

Non-Target Communist Area Analysis Department

Background Information USSR

25 October 1962

THE INDIAN BORDER QUESTIONKremlin's Political Support Swings to China

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(October 1962)

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Introduction

For the first time since the Chinese-Indian border clashes began five years ago, the Pravda editorial today (25 October 1962) swings the USSR away from a position of careful neutrality towards cautious political support for China. Pravda attempts to blame the "British colonizers" for the "notorious MacMahon line" which was imposed on the Chinese and Indian peoples and "which has never been recognized by China". The Kremlin thereby passes over three important facts: that it is recognized by India, that if British colonialism had never existed India and China would have needed a defined border (the MacMahon line is the most logical yet suggested) and finally that Chinese troops have already advanced by armed incursion about 40-60 kilometers in some areas beyond it.

Pravda's new-found support for Peking is also expressed in its choice of adjectives for the two countries, which describe China as "fraternal" but India as "friendly". The editorial rehearses the well-known reasons for Soviet-Chinese friendship - the common goal of building communism, the similar economic base and state structure, the single ideology, the struggle against imperialism, etc.

As regards India, the Soviet people are said to derive "profound satisfaction" from their developing cooperation with her, which helps to raise her economic and cultural level. "They value greatly her contribution to the struggle for peace and international security, against colonialism and imperialist military blocs." Then Pravda expresses concern at the recent armed conflicts on the border and recommends a "peaceful solution on the basis of the Chinese government statement of October 24."

The statement concerned suits China much better than India. It has been described in New Delhi as "vague, confusing and deceptive." It - and Pravda's editorial - talk glibly of negotiations based on "respect for the line of actual control," regardless of the fact that the latter has only been estab-

lished by the "forcible physical possession of Indian territory", in the words of the Indian Foreign Office spokesman yesterday. Moreover the Chinese and Pravda want both sides to withdraw 20 kilometers from this line, which would involve establishing a no-man's land 40 kilometers wide, and the abandoning by India of land up to 80 kilometers south of the frontier she believes to be right - the MacMahon line.

Pravda's editorial is so lacking in objectivity that it lectures India on the dangers from "reactionary circles", "nationalist influences" and "chauvinist positions" without addressing the same warnings to China. Mr. Nehru and Mr. Menon will be astonished and by no means pleased to find Pravda suggesting that their consistently defensive policy, which at present aims solely at regaining lost Indian territory south of the line, has been influenced by such considerations.

On the question of establishing the prerequisites for negotiations, Pravda also supports Peking by saying

"common sense demands that in the settlement of disputes there should be the wish (for agreement) on both sides. and no preliminary conditions should be stipulated."

But India has always maintained that before negotiations can begin, China must "vacate her aggression". The latter has now reached such serious proportions that the Chinese Army has been reported within 100 miles of the Assam oilfields, which at present are being developed with the aid of Soviet and Rumanian technology. In view of the Indian government's understandable desire to regain its own territory before beginning talks, Pravda's plan for "unconditional" negotiation is likely to fall on deaf ears in New Delhi.

Pravda ends by saying that "in our opinion the proposals of the Chinese government are constructive" and "they constitute an acceptable basis for the beginning of talks." If they are acceptable to the Kremlin, they are not to Mr. Nehru, who has appealed to the Indian people to follow the British example after Dunkirk and rally to "defeat the massive invasion of India by China" (Reuter, 25 October 1962).

Today's Pravda editorial may well mean the beginning of the end of the Indian-Soviet honeymoon. Certainly the Soviet support for China is at present only political, while in economics and military supplies the weight of the USSR is still tipped towards India rather than China. But it would be difficult even for Khrushchev to maintain for long a posture of verbal support for China while supplying Antonov 12s, helicopters and possibly even Mig 21s to India. The last named aircraft may prove to be one of the first tangible signs of Moscow's new attitude if the six expected to be delivered to India in December do not in fact arrive.

Another casualty from Khrushchev's switch will be the Indian Communist Party, which ever since November 1959 has held that the "area south of the MacMahon line is now part of India and should remain in India" (CPI's National Council Resolution).¹ This resolution has never been rescinded, and therefore Pravda's description of the line as "notorious" and "imposed" will cause trouble between the nationalist and Muscovite factions to add to the long-standing dispute between the nationalist and pro-Chinese wings.

The precise reasons for Moscow's change of attitude must be a matter of speculation. It is a perennial truth that at moments of external danger there is always a tendency for allies to come closer together. Hence the emergency resulting from the interdiction by the US of Soviet offensive weapons en route to Cuba, and the immediate support given by China to the Kremlin on that issue may have decided the Presidium that at last it was time to come off its neutralist fence as regards the Sino-Indian conflict.

