

On Historical Forces Which Shaped India-China Peace and Tranquility Agreement

Sreejith Sasidharan

Independent Analyst

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ABSTRACT

Can third-party States and intelligence agencies influence bilateral negotiations between adversaries? Limited literature exists on the influence of external actors on peace and conflict between India and China in the 1980s. This paper examines four factors that influenced the signing of the 1993 India-China border agreement on maintaining peace and tranquillity: (a) domestic political uncertainties in India and China, (b) the collapse of the Soviet Union, (c) changes in the global balance of power, and (d) the beginning of Indo-US defense partnership and (d) in particular, the role of intelligence agencies of third-party States such as the CIA, KGB, and their interplay with boundary negotiations between India and China. The paper's principal finding is that third-party States can influence bilateral negotiations between adversaries through at least four different ways, viz. military-technology cooperation, selective intelligence sharing, disinformation, or by capitalizing on internal security dilemmas of either of the States. Beyond external actors, the paper highlights the choices made by political leaders and demonstrates the limitations of individuals as agents of history. Historical forces sometimes overtake even the most powerful agents of history, such as leaders in India and China, even when they have the political will to normalize bilateral ties.

Keywords

CIA, Tiananmen, KGB, Coup, Malabar, Border

STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

1. Abstract	1
2. Introduction	3
3. Domestic political environment	4
4. Indian Army, Tibet, and His Holiness	7
5. Andropov's Choice	10
6. KGB, CIA, and South Asia	12
7. Zhou Enlai's Protégé	15
8. Puppeteers of Tiananmen	17
9. Malabar and the United States	19
10. Conclusion	21
11. References	23

It can never be a peace

– M.K. Gandhi to a journalist, *Gandhi and Churchill*,
2010

There is no better way to make peace than to talk in each other's home.

–Yitzhak Shamir to Arab States, *Madrid conference*,
1991

Media is the enemy of peace.

– Asad Durrani to A.S. Dulat, *The Spy Chronicles*, 2018

Introduction

Thirty years ago, 'The Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas' was signed on 7 September 1993. The agreement was signed after eight rounds of diplomatic talks between December 1981 and November 1987 and stressed the idea to 'observe and respect' the Line of Actual Control (LAC) (Panda 2015). Although the Sumdorong Chu crisis in 1986-1987 threatened the diplomatic negotiations, it was Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988 which facilitated a breakthrough, leading to the setting up of a joint working group and eventually reaching a modus vivendi in September 1993 (Jacob 2007). Why did an understanding of maintaining peace on the border take 12 years? What circumstances finally led to it?

The conditions for the border agreement were created by a favorable internal political environment in India and China after a tumultuous decade of domestic politics. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, revolts in Tibet, a surge in the Indo-US defense partnership, and the Indian Army's role in enforcing deterrence during the Sumdorong Chu crisis in 1986-1987 played their own role in influencing events on the Himalayan border. Political leaders at the sunset of

the Cold War – Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and Li Peng in China – also influenced global politics between 1989 and 1991, indirectly creating conditions suitable for an agreement in 1993.

Domestic Political Environment

After the death of Mao on 9 September 1976, Hua Guofeng became Chairman of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in October 1976. In India, Morarji Desai came to power in March 1977. The rise of new leaders after Nehru and Mao and the restoration of diplomatic ties with the arrival of K.R. Narayanan as the Ambassador to China in July 1976 allowed the two sides to start conversations in a fresh context (Raghavan 2019). Thus, the Indian External Affairs Minister A.B. Vajpayee's visit to China in February 1979 was reciprocated by Vice Premier Huang Hua's visit to India in June 1981 (AP 1981). It laid the ground for eight rounds of talks at the senior diplomatic level on the boundary question between the two sides from December 1981 to November 1987 (Ganguly 1989).

