

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unravelling the Geopolitical Dimensions of the 1962 Sino–Indian Conflict: How the US Shaped the Sino–India Split

Lakshmana Kumar 

Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India

Correspondence: Lakshmana Kumar (lakshmana@jgu.edu.in; lakshmanakumar104@gmail.com)**Received:** 8 April 2025 | **Revised:** 8 April 2025 | **Accepted:** 11 April 2025**Funding:** The author received no specific funding for this work.**Keywords:** cold war geopolitics | Sino–India border conflict of 1962 | Sino–India relations

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the underlying nature of the 1962 Sino–Indian conflict, exploring its genesis as an outcome driven by Cold War geopolitics rather than solely arising from the boundary dispute preceding the brief border war. While the border dispute has traditionally been regarded as the primary hurdle in normalising relations between the two nations, it is crucial to closely examine the origins of the Sino–Indian conflict within the broader context of Cold War geopolitics. Employing critical theory in international relations for discourse analysis of the border conflict, examination of declassified documents in recent decades and the latest research on Sino–India relations, this article challenges the prevailing narrative that has endured for over six decades. The study illuminates the complex factors and the role played by the United States, offering fresh insights into the multifaceted dynamics that shaped the Sino–Indian conflict beyond the realm of the boundary dispute.

1 | Introduction

The historical relationship between India and China stretches through millennia, intertwined in religious, cultural, economic, and diplomatic exchanges. Their civilisations have flourished, engaging in trade, philosophical discourse, and academic collaborations. However, despite the ebb and flow of history, the two nations managed to avoid military conflicts until the dramatic events of 1962 altered their relationship forever. The Sino–Indian conflict of 1962 has always been viewed as a border war emanating from the complex history of the boundary between the two nations. Much has been researched about the exact reasons for the Sino–Indian conflict in the last 60 years, with the primary focus being the border issue. The Indian official document, ‘History of the Conflict with China 1962’, explains the origin of the conflict through Chinese expansionism. The underlying theme concerns the Chinese betrayal relating to their slow and steady expansion along the frontiers and their

duplicity in diplomatic dealings throughout the 1950s (Sinha and Athale 1992).¹ On the other hand, the Chinese have given a detailed account in their official publication about the imperialist aggression in Tibet and the policy of expansionism inherited from Britain by India (Jiang and Li 1994). In his seminal work, Maxwell blamed Nehru and his ‘Forward Policy’ for the border conflict (Maxwell 1970). In later years, even after new documents relating to the Sino–Indian conflict had emerged, Maxwell continued to argue that ‘Indians’ mistaken belief that the border dispute and 1962 conflict with China were caused by China’s aggression make Sino–Indian rapprochement unattainable, with ill consequences for world peace. But it was the Nehru government’s refusal to negotiate that turned a readily resolvable boundary problem into an intractable dispute (Maxwell 2003).² However, J. Ward’s perspective suggests that China viewed India as a potential threat, influencing its decision to initiate the conflict (Ward 2016, 1). John Garver’s explanation of China’s reasons to go to war was a set of two interrelated reasons:

1. a perceived need to punish and end perceived Indian efforts to undermine Chinese control of Tibet, Indian efforts which were perceived as having the objective of restoring the pre-1949 status quo ante of Tibet,
2. a perceived need to punish and end perceived Indian aggression against Chinese territory along the border (Johnson and Ross 2006, 116).

