

SINO-INDIAN BORDER DISPUTE AT AKSAI CHIN

A MIDDLE PATH FOR RESOLUTION

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“I look forward to the day when a free India and a free China will co-operate together in friendship and brotherhood for their own good and for the good of Asia and the World.”

Mahatma Gandhi to Chiang Kai Shek ¹

Issues of Contention

1. India: China illegally occupying:-

North East Ladakh:	sq km	38,000
Central Sector:	sq km	2100
(Kaurik, Shipkila, Pulam, Sumdo, Jadhong, Barahoti)		
Ceded by Pak to China:	sq km	5180
Total		45,280

2. China India ‘illegally’ occupying in Arunachal Pradesh: sq km 90,000 ²

3. Tibet: India had in the past underlined China’s ‘suzerainty’ (as opposed to sovereignty) over Tibet. During June 2003 visit of Prime Minister Vajpayee’s India recognized ‘Tibet Autonomous Region’ as part of territory of Republic of China. It was done to accelerate the process of border settlement and resolve Sikkim issue.

Progress in the Border Talks

The setting up of Joint Working Groups in 1988 as a result of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s visit was the first serious step to negotiate the border issue. Earlier both sides seem to be happy in expanding relationship without focusing on difficult boundary dispute. The JWG was to determine the ‘Line of Actual Control’ (LAC) in western and central sectors. In eastern sector the troops are deployed generally on either side of Mc Mahon line .It was an important beginning as both sides did not have a mutually acceptable understanding where their troops hold ground on the border. JWG had exchanged maps of middle sector during 2000-03 and had come to understanding of LAC of this sector. Subsequently the negotiations on western sector had become very difficult.

During Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit in 2003 the boundary talks were elevated from bureaucratic to political level, to new negotiators, the Indian National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra and Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Dai Bingguo. It was also for the first time that India signaled readiness to settle the dispute at pragmatic level, departing from traditional line of Kuen Lun range in Ladakh

In April 2005 the new frame work for engagement which provided impetus was the Agreement on "Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of India-China Boundary Question" between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Chinese premier Wen Jiabao during latter's visit. 'It seemed to cover the major concerns of both sides. "The agreement on the principles was the first stage in the process, to be followed by an understanding on the nature of the mutual territorial concessions in the second stage, and a final stage when the actual delineation of the new border line on the map and the demarcation of the boundary on the ground would take place."³

On 14 March 2006 after seventh round of talks, Indian National Security Advisor M K Narayana had declared that a 'package deal covering all sectors is being negotiated.' While the true position is not known of progress in the border negotiations it is understood the package deal would mean swapping over Chinese claim of Arunachal with India legalizing Line of Actual Control held by Chinese in Aksai Chin. It is understood it did not made much headway as China is insisting on further concessions on Tawang tract. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had taken up the issue with visiting Chinese President Hu Jintao in Nov 2006 that India can not make any concessions in Tawang but would look at making territorial exchange elsewhere in Arunachal Pradesh. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao advocated "sincerity and patience" in resolving the border issue ahead of 11th round of talks in Beijing in September 2007. Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee announced during his China visit on 25 Oct 07 that they have decided to set up a working group to prepare the frame work and would wait for its report while the Prime Minister's visit to Beijing is due before the end of the year.

From foregoing it seems despite repeated hope for an 'early resolution' by both sides there is little to show for progress on the ground. While the negotiations would continue, both nations have made reasonably good progress in economic and cultural fields. The Asian Tigers have also been co-operating in international forums at UN and others.

There is a feeling in India that China does not consider the border with same urgency. "When time is ripe"⁴ a phrase has been often used by Chinese for border disputes. It is employed to stimulate party and national confidence without arousing dangerous expectations in one generation. On the other hand India would like to resolve the issue early, "to release considerable military energies and finances."⁵ *"If the border is demarcated and ratified there would be no reason to violate it. There would be no reason to locate army to defend it. Militaries can live with settled borders even if they are*

undefensible. On the other hand defending a disputed border always demands the possession of defensible areas.”⁶

The Aim of the Paper

To suggest a balanced, pragmatic and equitable resolution of border dispute at Aksai Chin.

Aksai Chin

The desert uninhabited plains in north east Ladakh at the attitude from 15500 to 18000 feet are called differently like Aksai Chin, Middle Plain (John Lal), Kuenlun Plains or Intermediate plains. (Ughur word meaning: great white stone plains) These are enclosed by great Karakoram ranges in the west which taper as Changlung range or Changchenmo ridge in the south. Mighty Kunlun range is the northern limit. In the east bordering Tibet are Changthan plains across Lanakla pass. The plateau is divided into two unequal portions by a ridge called Laktsang or Lak Tsung Tibetan which runs from little north west of Lanak la towards Karakoram. The ridge can be identified in satellite photographs and consists of rocky pinnacles, ravines and has parallel hill ranges. Laktsang ridge is a watershed dividing the entire plateau into two regions, northern part drains into Qara Qash moving north to Chinese Xinjiang, southern part, between Laktsang and Chang Chenmo, drains into Shyok which later joins Indus in south and south west. We shall henceforth refer north region as Aksai Chin and the southern Aksai Chin as Lingithang plains. These are also called ‘Soda Plains’ being covered with ‘thin layers of impure salt which cracked as one walked.’

