

*Chapter 2*  
*The Period of Stalemate (1963-1975)*

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## Chapter 2

### THE PERIOD OF STALEMATE (1963-1975)

Following the conflict of 1962, India-China relations were frozen into a state of hostile coexistence. Although both nations continued to maintain diplomatic relations these were at a lower level. The border conflict dealt a heavy blow to the sentiment of friendship between the two countries. As a result, the diplomatic impasse continued for a long period.

In the beginning of 1963, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranaike visited China with the mandate of the Colombo Powers. The Premier, Zhou Enlai expressed appreciation for the Afro-Asian mediators who were making sincere efforts to be of assistance to both sides.<sup>1</sup> The government accepted the proposals in principle as a preliminary basis of talks with the Indian government. It however raised two points of interpretation of the proposals. First, that the stipulation about the Indian troops maintaining their existing military position should be applicable to the entire border and not to the western sector alone. Secondly, China was prepared not to set up civilian posts in vacated places under dispute provided Indian troops or civilian personnel did not reenter those places. The areas were Thagla/Che-dong in the east, Barahoti/wu-je in the middle and the areas in the western sector.

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<sup>1</sup> *Beijing Review* (Beijing), no.2, 11 January 1963, p.16.

It was stated that the two-point interpretation would not prejudice the positions of India and China on their border alignment. The Indian government might have its own difference of interpretation which could be resolved during discussions.

Later the Sri Lankan Premier, Mrs. Bandaranaike arrived in New Delhi in January, 1963 to appraise the Indian leaders of the implications of the Colombo proposals. The representatives of United Arab Republic and Ghana also joined in the talks at the end of which a communique was issued. The communique indicated that India had received satisfactory clarifications on the substantive parts of the proposals. Nehru told them that he would place the proposals and their clarification before the Indian Parliament for consideration. India's final response to the proposals would be held in abeyance till the Parliament studied them fully. Later, the Colombo proposals as clarified were accepted in principle by the Indian government.<sup>2</sup> But the clarifications given to India were substantially different from China's interpretation of the proposals.

On China's part, there was strong criticism of the Indian attitude both towards the border dispute as well as the proposals of the mediator nations. The Chinese media stated that where as the Chinese were keen to avert any resumption of conflict, India had failed to reciprocate the Chinese goodwill. The Indian leaders

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<sup>2</sup> *White Paper*, vol. IX, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (New Delhi, 1963), p. 106.

including Nehru were asserting in their bellicose speeches that the fundamental conflict with China had not ended and that war efforts must not be slackened.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese also reacted unfavourably to the manner in which India had come to interpret the Colombo proposals. In the opinion of China, the purpose of the Colombo conference was to promote direct negotiations between China and India. The proposals were merely for the consideration of the two governments. The Chinese government was not obliged to accept them in toto. India on the other hand believed that its acceptance of Colombo proposals was in the interest of peace, even they fell short of the Indian demand for the status quo. It seemed to be a strange form of logic for China to reject the proposals because India had accepted them. India maintained that in refusing them, China was motivated to retain "at least partially the gains of its latest aggression".<sup>4</sup> In the light of a continued clash of views, the Colombo proposals were shelved and diplomatic stalemate persisted between India and China.

In his first address to the Parliament after conflict with the China, on 18th February 1963, the President reiterated Indian government's resolve to strengthen the defences and economic infrastructure in the context of China's past betrayal. Referring to China's intransigent stand on the Colombo proposals, he stated that India, "committed as it is to peaceful methods, will always

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<sup>3</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.3, 18 January 1963, pp.5-6.

<sup>4</sup> *White Paper*, vol. IX, 1963, p.17.

endeavour to solve disputes peacefully, in accordance with honour and freedom. But whatever may happen, we cannot and will not submit to dictation backed by military force.”<sup>5</sup> In March 1963, Chinese Premier Zhou En lai declared that the Chinese government’s stand for direct negotiations would not change. If India owing to the needs of its internal and external politics was not yet prepared to hold talks, China was willing to wait with patience.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, political parties, Swatantra Party, Jana Sangh, Socialist Party advocated aggressive policy towards China and criticised Nehru’s China policy. Nehru declared in the Parliament that India would continue to work for an honourable settlement. He further stated that, nothing prevented India from strengthening its defence while keeping the door open for an honourable peaceful settlement. He strongly resisted the suggestion of breaking off diplomatic ties with China and maintained that the gesture though brave would be quite unwise.<sup>7</sup>

In April 1964 Nehru suggested that India was prepared to surrender its claim to establish an equal number of civilian posts as the Chinese had in the demilitarized zone. He however hoped that it was for China to make the proposal. “No such approach has been made and therefore the position remains the same as before”.<sup>8</sup> Nehru stated in the AICC meeting on 17 May 1964 that

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<sup>5</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol.13, 1963, Cols. 12-14.