Westcott, who applied poliheuristic choice theory to analyse the Sino-Indian border dispute, also concluded that Nehru was responsible for the border dispute escalating to conflict (Westcott 2019). All the above explanations about the causes of the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 centre around the disputed borders and Tibet. Even the declassified Chinese internal communications 'establish that the Tibetan issue emerged as perhaps the most significant driving force behind China's decision to launch an offensive against India on October 20, 1962' (Krishnan 2012). As border tensions have arisen at regular intervals in recent times, the emphasis on the territorial dispute remains predominant in Sino-Indian relations (Guruswamy 2003; Zhu 2011; Sen 2014; Qaddos 2018; Set and Pant 2023). Only a few researchers have endeavoured to reassess the perspectives, motivations, and decision-making procedures of conflicting parties and third-party actors directly impacted by the dispute (Lüthi 2016). However, seldom have researchers examined the Cold War geopolitics leading to Tibet becoming the primary reason for the Sino-Indian conflict, though most have mentioned it as a contributing factor. This significant research gap must be addressed comprehensively to illuminate the concealed chapters of the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict narrative. The article aims to offer fresh insights into the multifaceted dynamics that shaped the conflict, particularly highlighting the influence of the United States. Thus, this article will contribute to existing knowledge by delving into the geopolitical dimensions of the 1962 Sino-India conflict, emphasising the role of Cold War geopolitics rather than solely focusing on the border dispute.

2 | Theoretical Approach and Methodology

The policies pursued by the United States and the Soviet Union during the late 1950s and early 1960s had a mix of intended and unintended consequences on India and China. While the Soviets wanted to collaborate with India and China, the United States desired a clear split. This crucial factor has only been analyzed as a contributing factor from a realist and balance of power perspective (Garver 2011; Hoffmann 1990; Lintner 2018), while the primary cause of the Sino-Indian conflict has been attributed to the territorial dispute. Therefore, to address the research gap, the theoretical framework of this research article is grounded in critical theory. Critical theory challenges established norms and assumptions, seeking to uncover underlying power dynamics, biases, and discourses that shape the interpretation of historical events. In this study, critical theory is utilised to examine the sudden downturn in relations between India and China in the late 1950s and the subsequent conflict of 1962, as well as the critical role played by the US in shaping the events.

Drawing from the Critical International Relations (IR) theory, this research analyses the geopolitical dynamics and power

structures influencing the Sino-India conflict. Critical IR theory questions dominant narratives and explores how power asymmetries, hegemonic influences, and ideology-based identity construction have shaped state behaviour (Wyn Jones 2001). By applying critical IR theory, this study aims to uncover the subjective nature of historical events and challenge the dominant narratives that often serve specific interests.

Selection and Analysis of Primary Sources: Primary sources, including official documents, reports, and statements from relevant countries during the 1950s and early 1960s, are analysed to establish the contemporary discourse surrounding the Sino-Indian conflict. These primary sources provide insights into key actors' perspectives in the conflict and inform the analysis of power dynamics and discourses. Most of the primary sources being analysed were declassified after decades, when the narrative surrounding the Sino-Indian conflict had already firmed up. Therefore, it's imperative to re-evaluate the information revealed by these sources to arrive at a more nuanced perspective on the underlying causes of the Sino-Indian conflict.

The methodology utilised in this research article combines the analysis of both primary and secondary sources using critical discourse analysis. Guided by critical theory, the interpretation of geopolitical dynamics in the years leading up to the Sino-India conflict considers the influence of power structures, identity construction based on ideology, and employment of overt means and covert operations as foreign policy tools during the Cold War to shape state behaviour. Critical theory allows for a nuanced understanding of how underlying power dynamics shape historical events and challenges the notion of objective truth in international relations.

3 | The Ideological Divide

On 22 October 1962, 2 days after the Chinese launched an all-out offensive on both the Western as well as Eastern sectors, the then-Indian Defence Minister was interviewed by a journalist. The final question asked by the journalist was, 'If the war develops and if India is involved in something very serious militarily, do you see this as the beginning or the end of your policy of non-alignment?' Krishna Menon's reply was very emphatic. He replied, 'No. Not at all. I do not see how non-alignment is adversely affected by this' (PMML 1962). However, unknown to him was the magnitude of the impending impact of the conflict on the world order, which continues to date.