The existence of Laktsang ridge has been documented by several explorers in 19th and 20th century while the attempts were made to delimit the international boundary. A study of goggle satellite imageries, which is appended, makes the existence of the ridge quite apparent. However, *“in sharp contrast Independent India has maintained that Laktsang is not a regular or even identifiable range and to that extent the definition of the boundary mapped out in Oct 1998 dispatch which was to later form the basis of McDonald line restricted on a faulty or even wrong premis⁷* New Delhi maintains the Qaratagh and Kunlun ranges form a “continuous watershed” and also have geographical continuity from Karakoram pass to Kuenlun ranges. While there is no doubt Kuenlun is the major watershed in the region, the existence of Laktsang as a water parting of Karakash and Shyok rivers and their feeder rivulets is also true as shown in the imagery attached with this paper. The imagery also depicts the geographical continuity of Karakoram range towards south east with Chang Chenmo ridge and not with Kuen Lun range.

Aksai Chin Road

The most notable part of this paper is Chinese built road which passes through Aksai Chin connecting Kashgarh in Xinjiang to Rudok in western Tibet. The 933 km Kashgarh-Yarkand-Tielong-Sumxi-Rudok is gravel road in good condition. It skirts west of Amatgor salt lake before it enters Tibet well north of Lanak la pass.

The route was earlier in use by Chinese. Xinjiang based troops mobilised for Tibet had moved along this route in the year 1951-52. The terrain is mostly flat with hard surface and it would not be difficult to improve the caravan route for light vehicles. Earlier in 11th century when muslims had migrated to Khotan-Kashgarh, Buddhists moved to western Tibet using this axis. While Ladakh had regular trade routes through Changchenmo valley –Aksai Chin to Shahidullah, Western Tibet would also be accessing the silk route for Pashmina trade through this ancient caravan route to Khotan/Kashgarh. Thus it would be in order to surmise that Aksai Chin desert plains though disolated and unhabitated were in use by Kashmir traders, and by western Tibet and Xinjiang since ancient times.

In early fifties, China had undertaken massive projects for road construction to support the invasion of Tibet. One important project started in 1953 was to convert old caravan route in Aksai Chin from Xinjiang into a motorable road. The road was completed in September 1957. It is expedient to support western Tibet garrison from logistics bases in Xinjiang. The military base of western Tibet with HQ at Shih Chuan Ho is placed under the command of Xinjiang Military District. On 31 Aug 1959 Prime Minister Nehru had informed Rajya Sabha that when they came to know of the road “through a Chinese newspaper indicating rough alignment of the road”⁸, two reconnaissance parties were sent. One party was taken under custody by Chinese and the other had returned and “gave us some rough indication of this newly constructed road in the Aksai Chin area.”⁹ It is interesting to point out to a map in a College of Combat August 1984 study of Sino-Indian Border Dispute where points upto Qaratagh pass, Haji Langar (in the vicinity of Aksai Chin road in Aksai Chin) and Lanak La have been shown to which Indian patrols had been going up to 1958.¹⁰

A unpublished report by an American traveler on the road in late July 2007 states that they covered the distance of 933 km from Rudok to Khotan in 22 hours of driving in two days. There was plenty of army and civilian vehicular traffic (land cruisers) and also number of fun loving high speed foreigner bikers. It is a desolate place with no habitation, fields, animals except vehicles and truck stops for the night. “ The road is normalized. They see tourist traffic on a regular basis. Extensive paving is being done throughout the length of the road and in less than five years the entire road may be blacktopped. The portion over Kuen Lun is perilous, very steep and number of land slides to deal with and work is in progress to deal with it.”¹¹

Chang Chenmo Ridge

The region between Pangong Tso and Linghithang (southern Aksai Chin) is known for its pasture lands. The graziers from Phobrang, Man, Kaksek, Marak, Spangmik, Tankse, used to visit Kyam, Hot Spring and then cross Kongka pass upto the frontiers of

Lanak La pass. They also took their flocks to the area of Spanggur lake and both sides of Pare river.

1. **Ancient Trade Routes to Shahidullah.** The strategic significance of Chang Chenmo Ridge lies in providing artery for trade since ancient times through its land which is rich in grass and fuel. There were two historical trade routes which ended at Shahidullah which till end of 19th century was part of Kashmir kingdom as a frontier outpost.