<sup>6</sup> *White Paper*, vol. IX, p.4.

<sup>7</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 19, 1963, Cols. 2191-2217.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, vol.29, 1964, Cols.107-09.

India had taken the lead in accepting the Colombo proposals as well as the suggestion of considering the vacation of the post as a basis for starting negotiations, and it was now upto China to take further initiative for direct talks with India.<sup>9</sup> Nehru's initiative was however, not reciprocated by China.<sup>10</sup> The bilateral relations remained unchanged in the Post-Nehru period.

The first important parliamentary discussion on external affairs after Nehru's demise took place on 25 September 1964. The new External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh initiated the discussion and regretted that China continued to take a "negative and intransigent attitude towards the Colombo proposals". He categorically stated that India was willing to enter into negotiations with China in the "manner envisaged in the Colombo Proposals", should the latter withdraw its seven posts in the demilitarized zone in Ladakh. He further stated that "we have thus gone to the farthest limit possible within the ambit of the Colombo Proposals in order to enable negotiations to take place between the two countries". The minister, however, declared: "we shall not go to the conference table on Chinese terms and we shall not give up our rights in territory which was illegally and by force occupied by China. It is for China to give evidence of her sincerity to reach a settlement which she has singularly failed to do so far".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Nancy Jetly, *India-China Relations, 1947-1977: A Study of Parliament's Role in the Making of Foreign Policy* (New Delhi, 1979), p.223.

<sup>10</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.23, 5 June 1964, p.4.

<sup>11</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 34, 1964, Cols.3789-90.

Throughout the year 1964 both countries alleged border intrusions into each other's territories and lodged protests. China continued to negatively portray India's image. On 16 October, 1964 China exploded atom bomb and conducted its first nuclear test.<sup>12</sup> With China going nuclear, India's threat perception increased manifold. The Members of Parliament warned that the entire context of India's defence strategy and foreign diplomacy had changed with China emerging as a nuclear power.

The Member of the Lok Sabha stated that "the Chinese explosion cannot be ignored; it cannot be written off; it cannot be played down; it is of major significance. We are the country for which it has the most immediate importance".<sup>13</sup> Prime Minister Shastri realised the gravity of the issue and stated in the parliament that India could not simultaneously raise its voice against nuclear warfare and weapons and also go in for atom bomb which, inter alia, would add heavily on state exchequer. He was of the opinion that India's policy towards nuclear weapons was advantageous to the nation, and the government would keep the threat in mind, but it would not take any decision in a hurry that only with an atom bomb it could defend itself against China.<sup>14</sup> In December, 1964 Prime Minister Shastri stated that in view of continued intransigence any question of negotiations with China

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<sup>12</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.42, 16 October 1964, Special Supplement, pp. ii-iii.

<sup>13</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 35, 1964, Cols—1239-40.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, Cols.1564-73.

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<sup>13</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 35, 1964, Cols—1239-40.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, Cols.1564-73.

did not arise, the Indian government would continue to believe “in the pursuit of peace and in settlement by mutual discussions provided always that such discussions can be held consistently with the honour and dignity of the country”. Replying to the non-communist opposition’s demand for a categorical assurance that not an inch of land would be surrendered to China, Shastri said: “we are not going to give up our Indian territory. But it is true that the Colombo proposals are there and we have to keep them in mind”.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, in December 1964, Premier Zhou Enlai stated that the Indian demand of withdrawal of China’s civilian posts was entirely unreasonable. He further stated that China had not given up its sovereignty over the 90,000 sq.kms of territory south of McMahon Line. Reacting to Zhou’s contention an Indian official spokesman said that “what Zhou En-lai has now done is to bolt and bar the door completely”.<sup>16</sup> In the first analysis of Shastri regime by the Chinese media, the Indian government was characterised as a dictatorship of the big bourgeoisie and big landlords which had stripped of “its own masks of democracy and socialism”.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese held that since his assumption of power, Shastri had followed Nehru’s domestic and foreign policies and the

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, vol.37, 1964, Cols. 6702-11.

<sup>16</sup> *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 1 January 1965.

<sup>17</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.4, 22 January 1965, pp.5-6.