The end of WWII saw the emergence of the Cold War between the West, led by the United States, and the East, led by the communist Soviet Union. Both desired a clear bipolar world order and, therefore, competed vigorously to increase their sphere of influence across the globe. In the late 1940s and 1950s, India's foreign policy of non-alignment, aiming to establish a unique identity for the newly liberated nation, appeared outdated within the context of Cold War politics and the global split into opposing ideological factions (Chaudhuri 2014). Nehru, who had championed the cause of the non-alignment movement, was convinced that it was essential for India to remain away from all treaties leading to military alliances. Even before India's independence, Nehru had advocated 'as far

as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even wider scale' (Nehru 1985, 74). Nehru's idea of non-alignment was more about maintaining India's independence for choices in international scenarios by interacting with everyone independently and then taking the best course of action based on India's interests.

For the West, communism was an existential threat, and it had therefore created a military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), to counter it. The emergence of Communist China changed the complete dynamics in Asia. Almost immediately, the spotlight was on India and Nehru. India was hailed as the 'anchor of Asia' and Nehru as the 'number one man in Asia' (Madan 2020, 19). The West was still pondering over its policy stand in dealing with the defeat of Nationalists in China and their escape to Formosa when India showed its interest in recognising the Communist Government. Against this backdrop, Nehru made his first visit to the United States in October 1949. As India's relations with the Soviet Union were rather cold till Stalin died in 1953, India had to rely mainly on the United States for aid. India was looking forward to aid without strings, while the US was looking forward to an ally against the Communists. The enthusiasm for Nehru's visit soon subsided as both sides realised each other's expectations.

The West saw Nehru's outlook as pro-communist simply because India was not anti-communist. India's recognition of the communist government of China on 30 December 1949 was deeply resented by the West. The New York Times echoed the US government's scepticism by questioning, 'Will India supply effective anti-communist leadership?' (Madan 2020). The Western bloc, led by the United States, prided itself as the 'Free World' and held its belief in the market-led economy dearly. On the other hand, Nehru believed in socialism in a democratic environment. Therefore, the West and the United States, in particular, were never really comfortable with Nehru.

On the other hand, the communist bloc did not view Nehru favourably (SWJN 1992, 515). Stalin viewed post-colonial governments, such as India's, as tools of Western imperialism, which limited Soviet relations with India (Mastny 2010, 52). It was only after his death in 1953 that there was considerable traction in Indo-Soviet relations, with Nehru's visit to the USSR in June 1955, followed by Nikita Khrushchev's return visit in November 1955. It also coincided with the Sino-Soviet honeymoon period, commencing with the visit of Mao in September 1954 to the USSR and a similar phase in Sino-Indian relations, with the signing of the Panchsheel agreement in April 1954. Simultaneously, the non-alignment movement also gained prominence with the Bandung conference in Apr 1955, and thus, India became more committed to maintaining its neutrality.

The initial phase of the Soviet-Sino-Indian relationship, however, was short-lived. The Soviet-Sino split commenced in 1956, with Khrushchev openly denouncing Stalin. The Sino-Indian relations also started deteriorating rapidly after the discovery of the trans-Aksai Chin Road and due to the events in Tibet, leading to the short border conflict in 1962.

4 | The Trigger for the Sino-Indian Conflict

John Graver correctly identifies the primary reason for the war being the perceived threat to Tibet from India. However, the reason behind this perception needs deliberation. By the late 1950s, Mao was convinced that India was the leading cause of trouble in Tibet. Unknown to the world then, there was a series of attacks carried out by the CIA-trained Tibetan rebels in Tibet, resulting in considerable losses to the PLA. These rebels were trained in the United States, and later parachuted into Tibet in 1957 (Conboy and Morrison 2002). In July 1958, the CIA increased the scale of its covert operations in Tibet by carrying out its first arms drop inside Tibet. Immediately after that, China lodged an official protest to India that 'subversive and disruptive activities against China's Tibet region, carried out by the United States and the Chiang Kai-shek clique in collusion with fugitive reactionaries from Tibet using India's Kalimpong as a base' (Rowland 1967, 102). Kalimpong, by then, had gained the reputation of being the epicentre of the Tibetan movement. It was, therefore, natural for the Chinese to assume 'some degree of Indian complicity in the CIA operation' (Riedel 2015, 32–33). The protest note given by the Foreign Office of China to the Counsellor of India in Peking, while expressing its concerns about the support received by the Tibetan rebels from Indian territory through the US and its Nationalist allies, also highlighted the concern that it was a ploy by the US to cause a rift between India and China (Bhasin 2018, 1899–1901). The role of Pakistan was possibly not established by the Chinese, as they did not protest against them (Riedel 2015, 33).

