



CLAWS

China: Differing Perceptions about the Line of Actual Control (LAC): A Hoax?

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The greatest victory is that which requires no battle.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

India never had a boundary with China till China illegally occupied Tibet in October 1950. China was nowhere in the Indian vicinity or even in Xinjiang till it forced its way into it in 1949. What then, is the basis for the Chinese perception of the Line of Actual Control (LAC)? If at all anyone was to have any view about the alignment of the LAC, it could have only been India or Tibet which had till then shared the boundary and had been on the ground. China till date has not committed to the limits of its so called perception, obviously to keep shifting it as convenient. It now claims Arunachal Pradesh as a part of Tibet and calls it Southern Tibet, an idea which the Tibetans and the people of Arunachal Pradesh residing on either side of the border don't subscribe to.

Or is it the McMahon Line created in 1914? China never questioned its alignment till January 23, 1959, when, for the first time since its creation, Zhou Enlai in a letter to Pandit Nehru claimed that no border agreement had been signed between India and China, conveniently forgetting the eight month long tripartite deliberations amongst three equal partners: British India, China and Tibet, and its commitments at the Simla Convention leading to the July 03, 1914 agreement. Yes, China had reservations about the boundary between Outer and Inner Tibet. It had not signed the agreement but had signed the

map of April 27, 1914, showing the alignment of the McMahon Line without any reservations or questions being raised. Fifty-five years later China obviously has given in to its expansionist ambitions by disputing the alignment of the McMahon Line.

If history was the point of contention, China and Tibet were independent prior to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368)¹. If historical documents are anything to go by, the “Agreement for the Restoration of Peaceful Relations and the Delimitation of a Provisional Frontier Between China and Tibet,”² dated August 19, 1918, and the “Supplementary Agreement Regarding Mutual Withdrawal of Troops and Cessation of Hostilities Between Chinese and Tibetans,” dated October 10, 1918,³ validates and clarifies beyond any doubt, the relationship that existed between China and Tibet in the early 20th century. Tibet definitely was not a part of China or under its control.

The proclamation issued in 1913 by his Holiness the Dalai Lama XIII⁴, stating that the relationship between the Chinese Emperor and Tibet “had been that of patron and priest and had not been based on the subordination of one to the other” corroborates the facts. For the next 36 years, Tibet enjoyed *de facto* independence till October 01, 1949, when Mao declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and entered Tibet in 1950.

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China: Differing Perceptions ...

The First Signs of the Chinese Expansionist Agenda

The Chinese agenda began to unwrap when it sent in its military into Tibet on October 07, 1950, against the Tibet Army in Chamdo. It forced Tibet to send a negotiating team to China as a follow up of the military action. The Tibetan delegation was coerced to sign the “Seventeen Point Agreement” with China without even being allowed to communicate with the Tibetan government in Lhasa. Seals were specifically manufactured for the purpose. The Chinese aggression, followed by forced negotiations between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Tibetan representatives resulted in the subsequent incorporation of Tibet into the PRC⁵.

The McMahon Line Debate

The Simla Convention to discuss the British India-Tibet boundary among British India, China and Tibet began on October 13, 1913. At the 4th meeting of the conference on February 17, 1914, McMahon tabled a statement on the territorial limits of Tibet. A map was attached to the statement showing the frontiers of Tibet. Discussions between Britain and Tibet followed, resulting in an agreement which is fully recorded in the letters exchanged between McMahon and Lonchen Shatra. The draft Indo-Tibet boundary was formally confirmed on March 24 and 25, 1914 and submitted at the 7th full meeting of all the delegates on April 22, 1914.

The maps of April 27, 1914, and July 03, 1914, showing the India-Tibet boundary, bear the full signatures of the Tibetan Plenipotentiary. The map of April 27, 1914, bears the full signature of the Chinese Plenipotentiary, Ivan Chen. The British Plenipotentiary, McMahon initialled the map of April 27, 1914, and the Convention of July 03, 1914, but signed in full, the map attached to the July 03, 1914 Convention.⁶ The Shimla Convention was signed on July 03, 2014,⁷ which created the McMahon Line.