However, diplomats on both sides tasked with negotiations on the boundary question met with an uncertain political environment. In July 1979, Prime Minister Charan Singh replaced Desai, taking an oath to occupy office, supported by the Congress (I). This proved to be another short-lived government, and by January 1980, Indira Gandhi was back again in power. Despite these frequent leadership changes in India, the Chinese kept the negotiations going. Chairman Hua Guofeng met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the neutral venue of Belgrade and released a joint statement on the need to avoid clashes on the border (Bhasin 2018).

In 1981, leadership changes happened in China. Hu Yaobang replaced Hua Guofeng as General Secretary at the 6th Plenum of the 11th Central Committee on 26 June 1981 (Sterba 1981). Thus, Vice Premier Huang Hua's visit to India on 26 June 1981 was a signal to Delhi regarding the Chinese intentions to continue the discussions on the boundary question because, on that day, Deng Xiaoping took over as Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Over the next three years, the diplomatic-level talks progressed slowly but steadily.

By September 1984, there was a brief moment when it seemed like the boundary question could be resolved. China showed interest in a proposal made by the then-Indian ambassador in Beijing, A.P. Venkateswaran (Saran 2017). The proposal suggested that China relinquish its claims in Arunachal Pradesh while also granting India an additional 3000 square km of land in

Ladakh, which was taken by China in November 1962. Shyam Saran was also involved in this negotiation with Chinese representatives in Beijing. He travelled to New Delhi with detailed maps to present the proposal in person to G. Parthasarathi, India's former ambassador to China. Parthasarathi had been working as an advisor on external affairs to Indira Gandhi since August 1984.

Gandhi wanted to consider the proposal after India's election in 1985, but her bodyguards tragically assassinated her in October 1984 before she could officially accept the proposal (Ustinov 1989). On the day of her assassination, Prime Minister's security advisor Rameshwar Nath Kao was in Beijing, in consultation with A.P. Venkateswaran, for backchannel talks with China. This meeting was intended to seek the possibility of a visit by Gandhi to China. Kao's trip to Beijing was made possible through the help of Yugoslav intelligence UDBA (Raman 2002). Chinese Vice-Premier Yao Yilin visited India for the funeral of Gandhi and remarked that relations be restored to the friendly 50s. However, in the next round of talks, in November 1985, the Chinese suddenly reversed their stand on the Venkateswaran proposal and sought additional concessions in Arunachal Pradesh.

This U-turn by China could have been due to multiple reasons. Did Deng think China could get a better bargain because of a younger, inexperienced Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in India in 1985? Perhaps. By November 1985, the Chinese leadership also knew that General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev was prepared to improve Sino-Soviet relations, thanks to his meeting with Li Peng in March 1985 (Garver 1989). The upward trajectory of the Sino-Soviet relationship in the mid-1980s likely led Deng to conclude that he could keep the Indian side waiting.

However, during this period, the most important development was the deepening of Sino-U.S. defense cooperation and technology transfer. This was set in motion by the visit of Chinese Defense Minister Zhang Aiping to the US on 11 June 1984 (Atkinson 1984). One week before Zhang's visit to the US, India had undertaken Operation Blue Star to remove Khalistanis and to take control of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by 7 June 1984. Operation Blue Star was a horrible mistake of Gandhi's judgment that alienated millions of innocent Sikhs, who were hitherto well integrated into Indian society. During his visit to the US, Zhang met the then-President Ronald Reagan, Vice President George HW Bush, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, and Secretary of State George P. Shultz, in addition to defense contractors including Boeing and General Dynamics, among others, in June 1984. After these meetings,

technology transfer and military cooperation between Beijing and Washington progressed quickly.

At the same time, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) also intensified cooperation with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the mid-1980s under Deputy Director of the Intelligence Bureau of the PLA Xiong Guangkai and Director Cao Xin. This cooperation began with the US setting up listening posts inside Chinese territory to gather information on the Soviet missile program (P. Taubman 1981). The then-Senator of Delaware, Joseph. R. Biden had requested Deng Xiaoping to set up these listening posts in April 1979 (Smith and Jeffrey 1989). After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the Chinese accepted the idea of cooperation. Interestingly, the listening posts were set up in January 1980 in the Qitai and Korla regions of Xinjiang, the Chinese province bordering Afghanistan. Beijing also supplied arms to the Afghan rebels at the behest of the US.

