

China to India, 16-09-1965

In early August 1965 Pakistani irregular forces crossed the border with Kashmir and launched an insurrection against Indian authorities. In response, Indian military forces occupied the areas from which the irregular forces had entered Kashmir on the side controlled by Pakistan on 25 August. Pakistan countered by invading Southern Kashmir on 1 September upon which India invaded Pakistan on 6 September. Both countries continued fighting despite international pressure – including a UNSC resolution – to conclude a cease fire.¹ Three years earlier China and India had fought the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. The demarcation of the border continued to put a significant strain on Sino-Indian relations.² Now, in 1965, the Chinese government sided with Pakistan. Chinese Foreign Minister Ch'en Yi visited with Pakistan leader Bhutto where he openly condemned India's 'provocative acts of violating the cease-fire line and kindling and aggravating the conflict' declaring Chinese backing for 'Pakistan's just action in striking back'.³ On 9 September, the Chinese government presented a note to India in which it asserted that Indian forces stationed along the Sino-Indian border in the Assam and Tibet region had intruded on Chinese territory on multiple occasions. This, the note contended, could not be 'regarded as isolated cases' since these were 'by no means accidental, occurring as they did when the Indian Government was carrying out armed aggression against Pakistan.'⁴ The Chinese government demanded that India break up all 'aggressive military structures built on or beyond the China-Sikkim border, withdraw its aggressive forces' and cease its 'frenzied provocative activities' or else 'bear the responsibility for all the consequences'.⁵ Expressions of support for the note featured widely in Chinese state media.⁶ Meanwhile UN led cease fire overtures led nowhere. The Soviet Union drew attention towards the escalatory nature of the situation explicitly warning China that 'no government has any right to add fuel to the flames'.⁷ The United States had issued an arms embargo to both Pakistan and India at the outset of the conflict. On September 13 India's government responded to the Chinese demands. In the note it attempted to delink 'the Kashmir question' from 'the Sino-Indian border question'.⁸ Although it declared that it did not have any military structures on the border in question, and it refused to comply with the Chinese demands, it proposed to appoint an inspector to examine the claims. On September 17, at 01:00 a.m., a senior Chinese foreign official handed the Indian representative in Beijing an ultimatum from the Chinese government. The ultimatum declared India's proposal 'pretentious' and asserted that India had built 56 military forts 'all over the important passes' on the border, trespassing on Chinese territory, kidnapping Chinese citizens and stealing livestock. The note went on to state that

The Chinese Government demands that the Indian Government dismantle all its military works for aggression on the Chinese side of the China-Sikkim boundary or on the boundary itself within three days of the delivery of the present Note, immediately stop all intrusions along the China-Indian boundary and the China-Sikkim boundary, return the kidnapped

¹ *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, vol. 11 (London: Keesing's Worldwide, LLC - All Rights Reserved, 2006), 21103. Brecher and Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis*, 170–71. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia: Relations among China, India, Pakistan, and the U.S.S.R.* (Konark Publishers, 1988), 196–200, 207.

² For concrete events, see *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21117. For general background see Xuecheng Liu, *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute and Sino-Indian Relations* (University Press of America, 1994), esp. chapter 2. Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia*, 157–75. Willem Frederik Eekelen, *Indian Foreign Policy and the Border Dispute with China* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), Chapter VI.

³ Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia*, 206.

⁴ Gupta, 208.

⁵ Gupta, 208–9; *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21117. Samina Yasmeen, *Chinese Policy Towards Pakistan, 1969-1979* (University of Tasmania, 1985), 68.

⁶ Yasmeen, *Chinese Policy Towards Pakistan, 1969-1979*, 64–67.

⁷ Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia*, 209–12.

⁸ Gupta, 212.

Chinese border inhabitants and the seized livestock, and promise to refrain from any more harassing raids across the boundary. Otherwise the Indian Government must bear full responsibility for all the grave consequences arising therefrom.⁹

When the Indian representative asked whether this constituted an ultimatum, the Chinese official replied 'yes'.¹⁰ The following day Chinese forces threatened to move in on Indian positions. Chinese forces deployed on the border were estimated to range between 100,000-300,000 compared to a total of 112,000-126,000 Indian forces.¹¹ Indian representatives urged the governments of Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States to issue an official warning to China not to attack India, which none of them heeded. The Soviet Union, however, openly stated that it would continue to supply India with arms.¹² The Indian government swiftly responded to the ultimatum calling the Chinese accusations 'completely groundless'.¹³ It claimed that the Tibetans who had sought asylum in Sikkim had not been kidnapped. A limited number of military structures had been constructed but they had been unused since the cease fire following the 1962 border war. India's government proposed a joint inspection of the military installations indicating India's willingness to dismantle them should they detect one. It also asserted that the responsibility for the consequences of Chinese aggression would 'lie squarely on the shoulders of the Chinese government.'¹⁴ The Chinese government in reply decided to extend the deadline with another three days expiring on midnight on 22 September repeating its demand that the Indian government dismantle its 'military works for aggression', return four Chinese citizens, 800 sheep and 59 yaks.¹⁵ With fear of further conflict escalation rife, the UNSC now passed a Resolution on 20 September calling on both parties to abide by a cease fire by 22 September. The resolution also included a promise from the UNSC that following the cease fire it would reconvene and reflect on ways 'to resolve the political causes underlying the conflict'.¹⁶ The Chinese government sent another note on 20 September to the Indian government claiming that Indian forces had encroached on Chinese territory and fired on Chinese citizens. The Indian government countered the following day that, on the contrary, Chinese forces had entered Indian territory and shot on police officers. There had also been other shootings, according to Indian sources, none of which had led to any casualties. Then on 21 September the Chinese government seemed to retract its ultimatum. It was announced on Peking Radio that between 16-20 September Indian forces had withdrawn after 'surreptitiously and hurriedly' tearing down the military installations or alternatively after they had 'fled without destroying the evidence', which was not confirmed by India who did not stray from its assertion that Chinese claims lacked any grounds in reality.¹⁷ Pakistan and India both assented with the UNSC Resolution calling for a cease fire on 22 September and accepted the mediation of the Soviet Union on 23 September.¹⁸ More notes followed in the next two weeks featuring similar accusations from one side to another and remonstrations to cease alleged intrusions, but with the ultimatum retracted, the crisis between

⁹ Victor Zorza, 'Peking's 3-Day Ultimatum to New Delhi: Withdraw from Border or Face "Grave Consequences"', *The Guardian*, 17 September 1965. Yasmeen, *Chinese Policy Towards Pakistan, 1969-1979*, 69; Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia*, 213. *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21118. Yasmeen speaks of 'all the consequences'.

¹⁰ Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia*, 213.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 215; Yasmeen, *Chinese Policy Towards Pakistan, 1969-1979*, 69.

¹² *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21118.

¹³ *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21117.

¹⁴ *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21117; Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia*, 215.

¹⁵ *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21118.

¹⁶ Yasmeen, *Chinese Policy Towards Pakistan, 1969-1979*, 69.

¹⁷ *Keesing's Record of World Events India, Pakistan, Pakistani, December, 1965*, 11:21119. I was not able to find any support in the English speaking literature (referenced in the preceding and following footnote(s)) that India had done so.

¹⁸ Yasmeen, *Chinese Policy Towards Pakistan, 1969-1979*, 70; Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia*, 223. A. Mark Weisburd, *Use of Force: The Practice of States Since World War II* (Penn State Press, 2010), 133.

India and China had reached its zenith and was now slowly coming to an end. Both Kashmir and the border dispute, however, would continue to weigh down on the prospects for regional peace.