Areas of Divergence on McMahon Line

The point of contention between China and the British on the July 03, 1914 agreement was the boundary between Outer and Inner Tibet covered under Article 9 and not the McMahon Line.

The official communication dated April 26, 1914, conveying the Chinese government’s stand on the Simla Agreement, through Ivan Chen, the Chinese Plenipotentiary, which states, “*With the exception of Article 9 of the draft convention, we are prepared to take the main principles, embodied in the other Articles, into favourable consideration,*⁸ and the subsequent communication received just prior to the signing of the Convention, “*This government has several times stated that it gives its support to the majority of the Articles of the Convention. The part it is unable to agree with is that dealing with the question of the boundary*”⁹ are self-explanatory.

Highlights of Simla Convention, 1904¹⁰

Great Britain and China recognised that Tibet as being under the suzerainty of China. Suzerainty is an old Asian political concept indicating limited authority over a dependent state. *The agreement recognised the autonomy of Outer Tibet and consented to respect the territorial integrity of the country.* It agreed to abstain from interference in the administration of Outer Tibet (including the selection and installation of the Dalai Lama), which, the treaty stated, “shall remain in the hands of the Tibetan government at Lhasa.” China agreed not to convert Tibet into a Chinese province which was reciprocated by Great Britain by concurring not to annex Tibet or any portion of it.

China further affirmed “not to send troops into Outer Tibet, nor to station civil or military officers, nor to establish Chinese colonies in the country”. The earlier provision permitting a Chinese ‘high official’ at Lhasa was to continue, with an escort not exceeding 300 men. Should there be any such troops or officials in Outer Tibet on the date of the signature of the Convention, they were to be withdrawn within a period not exceeding three months. As a corollary, Great Britain too agreed not to station military or civil officers or troops in Tibet or to establish colonies in that country.

It is an irony that China invaded Tibet, occupied it, merged large parts of it with its provinces and converted Outer Tibet into an Autonomous Region of China disregarding its earlier guarantees.

Chinese Follow up Proposals Relate to Outer and Inner Tibet Boundaries

On June 13, 1914, the Chinese made fresh proposals to the British government on the Inner-Outer Tibet boundary. Five years later, on May 30, 1919, the Chinese again made fresh proposals suggesting modifications to the Simla Convention. Both these proposals related to boundaries between Inner and Outer Tibet and Inner Tibet and China. The legitimacy of the McMahon Line was not questioned on either occasion. The Chinese Foreign Office issued the China Year Book 1921-22 in which it published the Chinese official version of the negotiations over Tibet. It made no mention of the McMahon Line or of any dispute over it¹¹.

The Chinese Agenda

The Chinese actions initiated in quick succession after its occupation of Tibet in 1950, gives an idea of its larger aims and long term objectives. Consolidation of its hold on Tibet, expansion of its territory to exploit the natural resources in the area, develop a communications network to access communications and transit centres, facilitate trade and speedy movement of its imports, including oil, give access to West Asia, and achieve speedy induction of its troops to contest its neighbours seem to be the motives. In the India–China border, as a part of the larger motive, the aim had been to acquire territory to link areas which are separated so as to have control over the areas dominating National Highway G 219, and protect the movements on its vital logistic infrastructure. It is in this context that Pakistan is demanding that India withdraw from Siachen, in all probability at China's insistence, as is evident from the fact that during the Siachen talks held in New Delhi between India and Pakistan on May 30 and 31, 2011, the Pakistani delegation had demanded that the Chinese be represented during the negotiations as the Shaksgam area is with them¹².

Tibet: The Appropriation: The First Stage

Greater Tibet consisted of the Central Plateau, Amdo (the Birthplace of Dalai Lama) and Kham. This was divided into Inner and Outer Tibet. Outer Tibet consisted of the Central Plateau and Eastern Kham now called the Tibet

Autonomous Region (TAR). Inner Tibet included the Tibetan-inhabited areas of Amdo and the rest of Kham. After Communist China's occupation of Tibet, it split the area, appropriated Outer Tibet as the Tibet Autonomous Region in 1965 and merged areas in Inner Tibet with the Chinese provinces adjacent to the TAR. Amdo was merged with Qinghai and Gansu provinces while the rest of Kham was included in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. Strangely, China and the rest of the world never questioned the merger of a large part of Greater Tibet with the provinces of China or the creation of the TAR.

