of an agreement patched up by army commanders at parleys on border to ease tension before formal talks resume."³⁰ According to the agreement, India started partial demobilization of its forces from disputed Sumodurong valley. China also reduced

29. *The Times of India*, June 17, 1987

30. *The New Nation*, August 15, 1987.

troops but whether the helipad had been dismantled could not be confirmed.

The border tension and apprehensions of a full scale-war, thus have been defused but not completely. In the light of the improved situation and withdrawal of troops, the stage was set for the crucial eighth round of talks which finally began on November 13-18, 1987 in New Delhi.

Easing of Tension

The eighth round of talks on Sino-Indian border dispute was held in a relaxed atmosphere on November 13-18, 1987 in New Delhi. The Indians seem to have realized that without innovative, skillful and long-term policy formulation, a peaceful settlement of the border dispute would be unlikely. They were more than willing to create such an atmosphere conducive to hold friendly talks. To begin with, a section of Indian press advocated for such move; in a two-day seminar organised by India International Centre in February 1987, there was consensus on the issue. India was, also, specially careful not to offend China during the recent disturbances in Tibet. It termed it as "an internal affairs of China and reiterated its policy that Tibet is an integral part of China". An Indian Foreign Ministry official on October 8, 1987, stated that India "does not recognise any government-in-exile and considered Dalai Lama as a religious and temporal head of the Tibetans, who was given political asylum on "humanitarian consideration". He further advised Dalai Lama not to conduct any political activities from the Indian soil.³¹ To make India's position clear on the issue, it sealed the border between Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh in order to stop any flow of Tibetan refugees.

China, on the other hand, responded positively. The eight-member Chinese official team led by Vice Foreign Minister, Liu Shuqing arrived in New Delhi on November 13, 1987 to hold talks with Indian team led by Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon. Mr. Liu, on his arrival, reiterated, once more, that "any settlement of Sino-Indian border

31. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 22, 1987.

dispute would require mutual accommodation and compromise".³² Both sides held extensive discussion without reaching any substantial agreement. The Indian side sounded optimistic about raising the discussion from official to political level or having another round of official talks and expressed hopes about the prospects for future developments in bilateral relations. They seemed quite pleased about creating an atmosphere conducive for friendly talks. The Chinese delegation also pointed out the importance to the development of friendly relations with India and expressed satisfaction at the progress of the talks and hoped that "a fair and reasonable settlement can be reached through friendly consultations."³³

There is no doubt that some progress has been made at the eighth round of talks; Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's acceptance of the invitation, in principle, to visit China, extended to him by Vice Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing is an indication in that direction but at the same time, there remains unreconciled differences between the two sides over the demarcation line and no discussion was conducted on sector by sector basis as done earlier but the two sides talked on the issue from an overall point of view.

Both India and China demonstrated that they were willing to sit down for talks for negotiated settlement shortly after the mistrust and tension of the preceding summer. In any event, the eighth round of talks was a step forward unlike the seventh round of talks which could not make any headway. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sounded optimistic about the progress made at the eighth round of talks.

Conclusion

If China and India could reach an agreement on their 25-year old border dispute, it would certainly be an event of far-reaching implications for Asia and for the world. But, as pointed out earlier, a number of factors contributed to the mutual hostilities between the two Asian

32. *The Times of India*, November 12, 1987.

33. *The New Nation*, November 19, 1987.

neighbours preventing Asian solidarity and unity. Since the 1962 war, both countries have become deeply suspicious of each other's move; the mistrust between the two has also largely contributed to the latest tension. India views the alleged "Peking-Islambad-Washington" axis as a threat to its security and diplomatic-strategic position, whereas Peking does not look upon Delhi-Moscow links favourably. During sixties, when Sino-Soviet relationship was at the lowest ebb, prospect for Sino-Indian normalization was not feasible. In the context of changing Sino-Soviet relationship, borne out of geostrategic compulsions there is likely to be readjustment of relations in Asia. According to Neville Maxwell, Rajiv Gandhi has been in close touch with Gorbachev about Sino-Indian border dispute specially since the recent tension.³⁴ India was assured of Soviet Union's goodwill flux inspite of the recent improved trends in Sino-Soviet relationship. There can be, in that case, possibilities of softening of attitudes in Sino-Indian relations. The assumption, that India was trying to create flaws in the improved Sino-Soviet border talks may therefore, be ruled out. Nor it is safe to presume that Indians were trying to take revenge of 1962 war as they know the cost of such futile war. The latest tension was more due to mistrust than any other factor.