Indian government was "becoming more and more a protégé of U.S. imperialism begging for its aid and working for its global strategy."<sup>18</sup>

The year 1965 witnessed one of the lowest ebbs in India-China bilateral relations due to Pakistan factor. The Sino-Pak boundary protocol involving territory in Jammu and Kashmir was signed on 26 March 1965. India termed the protocol as "legally invalid and politically mischievous". In the summers, the Indian government condemned the Chinese support of Pakistani aggression in the Rann of Kutch and termed "the Chinese government's stand of Pakistan's aggression in the Rann of Kutch as a reflection of its familiar technique of trying to change the established frontiers of states through the use of military force --- China has emerged as the greatest disruptive force in Asia..."<sup>19</sup> In September, 1965 when war broke out between India and Pakistan, China supported Pakistan. To pressurise India, China even accused India of intruding into China's territory. To exacerbate the tension, China sent a three day ultimatum, demanding that India should dismantle all aggressive military structures it had allegedly built in the Sikkim border. An aggressive China rejected India's proposal to send an independent observer to the Sikkim border. The Indian Premier Shastri refuted Chinese allegations and termed its stand on Indo-Pak conflict as "nothing but interferences calculated to prolong and enlarge the conflict". Subsequently on 22

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

September when ceasefire was declared between India and Pakistan, Chinese ultimatum was quietly withdrawn. During September, October and November many border incursions and clashes took place on the India-China border. On 19 September, the Chinese troops ambushed and killed three civilian personnel of an Indian patrol in Tsaskur in the Ladakh Sector. Later, on 20 and 21 September, troops also intruded into the Sikkim border at Nathula and Dong Chula.<sup>20</sup> On 13 November, Chinese troops opened fire on two Indian outposts across Dong Chula on the Sikkim border and killed one Indian soldier.<sup>21</sup> Both nations exchanged diplomatic notes and lodged strong protests.

The Indian Defence Minister, Y.B. Chavan conceded that since 15 September, China had intruded across the border, or the line of actual control on 33 occasions.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the year the Chinese Government maintained, in an intensified form, its hostility towards India. Developments during the year revealed, even more clearly than before, that the India-China border question was not merely a territorial issue but an instrument forged by China to bring about a political confrontation between

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<sup>19</sup> *Foreign Affairs Record*, Ministry of External Affairs (New Delhi), 1965, pp.100-101.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Nancy Jetly, n. 9, p. 233.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Nancy Jetly, n.9, p.236.

the two countries and to apply protracted military pressure on India.<sup>23</sup>

Although no major armed clash took place on the border in 1966, Chinese aggressive activity kept the tension simmering on the border. China not only reiterated its territorial claims on the western and eastern sectors of the border, but also carried out a series of minor intrusions across the border. In February, Defence Minister Chavan informed the Parliament that during December 1965 January 1966 the Chinese committed as many as 27 violations.<sup>24</sup> When Mrs. Indira Gandhi assumed the post of Prime Minister after the sudden death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Premier Zhou Enlai sent message to Madam Gandhi greeting her on the assumption of the post of premier.<sup>25</sup> In January, 1966 China lodged protest with the Indian government against its alleged interference in China's internal affairs by using the question of Tibet. China expressed concern over Dalai Lama's anti-Chinese activities in India.<sup>26</sup> Earlier, when an unofficial delegation came from Taiwan to take part in some celebration programme on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, not only did China lodge a protest, but also charged India with efforts to create two China "under the instigation of the U.S. imperialism". Again in March, 1966 when

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<sup>23</sup> *Annual Report 1965-66*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (New Delhi), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 237.

<sup>25</sup> *Beijing Review*, n. 6, 4 February 1966, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, no.2, 7 January 1966, p. 3.

Minister of Economic Affairs of Taiwan visited New Delhi to attend United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and East Pacific, China protested the Indian government's provocation against the Chinese people.<sup>27</sup> The Chinese note alleged that the Indian government has become unscrupulous in following Washington's policy of hostility to China and its plot to create "two China's".

China continued hostile propaganda against India. The Chinese Media tried to present a lurid picture of conditions in India. The reports described the Indian economy as a Semi-Colonial economy dependent on foreign aid and the Indian experiment in economic development a failure and "a negative example for the advancing people in Asia, Africa and Latin America." This brought to the surface some of the ideological bitterness and sense of rivalry the Chinese Government has been harboring towards India. The Chinese aim was to hold up to Asia and Africa the Chinese example as the only model worthy of imitation and challenged India's development of economy through peaceful democratic methods.<sup>28</sup> In April, 1966 when Mrs. Gandhi visited U.S.A, her exercise was termed as "the art of begging". She told an American audience that China entered into 'conflict' with India because of its efforts to develop in democratic socialism and India served as a "strong example of democracy" for the Asian countries. The Chinese media reacted that the 'prosperity' and

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, no.15, 8 April 1966, p.14.