The Tibetan rebellion in March 1959 was certainly a big blow to the Chinese leadership. The massive outflow of refugees from Tibet into India and the escape of the Dalai Lama, followed by the grant of asylum in India, were enough to trigger a complete change in the foreign policy of China. On 25 April 1959, Mao set the collision course with India. Presiding over an enlarged CCP Politburo meeting to discuss China's policy toward India, Mao said:

We will begin a counteroffensive against India's anti-China activities, emphasising a big debate with Nehru. We should sharply criticise Nehru and should not be afraid of making him feel agitated or of provoking a break with him. We should carry the struggle through to the end (Jian 2006, 87).

This was certainly an extreme step against the backdrop of the growing Indo-Russia friendship. The series of meetings of the enlarged CCP Politburo continued till 5 May. Mao also instructed the CCP propaganda apparatus to target Nehru and India:

For a long while we have said that 'the imperialists, Jiang Jieshi's bandit gang, and foreign reactionaries have instigated the rebellion in Tibet and interfered in China's internal affairs.' This is completely inappropriate and should be retracted and changed to 'the British imperialists have acted in collusion with the Indian expansionists to intervene openly in China's internal affairs, in the hope of taking

over Tibet.' We should directly point to Britain and India and should not avoid or circumvent this issue (Jian 2006, 87).

On 06 May 1959, The People's Daily (Renmin Ribao), the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China, published a lengthy commentary by its editorial department titled 'The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru's Philosophy.' In response to the perceived support to the Tibetan rebels by India, it raised several issues on moral, legal, and ideological grounds. Though very measured in its approach, the article attacked Nehru's policies for Tibet. The article listed all the interventions by India in China's internal affairs concerning Tibet. China was extremely unhappy with the attention the Dalai Lama was getting and the public discourse on Tibet, as reflected in the excerpts from the article below.

The Indian Government insists that the Dalai Lama is not held under duress by the rebels but is the head of the rebels. If this is so, did not the impressive welcome extended to the Dalai Lama by the Indian Government and the visit to Mussoorie by Prime Minister Nehru himself mean giving a welcome to and holding a meeting with the leader of a rebellion in a friendly country? Because the head of the Indian Government has never pursued a clear-cut hands-off policy, it is quite understandable why both Madame Indira Gandhi, President of the ruling National Congress Party, and Madame Sucheta Kripalani, General-Secretary of the Party, have declared that Tibet was a 'country' or an 'autonomous country' and why the 'People's Committee in Support of Tibet' which was formed by most of the political parties in India including the National Congress Party openly demanded that the Tibet question be submitted to the United Nations, and why Indian papers openly slandered the Chinese Government as 'practicing banditry and imperialism,' insulted China's head of state as an 'abominable snowman' and demanded the convening of a so-called tripartite conference of India, Tibet and China on the pattern of the Simla conference to settle the Tibet question, which is purely China's internal affair (Peking Review 1959, 13).

This article, along with other such critical articles like 'The Truth about the Sino-Indian Boundary Question', published on 12th September 1959, and 'Our Expectations', published on 16th September 1959 by the Renmin Ribao, were republished by the Chinese Embassy in India. When India registered a protest note on the issue, the Chinese, in their reply, once again expressed their displeasure about India's apparent intervention in Tibet and the importance being given to the Dalai Lama.