- (a) Pamzal- along western limits of Chang Chenmo valley-Shamal Lungpa-Samsung Ling-Dehra Compa-Quila Jilga-Cung Tash-crossing Tag pass-Chibra valley-Malikshah to Shahidullah.
- (b) Pamzal-along eastern boundary of Chang Chenmo valley-Nischu-Linzi Tang-Lake Tsund-Thaldut-Khitai pass-Haji Langar and along Qara Kash valley to Shahidullah.

It was the responsibility of Maharaja of Kashmir to maintain the above routes. The traders were asked to submit their reports and one such report sent to Wazir in 1868 mentions that:-

*“ The nomads from Pongong (Phobrang) visit this place with their flocks of sheep and goats and camp at Pamzal. Fuel and grass are plentiful in this place.”*¹²

Ever since the establishment of the state of Jammu and Kashmir the areas up the frontiers were regularly administered. The check posts on the trade routes were marked on the maps from 1865 onwards. Till 1901 the state authorities included the territory in the wazarat of the Frontier Dist. It was later divided into the wazarat of Gilgit and Ladakh. The tehsils of Skardu, Kargil and Ladakh formed the wazarat of Ladakh and Aksai Chin and Chang Chenmo valley were parts of the ilaqa of Tankse in the Ladakh tehsil.

*Mangal Mehta, wazir of Ladakh during 1860-65, organized the revenue settlement of the whole area. In the regular revenue assessment reports the names of areas and villages and the amount of revenue collected from each of them, which is now claimed by China as having been under their administrative jurisdiction for centuries, were included. The report of 1908 mentioned 108 villages including Tankse, Demchok and Minsar and mentions Aksai Chin, Lingzi Tang where rights of pastures and salt collection were exercised, as parts of Tankse ilaqa. The preliminary report of Ladakh settlement outlined a revenue and political history of these areas. The boundary question found direct and indirect mention in these reports. The assessment report of Ladakh tehsil of 1909 stated, ' There have been no boundary disputes on the Lhasa frontiers and the existing boundary seems to be well understood by the subjects of both the state and the Lhasa Government'*¹³.

*In 1865, Mangal Mehta had prepared an original sketch map showing the routes and stages up to Shahidullah in the north and Minsar in the east in which Demchok was shown as the eastern boundary post.*¹⁴

The question of revenue in relation to Chang Chenmo valley was of no importance as the land was sparsely populated. The significance of northern Chang Chenmo valley up to Shahidullah was more for the trade routes. The Anglo-Indian and Kashmir government had constructed facilities like store houses and rest houses along the route.

Demchok

Indian and Chinese Government delimit the eastern boundary of Ladakh in Demchok area. The differences are in the status of border village of Demchok.

The treaty of Tingmosgang signed in 1683 between the King of Ladakh and Government of Tibet is noteworthy as the earliest historical record on the boundary. As per the treaty the Rudok and Guge (region of Western Tibet adjoining Ladakh) were given to Tibet with frontier at Lhari stream at Demchok.¹⁵ The treaty of 1846 at Lahore between Government of Lahore and Emperor of China after the defeat of Dogras led to appointment of a boundary commission to determine the eastern limits of the Kingdom. However, the commission did not specify the boundary “ since boundaries already existed, there was no need to establish new ones.” The boundary commission made it clear that, “There existed plenty of evidence of a boundary line observed by custom and tradition that is to say by traders who looked on it purely from the point of view of when and where taxes are to be paid.” One of the members , Van Agnew, had proceeded with survey and submitted a detailed memo on 13 May 1847 in which he reported that “Demchok as one of the termini.”¹⁶ The boundary crossed Indus at Demchok or little higher which means Demchok village will be in Ladakh. This was the last occasion when a boundary was laid.

Faquir Chand, a wazir of Ladakh toured these routes in 1904-05 and wrote:-

“ I visited Demchok on the boundary with Lhasa.....this place is situated just on the banks of river Indus. A nullah falls into the river from the south west. Across is the boundary of Lhasa, where there are eight to nine huts of Lhasa zamindars. On this side are only two zamindars. In between the mouth of nullah stands a big minarette of stone. On it is fixed a wood which looks like a flag. This is the boundary line.” Faquir Chand's report also mentions Minsar and stated that a sum of Rs 297/- was being collected annually from the village.¹⁷

Minsar village located across the frontier at Demchok was received as a gift by Ladakh authorities with rights to collect revenues.

Lanak La

Van Agnew continues to report “ The boundary continues along top of the ridge so as just to leave to Ladakh the little rivulet running by RAHNANG and leading upto the pass called the TSAKALA as also the CHUSHOOL rivulet running down the other side into the LAKE PANKUNG.”¹⁸ The pass called “Tsakla’ (probably Lanakla) is at its

(boundary's) eastern extremity His description beyond this pass makes it clear that Changchenmo valley is within Ladakh before it joins Karakoram range. Agnew's was the first description of the traditional boundary by a responsible officer of the Govt. of India. He makes it clear that the *water shed of Shyok and its tributaries such as Chip Chap were in the Kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir*. These valleys are in south of Lakhsang ridge in Changchenmo region.