Apart from arms and intelligence cooperation, in May 1986, the US approved the sale of avionics worth USD 500 million to China. This was followed by a US Navy warships port call in Qingdao in a rare event after four decades in November 1986 (Southerl 1986). The port call was at the height of the India-China standoff at Sumdurong Chu. Simultaneously, China and the US were also involved in supplying arms to both sides in the Iran-Iraq war between 1981 and 1988 (Southerl 1988).

These overlapping interests and mutually beneficial cooperation in the 1980s worked well for the Beijing-Washington defense relationship. On the other hand, intensifying the Chinese military relationship with the US made India uneasy. Deng Xiaoping even sought to portray China as a helpful partner who could teach India a lesson, according to the message he conveyed during his meetings with Defence Secretary Weinberger and Secretary of State Shultz (Pardesi 2020). China's U-turn on the Venkateswaran proposal, hardening of stance on the border, and even the Sumdorong Chu crisis must therefore be seen in this context of the PLA's deepening ties with the CIA and Washington's military-industrial cooperation with Beijing.

In any case, the hardened Chinese position made the situation tricky for both parties to resolve the border conflict. From 1986 onwards, the internal debates and factionalism in the CPC intensified on the question of reforms, rendering any agreement with India an untenable proposition for the Chinese leaders. Only in February 1992 did the Central Committee publish

the speeches of Deng's inspiring Southern China tour as he emerged victorious on the question of reforms.

This consensus, arrived at by the leaders of the CPC, created a favorable atmosphere towards addressing the border situation with India. The extent of political uncertainties in India is captured by the fact that between 1979 to 1991, 7 Prime Ministers held office in 12 years. The CPC was also headed by four leaders in 8 years between 1981 and 1989. The end of political uncertainty and the rise of stable leadership with predictable durability in India, as well as China, provided a conducive environment for the border agreement in 1993.

Indian Army, Tibet, and His Holiness

Before the third round of border talks between Delhi and Beijing in February 1983, a group of dancers from Arunachal Pradesh performed at the closing ceremony of the Asian Games in December 1982, organized under the leadership of K. Shankaran Nair (Bobb and Raina 1982). Despite the threat of a terror attack by Khalistani militants, the Asian Games was a success. However, the Chinese objected to the performance by dancers from Arunachal Pradesh as a violation of their sovereignty. New Delhi protested to the Chinese Ambassador and suspended officials' visit to Beijing for the third round of talks scheduled for February 1983. However, the two sides eased their positions gradually and continued with the mechanism of negotiations.

In April 1983, a delegation of Indian Marxists led by E.M.S Namboodiripad met the Chairman of the CMC, Deng Xiaoping, General Secretary Hu Yaobang, and Qiao Shi. From April 1982, Qiao had been serving as the head of the Party's International Liaison Department (ILD), in charge of cultivating relations with foreign Communist parties, leading influence operations, and inter-Communist party intelligence. It was during Qiao's leadership that the then-Foreign Secretary R.D. Sathe authorized A.P. Venkateswaran to explore the boundary question with the ILD (Menon 2021).

Namboodiripad's visit to China was significant for two reasons. First, his government was dismissed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in July 1959 (Bhadrakumar 2019). A few months before doing so, Nehru received the 14th Dalai Lama, who escaped to India in March 1959 against the backdrop of a Chinese crackdown in Tibet (Karat 2017). On 7 September

1959, Nehru's government published a white paper containing details of correspondence between India and China on the boundary question under pressure from the Parliament of India (Raghavan 2006). China took this as a sign that imperialist agents in India prevailed upon Nehru to do so (Madan 2019). Indeed, Director of Central Intelligence (CIA) Allen Dulles, had been keeping an eye not only on Kerala but also on the Himalayas (Karun 2017). On 10 September 1959, he conveyed to the US National Security Council that the Chinese attack in Longju along the border 'resulted in a penetration 3 miles beyond the McMahon line' (Rao 2021).

