CONCLUSION

The discussion in the preceding chapters clearly points out that India under Nehru, like other post colonial post-second world war states, structured itself and fashioned its foreign policy in reaction to competing forces of cold war, rival military alliances and divergent political ideologies. India also utilized the competition between powers as a leverage to further its interests as well as to consolidate and stabilize her position. This provided India with a chance to assert its own importance. It was this assertiveness based on its own importance which made India expect that others will respond to its requirements as it wished. Indian policy makers began to view others with high expectations and with regard to China also it was no exception. In fact in the case of China it was rather based on excessive expectations. Such an expectation was built upon because of the urge for friendship with China which Nehru had nurtured long before India and China became independent from colonial rule. In the chapter, "Policy makers, Crisis and War", it has been analysed how expectations play an important role in crisis and how these expectations sometimes force policymakers to commit themselves publicly on certain policies. Nehru too because of his obsession for friendship with China had expected that India and China would be friendly and two great Asian nations would cooperate with each other. This urge for friendship made Nehru commit publicly India's policy towards China based on the twin principles of "friendship" and "firmness". Nehru had based his policy towards China on both idealistic and realistic considerations. It was a realistic policy because he had started the relationship with China on the right track in the beginning of 1950, despite initial strains. At that moment if Nehru had alienated China it would have brought both China and Russia together against India which would have been very harmful to India's interest. With his unique sense of history, Nehru had comprehended the need of the hour and he extended his hand of friendship to the globally isolated China. The Chinese reciprocated Nehru's friendship in
the early years because they never wanted any trouble to their regime from the Indian side and waged an assurance from India with regard to Tibet. Having established good relationship with China, India very unrealistically or idealistically began to expect that others would accept what it wanted. A good example of this was India trying to assert its right to unilaterally define its own boundaries and describing China’s refusal to defer to India as culpability. In doing so India overlooked the fact that China too would try to emphasise its own historical authenticity and would not allow that to be denigrated and that it regarded itself as being in the top category of powerful nations. The Chinese approach to the world affairs is throughout guided by the imperatives of power politics. The adamant attitude of the Chinese was contrary to India’s expectations based on strong ties of friendship. The Chinese attitude was shaped by centuries of history and its traditional attitude. The Indian reaction to this was no less dogged or less rigid and India began to insist on infallibility.

It was in this background that Nehru was cornered by his opponents in the Parliament on the issue and Nehru on his part failed to explain to the ill informed public and the Parliament the real historical background of the dispute. It is a cliche that the past must inform the present. But Nehru when questioned by the Parliament on the boundary matters, instead of highlighting the real aspect of the dispute, claimed what the Chinese were disputing was ours. That was accepted by the majority and the opponents of India’s China policy got an opportunity to corner Nehru in this regard. Within Nehru’s party also many of his colleagues were upset by his “loftiness” which aided the opposition in this matter. Moreover China was treated as Nehru’s problem and Nehru had kept the matters pertaining to external affairs to himself and to Krishnan Menon of whom he was fond. To get over this uncomfortable situation in Parliament Nehru had to sound tough and uncompromising. In doing so “stiff-necked nationalism” had precedence over realpolitik. Consequently the whole relationship became hostage to pride. Once the relationship became
hostage to pride, Chinese too linked the issue with fierce and aggressive nationalism and were keen on establishing its predominance. Nehru on his part found it difficult to harmonise reality with sentiment, pragmatism with historical belief and nationalist belief with imperialist legacies.

India was trying to argue her case more from the nationalistic point of view. Especially she was trying to establish that the concept of India was existent even before the British came to India, which was then very much necessary in view of the fragile nationalistic state that had come about after independence. Failure to establish this fact would have encouraged fissiparous tendencies in the country and it was with this intention that India emphasised on historical boundaries based on geography etc. The general belief has been that an Indian nation had existed through time defined by culture, common experience, custom and geography. This in turn supported the belief that India’s traditional boundaries had long existed and had evolved naturally. Questioning of this boundary would mean that there was no India before the British and it would be denigrating the historical authenticity of Indian nation and any demand to negotiate the boundary would be tantamount to treating India as an artificial state creation.