Lanak la has been also been described as the accepted border between Ladakh and Tibet by several travelers. Notably amongst them are as follows:-

- a) Capt H H Godwin –Austen. He was working for topographical survey and sketched upper Changchenmo and northern border of the Pangong dist in eastern Ladakh in 1862-1863. He assumed the frontier at village Pal as the Zimskang of Rudok having pitched his tent opposite side of stream at Pal and requested him with a letter and gifts from the Governor not to cross the border¹⁹.
- b) Capt M S Wellby. He had left Leh for Tibet in May 1896, wanted to cross the border at Wapula La (18434 ft), a shorter route. However, Tibetan officials stopped him and guided him to east side of Lanak la (our frontier). Capt Wellby mentions the Lanak La as the then accepted border between Ladakh and Tibet²⁰
- c) A D Carey made the same point in his diary on August 21 1885, “gentle ascent to head of Lanoka pass. From top of this pass slight descent into valley with wood, water, and little grass. At 5th mile a grassy swamp crossed...Route now lies in independent Tibet.”²¹
- d) Next British officer to cross Lanakla was Capt Hamilton Bower. The party traveled towards Lanakla, crossing two small easy passes enroute. His diary July 3,1891 reads “crossed the frontier at Lanakla”²²
- e) Capt C G Rowling and Sven Hedin are two European travelers of 20th century who crossed over Lanakla and noted it as the frontier mark. June 11, 1902, “A four miles brought us to Lanakla 18,000 feet high. The ascent was easy. So the tents were pitched but few feet below the summit of the pass and about seven miles beyond the boundary pillar between Ladakh and Tibet.”²³
- f) William Moorcraft. A vet surgeon wrote two volumes titled, “ Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab” He has stated Changtan as a region of Ladakh.
- g) Sven Hedin. In 1906 he was not given permission to cross Lanak La by the Anglo-Indian government.
- h) Capt H H P Deasy. Of Survey of India observed recognition of customary boundary line by the people of Rudok when he tried to go there.

We have seen that there is sufficient evidence of customary frontier at Demchok (Exact demarcation could be determined) and Lanak la. There is no dispute on Karakoram pass as the boundary. The area between Karakoram pass and Lanak La, ie Aksai Chin, is the only region where the boundary has not remained delimited. There is also evidence that Aksai Chin was used by both Ladakhis and Tibetans for trade. There is no evidence available of Tibetan use of Lingzithang plains or Changchenmo ridge area for trade or for grazing. The Tibetans kept themselves on the other side of Lanak la

Johnson's Survey 1865

By middle of 19th century British and Indian governments were very keen to fix the northern boundary in view of Russian threat to advance towards Tibet and India.

One of the earliest detailed reports of Aksai Chin was written by W H Johnson a civil assistant of Trigonometrical Survey of India. In 1865 he was asked to explore the country of Khotan. He traveled extensively and described the places in detail. He fixed the boundary along Kuen Lun range, making the entire Qara Tash Valley as part of Kashmir territory. His survey was criticized by Colonel Walker, the Surveyor General in 1867. Later the minor errors were corrected and map was published known as Johnson's map. Director of Military Intelligence Sir John Ardagh, in 1897, supported the Johnson's map. Viceroy of India, Lord Elgin rejected Johnson-Ardagh proposal as the Chinese claimed Aksai Chin any attempt to implant this line would strain relations with China and would precipitate the Russian advance. By many authors Johnson has been regarded as highly controversial explorer. To quote Maj Gen D K Palit, former Director General of Military Operations, "There was much controversy about every aspect of Johnson's geographical and other claim right up to Kun Kun range and beyond."²⁴

The boundary line remained at Kuen Lun as surveyed by Johnson due to the fear of Russian forward move and need to define the British and Russian sphere of influence. Later British Commander in Chief called it as "militarily unsound." The Foreign Secretary W J Cunningham had noted that the" proposed Kuen Lun Line would be unwatched or cost of watching would be tremendous." Susequently the Kuen Lun line was dropped by White Hall. Therafter Harward, Forsvth, Ilias, Henvey, in 1878 to 1885, expressed the view limiting Kashmir to Chang Chenmo passes.

Elgin suggested Aksai Chin should be divided between Britain and China along Laktsang (or Log Zung or Lak Rsang) range. Though the Chinese claim is not supported by the actual exercise of administration, the line was proposed to satisfy China.

1899 Mc Donald Proposal: Laktsang Range Watershed as International Boundary

Towards the end of 19th century the thinking in Foreign Dept of Govt. of India was that there are two areas in Aksaichin. North Aksai Chin or Soda plains belong to China and Lingithang is ours.

