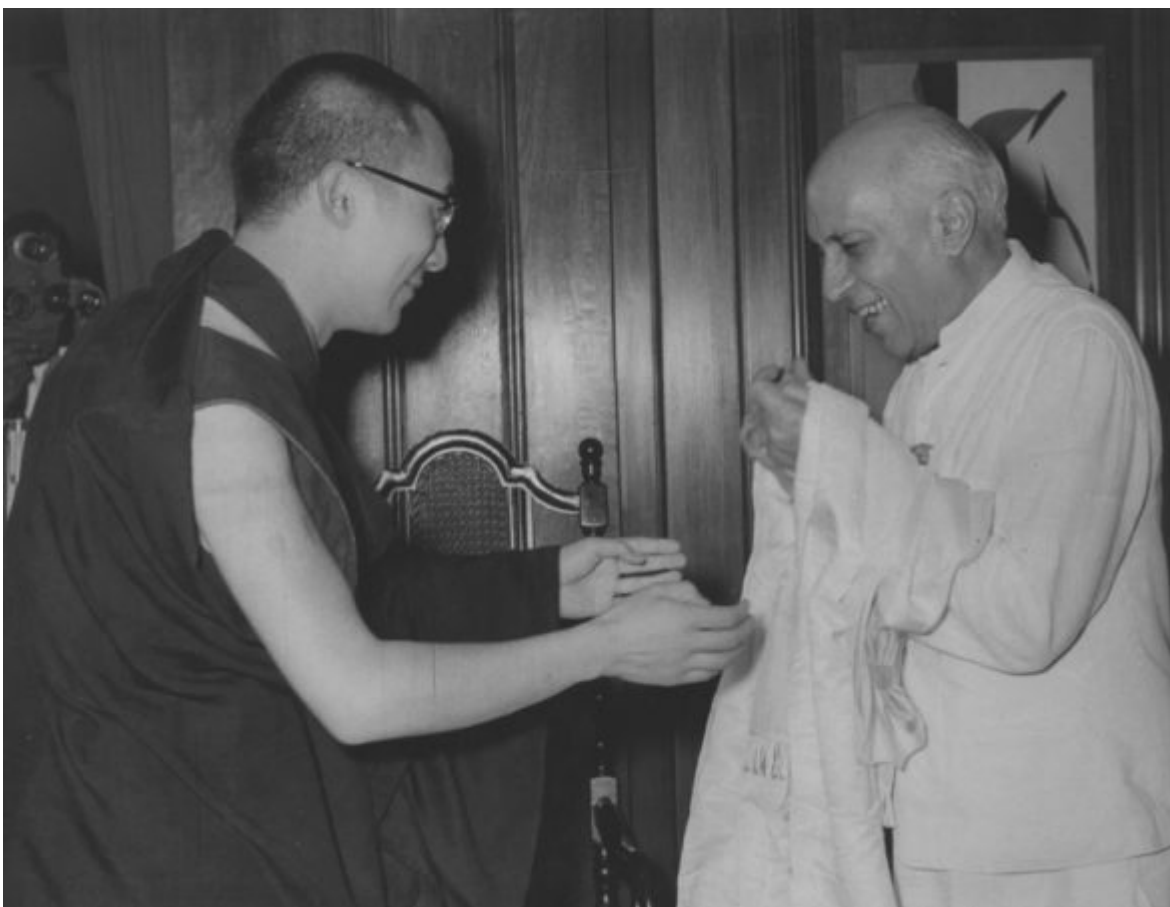


From the start, Indian and Chinese approaches to the territorial issue remained poles apart. While for Nehru the question of the territorial definition of India continued to be as an ex-colonial modern state and he failed to make it a priority goal of foreign policy, Mao regarded the territorial formation of the PRC with utmost seriousness and took hard decisions in this regard. Now the basic policy defects of India began to impart dividends and from 1958 divergence of approach to the territorial issue surfaced. Height of the event was on 14 December 1958 when Nehru personally wrote to Chou En-lai rebutting the Chinese claims. India was shocked when in his reply the Chinese premier said that “the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited” and that the so-called “McMahon Line was a product of British policy of aggression against the Tibet region of China.” Obviously, by that time, China’s borders with its neighbouring states in the Himalayan region except India had been finally settled and its troops had been posted all along the Sino- Indian border. Complaints and counter-complaints were pushed in the background as Sino-Indian border conflict took a serious turn causing great anxiety.