The Indian attitude on the Tibetan issue especially after the flight of Dalai Lama in 1959 to India continued to damage the image of China especially at a time when it was trying to project itself as a reasonable conciliatory country yearning for peaceful co-existence with its neighbours. To the Chinese, India’s attitude appeared to be questioning China’s integrity. Tibet was an important domestic political consideration for the Chinese and turbulence in Tibet was seen as a development which would be dangerous to the ruling Communist Party of China. Tibet’s subjugation was a must for China in order to protect Communism itself in that country. So long as Dalai Lama was outside Tibet and his residence in India there would always be for Tibetans focus of loyalty
outside Tibet. The presence of Dalai Lama in India was seen by China as a constant source for turmoil in Tibet, which was detrimental to the Chinese political interest domestically and internationally. Thus, geographically Tibet became the major point of Sino-Indian entanglement. Unfortunately boundary dispute also was related to the Indo-Tibetan border. Therefore reassurance from India that Tibet was an integral part of China would have been advantageous to China. But instead of such a reassurance by Nehru, in 1959 following Khampa revolt, Nehru began to describe it as a movement based on nationalist aspirations. Coupled with the Tibetan issue was India’s tough stand on the border dispute implying defiance of China and that India did not give much importance to Chinese friendship. The presence of Dalai Lama in India and support by India to Tibetan revolt of 1959 was viewed by China as a perennial weapon in the hands of New Delhi to put pressure on China.

The stiff-necked nationalism made India emphasise on the historical evidence to support the claims and the penchant for legalism prevented India from reaching a settlement on the dispute. To the Chinese it would have been surprising that India an ardent and foremost advocate of peaceful resolution of international disputes in a give and take spirit, should insist on unilateral concessions. India’s rigidity in this regard queued the pitch in the dispute. In this regard, modern nationalism is a powerful sentiment; whether its is good or bad depends on how we are able to organise it and use it for constructive ends. When this sentiment is badly organised it results in confusion between patriotism and self-righteousness. It was this self rightousness which made Nehru remark:

China is a great and powerful country with enormous resources. But India is no weak country to be frightened by threats and military might. We shall build up our strength, both military and economic, to win this battle of Indian freedom. We shall always be willing to negotiate a peace but that can only be on a condition that aggression is vacated. We can never submit or surrender to aggression. That has not been our way, and that
will not be our way in future. ¹

With prevalence of such a confusion the essence of negotiation is lost, that is, that each party should be prepared to settle the differences in such a way that none of the parties suffer a significant loss. A settlement necessarily includes concessions and compromise.

Internally, the opposition leaders and the critics of India’s China policy cared little to inform themselves of realities on the ground or even hard facts of the dispute. The lack of awareness of actual situation prevented flexibility, which is a must in foreign policy from the national interest and security point of view.

After a particular point especially when the expectations turned to disillusionment with the hoped for results not materialising, India became sentimental about the boundary and Nehru wrote on 20th October 1962:

There can, of course, be no surrender to this kind of thing. But we must be prepared for losses from time to time.... We have a very difficult task, but we shall face it with a stout heart. We must realise, however, that this is going to be a long-drawn out affair. I see no near end of it. ²

Overlooking our national interests India, therefore, began to reiterate that tradition, customs and treaties be taken into account while striving for a settlement as against China’s plea for give and take. This led to procedural wrangling rather than tackling the substance of the border dispute. Procedural wrangling bound both the leaders by rigid historical cum legal claims. The Chinese on the other hand had no place for sentimentalism and they have always been known to be more pragmatic and down to earth.