In April 1898, Government of India had learned that Russians and Chinese are settling their mutual frontier in Turkistan. Finding it a suitable opportunity, Government

of India finally on 20 July 98 proposed to White hall depicting a line on the crest of Karakoram then moving to south easterly direction following Laktsang range until it meets eastern boundary of Ladakh little east of 80 longitude. It abandoned Johnson's eastern boundary along Kuenlun range. It is noteworthy that North East Aksaichin, through which Chinese later constructed the Road from Xinjiang to Tibet remained part of Tibet. The Southern Aksaichin, i.e. Lingzhitang plain, was included as part of Kashmir. Lord Salisbury of Whitehall on 14 March 1899 sent the same proposal, which was earlier received from Government of India, to Sir Claude Mac Donald, the British Minister at Peking. The note was addressed to Chinese Government. There was no response from Chinese Government apart from a verbal assurance that a reply would be sent after receiving views of Governor of Xinjiang. Chinese had some reservations about wording of Hunza's extra territorial rights but there is little doubt that the line suggested in Aksaichin along Laktsang range was tacitly accepted by them. In his dispatch of 03 Nov 03, Satow, British Minister at Beijing, wrote that Governor of New Dominion had reported in favour of the British proposal. "The British note of 14 Mar 1899 represents, so far as the available records show, the only formal proposal on a boundary between India and China in the Karakoram, that is to say from Wakham to Lanakla pass at the head of the Changchenmo basin, which the British ever made to the Chinese during the course of their rule in India." ²⁵

What is surprising is the absence of follow up to the line proposed in 1899 to Chinese though both Indian Govt. and British Governments were committed to it. Viceroy Curzon had recommended in Govt. of India dispatch of 24 Mar 04 that "in the absence of reply, they (Govt. of India) took it that the proposal had been accepted and they, for their part, would proceed to act as if it had."²⁶ The Secretary of State had directed on 01 Aug 07 that map of the border between China and Kashmir "should indicate the frontiers as following the line described in Note of 1899 to China."²⁷ The Aksai Chin was made part of Tibet and not of Xinjiang. The British Government held on to 1899 proposal. The maps accompanying the Shimla convention of 1914 showed Aksai Chin as part of Tibet.

It is interesting to note here that from 1917 to 1933 the "Postal Atlas of China" published by Government of China in Beijing had shown Kuen Lun as boundary. The boundary was decided at Laktsang range not because British felt Chinese had a claim on region north of it. It was done to make China strong in Kashgar-Yarkand to become an obstacle to Russian advance in this line.

However, the Chinese revolution in 1911 when it became weak made British to reevaluate northern frontier of Kashmir. The objective was same to keep Russia away. Ardagh/Johnson line again became the frontier. Times Atlas and Oxford Atlas included Aksai Chin as part of British territory.

In short Aksai Chin had become an expendable commodity, the main motive being to protect British empire in India from fear of Russian advance and boundary kept moving forward to Kuen Lun or retreated to Laktsang .

Chinese Claims

In boundary talks in 1960 Chinese officials had shown a map drawn by General Staff of Chinese Army drawn in 1918 showing whole of Aksai Chin as Chinese. The map was not published hence its authenticity is doubtful. Another document presented by them was a map of Bureau of Survey of Chinese Ministry of National Defence of 1943 which had shown Aksai Chin as part of China.

Assessment

Assessment so far is that Aksai Chin was used by both Ladakhis and Tibetans. However, the documentary evidence of Kashmir's jurisdiction over trade routes and as part of territory makes superiority of Indian claim over Chinese. There is no doubt of Lanak La and Demchok as the well accepted boundary by both sides which would by itself include Chang Chenmo and Linzgithang as part of India.

Some of the contemporary western writers like Nevelle Maxwell and Alastair Lamb are biased and proclaim whole of Aksai Chin as a no mans land which is not true.

Sino- Pakistan Agreement of 1963

At this stage we may have a brief glance at Sino Pakistan Agreement 1963 as an example of statesmanship by President Ayub Khan and Prime Minister Chou en Lai for resolution of border dispute by mutual accommodation and adjustment..