Political asylum of Dalai Lama



His Holiness the 14th Dalai lama with Jawahral Nehru (Indian Prime Minister)/ India Collection/Archives

What vitiated the atmosphere was the other side of the coin. Particularly in case of political asylum to Dalai Lama India was guided by reasons more than one. Nehru's decision to grant asylum to Dalai Lama had the near-unanimous support of public opinion in India. This humanitarian act suited the guest as he was respected in India as a high priest of Buddhism. There was also wide-spread sympathy for Tibet because of the 'cultural kinship'. Despite being affirmative in 1954 when Panikkar said about the asylum of the Government of India if Dalai Lama had ever sought, this time in 1959 China regarded the grant of asylum as an unfriendly act. It condemned India's attitudes and actions as inconsistent with the Panch Sheela and charged India 'expansionist' withholding the Dalai Lama 'under duress'. Later it was also charged India with encouraging the rebels and interfering in China's internal affairs. In the meantime, the Prime Ministers of the two countries met in April 1960 but failed to cut much ice. In fact, the summit was the last real opportunity for arriving at a common approach to the border problem - weakened the prospect of a negotiated settlement. Even three meetings of the officials of the two countries held in Peking, New Delhi and Rangoon respectively in 1960 failed to find any solution rather they made perceptions even more obvious. Simultaneously relations between the two went on deteriorating and border incursions becoming more frequent they assumed more menacing dimension.

Earlier at the close of the year 1959 pressed by Chinese advances and strong public sentiment, Nehru decided to pursue the 'Forward Policy' with a view to exercising effective control up to its borders. The sole purpose of this decision was to establish checkpoints and dispatch patrols, wherever possible, up to the boundary and to constitute a special board to complete the building of roads in the border areas within two years to make clear that any further Chinese advance was obvious aggression. This step of the Indian government was necessitated as the Chinese had been steadily moving southward into Ladakh and a parallel Indian position became essential. This might halt the flow of Chinese encroachment and help to create a climate where good sense would prevail and negotiations could begin. By the end of 1961, about 50 posts were established by Indian forces all along the border.

1962 war at the doorstep



The early months of 1962 saw a continued exchange of diplomatic notes with China protesting at the patrolling and the establishment of border posts by India. In March and April 1962 some posts were established by India on the Depsang Plains and on post twelve miles north-east of Daulat Beg Oldi. These posts were intended to affirm Indian sovereignty over these border areas rather than to withstand Chinese attack but it was misinterpreted by China and the latter had resorted to aggressive tactics. Intense Chinese activity was reported in the western sector, especially in the Chip Chap, Chang Chenmo and Pangong regions, but many protests were lodged by India when there was confrontation or firing. Expressing readiness for talks, disappointed Nehru remarked on 3 October 1962 when B.M. Kaul, India's Chief of the General Staff, met him, 'India had tolerated Chinese incursions into her territory for far too long and a stage has come when she should take-or appear to take-a strong stand irrespective of consequences'.

The climax of India- China border dispute came on September 8, 1962, when Chinese troops crossed the McMahon Line in NEFA in the eastern sector and occupied a good part of Indian territory. Pressed by political compulsions Nehru told the media on October 13, 1962, that his Government had asked the army to throw the Chinese out of our territory. Many people in the country including B.M.Kaul were surprised and acknowledged that this

might have provoked the Chinese to launch a massive attack on October 20, 1962. By October 25, Chinese were inside India about 16 miles south of McMahon Line. Further, the Chinese began attacks on a very large scale on November 15 in both NEFA and Ladakh sectors. The victorious Chinese reached a spot in Assam overlooking river the Brahmaputra, plains of Assam and the Bay of Bengal in the eastern sector. Suddenly on November 21, 1962, the Chinese announced a unilateral cease-fire. Timely help by Britain and the US perhaps compelled China to a cease-fire and withdraw to the point chosen by them. The Indian armies abided by the cease-fire and did not impede the Chinese withdrawal in the eastern sector, although this meant that the Chinese would remain in possession of about 2,500 square miles recently occupied in the western sector. While the Chinese asserted that they would withdraw to the 'line of actual control' as on 7 November 1959, they also let slip that, in fact, to do so would mean withdrawal from about 6,000 square miles of territory which they had occupied.

1962 enabled China to establish an international identity ideologically and politically distinct from that of the Soviet Union. Its military victory and its unilateral withdrawal enhanced its image and standing in the third world. It paved the way for China to play an independent role in world affairs. By contrast, for India, the year proved a trauma. The collapse of the India-China amity effectively destroyed the structure of Nehru's foreign policy. It did more: it shook the foundation of his worldview. After 1962 the two concerns became most pressing for it. The one was territorial definition and consolidation which became the core problem in its relationship with all neighbours, especially China and Pakistan.

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