

# Sino Indian war of 1962

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**Source:** *The Hindu*

**Manifest pedagogy:** The Sino Indian war of 1962 is a very important event in post independent Indian history. It led to a broader realignment in the international outlook of India and tethered it's foreign policy to realism. What are the events which led to this war, its consequences and the international response to the war are important dimensions which can be explored by UPSC. In the light of the recent standoff at the LAC an historical background of the issue needs to be understood well.

**Placing it in syllabus:** India China relations

## **Dimensions:**

- Historical border issues
- 1959 Tiberian uprising
- Asylum to Dalai Lama
- Forward policy of India
- International response during the conflict

## **Content:**

**Historical border issues:** Following India's Independence, China felt the British had left behind a disputed legacy on the boundary between the two newly formed republics. The **3,488-km length border between India and China** is not clearly demarcated throughout and there is **no mutually agreed Line of Actual Control(LAC)**.



The India-China border is divided into three sectors, viz. Western, Middle and Eastern.

**Western Sector** – dispute pertains to the **Johnson Line** proposed by the British in the 1860s that extended up to the Kunlun Mountains and put **Aksai Chin** in the then princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (or the Chinese province of Xinjiang). Independent India used the Johnson Line and claimed Aksai Chin as its own. However, China stated that it had never acceded to the Johnson Line.

**Middle Sector** – the dispute is a minor one and is the only one where India and China have exchanged maps on which they broadly agree.

**Eastern Sector** – dispute is over the **MacMahon Line**, (formerly referred to as the North East Frontier Agency, and now called Arunachal Pradesh) which was part of the **1914 Simla Convention** between British India and Tibet, an agreement rejected by China. Till the 1960s, China controlled Aksai Chin in the West while India controlled the boundary up to the McMahon Line in the East.

In 1960, based on an agreement between Nehru and Zhou Enlai, Chinese minister, discussions held by Indian and Chinese officials in order to settle the boundary dispute failed. The 1962 Sino-Indian War was fought in both of these areas.

### **1959 Tibetan uprising:**

- China's occupation of Tibet began in October 1950, when troops from its **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** invaded the country.
- The Tibetan government gave into Chinese pressure and **signed a treaty** that ensured the power of His Holiness the **Dalai Lama, the country's spiritual leader**, over Tibet's domestic affairs.
- As a resistance to the Chinese occupation, there was a revolt in several areas of eastern Tibet in 1956.
- By December 1958, rebellion was simmering in Lhasa, the capital, and the PLA command threatened to bomb the city

if order was not maintained.

- The **March 1959** uprising in Lhasa was triggered by fears of a plot to kidnap the Dalai Lama and take him to Beijing.
- Chinese military officers invited Lama to visit the PLA headquarters for a theatrical performance and official tea, but with no Tibetan military bodyguards or personnel.
- On March 10, 300,000 loyal Tibetans surrounded **Norbulinka Palace**, preventing the Dalai Lama from accepting the PLA's invitation.
- By March 17, Chinese artillery was aimed at the palace and the Dalai Lama was evacuated to neighboring India.
- Fighting broke out in Lhasa two days later, with Tibetan rebels outnumbered and outgunned.
- In the aftermath, the PLA cracked down on Tibetan resistance, executing the Dalai Lama's guards and destroying Lhasa's major monasteries along with thousands of their inhabitants.

### **Asylum to Dalai Lama:**

- **Tensin Gyatso** was designated the **14th Dalai Lama** in 1940, a position that eventually made him the religious and political leader of Tibet.
- In **1951, Tibetan-Chinese agreement** was signed in which the nation became a **"national autonomous region"** of China, under the traditional rule of the Dalai Lama but actually under the **control of a Chinese communist commission.**
- The highly religious people of Tibet, suffered under communist China's anti-religious legislation.
- After years of scattered protests, a full-scale revolt broke out in **March 1959**, and the **Dalai Lama was forced to flee as the uprising was crushed by Chinese troops.**
- On March 31, 1959, the Dalai Lama fought his way through the snow to reach Chutangmu, a tiny Assam Rifles outpost

near Tawang, to request asylum in India.

- Forewarned, Indian authorities immediately gave him protection.
- A few weeks later, Indian then PM Nehru welcomed him in Mussoorie and formally offered him asylum.
- He **began a permanent exile in India, settling at Dharamsala** where he established a democratically based shadow Tibetan government.
- With the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in China, the **Chinese suppression of Tibetan Buddhism escalated**, and practice of the religion was banned and thousands of monasteries were destroyed.
- Tens of thousands of Tibetans followed their leader to India.
- Although the ban was lifted in 1976, protests in Tibet continued and the exiled Dalai Lama won widespread international support for the Tibetan independence movement.

### **Forward policy of India:**

- At the beginning of 1961, Nehru appointed **General B.M. Kaul** who was influential in all army decisions.
- Kaul reorganized the general staff and removed the officers who had resisted the idea of **patrolling in disputed areas**.
- In the summer of 1961, China began patrolling along the McMahon Line and entered parts of Indian-administered regions.
- **After May 1961 Chinese troops occupied Dehra Compass** and established a post on the Chip Chap River.
- The Chinese, however, did not believe they were intruding upon Indian territory.
- In response, the **Indians launched a policy of creating outposts behind the Chinese troops so as to cut off their supplies and force their return to China**.
- This has been referred to as the **“Forward Policy”**.

- There were eventually 60 such outposts, including 43 north of the McMahon Line.
- Indian posts and Chinese posts were separated by a narrow stretch of land.
- China had been steadily spreading into those lands and India reacted with the Forward Policy to demonstrate that those lands were not unoccupied.
- The initial reaction of the Chinese forces was to withdraw when Indian outposts advanced towards them which encouraged the Indian forces to accelerate their Forward Policy even further.
- In response to Indian outposts encircling Chinese positions, Chinese forces would build more outposts to counter-encircle these Indian positions, which resulted in **chessboard-like deployment of Chinese and Indian forces**.
- However, no hostile fire occurred from either side as troops from both sides were under orders to fire only in defense.

### **International response during the conflict:**

- Western nations at the time viewed China as an aggressor and the war was part of a monolithic communist objective to dictate the world.
- The **United States was unequivocal in its recognition of the Indian boundary claims in the eastern sector**, while not supporting the claims of either side in the western sector.
- During the conflict, **Nehru wrote two letters to the U.S. President John F. Kennedy**, asking for 12 squadrons of fighter jets and a modern radar system.
- He had also asked that these aircraft be manned by American pilots until Indian airmen were trained to replace them.
- **These requests were rejected** by the Kennedy Administration.

- The **U.S. provided non-combat assistance** to Indian forces and planned to send the carrier USS Kitty Hawk to the Bay of Bengal to support India in case of an air war.
- As the Sino-Soviet split heated up, **Moscow made a major effort to support India, especially with the sale of advanced Mig warplanes.**
- India and the USSR reached an agreement in August 1962 (before the Cuban Missile Crisis) for the immediate purchase of twelve MiG-21s as well as for Soviet technical assistance in the manufacture of these aircraft in India.
- **Britain agreed with the Indian position** completely.
- The **non-aligned nations remained uninvolved**, and only the **United Arab Republic openly supported India.**
- Of the non-aligned nations, six, Egypt, Burma, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Ghana and Indonesia didn't unequivocally condemn China which deeply disappointed India.
- Pakistan, which had had a turbulent relationship with India ever since the Indian partition, improved its relations with China after the war.

**Moud your thought:** What is the **Forward Policy** of India? Explain the historical border issues between India and China.