<sup>28</sup> *Annual Report 1965-66, Ministry of External Affairs*, p.3.

'democracy' was a euphemism for famine and arrests of the innocent which India now enjoyed.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, on 9 May, 1966 China successfully conducted a thermo-nuclear bomb. Over which a number of Member of Parliament voiced their concern. In Lok Sabha during the discussion on Demands for Grants of Ministry of External Affairs, M.L. Sondhi of Janasangh stated that "to meet the nuclear threat from China it is my submission that India can undertake a test explosion. We must enter the nuclear comity; otherwise, we shall be working in foreign affairs at our peril".<sup>30</sup> The Minister of State of External Affairs, Shri B. R. Bhagat intervened in the debate and stated that:

The situation is such that it is China which has to change its policies. They have to change their posture of hostility. We have adopted a policy of reciprocity and firmness without giving any provocation towards China. If and when China changes her policy towards us, we shall not be found wanting in working a proper response to it.<sup>31</sup>

Mrs. Gandhi however, stated in Parliament that China's nuclear explosion did not justify a revision in the Government's policy of not developing nuclear energy for non-peaceful purposes:

I myself fail to understand how our production of one or two bombs will help us. Many other questions arise out of them. Furthermore, the belief that China can attack any country with nuclear weapons with impunity, I think is a misconceived one".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.15, 8 April 1966, pp.30-31.

<sup>30</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 15, 1968, Col - 2305.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, Col- 2367.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, vol. 55, 1966, Col.15716.

From mid-1966 onwards, the internal condition of both India and China was in a state of continuous flux. China was in the midst of socio-economic upheaval and acute leadership struggle during the cultural Revolution phase (1966-69). In India, the new Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi was an untried and untested leader. There was the spectre of famine due to widespread drought conditions which did not occur because of food assistance from the U.S.A. In the midst of this all, the 1967 parliamentary elections severely weakened the central leadership, where the ruling congress party of Mrs. Gandhi was returned to power with a reduced majority. China's foreign policy remained dormant during the phase of Cultural Revolution but this did not stop the Chinese from extending its support to the so-called national liberation movements in the third world by exhorting them to replace the legitimate regimes. Accordingly, China started exploiting two basic weaknesses in the governance of India. One was the inability to integrate the tribal peoples of the northeast into the mainstream of Indian life. Another was the failure to ameliorate the condition of the rural peasantry and landless labourers in the lower Ganges Valley.<sup>33</sup> Sensing the weakness as an opportunity, China openly supported Naga and Mizo insurgents and encouraged them to rise in revolt against India. The Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search For Power*, New Delhi, 1984, p.202.

provided a golden opportunity to the Chinese to recommend the Maoist path for the Indian revolutionaries.<sup>34</sup>

India-China relations further deteriorated in June 1967 with the expulsion of two Indian diplomats from Beijing on alleged charges of “espionage activities”.<sup>35</sup> The Indian External Affairs Minister stated that the list of charges of alleged spying was a “tissue of lies”. On 14 June, the minister referred to the humiliating treatment accorded to the Indian diplomats by the Red Guards who had been physically assaulted. He further stated that the Chinese Government had violated the “ordinary rules of diplomatic usages” and had also broken its own “pledge of conducting the diplomats safely across to border”.<sup>36</sup> Later in a daring and surprise action, China put the entire staff of the Indian Embassy and their families in Beijing under seige in the embassy’s compound. India immediately lodged a strong protest and warned China that should the seige of the Indian Embassy not be lifted “within 4 hours”, India would take appropriate counter measures. On 19th June, India did the same to Chinese embassy staff at New Delhi and immediately the next day China lifted the seige of the Indian Embassy in Beijing India responded on 21 June by lifting restrictions on the movement of the Chinese staff and sent back two Chinese diplomats from India.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.29, 14 July 1967, p.26.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, no.25, 16 June 1967, p.39.

<sup>36</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 4, 1967, Cols.5408-10.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Nancy Jetly, n.9, pp.248-49.