¹ S. Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru, A Biography Vol. 3 (Delhi, 1984), p. 221
² Ibid
In China they placed emphasis on facts and on the other hand India emphasised on opinions. Between the two substance is always in facts. Having taken a stand based on opinion supported by historical and traditional aspects in India the border dispute became an obsession causing psychological burden on everybody in matters related to China. The overzealous zeal with which India extended hand of friendship towards China led to the overlooking of the signals which the Chinese were sending on the dispute. The overzealous nature of India’s friendship with China made India expect that profession of amity itself would provide solutions to the problems and therefore wanted quick solutions to the problems between the two countries. When these expectations failed, disillusionment set in which soon turned into frustration and anguish. The frustration and anguish in this regard is very much evident from the statement of Nehru to the then Army General B. M. Kaul and according to B.M. Kaul on 3rd October 1962 Nehru remarked, if the Chinese failed to see reason then India would have no option “but to expel them or atleast try to do so to the best of our ability” and if the Indian Government did not take any such action then it would lose public confidence completely.\(^3\) India thus lost control of events and overstepped the bounds of common prudence. The failure of expectations resulted in India denying that a dispute exists or that the other side never had a case and it was non-existent. On the other hand if India had accepted that the border was disputed it would have helped in its resolution. Disillusionment forced India to say that there was no dispute. To justify the non-existence of the dispute was the religious belief in the correctness of India’s survey maps.

Nehru’s attitude on the dispute also had two consequences. His unequivocal commitment tied his own hands in advance of subsequent dealing with China and he also stood committed to the Indian public. Advance public commit-

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ments can cause difficulties in bilateral negotiations. It was this commitment also which made India demand unilateral concessions from the Chinese. The Chinese viewed Indian demand as an attempt to impose on China the illegal boundary as concocted by the imperialists. Following the commitment, Nehru made to the Indian public on the frontiers with China he became predisposed to attain it. The Chinese declared their attitude towards the border in 1958, making Nehru a prisoner of the circumstances. Thus Nehru refused to see any merit in the opposite view and he was not receptive to fresh ideas, especially to those views that were opposed to his own cherished beliefs. He was compelled to arouse public opinion in the hope of getting his position justified and to put pressure on China. Nehru in making such public commitments did not realise that it could cause difficulties in bilateral negotiations and that public opinion would not accept the results that easily especially when it was not to its liking. This is so because public opinion seldom acts as positively to promote new policy, but it often acts negatively to demonstrate its dissatisfaction with its existing policies. The public opinion survey conducted at that time had shown that Nehru could have gone for a settlement with China on the dispute. But Nehru, according to his Foreign Secretary K. P. S. Menon, gave too much emphasis to the public opinion as represented by Parliament and newspapers, which need not be the opinion of the actual public. George Kennan had defined the significance of public opinion thus: "What purports to be the public opinion, in most governments is often not really the consensus of the feelings of minds of the people at all, but rather expression of the interests of special highly vocal minorities, politicians commentators and publicity seekers of all sorts." This is more true in a country like India where an uninformed public can easily be persuaded to believe what the political leadership wants them to believe. Thus the uninformed public on such matters was a big liability. Consequently the border problem was blown out of proportion by emotional

4. Quoted in K.P.S. Menon, Twilight in China (Bombay, 1972), p. 261
factors resulting in very strong emotional reactions which were not based on historical facts. Having become emotional on the matter, flexibility which is a must in foreign policy from the national interest and security point of view was discarded totally by Nehru. Naturally the capacity for bold initiative was impaired to the detriment of national interest.

The absence of a demarcated boundary especially in the western sector made it look like both sides were trying to stake out a claim for themselves and prevent the other from doing so. Consequently the Indian forward policy became demonstrative in effect that is action designed to demonstrate a presence and so a claim defiance of the fact that the frontier was not delimited by treaty or was without physical demarcation. Such an action was taken as an insult to the status of China and refusal by India to respect China’s position in the comity of nations.

China in 1958 when it made clear that the boundaries are not formally delimited, was actually trying to have an agreement with India in order to assert its status as an independent power. It never wanted to meekly accept what India stated in this regard. India on its part took it as an insult to its friendship and all that India had done for China. Such an attitude was adopted by India and China because national frontiers come to have a high symbolic and psychological importance for nations, where nationalist sentiment is very intense because of the process of decolonisation. Even small violations or demands can arouse very intense passions and by claiming Aksai Chin publicly Nehru did stimulate the necessary emotional overtones. Under such a situation India began to emphasise on concepts like “territorial integrity” “inviolability of frontiers” etc. overlooking its national interest. Therefore in India the boundary issue became almost an obsession and it placed psychological burden. Once it became an obsession, India wanted a solution which was acceptable to public opinion Hence India’s reiteration of a claim to the boundary on the basis of
tradition, customs and treaties in order to arrive at a settlement.

