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DATE: SEP 2001

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B. Smith
Burdy
India

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

24 September 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Sino-Indian Border

1. The strength of Chinese Communist military forces in the Sino-Indian border area is apparently unchanged since the fighting in the fall of 1962, though road improvement and stockpiling probably have improved their offensive capabilities. While our knowledge of the disposition of Chinese forces within this area is limited, they remain capable of launching strong attacks at various sectors of the frontier with little or no warning.

2. We still believe, as we stated in SNLE 13-4-63, "Possibilities of Greater Militancy by the Chinese Communists," dated 31 July 1963, that for some time to come Peiping is unlikely to undertake major military operations against India, though it might carry out small-scale border probes. Last year's attacks were to a considerable extent a reaction to India's efforts to push its units forward into disputed territory during the summer

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of 1962, and no such Indian activity has occurred this summer. Moreover, the Chinese will probably be deterred by the change in international alignments affecting India. They now know that if India were attacked, it would receive US-UK material support, and at least political support from the USSR.

3. Nevertheless, the approaching anniversary of last year's attacks, together with arrival of favorable weather for offensive operations along the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian frontier, will increase Indian concern about renewed fighting. If the Chinese should decide to make new attacks, they would be able to occupy a substantial amount of Indian territory. Indian defenses in the Ladakh area have been improved, but Indian forces there probably could at best make Chinese advances slow and costly. Indian defenses have also been strengthened in the Sikkim-West Bengal area, and now consist of three divisions. In the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA), however, the Chinese could advance even more rapidly than they did in 1962, for the area has been left almost completely undefended.

4. The shock of seeing their army humiliated and their country open to invasion until the Chinese announced their cease-fire and withdrawal caused Indian leaders to adopt a basic shift

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in their defense strategy for NEFA. Whereas in 1962 India was attempting to occupy every part of Indian-claimed territory it could garrison, present military plans call for moving into NEFA only gradually and only into positions that can clearly be defended. New Delhi has given the three divisions -- plus independent smaller units -- it has south of NEFA the primary mission of defending Assam. (In addition, India has an armored division and a parachute brigade as a mobile reserve; these could be moved to the area within a week.) India's present strategy takes account of the sharp increase in logistical problems the Chinese would experience as their forces penetrated more deeply into Indian territory. This strategy, combined with Indian willingness to use air power against the Chinese in the event of a major attack, make it likely that in any new conflict Indian forces would be less likely to be overrun.

5. However, if Chinese forces should reoccupy only a part of NEFA, New Delhi would be in a difficult and embarrassing position. If India failed to secure the withdrawal of Chinese forces by other means, New Delhi would be under heavy political pressure to expel the Chinese despite poor prospects of success.

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SHERMAN KENT
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