The winter of 1967 witnessed skirmishes on India-China border. On 11 September, Chinese troops attacked Indian troops on the Sikkim border across the Nathula and opened heavy mortar and artillery fire. After repeated Indian protests and proposal for ceasefire, by 15 September there was a virtual cessation of all hostile activity. The Chinese again fired heavily on the Indian positions at Chola, on 1 October and both sides suffered casualties. On 10 October, Chola again witnessed exchange of heavy fires between Indian and Chinese troops. The Indian Defence Minister informed the Parliament that Indian losses in the two border incidents were 88 killed and 163 wounded, while the Chinese casualties were estimated to be 300 killed and 450 wounded in Nathula firing, and 40 in Chola. The minister assured that the government was keeping a close watch on developments across the borders having a bearing on India's security, and those were accordingly taken note of in the defence plans.<sup>38</sup>

By the end of 1967, in a discussion on external affairs, Mrs. Gandhi stated:

China continues to maintain an attitude of hostility towards us---carries on anti-Indian propoganda not only against the Indian Government but against the whole way of our democratic functioning and even our national integrity. But I would like to say that we do not harbour any evil intention towards the Chinese people, and we do hope that a day will come when they will also realise that it is in the interests of all the countries of South East Asia that we should be friends and that each country should be able to devote its

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<sup>38</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 9, 1967, Cols. 65-66.

strength to solving the very major problem of combating poverty and backwardness".<sup>39</sup>

This was a flexible approach adopted by Mrs. Gandhi regarding relations with China.

The Presidential address on 12 February 1968 underscored India's desire to seek normalisation of relations with China. "We have always wished the Chinese people well--- The principles of mutual respect, non aggression and non-interference alone provide a durable basis for international relations. On our part, we seek restoration of our relations with China on these principles".<sup>40</sup> The Government of India in a subtle manner indicated that should China not interfere in India's internal affairs, or provoke any aggression, India would be willing to normalise relations with China. However, China did not respond immediately. As usual the Chinese media carried out propaganda against India. India however remained was increasingly concerned with China's blatant interference in its internal affairs. As Prime Minister, Mrs. Gandhi stated in Parliament,

What happens internally in other countries cannot be a subject matter of public comment---our difference with China arose mainly from the fact that China is not prepared to accept this elementary code of international conduct. The day they accept it, we would have gone a long way towards normalising our relations<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> *Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi*, vol. 1, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (New Delhi, 1974), pp.400-401.

<sup>40</sup> R.K. Jain, *China-South Asian Relations, 1947-80*, vol. 1 (New Delhi, 1981), p.378.

<sup>41</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol.15, 1968, Cols.2680-85.

She further stated: in foreign affairs there are no set positions---what are permanent and set are certain values and interests on which we cannot compromise.<sup>42</sup> The farsighted statements of Mrs. Gandhi apparently indicated that despite Chinese intransigence, India was moving towards creating a favourable climate for ending the stalemate in India-China relations.

On 1 January 1969, Premier Gandhi stated at her Press Conference that the Government of India was prepared to "try and find" a way of solving the dispute with China without insisting on its acceptance of the Colombo proposals as a precondition.<sup>43</sup> The President, Zakir Hussain, stated further in his address to the parliament on 17 February:

It is our firm belief that the disturbed image of our country which China projects through its ideological prisms will succumb to the realities of the situation. Government have expressed more than once with frankness and sincerity their desire to have friendship of relations with China.... consistent with our sovereignty, territorial integrity and on the basis of absolute non-interference in each other's internal affairs.<sup>44</sup>

On 8 April, 1969, External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh outlined the Government's China policy in the Lok Sabha:

Our policy is based on friendship and cooperation. We do not wish to interfere in the internal affairs of others--- The policies of China will have to change one day--- we have a long frontier with China. We would like to reduce tension along this frontier.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Times of India* (New Delhi), 2 January 1969.

<sup>44</sup> *Lok Sabhas Debates*, vol. 24, 1969, Col. 23.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Surjit Mansingh, n.33, p. 204.

Now, Chinese foreign policy was marked by a more relaxed profile. In 1969 China witnessed the end of infamous cultural revolution. Moderation was the keyword in Chinese internal and external policies. Following the ninth National Party Congress in April, China stated that regarding boundary question "Government have consistently stood for negotiations through diplomatic channels to reach a fair and reasonable settlement. Pending a settlement, the status quo of the boundary should be maintained and conflict avoided--".<sup>46</sup> As a result, Chinese diplomats started attending some receptions in other capitals given in honour of visiting Indian dignitaries. The atmospherics further improved, by the end of the year when, both the Indian and Chinese diplomats exchanged greetings and attended receptions hosted by their respective missions. This led to a limited than at thaw diplomatic level.

The government of India stated in no uncertain terms that "with China it will be our effort to keep our doors open for resolving our differences by discussions provided they are prepared to respect our sovereignty and territorial integrity,"<sup>47</sup>

In his address to the Parliament on 20 February 1970, the President reiterated his government's desire to conduct its relations with China on the "principle of mutual respect of each other's

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<sup>46</sup> *Beijing Review*, Special Issue, 28 April 1969, p.27.