China had been claiming certain parts of Pakistan in 300 miles long undefined border between Xingjian and occupied Kashmir as they were doing with India. Up to 1959, Pakistan had been expressing concern that India would surrender Aksai Chin. During Chou-en-Lai's Indian visit in 1956 anticipating a possible Sino-Indian Border Agreement, Pakistan warned India not to surrender Kashmir territory in the Aksai Chin area of Ladakh. After 1959, however, the Pakistanis began their journey of rapprochement with Beijing. In the process, they abandoned not only Aksai Chin, which in any case lay well beyond their grasp, but also Jammu & Kashmir territories across Karakoram, like Raskam & Taghdumbash Pamir. In this frame of mind, they had come to a border agreement with China in March 1963. The agreement based on McDonald proposal of 1899 abandoned Hunza claims of approx 4000 sq km over Taghdumbush and Raskam. The agreement signed on 2nd March 1963 between Chou-en-Lai and Z. A. Bhutto, has formally delimited and demarcated the boundary between China's Xinjiang and contiguous areas "defence of which is under the actual control of Pakistan."²⁸ The Article I of the agreement recognizes that the boundary in this sector has never been delimited and explains that the agreement is based on "traditional customary boundary line including natural features." The treaty alignment follows the main Karakoram watershed. Shaksgam valley which Pakistan has given to China is on southern slopes of Aghil ranges. According to K Mason, who surveyed the Shaksgam valley in 1926, the Shaksgam (Oparang) river drains the plains(which seem like Lingzi Tang) between

Karakoram and Aghil ranges and proceeds northwest to join Yarkand river.”²⁹ The article VI makes the agreement provisional’ as after the settlement of Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India, the Sovereign Authority concerned will reopen negotiation with the Govt. of the people of China on the boundary and replace this agreement. As per ‘The Times’ 21 June 1965, about 3400 square km of border were overlapping on Pakistan and China’s maps. “The compromise border now agreed upon leaves about two thirds of it (2050 sq. miles) on China’s side, but while Pakistan has given up only claims on maps, China will be withdrawing their frontier forces and administration from about 750 sq. miles”³⁰ The agreement laid the foundation of Karakoram highway which was built jointly between Chinese and Pakistani engineers in 1970s.

“ The disputed nature of Kashmir’s northern boundaries with Xinjiang in the context of the greater intensity of Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistani confrontation served as an incentive for Pakistan to engage in the Kautalian realpolitik of forging a tacit alliance with China.”³¹

The treaty had laid the base for all weather friendship between the two countries giving immense benefits to both and had adverse affect on the geo strategic balance against India in south Asia.

Proposal

In border delimitation the watershed and important geographical features are important principles This was followed in McMahon line in Arunachal Pradesh, Sino-Burma boundary delimitation and Sino-Pakistan Agreement 1963. The boundary is well delimited up to Karakoram pass. We have seen sufficient historical evidence that traditional boundary existed up to Demchok and Lanakla. Laktsang is a good natural feature which connects Karakoram pass and Lanakla and divides Aksai Chin in two unequal portions. It is proposed :-

(a) India-China border in Aksai Chin should be delimited at Laktsang watershed. This would imply that Chinese would be withdrawing from Linzithang and Changchenmo ridge.south of Laktsang Ridge.

(b) The area so vacated by Chinese should be converted and recognized as “Aksai Chin Peace Park.” There should be no military deployment in this region.

An Examination of Laktsang Watershed Proposal with Political Parameters and Guiding Principles of April 2006

On 11 April 2006, India and China have put a new vigor to slow moving boundary talks by framing ‘Political Parameters and Guiding Principles’ for resolution of boundary dispute. The guidelines also stipulate that they should “arrive at a package settlement to the boundary question. The boundary settlement must be final covering all sections of India-China boundary”³² We shall examine above proposals with the basic provisions of the principles.

Article IV. “The two sides will give due consideration to each other’s strategic and reasonable interests and the principle of mutual and equal security.” The Laktsang

boundary keeps Xinjiang-Rudok road with adequate depth with China. Chinese have further consolidated and expanded road net work in this region by connecting Aksaichin Highway with Karakoram Highway (to Gilgit). They have also built road net work west of Aksaichin Road probably for their border posts. The Laktsang boundary keeps all this net work in China.

The delimitation of international border at Laktsang would also give additional security to India as under:-

- (a) Narrow Karakoram corridor would get elbow room towards east. This would considerably bolster security of north Ladakh.
- (b) China is occupying dominating heights on other side of Pangong Tso lake/ Spanggur area on Line of Actual Control thus putting Indian troops at a tactical disadvantage. Their withdrawal to Laktsang range or beyond and making the area vacated as a peace park would provide a peaceful buffer to both countries.

Article V “The two sides will take into account, inter-alia, historical evidence, national sentiments, practical difficulties and reasonable concerns and sensibilities of both sides and the actual state of the border areas.” This article is open to several interpretations. India is a defeated country in 1962 war. This deep psychological trauma still remains in the minds of the people. The package deal would amount to be under pressure and will give benefit of aggression. The agreement must be based on give and take and mutual accommodation. It would be unimaginable how much good will would be created in India if Chinese vacate their occupation as they had done in Shaksgam as per 1963 Sino-Pakistan border agreement. The Indian Parliament resolution of 14 November 1962 pledging to vacate the territory occupied by Chinese may not, then, generate so much hysteria against China. It is significant that even recent Government statements reiterate the official position that there is no proposal to cede Aksai Chin to China which means Indian public is yet to be prepared for any give and take. The boundary along Demchok- Lanak La -Laktsang - Karakoram pass is backed by history as in 1899 British Govt had proposed this boundary line to which Chinese did not respond. It could be revived again.