The Chinese Government notes with regret that contrary to the news bulletins issued by the Chinese Embassy in India, the news bulletins issued by many

Indian Embassies in Foreign countries failed to pay full attention to the maintenance of Sino-Indian friendship and strictly abide by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The news bulletins of many Indian Embassies abroad widely carried several so-called statements of the Dalai Lama. The news bulletins of the Indian Embassy in Indonesia, Afghanistan and the U.A.R. further carried ill-intentioned commentaries of some Indian newspapers on the so-called statements of the Dalai Lama (WHITE PAPER II 1959).

The die had been cast. The first direct manifestation of China's changed policy was visible on the ground in August 1959. Initially, the Chinese confronted the Indians at Khinzemane and then at Longju on 7 August 1959. Later, on 25 August 1959, at Longju, Indians were violently pushed back from their posts by opening fire, resulting in fatal casualties. It was the first violent confrontation in a series of border confrontations that were to follow.

India immediately reached out to the Soviets to rein in the Chinese. In a clear deviation from the past, on 09 September 1959, the Soviets published a declaration in TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) taking a neutral stand on the Sino-Indian dispute. It certainly was not appreciated by the Chinese. The Sino-Soviet split was now in the open for the world to see.

The Soviet Union's strategic interest in India during the late 1950s and early 1960s was assessed to be more multifaceted, driven by various factors. Viewing India as a primary target for influence and control, the Soviets pursued extensive aid programs, trade initiatives, and technical assistance to exploit India's economic vulnerabilities and establish a foothold in the region. This strategic engagement aimed to counter Western influence, with the Soviets seeing a strong and economically stable India as a potential bulwark against Western interests and ideologies. Additionally, India's strategic location and size made it an attractive ally for the Soviets, who sought to extend their influence in South Asia and enhance their geopolitical position vis-a-vis other major powers, particularly the United States (NSC 5909/1 1959).

On 02 October 1959, Nikita Khrushchev held a high-level meeting with all the top CCP members at Mao's residence. Khrushchev had just returned from talks with the US President. He gave a detailed account of his conversation with the US President and then discussed Taiwan, wherein they had a difference of opinion. However, as soon as the discussion came to the question of Tibet and Sino-India relations, tempers started flaring up among all the top nine Chinese CCP members present, including Mao. Excerpts of the discussion held show their differences over Tibet and India.

N.S. Khrushchev: ...You have had good relations with India for many years. Suddenly, here is a bloody incident, as result of which [Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal] Nehru found himself in a very difficult position. We may say that Nehru is a bourgeois

statesman. But we know about it. If Nehru leaves, who would be better than him? The Dalai Lama fled from Tibet, he is a bourgeois figure. This issue is also not clear for us. When the events in Hungary took place, then Nehru was against us, and we did not take offense at him, because we did not expect anything from him as a bourgeois statesman. But although he was against it, this did not prevent us from preserving good relations with him. If you let me, I will tell you what a guest should not say the events in Tibet are your fault. You ruled in Tibet, you should have had your intelligence [agencies] there and should have known about the plans and intentions of the Dalai Lama.

Mao Zedong: Nehru also says that the events in Tibet occurred on our fault. Besides, in the Soviet Union they published a TASS declaration on the issue of conflict with India.

N.S. Khrushchev: Do you really want us to approve of your conflict with India? It would be stupid on our part. The TASS declaration was necessary. You still seem to be able to see some difference between Nehru and me. If we had not issued the TASS declaration, there could have been an impression that there was a united front of socialist countries against Nehru. The TASS declaration turned this issue into one between you and India (Wilson Center Digital Archive 1959).

While there was a difference of opinion between the Soviets and the Chinese on Taiwan, the disagreement over India was irreconcilable. Khrushchev was convinced that the Longju incident was not initiated by the Indians. As the Chinese leadership, which included Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, and Chen Yi, kept repeating that the Indians had initiated the incident, Khrushchev remarked, 'Yes, they began to shoot and they themselves fell dead'. Khrushchev wanted to support Nehru 'to help him stay in power' and on their side. Mao, however, was not convinced. He blamed Nehru for the entire Tibet issue. He considered the border issue as a marginal one, as he assured Khrushchev that the border issue would be settled peacefully through negotiations (Wilson Center Digital Archive 1959).