Territorial issues for young nations thus become of great importance as they reflect or represent the tangible evidence of independence and boundaries of nationalist determination. The newly independent states linked their security with territory and consider giving away even an inch of land as surrendering national pride. In the case of India, the national pride had already taken a severe beating by way of partition followed by an immediate war over Kashmir by Pakistan resulting in losing a part of it to Pakistan.

Chinese pride was also under stress following frustration over not being able to integrate Taiwan with the motherland, the problems in Tibet and their helplessness against Soviet Union over disputed areas. Therefore it was quiet natural that with India the Chinese would refuse to make unilateral concessions. Under such circumstances mixing of national prestige with national interest was inevitable. In the case of India and China it was inevitable as both these countries claimed themselves as centres of great civilization. The feelings of superiority complex about one's own cultural heritage was connected with pride in the past. Both India and China with their pride in the past were attempting for a bright future but by over emphasising the past the present and future were being buried. Having got the freedom from foreign domination after prolonged struggle the two countries began to view international relations in terms of imperialism. Such a view compelled them to emphasise on historical continuity not only to provide a sense of security but also to get a sense of worth.

The Sino-Indian dispute arose at a time when both India and China were discovering and establishing themselves and China's boundary problem was with countries which were also in search of national boundaries. To establish territorial impermeability, historical continuity, racial homogenity, customary
laws etc. are emphasised.

India had based her case of boundaries on the ground that boundaries come into existence because of natural features like mountains and watersheds. When not artificially altered by conquest or transfer these boundaries develop legitimacy long before treaties are concluded.

The Chinese on the other hand asserted that international boundaries are valid only when they have sanction of formal delimitation through a treaty and such a treaty must be accompanied by delimitation on agreed maps, demarcations on the ground or at least an agreed detailed description. In the absence of such a valid treaty, to the Chinese renegotiation of the boundary was needed not so much to adjust territory but to solve the problem left over by history. India by refusing to negotiate the boundary gave the Chinese the impression that India was clinging to imperial rights. India refused to accept the spirit behind China’s insistence on negotiations. To the Chinese the spirit of agreement should be based on formal equality because valid commitments are those which are freely negotiated by the sovereign nations and not imposed by foreign treaties. Equality and sovereignty do not acknowledge unequal treaties and only mutually beneficial treaties without any discrimination form a satisfactory basis for International Relations. The Chinese insistence on equality could have been due to China’s growing consciousness of her international strength. Thereby she aspired that her new status should be commensurate with her strength. A new treaty based on equality would have also assured China that her Asian neighbours would not be used by any other power to threaten her. The Indian reaction to the Chinese attitude was negative and India refused to discuss her border with China giving an impression that she was questioning China’s status and strength.

The Chinese negotiating stance and China’s attitudes frustrated Indian
attempts to bring the Chinese to a favourable decision which India wanted badly. Similarly the Chinese were equally frustrated at not being able to bring India to the negotiating table. Frustration caused India to burst out against China in anguish in 1962. The Chinese too reacted in an anguished manner by launching a full-fledged war.

In 1960 Chou En-lai had taken the initiative to evolve a "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement" based on the spirit of equality. But Nehru withheld the positive response to Chou En-lai’s initiative because the word "compromise" had become a taboo. Even today the taboo continues as is evident from the joint statement declared in September 1993 in which on one hand it is pointed out that "the references to Line of Actual Control do not prejudice the respective position of the two countries on the boundary question." At the same time it also states that India and China will continue their search for a fair reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question. This contradiction is an indication that the boundary dispute even today remains a festering sore. Therefore it is time the Indian political elite realised this at least now. The political parties in Parliament had already done a great disservice to the nation and if they still refuse to consider dispassionately the rival claims about the border then the solution to it will be a far cry. All the political parties should not attempt to apportion blame for the past failure but should decide how best it can be revised. It is time that the Indian political elite realised that the sweeping changes in Asia demand a new look at the India-China border. India will not be in a position to play its legitimate role in influencing the new shape of things if it is fettered to the border dispute. The rigid attitude had caused great harm to the country hence the freedom from pre-occupation with this dispute should not be delayed anymore.

5. The Hindu, 9th September 1993 (For details see Appendix - 4)