A less obvious possibility which cannot be altogether ruled out is that China has somehow blackmailed the USSR into taking the step, perhaps by threatening to make the Sino-Soviet dispute public unless some Soviet political support for the Chinese position on the border issue were forthcoming. This is less probable, since China almost certainly needs the Sino-Soviet alliance more than the USSR needs it. A more elaborate version of this theory might suggest that if Mao had threatened to make the rift public on delivery of the Migs, Moscow then might have decided firstly not to supply them, and secondly, that some political appeasement of its eastern ally, such as that in Pravda today, was urgently necessary.

Whatever the reasons for it, the Pravda editorial marks a turning-point in Soviet relations with India. It calls for appeasement of an aggressor, leaving him in possession of thousands of square miles of Indian territory. It casts doubt on the Indian national frontier, a procedure which inevitably favors the stronger contestant in the dispute. It may lead to a reduction of Soviet military, though less probably of economic, aid to India.

The 25th October 1962 is likely to be a day long and unhappily remembered in the minds of all those in New Delhi, including Mr. Nehru and Krishna Menon, who have consistently hitherto regarded the USSR and Khrushchev in particular as being favorably disposed towards India. The change of line in Moscow looks unpleasantly as though it is based on the blatant opportunism of Soviet national interests, for which both Indian interests and the objective merits of the border dispute have been sacrificed.

r.r.g.

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See appendix below, p. 2.

FRONTIER - TENSION WITH INDIA

October 1962

The switch during September of Chinese military penetration from the western to the eastern sector of the long mountain-frontier with India came towards the end of the limited operational season at these altitudes. It could, therefore, be regarded as partly, if not wholly, aimed at improving the Chinese situation for a winter propaganda season. Motives for Chinese depreciation of the value of the Indian Government's professed readiness for peaceful negotiations have long been clear. The Chinese, by the agreement for delimitation of their frontier with Nepal, and by diplomatic approaches to Pakistan (at the same time making the most of points of issue between these States and India) have added to their list of countries to be called as witnesses to China's "good neighbors" policy. The settlement in Laos can be used to reinforce the line, and thus to range India among the "collaborators of aggressive US imperialism."

The renewed Indian offer of talks on the subject of the Ladakh-Tibet and Ladakh-Sinkiang frontiers, put forward in late July, repeated once more the suggestion of a withdrawal by each side to the line claimed by the other. At the same time the Chinese realized that the Indians were in a position to resist further encroachments in this area, and to advance their posts in some cases behind those pushed forward by the Chinese. In addition to official exchanges the Chinese put out, on September 9, a "report on the border situation", followed next day by a widely publicized People's Daily editorial, accusing India of aggravating a tense situation by "nibbling" at Chinese-claimed territory. The principal object of the attack was to evade the Indian proposals for a peaceful settlement, which clearly had no part in the Chinese tactical plan.

By the Chinese attack on the India/Tibet/Bhutan trijunction, which took place in the middle of September, the position was altered in that the Indian willingness to begin talks on the western sector in Peking on October 15 had been deliberately countered by the Chinese shift of military pressure to the eastern sector, thus making it more difficult for an elected Indian government to maintain a posture of negotiation.

Effects on Indian Communists

The Communist Party of India, after adopting with difficulty a "fence-sitting" resolution on the frontier-dispute in the third week of August, have now had their dilemma increased by the action of the Chinese Communists. "Nehru's dual policy" (defence plus negotiation), which has become a specific target for Chinese hostility, is the one rock to which the Indian Communists have contrived to cling among the contradictory eddies of Marxist-Leninist solidarity and nationalist propriety. Moreover, it was only by focusing attention on the western sector of the frontier that they could

find arguments in support of the "dual policy". In the eastern sector, along the MacMahon line, it is inevitably more difficult to avoid the challenge to be either pro-Indian or pro-Chinese. As long ago as November 1959, the CPI National Council, while taking refuge in a statement by Mr. Nehru that the dispute over the western sector (Ladakh) was "a complicated matter", came out positively in regard to the eastern sector. "The National Council holds", said the resolution, "that the area south of the MacMahon line is now a part of India and should remain in India." That Resolution has never been rescinded and the Chinese incursions south of the MacMahon line in the middle of September and their denunciation of Indian resistance as "invasion" will make it even more difficult for the two factions of the CPI to reach agreement.