When Khrushchev blamed China for everything that had happened in Tibet, Mao responded emphatically, 'No, this is Nehru's fault.' He further added that 'The Hindus acted in Tibet as if it belonged to them.' When Khrushchev insisted on the importance of maintaining good relations with India and Nehru, Mao responded, 'We also support Nehru, but in the question of Tibet, we should crush him' (Wilson Center Digital Archive 1959). It was the most unambiguous statement of Mao's intended action and its reason. The discussion between the three Soviet leaders and the nine Chinese leaders became a heated argument as the Chinese kept blaming India for all their troubles in Tibet and also for initiating the fire in Longju. In contrast, Khrushchev

blamed China for their inability to control things in Tibet and the violent incident at Longju. Finally, to placate the Soviets, Mao said:

Mao Zedong: The decision to delay the transformations was taken earlier, after the Dalai Lama visited India [in early 1959]. We could not launch an offensive without a pretext. And this time we had a good excuse and we struck. This is, probably, what you cannot grasp. You will see for yourselves later that the McMahon line with India will be maintained, and the border conflict with India will end.

N.S. Khrushchev: This is good. But the issue is not about the line. We know nothing about this line and we do not even want to know.

Mao Zedong: The border issue with India will be decided through negotiations.

N.S. Khrushchev: We welcome this intention (Wilson Center Digital Archive 1959).

The Chinese anguish emanated from the fact that the PLA had suffered several reverses from the CIA-trained rebels in late 1958 and early 1959. The estimated casualties suffered by the PLA in Tibet, according to one source, were as high as 80,000 in the 5 years of struggle till then (Rowland 1967, 104). Surprisingly, during the entire conversation with the Soviets, Mao did not discuss the CIA's role and the perceived support by India, about which they had already protested to the GOI in 1958. Mao was also unhappy about the public statement made by the Soviets in the TASS, as it was against the policy of communists to show their differences to the outside world. He felt 'it made all imperialists happy' (Wilson Center Digital Archive 1959). For the Chinese, a clear takeaway from the meeting was that they could not rely on the Soviets against the Indians and, therefore, they would have to wait for an opportune moment to 'crush Nehru', as they had done before launching a complete offensive in Tibet. In the following years, the covert operations in Tibet increased considerably, putting enormous pressure on China. At the peak of these operations, the CIA was supporting a strength of 14,000 rebels (Kinzer 2013, 280) and forced China to launch even aerial bombardment on the rebel camps (Conboy and Morrison 2002, 28). China, therefore, had little interest in boundary negotiations, as their primary focus was on the Tibet issue.

5 | The Sino-India Split³

Even before the Communists came to power in China, the United States, in April 1949, was pondering over the idea of recognising Tibet as an independent state. They concluded they should consider such a move only if the Nationalists completely lost control in China (Office of the Historian n.d. 1065–1071). However, even after the nationalists were chased out of Mainland China to Formosa, they continued to claim to be the legitimate government of the whole of China. They considered Tibet to be an integral

part of China. Owing to the sensitivity of the Nationalists, the recognition of Tibet was never taken forward.

The US covert operations in Tibet were undoubtedly not because of their sympathy towards the Tibetan cause. Even the Dalai Lama himself later felt that Americans' help for Tibet's cause had been 'a reflection of their anti-Communist policies, rather than genuine support for the re-establishment of Tibetan independence' (Kinzer 2013, 280). Dalai Lama's older brother, Gyalo Thondup, the most crucial link for PRC, ROC, CIA, and IB, has since ridiculed it as 'a provocation, not genuine help' (Conboy and Morrison 2002, i). The US saw Tibet as just another tool to keep the communists in check and to gain intelligence about them. Allen Dulles later defended the CIA's operations in Tibet as being worthwhile because it baited the Chinese into brutal repression and therefore produced 'propaganda value' (Kinzer 2013, 281).