Article VI “The boundary should be along well defined and easily identifiable natural geographical features to be mutually agreed upon between the two sides.” The striking feature of the Aksai Chin is Laktsang Ridge which is extension of Karakoram watershed running from south east of Kizil Jilga towards Lanak La dividing the plateau into unequal half. The ridge can be easily identified from satellite imagery.

Article VII. “In reaching a boundary settlement the two sides shall safeguard the due interest of their settled populations in the border areas.” As there is no habitation in Aksai chin this clause is not applicable here.

Article VIII. “Within the agreed frame work of the boundary settlement, the delineation of the boundary will be carried out utilizing means such as modern

cartographic and survey practices and joint surveys.” This is dealing with the procedure of delimitation.

The proposal meets all parameters and guidelines for settlement of the dispute. It provides optimum advantages to emerging Asian powers in a win-win situation.

Conclusion

Agreement based on Lakhsang line offers a resolution based on equality, real give and take and mutual accommodation. It meets all the political parameters and guiding principles and has political appeal to the defeated psyche of Indian parliament and public.

India's apparent tilt towards US has set the ball rolling for realignments in South Asia. India should wait for changed geo-strategic balance emerge and not sign the agreement under “package deal” ie surrender of whole of Aksai Chin in hurry. Any agreement based on actual line of control in Aksai Chin would be short sighted and would remain as mark of defeat with China.

Let north Aksai Chin be a expandable once again but this time in our own national interest with honour and justice.