The Dalai Lama fleeing to India in March 1959, the removal of the Marxist government in Kerala in July 1959, and Nehru's publishing of the white paper in September 1959, in quick succession, influenced Mao's perception that Nehru was colluding with the CIA to weaken China. During this period, the Chinese saw India as a facilitator of the policies of the imperialist camp.

Second, as soon as Indira Gandhi became President of the Congress party in February 1959, a young sub-divisional police officer serving in Madras, M.K. Narayanan, was deputed to the Intelligence Bureau in Delhi to work towards dealing with the Communism in Kerala (Malhotra 2010). Over the next many months, it was Gandhi and the Intelligence Bureau that played a crucial role in ousting the Communist government.

Therefore, Namboodiripad's visit to China during Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister in April 1983 conveyed the message to China that Gandhi's political opponents also supported her genuine desire to improve relations and that unlike in September 1959, the Parliament was unlikely to create difficulties. The Janata party's Subramanian Swamy visit to China, first in September 1978 and then in April 1981, also conveyed to the Chinese that Indian politicians across the spectrum sought better relations. Despite the positive momentum generated by these visits, the restoration of party-to-party relations, and diplomatic talks, the troubles on the border saw no end.

The Wangdong crisis unfolded in Arunachal Pradesh in 1986, even as the two sides were engaged in talks. It is impossible to ascertain whether the aggressive PLA actions correlated with factionalism in the Party. The then-General Secretary Hu Yaobang had fallen out of favor with Deng. As the Chairman of the CMC, Deng may have directed the PLA to be aggressive with India to exert additional pressure on Hu, leading to the latter's removal in December 1986.

Notably, the crisis came at a time when Deng was deepening ties with the US in the second half of the 1980s, as mentioned earlier.

There is also a scholarly view that the Wangdong crisis resulted from China's insecurity after the establishment of a new post by India in hitherto disputed areas (Fravel 2008). In any case, what surprised the PLA was India's response through Operation Falcon under General Krishnaswamy Sundarji (Badhwar and Bobb 1988). The Indian Army enforced deterrence on the ground and took positions on Hathung La ridge overlooking Sumdorong Chu on 20 October 1986, the 24th anniversary of the 1962 Sino-Indian war (Joshi 2017). Both sides deployed a large number of troops, and the situation was tense.

Within a few months, in December 1986, the Constitutional Amendment Act called 'The State of Arunachal Pradesh Bill' was tabled in Parliament. By February 1987, the act was enacted, and Arunachal Pradesh successfully attained statehood. Although the border was tense, Indian External Affairs Minister K.C. Pant made an informal visit to China in April 1987 to calm the temperatures, followed by a visit by External Affairs Minister N.D. Tiwari (Joshi 2022). E.M.S Namboodiripad also visited China again in April 1987. Deng conveyed to him that the dispute must be solved by "mutual accommodation and mutual understanding" and that Indian actions would "add difficulties" to the dispute (Southerl 1987). Despite these exchanges at high party and government levels, a solution seemed distant.

Towards the end of 1987, the Dalai Lama's proposal of a peace plan was rejected by the Chinese, hurting Tibetan aspirations and sentiments in the process and igniting the Tibetan crisis of 1987-1989 (Sanchez 1987). People's Armed Police, under the leadership of Li Lianxiu and the then-Party Secretary in Tibet, Hu Jintao, resorted to the use of force to crush the uprising. Martial law was imposed in Lhasa, and danger from the Tibetan uprising was averted. It was during this crisis that the 10th Panchen Lama died in Tibet in January 1989.