<sup>47</sup> *Annual Report 1969-70*, Ministry of Defence, Government of India (New Delhi), p. 1.

sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference. We expect China to respect our rights to pursue own domestic affairs and foreign policy".<sup>48</sup> On 1 May 1970, during the May Day parade at Beijing, in response to India's overtures, Chairman Mao Zedong shook hands with the Indian charged affaires the Tiananmen Rostrum stated that "India is a great country. The Indian people are a great people--- we should be friendly".<sup>49</sup> Mao's smile signaled China's intention to normalise India-China relations. Nothing concrete, however, emerged from chairman Mao's famous smile. China went ahead with its propaganda inciting armed rebellion in India and continued to aid and abet the insurgents in north east. In late 1970 informal contacts between the Indian and Chinese diplomats in many third countries capitals were reported and opened up the possibility of resumption of dialogue between the estranged neighbours.

However, the hopeful pointers of 1970 evaporated as quickly as they had appeared. This was due to the growing separatist movement in East Pakistan. China not only supported the military junta and its role in East Pakistan but also tried discreetly to moderate Yahya Khan's brutal policy toward East Pakistan but without success.<sup>50</sup> China alleged that "weighed down with difficulties at home and abroad, the reactionary Indian Government

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<sup>48</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol.36, 1970, Col.12.

<sup>49</sup> GengNien, Sino-Indian Relations: Retrospect and Prospect, *South Asian Studies* (Beijing), no.3-4, 1981, p.3.

<sup>50</sup> G.W. Choudhury, *China in World Affairs* (Colorado, 1982) pp.254-55.

has embarked on a mad course of arms expansion and war preparations---to carry out an expansionist policy towards its neighbour--"51 China continued to step up unfriendly acts against India. On 12 April, Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai sent a message to Pakistan President Yahya Khan, reiterating Chinese support to the people and Government of Pakistan in their struggle to protect their national sovereignty and political independence.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of virulent anti-Indian Chinese propaganda; India played it cool and maintained a low profile. India again took initiative to start a dialogue with China, when its ambassador in Moscow met twice with his Chinese counterpart in May 1971, to discuss the terms of restoration of diplomatic representation to the Ambassadorial level. The Indian Premier wrote a letter to her Chinese counterpart in July, appraising him on the situation in East Pakistan and proposed meetings at any level acceptable to China.<sup>53</sup> In the Indian Parliament, the External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh stated that while India was willing to normalise relations with China, normalisation did not depend upon one party alone: "If and when the Government of the People's Republic of China is willing and ready to take concrete steps towards normalisation, we shall be equally ready and willing to do so". He welcomed the change in the style of China's diplomacy which had

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<sup>51</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.12, 20 March, 1970, p.29.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in R.K. Jain, n.40, vol. II, pp.115-16.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Nancy Jetly, no.9, p.267.

been in evidence of late and hoped that it would also lead to a "change in substance".<sup>54</sup>

After its initial propaganda, China reacted cautiously against the Indo-Soviet treaty in August 1971. China sent positive signals and invited India to participate in the Afro Asian Table Tennis Tournament to be held in Beijing in November. India did not lag behind and removed the police post outside the Chinese embassy, which had been posted there since June 1967. In October, 1971 India among other countries joined and voted on the question of restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nation.<sup>55</sup> On 27 October, Indian Premier greeted Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai in a personal letter and expressed India's desire for "working in close cooperation with China in the interest of peace and progress in Asia and throughout the world".<sup>56</sup> In the United Nations, Mr. Samar Sen, Permanent Representative of India welcomed restoration of the Chinese seat and mentioned about Zhou Enlai's reply to Mrs. Gandhi, which concluded with the words: "May friendship between the peoples of China and India grow and develop daily".<sup>57</sup>

But due to rapid developments in East Pakistan, India-China relations could not witness much improvement. Later on, China set

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<sup>54</sup> *Annual Report 1971-72*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.27.

<sup>55</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.44, 29 October 1971, p.6.

<sup>56</sup> *Annual Report 1971-72*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.27.