China's intentions, on the other hand, can be explained in the context of 'package deal' formula which requires 'give and take' spirit. They have always insisted that in case of India's acquiescence to Aksai Chin—it would relinquish its claim on the area below the "illegal McMahan Line". They had objected earlier to the presence of the folk dancers from Arunachal Pradesh at New Delhi Asiad in 1982, protested the granting of the bill in the Parliament upgrading Arunachal Union Territory to statehood on December 11, 1986, and lastly bitterly warned India of 'facing serious consequences' when Arunachal Pradesh was finally granted the statehood in February 1987. By all

34. Neville Maxwell, "Sino-Soviet Border Agreement: Prelude to Sino-Indian Settlement ?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 26, 1987.

these actions, China obviously made it quite clear that without a compromise in the western sector, India cannot expect any concession in the eastern sector. It had "reminded India that though the Chinese claim can become a bargaining counter in the process of negotiation, in the absence of negotiation, it remains a real claim".³⁵

As far as the leadership and influence in Asia, both countries realize that both are large and powerful and both are capable of playing such roles. During 1950s and early 1960s, India under Nehru was almost assured of its destiny and eventually taking the leadership of Asia. After the debacle of 1962, with profound shock, India realized that it could not impose its version of boundary on a powerful neighbour like China. Here was another country equally large and powerful. It was most difficult for the Indians to comprehend the existing realities. India, it seems, has come a long way since the days of post-1962 war. The emotional public outcry of the 1960s to punish the aggressors (Chinese) and not to yield one inch of soil of Mother India has somewhat given way to pragmatism and realism. Both countries now realize that they have to come to terms with each other ; China's pressing needs for modernisation programmes and India's need for peace with China in the context of India's strained relationship with her South Asian neighbours make the objective even more compelling. The competition between the two should not, therefore, create major obstacles in resolving their border disputes.

China and India, in the context of new international and national atmosphere, should try and resolve the border disputes. Neville Maxwell quoted *Sunday Observer* (August 16, 1987) report about an early settlement of Sino-Indian border disputes. According to the report, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi would visit China in the winter of 1987 to sign a treaty delimiting the boundaries—that is, agreeing on their general alignments. A joint boundary commission would then demarcate those alignments by

35. Neville Maxwell, "Towards India's Second China War ?" *op cit.*

marking them on the ground.³⁶ If Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is successful in signing a treaty, surely he would go down in history in creating a new peaceful international and national environment. But the crux of the problem is the same stumbling block (Aksai Chin) which created hindrances in the past in reaching a negotiated settlement. Can Rajiv Gandhi sell a negotiated settlement based on the present *status quo*? Will it be politically possible for the Prime Minister? Indian Parliament is not likely to concede to such agreement specially in the context of the resolution passed by the Lok Shaba on November 14, 1962. China would have to make some concessions in order to make the agreement acceptable to Indian public but whereas China is agreeable to give up the claim on Arunachal Pradesh—it cannot do the same in Aksai Chin. India, on the other hand, cannot make compromise unless its rigid stand on both eastern and western sector is softened. In case of India, the boundary (especially Aksai Chin) has become an out-and-out prestige issue. It has for them almost the same emotional impact that Kashmir has for Pakistan or Alsace-Lorraine has for France or Germany.”³⁷ Will then China make some kind of compromise in the western sector also in order to strengthen Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s hands?” In the western sector, again, the Chinese record in boundary negotiations with its neighbours suggests that they will be willing to seek a compromise line that is as near as the security of the Aksai Chin road allows to being acceptable to India.³⁸ In return, India would have to make some alignments in the eastern sector so that it is acceptable to China.

This compromise formula seems to be too far fetched at the moment but not impossible to achieve in the future. It would, to a great extent, depend on the overall improved relationship between the two countries. The result of the eighth round of talks, though

36. Neville Maxwell “Sino-Soviet Border Agreement: Prelude to Sino-Indian Settlement?” *op-cit*.

37. T. S. Murty. *op. cit* p-132.

38. Neville Maxwell “Sino-Soviet Border Agreement : Prelude to Sino-Indian Settlement?” *op cit*.

full of optimistic note, has not produced any substantial result. The improvement in the bilateral relationship in other fields would materialise with the raising of official level talk to political level and Indian Prime Minister's visit to China, if and when that takes place. The pragmatic approach taken by Indian policy makers may contribute in that direction. At present the two countries are still trying to bridge the gaps with points of differences still unreconciled.

It is difficult to predict the future course of Sino-Indian border conflict. When and in what forms the ultimate agreement would take place is still a matter of speculation. But from our survey and analysis of the Sino-Indian border issue, it is clear that both sides now want a negotiated settlement and not armed conflict. This is a great relieving factor in Asian international order. The sooner the two Asian giants make up a rapprochement, the better for peace and stability in the world, specially in Asia-Pacific region.