Merely five months later, as soon as Tiananmen Square was cleared after the deployment of PLA in June 1989, the Norwegian Nobel Committee suddenly took note of the 14th Dalai Lama's teachings for decades and awarded him the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1989. Global attention on Tibet must have added to the Chinese fears of US influence in Tibet. The dangers of a so-called 'color revolution' in the aftermath of Tiananmen possibly created a sense of urgency in the minds of the Chinese leaders to restore normalcy in external relations with India.

Andropov's Choice

Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov from Stavropol, with a photographic memory, a penchant for romantic poetry, and affection for William Shakespeare (Miles 2020), had an extraordinary career (Remnick 1990). Andropov was the Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB) for 15 years from 18 May 1967 onwards, before becoming the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in November 1982 (Burns 1984). Andropov played an instrumental role in crushing the uprising in Hungary in November 1956, in suppressing the Prague Spring through an invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20 August 1968, and was one of the masterminds behind the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 (Apple Jr 1982).

Throughout his tenure as Chairman of the KGB, Andropov had control over the First Chief Directorate (FCD), overseeing foreign intelligence, and the 9th Department of the KGB, overseeing the security of high-ranked party personnel in the Kremlin. In 1982, the death of Soviet leaders with health issues, including Semyon Tsvigun, Mikhail Suslov, and Leonid Brezhnev, cleared the way for Andropov to assume the role of General Secretary of the CPSU.

Without Andropov's mentorship and blessings, the young Stavropol star Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev would not have likely made it to the Politburo as a full member in 1980, let alone as General Secretary in March 1985. As the Chairman of the KGB for 15 years, with a keen eye for talent and the ability to ruthlessly suppress rivals, it is unlikely that the KGB Chairman missed signs of Gorbachev's proclivities for reform. Perhaps Andropov saw the potential to end the Soviet Union's economic distress, impressed by Gorbachev's empathy, integrity, and wisdom beyond his age.

In any case, less than fifteen months after Andropov's death, Gorbachev took over as the General Secretary of the CPSU in March 1985. He reorganized the Politburo with progressive liberal leaders such as Eduard Shevardnadze and Alexander Nikolayevich Yakovlev (Lee 1987). Gorbachev had first met Shevardnadze as a Komsomol (party youth league) leader in April 1958. Yakovlev, a steadfast supporter of Gorbachev, was a Soviet exchange student at Columbia University, later Ambassador of the Soviet Union to Canada, and a champion of liberal reforms (Bohlen 1985).

On 16 May 1983, during the last months of an ailing Andropov's tenure, Gorbachev made a trip to Canada. Pierre Trudeau, the then-Prime Minister of Canada, had appointed Eugene Wheelan as the Agricultural Minister. It was on Wheelan's farm that Yakovlev and Gorbachev discussed the hopeless economic situation and repressive political climate inside the Soviet Union, planting the seeds of *glasnost*.

Supported by the likes of Yakovlev and Shevardnadze, Gorbachev undertook a series of reforms after becoming the General Secretary in 1985, most notably *perestroika* and *glasnost*, which culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Unhappy with Gorbachev's reforms, hardliners in the Communist Party conspired to remove him through a coup in the mid-1990s. On 19 August 1991, armored personnel carriers moved towards the Kremlin to seize power, declaring that Gorbachev was 'unwell' to perform his duties.

If all the world is a stage – to borrow Shakespeare – one of the last scenes in the Soviet Union's life was the coup staged on Krasnopresnenskaya on 19 August 1991. Standing defiantly on top of tank number 110 of the Taman division, Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin gave a speech reading from two sheets of paper and called the grab of power by the hardline coup leaders an illegitimate act. He called for an open resistance by the people against the coup. This speech allowed Yeltsin to emerge as a hero in the eyes of the people of Moscow.