<sup>57</sup> Speech by Samar Sen, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, in *Beijing Review*, no. 49, 3 December 1971, pp. 44-45.

aside cautious approach and alleged that India acted as sub super power. China's acting foreign minister, Chi Pengfei, expressed concern at the present tension in the sub-continent and criticised India's crude interference in Pakistan's internal affairs. On 3 December, Indo-Pak conflict broke out on the eastern and western fronts. China accused India of launching a "large scale" attack on Pakistan.<sup>58</sup> China used its newly acquired membership of the United Nations, particularly the security council to the hilt and its permanent representative, Huang Hua mobilised international diplomatic pressures against India.<sup>59</sup> But compared to 1965 war, during this round of Indo-Pak conflict, China played overall a rather limited role. China sent three protest notes to India and two notes accused India of intrusions in the Chinese territory in December, 1971. But the government of India rejected protest notes and stated Chinese charges as baseless. The Government of India Stated that

We do not wish to provoke China unnecessarily and are willing to normalise relations with her on a basis of equality, mutual respect and non interference in internal affairs. We hope that sooner, rather than later, China will show a positive and constructive response. Normalisation of relations between India and china, we believe, would strengthen peace and security, promote progress and lessen tensions in Asia.<sup>60</sup>

The Bangladesh crisis, undoubtedly impeded the process of normalisation of relations between India and China. China refused

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<sup>58</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.50, 10 December, 1971, pp.6-7.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, pp.7-8.

<sup>60</sup> *Annual Report 1971-72*, Ministry of External Affairs, p.29.

to accept the emergence of a new power balance in the region. When the Simla Agreement was concluded between India and Pakistan in July 1972, China reacted favourably. But India regarded China's attitude towards Bangladesh as not very encouraging. In a Parliamentary debate on international affairs in December, the minister of external affairs conceded the lack of Chinese response to India's repeated offer of negotiations. He expressed the hope that China would "appreciate the desirability and the necessity of normalising relations with India so that the two countries---can live as good neighbours".<sup>61</sup> In March 1973, China, sent a new charge d'affaires to New Delhi, after a lapse of nearly 18 months and this was a positive step. Further, some improvement on the diplomatic front was noticeable and increased contacts between the Indian and Chinese diplomats were reported from many world capitals. China also toned down anti-Indian propaganda in a limited way. In April, China invited an Indian team to play in a Table Tennis Tournament to be held at Beijing in August.

As moves were being made to gradually improve India-China relations, the political crisis in Sikkim again put India and China into another round of diplomatic confrontation. After the fifth general elections in January 1973, Sikkim witnessed breakdown of law and order because of tension between pro-chogyal and anti-chogyal parties. In April, following a request from the Chogyal, the

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<sup>61</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol.21, 1972, Cols. 170-172.

Indian government sent its army to maintain law and order in Sikkim, later on Sikkim's administration was taken over by the Indian Political officer in Gangtok. In September 1974, the Indian government made Sikkim an associate state of India by thirty-fifth Constitutional Amendment Bill. Finally, the Indian government formally announced Sikkim as its twenty-second state on 23 April, 1975.<sup>62</sup> For India, the question was that of Continuous lurking danger in one of its most sensitive border areas. The conferment of full fledged state in April, 1975 served the needs of the Sikkimese people, (which was evident by holding a referendum on the verger issue raised by the Assembly.) The popular mandate came in through a direct reference to the people who overwhelmingly voted in favour of the merger. It also served India's interests as it prevented a threat developing in this region. As a full fledged state of the Indian Union, all internal and external factors could be taken care of within the overall rational policy.<sup>63</sup> The Chinese government accused India of taking over the administration of Sikkim. On 11 September, 1974, the Chinese government issued a statement condemning India for "annexing Sikkim in a colonial way" and declared that China would absolutely not recognise India's annexation of Sikkim.<sup>64</sup> China landed the incident as an effort to found a general Indian empire "with the support of the

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<sup>62</sup> *Foreign Affairs Reports (New Delhi)*, vol. 24, no.9, September 1975, pp.140-56, See also B. S. Das, *The Sikkim Saga* (New Delhi, 1983).

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in B.S. Das, *The Sikkim Saga*, p.79.

<sup>64</sup> *People's Daily* (Beijing), 11 September 1974.

Soviet Union".<sup>65</sup> India's position was articulated by Mr. Jaipal, India's Permanent Representative at United Nation's General Assembly, who stated that I feel it necessary to place on record the facts, while making it clear at the same time that Indo-Sikkimes relation are not a matter for discussion at the U.N. The people of Sikkim did not have adult suffrage and their elected representatives did not participate in the administration of Sikkim. The ruler agreed to the holding of free elections to Legislative Assembly of the people. Thereafter the Assembly adopted a democratic constitution for Sikkim . . . it is natural and free political evolution of the people of Sikkim in the direction of internal democracy and closer links with neighbouring India. This is entirely in accordance with the wishes of the people of Sikkim as expressed in their elections. The Chinese allegation that India has annexed Sikkim is therefore, clearly mistaken.<sup>66</sup> For India, Sikkim's merger went a long way in strengthening Indian security in the Himalayan region. Now onwards, China-Sikkimese border turned into China-India border.