Notes: -

1. Bimla Prasad, ‘*Origin of Indian Foreign Policy*,’ p204.
- 2 Digvijay Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs in Lok Sabha, New Delhi 30 July 03
- 3 C Raja Mohan, ‘*Soft Borders and Cooperative Frontiers: India's Changing Territorial Diplomacy towards Pakistan and China*’ Strategic Digest, IDSA, New Delhi, Volume 31, January 2007, p 13.
- 4 Francis Weston, ‘*The Frontiers of China*’, London 1966, pp 212
- 5 Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee while addressing Army Commanders at New Delhi on 01 Nov 03 Hindu, 02 Nov 03.
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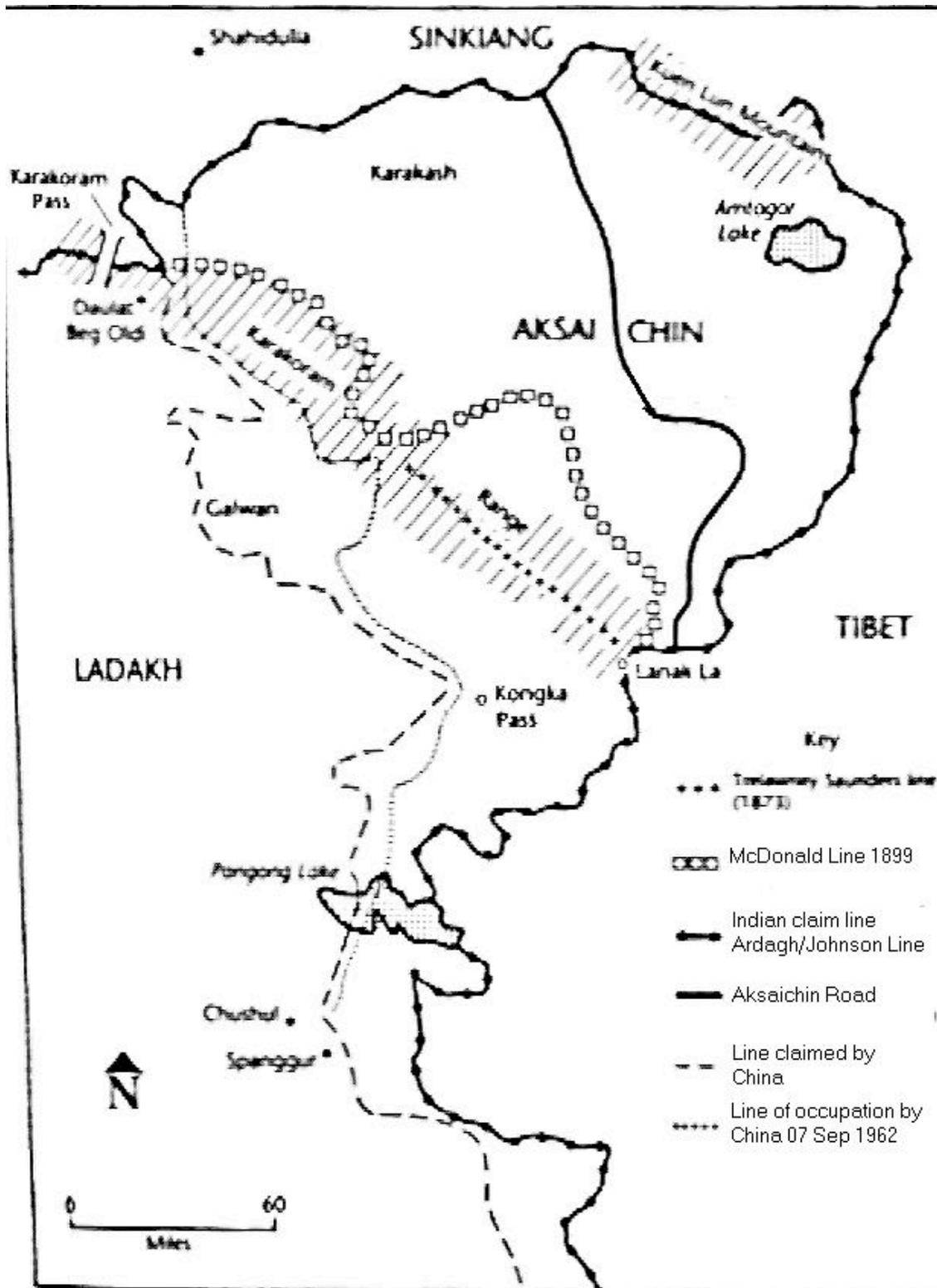
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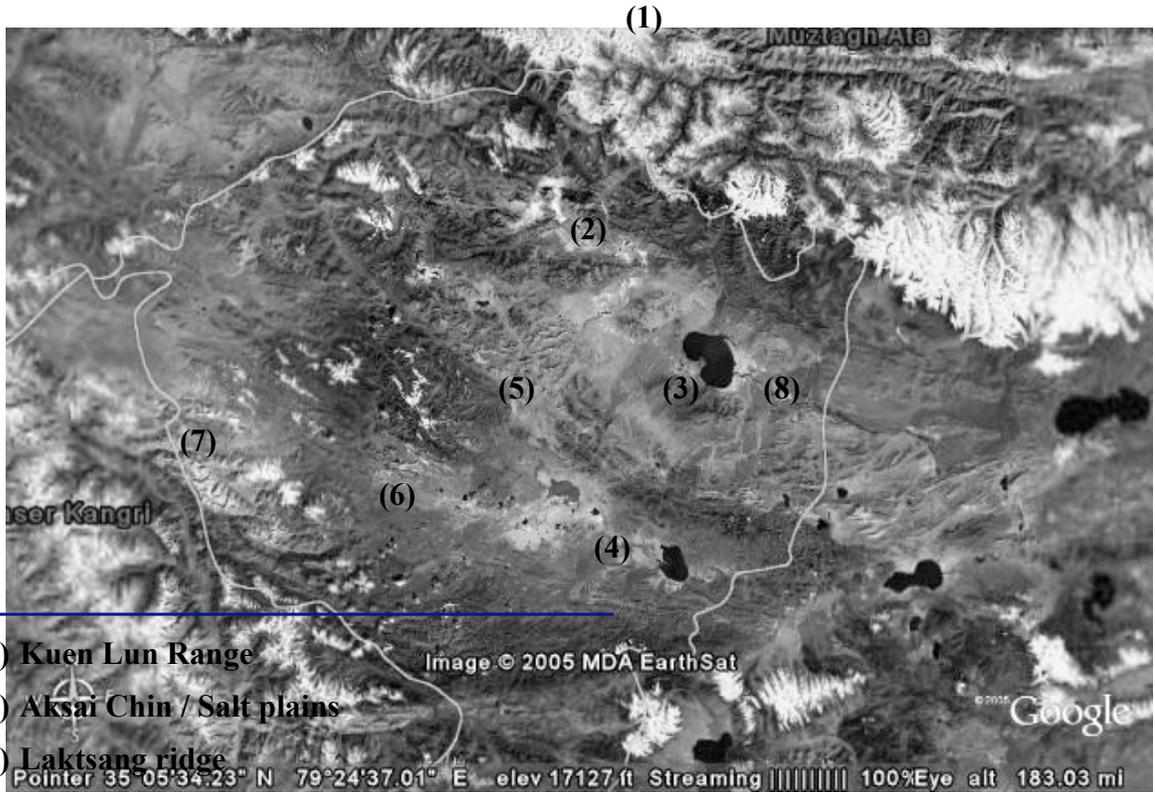
SIACHEN

LANAKLA



Map 2 BOUNDARY LINES IN AKSAI CHIN

Annex 3



(1) Kuen Lun Range

(2) Aksai Chin / Salt plains

(3) Lakhsang ridge

(4) Lanakla

(5) Linzithang plains

(6) Changchemo range

(7) Chinese claim line

(8) Indian claim line