Galbraith, who was an outsider and came into the scene only after being nominated as the Ambassador to India in March 1961, had not supported the CIA operations in Tibet even during the first briefing he got in 1961 and consistently argued for its closure as it risked an 'unpredictable Chinese response' (Riedel 2015, xiv), besides endangering Indo-US relations. Riedel claims that though 'the CIA operation helped persuade Chinese leader Mao Zedong to invade India in Oct 62', it was an unpredicted outcome (Riedel 2015, xiv).

The documents declassified by the US government do not reveal the accurate or complete intentions of the US, as most of the crucial lines and paragraphs from the documents have not been declassified. Therefore, based on the available documents, it may be challenging to conclusively state that the primary reason for the initial support for the covert operations was to bring about a split in Sino-India relations and make India dependent or aligned with the US in the fight against communism. However, the US had certainly pondered the idea as early as 1951. The US State Department's Far East Asia desk had advocated that, 'diplomatically, the US should endeavor to use Tibet as a weapon for alerting GOI to the danger of attempting to appease any Communist Govt and, specially, for maneuvering GOI into a position where it will voluntarily adopt a policy of firmly resisting Chinese Communist pressure in the south and east Asia (Office of the Historian 1951, 1801)'. Though they couldn't pursue this policy in 1951, the opportunity in Tibet came up again in 1956. By this time, with John Foster Dulles as the Secretary of State and his brother Allen Dulles as the Director of CIA, 'The CIA became a major force in executing and formulating foreign policy (Kinzer 2013, 190)'. With the increase in the CIA's role in Tibet during 1957-1958, Chinese suspicion of Indian involvement kept growing. Nehru's sympathetic approach towards Tibet and his meetings with the Dalai Lama only accentuated the Chinese resentment towards India. During the same period, India's relations with the Soviet Union were on an upswing. Therefore, for the United States, Tibet became the most potent weapon to cause a Sino-India split, which would also force the Soviets to take sides and force a split among the three nations. Because of these considerations, along with Nehru's strong views against interference in Tibet, the CIA's covert operations and their scale were never really revealed to their Indian counterpart until it was too late. Throughout the 1950s, capitalising on the discord between India and the Communist bloc had been a recurrent feature of their policy. However, there was a notable shift toward conducting these manoeuvres with greater discretion, particularly

in light of the deepening mistrust between India and China (NSC 5701 1957; NSC 5909/1 1959).

President Eisenhower also saw the revolt in Tibet as an opportunity to promote a better relationship between India and Pakistan, to have a united front against Communist China. In a briefing by CIA director Allen Dulles about the Tibet rebellion, the President remarked that 'Pakistan had always maintained that it was arming because of the danger from Communist China, but Nehru had pooh-poohed this contention. Now, however, Nehru must recognize that Communist China is getting tough and might start trouble in Nepal next (Office of the Historian n.d.).'

When Kennedy won the US Presidential election in 1960, there were reviews on the merit of continuing the covert operations in Tibet. CIA had scaled down its operations in the days before the elections as it wanted to see if the next President would like to continue with the covert operations. Kennedy was known to be pro-India, so he was unlikely to pursue any policy that could have jeopardised their relationship with India. However, by then, the CIA's operations had started showing some desired results. The desired results had nothing to do with Tibetan independence or the grant of autonomy. 'Even from the start of the uprising in 1959, it was obvious that the Tibetan resistance was no match for the PLA in numbers, training, or weapons (Riedel 2015, 58)'. The desired results were sought instead in the shaping of Sino-India relations.