Yeltsin's bravery in defying the hardline coup plotters boosted his public image (Dobbs 1991). On the other hand, Gorbachev's absence from Moscow during the coup weakened him. During those critical hours, while Yeltsin's defiant speech was broadcast live all over the world, Gorbachev was isolated in his dacha in Crimea, far away from Moscow, and his communication lines were cut by the KGB, giving him no access to the media. As their leader, Gorbachev, was under house arrest, young Muscovites used the internet to communicate with the outside world.

Thus, two decades before Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp became buzzwords for protest during the Arab Spring and later protests across many parts of the world, the failed Soviet coup of August 1991 was the first organized use of the internet by democratic protestors anywhere in the world (Soldatov and Borogan 2016). They communicated amongst themselves and peacefully disseminated their democratic dissent to the outside world against the coup plotters of their powerful security State. On 21 August 1991, infantry fighting vehicles of the Taman guards commanded by a young Captain Sergey Vladimirovich Surovikin fired at the people

opposing the coup, killing three protestors. This incident left the hardline leaders in a state of panic, leading to the coup's failure.

Against this backdrop, Gorbachev returned to Moscow from Crimea, but with full knowledge that the Soviet Union was beyond redemption. Merely three days after the failed coup, Gorbachev resigned from the office of General Secretary of the Communist Party on 24 August 1991 and from the Presidency on 26 December 1991, bringing the Soviet Union to its end (Clines 1991). Thus, the failed coup of August 1991 triggered the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union. Soviet disintegration removed an immediate external threat from China's calculus and also dealt a setback to India since New Delhi's primary external partner was suddenly a non-existent political entity. The leaders in New Delhi and Beijing factored this reality into their calculations towards the end of 1991, paving the way for an agreement in 1993.

KGB, CIA, and South Asia

On 16 May 1991, 3 months before the collapse, the Soviet Union signed a border agreement with China (Dahlburg 1991). During Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister, Gorbachev had encouraged him to explore ways to better India's relations with China (Bobb 1989). However, the KGB still viewed China's intentions suspiciously because of a China-Pakistan-US combined front in Afghanistan against Moscow. The KGB had, by then, become a power unto itself, and therefore, its attitude towards a possible Chinese rapprochement with India mattered a great deal.

Incidentally, the last chief of KGB's foreign intelligence till August 1991, the Urdu-speaking Leonid Vladimirovich Shebarshin, was an expert in the politics of the Indian subcontinent who managed to find himself in the thick of action wherever he was posted (Bearden 2012). He was the KGB station chief (*resident*) in Delhi during the State of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi between 1975 to 1977 (Zhirnov 2001). He was also the *resident* in Tehran immediately after the Iranian revolution in 1979, where officer Vladimir Anatolyevich Kuzhickin defected to the West under his watch and caused embarrassment to the KGB (Asinovskiy 2022).

Kuzichkin's defection provided an opportunity for the CIA to reveal Soviet operations in Iran to Ruhollah Khomeini despite the Ayatollah being a sworn enemy of the US in public (Woodward 1986). This favour by the CIA to the Ayatollah limited Soviet influence in Iran. In

the political space vacated by the Soviets, the Chinese moved in and sold arms to both sides in Iran's war against Iraq between 1981 and 1988 (Weisskopf 1983). The US pretended not to notice Chinese arms sales.

In Iran's neighbouring Afghanistan, Chinese weapons were also funnelled in by the CIA to arm Afghan rebels fighting Soviet invasion (Coll 1992). This clandestine Langley-Beijing cooperation began in 1980 after CIA director Stansfield Turner – disguised as a mechanical worker from Poland – and Soviet specialist Robert Gates met Deng Xiaoping secretly in Beijing in a follow-up to Biden's meeting with Deng in 1979 (Perlez and Tatter 2022). As discussed earlier, this mutually beneficial China-US cooperation complicated the China-India border talks and likely hardened the Chinese attitude to the Venkateswaran formula. This was because, for the CIA, Chinese arms support in Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq war were invaluable, whereas, for the KGB, India's support on Afghanistan was crucial.

