

The Sino-Indian Border War 1962

New Perspectives

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A new volume, *The Sino-Indian War of 1962: New Perspectives*, edited by Amit R. Das Gupta and Lorenz Lüthi, provides fresh insights into the brief 1962 border war that set India's non-aligned policy teetering, but left the People's Republic of China (PRC) relatively unscathed. Eleven authors and twelve chapters survey the background, policies, and errors surrounding the event, using both new and existing archival materials. Among the novelties: Amit Das Gupta on India's policy, Dai Chaowu on China's strategy, and Payal Banerjee on the little known wartime plight of India's Chinese citizens.

The 1962 border dispute arose, in part, from the fact that rigid frontiers were a Western concept imposed on Asia, and whose after-effects can still be felt today. As recently as the mid2017, jingoistic voices were heard in the standoff over China's road-building near the Bhutan border in the Northeast, which threatened India's Chicken's Neck corridor. Other bilateral irritations include the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC, a massive Chinese investment in rival Pakistan's infrastructure), China's opposition to both the inclusion of Masood Azhar (the Pakistani founder of Jaish-e-Mohammad in Kashmir) on a UN terror list, and to India's membership in the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (which seeks to



prevent nuclear proliferation, founded in response to India's 1974 nuclear tests). Yet a discussion of Sino-Indian relations must also register the robust economic ties between the two nations – bilateral trade of more than US\$70 billion annually, making the PRC a top trade partner of India – as well as joint military exercises in 2016. Furthermore, periodic spikes in border tension have not seriously disturbed the peace for decades.

Lorenz Lüthi and Amit Das Gupta's co-written "Introduction" begins with a careful survey of the issues, archives, and literature on the war, including a useful narrative on the border dispute from the 19th century to the outbreak of hostilities. They conclude that militarily ill-prepared India miscalculated the PRC's resolve, leading to the disastrous war (p.11). According to the leaked [Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report](#), India's Intelligence Bureau – and not, as previously assumed, the army – also misled the government in their decision to go to war. The chapter's reference to Neville Maxwell (India's China War, 1970, which blames Nehru's 'forward policy' for the war) omits his 2014 addition that forged British documents shaped India's stand on the border (Neville Maxwell interview, [India Today, 31.3.2014](#)).

In a separate chapter, Lüthi shows that while Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru supported the PRC's claim to a seat at the United Nations, he was alarmed at its irredentism in Tibet and the Aksai Chin border region.



In his two chapters, Das Gupta sketches the role of Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt in shaping India's border policy. In April 1960, the Nehru-Zhou Enlai border talks failed to agree on a redrawing of the border line, revealing the disunity among India's leaders. Das Gupta also shows how the war impacted Pakistan's regional policy, which quickly turned in the direction of the PRC, including a gift of no-man's-land in Ladakh to China. But if the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation war irritated US-Pakistan relations (despite Kissinger's tilt to Pakistan), close cooperation also occurred. Pakistan aided the US-Chinese thaw and helped to foment anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan. Chinese aid in the form of missiles and nuclear technology helped Pakistan tweak the power imbalance with India.

Dai Chaowu and Eric Hyer both see the initial Chinese stance on the border as flexible. Dai argues that India's restriction of vital trade to Tibet caused difficulties for the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) there. The G219 road running via India-claimed Aksai Chin to Tibet, various border spats, and the Tibetan Uprising in 1959 (during which the Dalai Lama escaped to India) added to the Sino-Indian squabbles. Zhou's 1960 proposal to de facto recognize the McMahon Line (the disputed border line between India, China, and Tibet drawn up at the Simla Conference in 1914), which India had accepted as fact but China understood as provisional, in exchange for the Aksai Chin region failed due to India's insistence that Chinese forces and government institutions vacate the Aksai Chin region first. While offering new insights into China's policy, Dai echoes Maxwell's position on the causes of the war.



For Hyer, the PRC's growing aggression against both superpowers shaped its early flexibility, but Mao's radical turn would eventually defeat the more moderate 'sanhe yishao' policy. Hyer argues that the PRC managed to settle border issues with India's neighbours (Burma, Nepal, Pakistan) but failed to impress India itself, despite the fact that public opinion in India viewed the British-drawn border as settled. China's war of "self-defence and counter-attack" arose out of this constellation.

In his chapter, Paul McGarr maintains that that the United States and the United Kingdom wished to cultivate India as an ally in order to limit Soviet influence. While their ire over India's liberation of Goa in 1961 can be understood as hypocritical, Washington and London nonetheless stood by India in its border war with PRC. But with a US demand to link the Kashmir dispute to long-term arms supply, India turned to Moscow. Andreas Hilger discusses how the decision by the Soviets to send military aid to India while denying it to the PRC may have angered Beijing. Moscow did not initially take sides in the border dispute, but later supplied India with MiG-21s. Soviet participation in the conflict may have hardened the Sino-Indian faceoff and paved the way for greater US-UK involvement in South Asia.

Jovan Čavoški discusses the divided Afro-Asian reaction to the war, born of Chinese pressure and India's failure to inspire. While the mediation attempt in Colombo, Sri Lanka, failed, so too did the PRC's attempt to discredit India's non-alignment after Nehru had sought US military help.



Chapters 9-12 turn to India's domestic scene. Intiaz Omar looks at the impact of the 1962 war on India's constitution: For the first time in independent India, a National Emergency was declared under Article 352. The draconian Defence of India Act of December 1962 had 156 rules governing all aspects of daily life, and was identical to the British-era Defence of India Act, which promulgated in 1915, and then re-enacted in 1939 at the beginning of World War II to subdue the independence movement. It suspended all fundamental rights of detainees, and was only lifted in 1968. Part of Omar's exposition, however, seems off-beat; he also discusses emergency measures taken in the later decades.

Subho Basu explores how the Act contributed to the repression of India's communists and the subsequent division in their ranks. During the course of the border dispute, the Communist Party of India (CPI) split into moderates and radicals, leading to the birth of the more radical CPI (Marxist) party in 1964. Ironically, the provisions of the national emergency may have forced even moderate communists to turn radical.

In his chapter, Payal Banerjee reveals the mistreatment of India's ethnic Chinese citizens, whose civil rights were denied under an amended definition of "foreigner." The war soon spawned the Foreigner's Law and Foreigner's Order, which led to the mass arrests of the local Chinese population. Many were sent to the Deoli camp in Rajasthan, others to local jails, or were deported. Malice greeted them everywhere in India.

Finally, Jabin T. Jacob investigates the continued Indian paranoia about the PRC. Instead of studying their powerful adversary, as the US and the



USSR did during the Cold War, neglect of China-specific expertise continues in India today. How many of India's China-experts can read Mandarin, Wu, Yue, or Min originals? He also surveys the literature apportioning blame for India's fiasco. Ultimately, the book succeeds in throwing new light on aspects of the policies surrounding the war. It also affords keen perspectives on India's domestic scene at the time.

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