Appropriation: The Second Stage

After annexing Xinjiang, the largest Chinese administrative division spanning over 1.6 million Km² with abundant oil and natural gas reserves (China's largest natural gas producing region) in 1949, it converted Xinjiang into an Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 01, 1955.

Immediately following the annexation of Xinjiang, China annexed Tibet in 1950 and as explained elsewhere in the article, Outer Tibet was incorporated into China as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965. Inner Tibet was merged with the regions of China.

Soon after annexing Tibet, commencing 1951, China started constructing the National Highway (China National Highway G 219) connecting Xinjiang and Tibet (2,086-km) and completed the project in 1957. This road had to pass through Aksai Chin. Accordingly, after the 1962 War, China laid claims on Aksai Chin (37,244 sq km). From Quilnaldi, this road branches off to the Khunjerab Pass and, subsequently, becomes the Karakoram Highway, right up to Gilgit. In pursuit of this project, China forced Pakistan to cede Shaksgam Valley, a part of India, in occupation by Pakistan (approximately 5,160 sq km) in 1963. The development of this road beyond Shaksgam Valley was aimed at gaining access to Gwadar port which demanded the utilisation of Gilgit–Baltistan. According to the Western media, this area has been leased to China for a period of 50 years by Pakistan.^{13 14} Several Chinese workers are working in this area.

Without losing any time, Tibet was also linked with the other Chinese provinces bordering it - Qinghai (China National Highway G 109), Sichuan (China National Highway G 318) and Yunnan (China National Highway G 214). China has also linked Lhasa with the main land by rail. The Qinghai Tibet Railway (QTR) was inaugurated by Chinese President Hu Jintao on July 01, 2006

In pursuit of its ambition to access Gwadar port, China forced the Pakistan Government to terminate the 40-year contract it had signed with the Port Authority of Singapore, in February 2007.¹⁵ On February 18, 2013, Pakistan formally awarded a multi-billion dollars contract for construction and operation of Gwadar port to China. Pakistan is now in the process of granting special status to Gwadar¹⁶ similar to Hong Kong. It is estimated that China has already spent US\$ 30 billion and is expected to invest US\$ 30 billion more. Such extravagance and speed indicate the intentions.

China intends to lay pipelines and a railway track. Pakistan has offered China a “trade and energy corridor” via Gwadar,¹⁷ linked to inland roads. The plan would see oil being imported from the Middle East, stored in refineries at Gwadar and sent to China via roads, pipelines or railway. It also provides China the strategic space to counter foreign naval presence in the region. On July 05, 2013, China and Pakistan signed a US\$ 18 billion deal to build a 200 km-long strategic tunnel.¹⁸ This will connect Pakistan’s Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea and Kashghar in Xinjiang in northwest China through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). The Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang has been quoted as saying China has strategic interest in Pakistan-China Economic Corridor. China has also constructed a smaller stretch of roads in the area over a period of time to facilitate troop movement.

Ladakh: The Differing Perceptions

At this stage, the geography of the Ladakh region needs amplification. Immediately to the northwest of Siachen, a part of India, lies the Shaksgam Valley, a segment of POK (Gilgit-Baltistan). Adjoining this valley, to its southeast, lies the Ladakh region (Depsang Valley, Chumar, etc.) South East of this area is the Aksai Chin, presently in occupation

by China. Through its expansionist methods and Pakistan’s cooperation, areas right from Aksai Chin to Shaksgam Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan and the areas northwest of it, right up to the Wakhan Corridor, and Gwadar in the southwest is already under Chinese control in one form or the other. The only missing link is the Ladakh region. All the border incursions and the perceptual differences occur in this region specifically. The logic is simple. China wants to link Aksai Chin with Shaksgam Valley by annexing the Ladakh region sandwiched between them so as to ensure secure passage of its imports being transported from Gwadar. There are no perceptual differences.