In May 1960, a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) was prepared by the CIA and the intelligence organisations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff. The NIE was titled 'Sino-Indian Relations', and it was prepared to assess Sino-Indian relations and their international implications. It observed that the 'outbreak of the Tibetan revolt in early 1959 caused China to take rapid and ruthless action to put it down. Peiping was suspicious that the revolt was supported by India and gave little thought to Indian sensibilities'. It also noted that the revolt 'precipitated a crisis in Sino-Indian relations and forced both countries to re-examine their policies towards each other'. That had further 'resulted in a sharp upsurge of anti-Chinese sentiment in India'. The 'failure of Nehru's policy of befriending Communist China caused a noticeable decline in his prestige'. The NIE also observed that the border dispute with China had created 'among Indian leaders a more sympathetic view of US opposition to Communist China' (CIA FOIA, 1960). With this as the backdrop, Allen Dulles briefed the new President on 14 February 1961. Kennedy gave his approval for the continuation of the covert operations in Tibet. 'There is no record of that Valentine's Day CIA briefing' (Riedel 2015, 58). Therefore, it is extremely difficult to know why President Kennedy consented to continue covert operations. We can, however, summarise the following facts:

1. The CIA was sure that the rebels would never be able to win in Tibet.
2. The US State Department had seriously considered using Tibet as a tool to influence India to be more aligned with its policies.
3. The US intelligence community was satisfied with the results of the Tibetan revolt in March 1959, as it caused enormous friction in Sino-India relations.

4. The entire CIA operations in Tibet were carried out in consonance with the State Department directives.

6 | Conclusion

Initially, Mao had assured Khrushchev that the boundary issue with India would be resolved through negotiations. Even the US NIE acknowledged the potential for China and India to resolve the boundary dispute. However, the Chinese leadership later became convinced that India was conspiring to 'seize Tibet' by inciting rebellion and that the rebellion itself would not have been possible without India's support (Johnson and Ross 2006, 116). Therefore, had Mao been aware in the early stages that it was Pakistan and not India which was assisting the CIA in covert operations in Tibet, his approach to the issue could have been markedly different. As the events later proved, the covert operations of the United States achieved much more than they desired. It indeed led China and India on a collision course while further deepening the Sino-Soviet split. The US, anticipating an escalation in the Sino-Indian conflict and consequent India's outreach to them, had formulated policy guidelines for their response wherein they decided to restrain their 'expressions in the matter so as to give the Chinese no pretext for alleging any American involvement' (JFK Presidential Library & Museum 1962). The Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 forced Nehru to reach out to the US for military aid, which was a significant policy shift for Nehru, much to the satisfaction of the US.

The opposition in India had also turned pro-West and openly called for a review of India's non-alignment policy. The 'symbol of anti-Americanism,' as Galbraith called Menon, had also been removed due to the Sino-India conflict. As Chaudhuri notes, 'there was never a better moment for Anglo-American goodwill generated and augmented inside the 530-metre circumference of what was then a 35-year-old Parliament building (Chaudhuri 2014, 103).' The CIA carried out an assessment in December 1962 on the impact of the Sino-India conflict and concluded that India was 'more susceptible than ever before to influence by the US and the UK', and it presented 'new opportunities for the West' (Chaudhuri 2014, 111). Over subsequent years, a significantly expanded intelligence network was developed along the Sino-India border, with India becoming involved in covert activities in Tibet. As time passed, while the US remained flexible in its approach toward both India and China, the spectre of the 1962 conflict continued to linger over Sino-India relations. The conflict's enduring impact is evidenced by the continued dominance of the territorial dispute in Sino-Indian relations, frequently leading to crises along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Recent examples include the 2017 Doklam standoff, the 2020 clash in Galwan Valley, resulting in casualties on both sides and the Tawang Sector scuffle in 2022. The only unintended consequence for the US was the establishment of a strong 'Pakistani-Chinese alliance that still continues' (Riedel 2015, xiv).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Endnotes

- ¹ This document was never officially published by Govt of India. However, its copies are available in institutes like the United Services of India and also on the internet. The original manuscript is still kept in History Division, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi.
- ² This paper utilises the critical theory of international relations to analyse the discourse surrounding the Sino-Indian border conflict. As a result, the paper intentionally includes verbatim original quotes in many instances to preserve the core meaning of the statements rather than attempting to rephrase them.
- ³ After establishing that the conflict's root cause was Tibet rather than the boundary matter, the next step involves investigating whether the covert support extended by the US for the Tibetan cause had intended to create a Sino-India split or was it an unintended consequence.

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