On 18 May, 1974, the Indian government announced that India had carried out an underground peaceful nuclear explosion, China did not react directly. The Chinese media, published Pakistan. Premier's statement in Lahore on 19 May that his

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<sup>65</sup> *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 22 April 1975.

<sup>66</sup> Jaipal's Speech at U.N. General Assembly on 20 October, 1974 cited in *Strategic Digest* (New Delhi), IV, no-11, November 1974, p. 65.

country would never succumb to Indian nuclear blackmail Pakistan "will not compromise the right to self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Bhut to further said: "Nor will we accept Indian hegemony or domination over the sub-continent".<sup>67</sup> China pointed out that despite facing economic troubles, the Indian government was raising military spending.<sup>68</sup> India's position was stated by Ambassador R. Jaipal at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna that :

India did not violate any international treaty or agreement. In the light of India's categorical declaration that it does not intend to manufacture nuclear weapons, it cannot legitimately be regarded as posing a nuclear threat to any state. <sup>69</sup>

Further in March 1975, China interfered in the internal affairs of India by commenting adversely on the agreement reached between Indian Premier, Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah on 24 February, 1975 whereby Kashmir now became a constituent unit of the Union of India with Sheikh Abdullah serving as the Chief Minister of the state. China commented that; the Indian government violated the U.N. resolutions and international agreements ---- took new expansionist steps on the question of the accession of Kashmir to further deprive the Kashmir people of their right to self-determination and gobble up the Kashmir region".<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.22, 31 May 1974, p.27.

<sup>68</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.25, 21 June 1974, pp. 18-19.

<sup>69</sup> Text of the statement by R. Jaipal at the IAEA Board in Vienna on India's Nuclear Explosion in *Strategic Digest*, IV, no.6, June 1974, pp. 57-58.

<sup>70</sup> *Beijing Review*, no.12, 21 March, 1975, p.28.

The hostile propaganda about India continued unabated in the Chinese media throughout 1975. More seriously, on 20 October 1975 there was an incident at Dulong La in the eastern sector of the border and four Indian soldiers were killed. The Government of India lodged a strong protest about this intrusion into Indian territory and the ambush staged by Chinese soldiers.<sup>71</sup> However, both countries showed maturity in keeping the protests in a low key.

Simultaneously, both countries kept the door open for normalisation of relations. In January 1975 a Chinese table - tennis team made a long tour through India in the course of which 'ping pong diplomacy' occupied head lines in the newspapers. In February 1975, Chinese Vice Premier, Chen Xidian stopped in Calcutta on his return from Nepal King Birendra's coronation and announced his government's readiness to hold talks with India.<sup>72</sup> Participating in a parliamentary discussion on foreign affairs, the Minister of External Affairs, Y.B. Chavan reiterated that:

Inspite of what China has or has not done India continued to have an open mind on the question of improving its relations with China and had repeatedly made known its desire and willingness to do so: unfortunately this cannot be a one way affair as well--- the Chinese have shown no real change in attitude.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Surjit Mansingh, n.34, p.246.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. 51, 1975, Cols-294-5

Later, Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi stated in 1975:

We Want better relations with China. Much to our disappointment, the last two decades have failed to fulfil our initial hope . . . we began with mutual confidence and good will, but the events of the 1950s brought tension and misunderstanding . . . It would be an over-simplification to regard this merely as the result of a border dispute. Simultaneous or subsequent developments – such as China's systematic Support of Pakistan against India, her provocative criticism of India for alleged subservience to the United States and later the Soviet Union, and her persistent, though futile efforts to promote internal subversion – leave us no option but to infer that the border dispute was the outcome of a more complex policy which was aimed at undermining India's stability and at obstructing her rapid and orderly progress. After the cultural revolution, conditions seem more tranquil and there appears to be a new orientation of China's policies. We wonder whether this new mood will also be reflected in China's policy towards India.<sup>74</sup>

During the period between 1963 to 1975, India-China relations were largely frozen. At the diplomatic front, the period witnessed a stalemate which was difficult to break despite India's flexible approach. Further, the internal and external events factors and forces of both countries prevented improvement of bilateral relations. China and India alleged that the other nation was interfering in their internal affairs, the outbreak of naxalbari movement and insurgency in northeast in the case of India and Taiwan as well as Tibet issue in case of China. The estranged neighbours held and projected negative images of each other. All these factors created an atmosphere of India-China cold war which proved difficult to defrost.

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<sup>74</sup> *Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi*, vol – III (New Delhi: 1984), p. 633.