Conclusion

The rapidity and sequence of events to annex territory to keep pace with the infrastructural development gives a clear indication of Chinese intentions. It is time India forces China to spell out the limits of its claim line. The frequent intrusions which one witnesses on the land as well as in the air are meant to keep its territorial claims alive and ultimately force India to give up on its territory to meet the larger Chinese game plan. The Chinese incursions in the Ladakh sector are being brushed under the carpet by India, labelling them “the effect of differing perceptions”. The Chinese have not voiced any such belief but have always maintained that they are within their boundaries thereby implying that the areas under question belong to them. For example, questioned on the Daulat Beg Oldie standoff, the Chinese spokesperson maintained, “The Chinese side has confined activities to within the Chinese border and never trespassed across the line.¹⁹” The Chinese have, thus, prevented India from patrolling or even monitoring areas that India considers its territory. *Ipso – facto* the territories in question, except in the case of Arunachal Pradesh, are out of our control. Chinese intentions in Arunachal Pradesh are not yet discernable. Perhaps developments in that region are not their priority at the moment.

It is not in India’s interest to have Chinese military facing us all along our border right from Gilgit – Baltistan in the North to Tibet in the East increasing our military commitment many fold with huge financial implications.

... A Hoax?

Notes

1. Wang and Nyima (1997), p.20, Sperling (2004), p.21.
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3. Supplementary Agreement Regarding Mutual Withdrawal of Troops and Cessation of Hostilities between Chinese and Tibetans (1918) [409] dated October 10, 1918, available at <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties19.html>. Accessed on August 04, 2014.
4. Proclamation issued by His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIII available at <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/tibet/tibet1.html>. Accessed on August 3, 2014.
5. Wikipedia, 'Incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China', available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incorporation_of_Tibet_into_the_People%27s_Republic_of_China. Accessed on August 06, 2014.
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8. L/P&S/10/344.[File No.P.464/1913, Pt. 5] Proceedings of the 7th Meeting/Annexure 3. Chen to McMahon, April 26, 1914.
9. L/P&S/10/718.[File No. P.3260/1917 Pt.6] John Jordan to British Foreign Office No. 250 dated June 30, 1914 contains memo from Wai Chiao Pu [Chinese Foreign Office] dated 29 June 1914 containing paragraph cited.
10. Legal Materials on Tibet Treaties and Conventions Relating to Tibet Convention Between Great Britain, China, and Tibet, Simla (1914) [400], convention between Great Britain, China and Tibet, Simla 1914, Attached to the Anglo-Tibetan Declaration of July 03, 1914 available at <http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties16.html>. Accessed on August 04, 2014.
11. n. 6.
12. RN Das, "India China Relations – A New Paradigm", IDSA, Monograph series No 19 May 2013, available at <http://www.idsa.in/system/files/Monograph19.pdf>, P – 74. Accessed on May 18, 2013.
13. "China's Interest in Gilgit Baltistan", *New Europe*, July 19, 2013, available at <http://www.neurope.eu/article/china%E2%80%99s-interest-gilgit-baltistan>. Accessed on August 08, 2014.
14. IDSA, *Resources*, Rajya Sabha Question No 44, "Handing over of Gilgit Baltistan Areas to China," available at <http://www.idsa.in/resources/parliament/HandingoverofGilgitBaltistanareastoChina>. Accessed on August 07, 2014.
15. Arun Kumar Singh, "Dragon at Gwadar", Pakistan Defence, February 15, 2013 available at <http://defence.pk/threads/dragon-at-gwadar.235318/>. Accessed on August 06, 2014.
16. "Nawaz says Gwadar Can be Given Status Like Hong Kong", *The News*, August 23, 2013, available at <http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-114976-Nawaz-says-Gwadar-can-be-given-status-like-Hong-Kong>. Accessed on July 04, 2014.
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