In any case, Shebarshin's deputy in the KGB, Vyacheslav Ivanovich Trubnikov, also went on to become the chief of Russia's foreign intelligence (Kovacevic 2020). Trubnikov served as the *resident* in New Delhi between 1987 and 1990 and later as head of the South Asia department (17th department) of the KGB, and oversaw operations not only in India but also Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan till September 1991. Trubnikov and his predecessor Shebarshin were mentored by Yakov Prokofievich Medianik, the KGB resident in Delhi between 1970 and 1975. Before his stint in Delhi, Medianik served as the KGB resident in Tel Aviv during the Suez crisis and the Six-Day War and later served as head of the Near East and West Asia department of the KGB for 12 years from March 1975 to April 1987.

This powerful trio of Medianik, Shebarshin, and Trubnikov came to be known as the South Asian gang within Russian intelligence circles (Mlechin 2011). Together, they oversaw KGB activity over a vast area from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea through the Hindu Kush mountains all the way to the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, it became all the more critical for the KGB to have India firmly on its side. The KGB managed to do this by feeding disinformation to Indira Gandhi about the anti-Indira attitude of the US (Mitrokhin 2004). To make matters worse, Gandhi believed that the CIA was responsible for her electoral loss in 1977 (Gujral 2011). This increased her dependence on Moscow and, by extension, the KGB's leverage over India.

On the other hand, the CIA and PLA arrived at a mutually beneficial arms deal to help the Afghan rebels fight the Soviet Union. In other words, throughout the 1980s, from the KGB's perspective, and indeed from the CIA's perspective, China and India remaining hostile to each other were useful. Thus, India and China were on opposite sides in the great game in Afghanistan during the 1980s, and convincing adversaries that India's position was conciliatory, therefore, was an impossible task (Paliwal 2017). These factors were playing at subterranean levels while New Delhi and Beijing were engaged in diplomatic negotiations to find a solution to the boundary question.

However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union brought about institutional changes in the KGB's foreign intelligence towards the end of 1991. This provided a favourable environment for the India-China border agreement. Scholar-journalist Evgeny Maksimovich Primakov became the head of Russia's newly formed Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). During the transition from the Soviet Union to Russia, Primakov acted as the guiding light of Russia's foreign intelligence with great ambidexterity and intellectual flexibility.

During Primakov's tenure as the head of SVR between December 1991 and January 1996, Vasily Nikitich Mitrokhin defected to the UK in April 1992, which resulted in the publication of Mitrokhin Archives. If Mitrokhin is to be believed, the KGB's Active Measures in South Asia were directed against India and Pakistan to keep their mutual suspicions alive and to deepen their disagreements in the 1980s. In particular, the KGB took steps to increase India's security dilemma by exploiting concerns about Pakistan's nuclear activity, playing on India's fears of Sikh separatism, the Khalistan movement, by attributing these movements to the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

At the same time, the KGB undertook steps to undermine China in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and in the eyes of the non-aligned countries. Even if the Mitrokhin archives were true, it should have come as no surprise to the subcontinent's political leaders because neither the CIA nor KGB benefitted from peace between Pakistan, India, and China during the Cold War, as explained earlier.

However, the pragmatic Primakov thought differently and saw a new opportunity. He envisaged a Russia-India-China bloc acting as a balancing coalition against the US. Despite Russia's warm ties with Washington during the 1990s, Primakov opposed a unipolar US-led global order and consequently supported better China-India relations since 1992. From China's

perspective, too, this seemed like an attractive proposition as the global balance of power had changed drastically by 1991.

For the Chinese, the image of Gorbachev shaking hands with a smiling George H.W. Bush must have appeared more like a get-together of friends than foes (Devroy and Dobbs 1991). The PLA-CIA alliance against the Soviet Union had run its course by then and was about to collapse (Lardner Jr. and Smith 1989). In other words, changes in the military and intelligence interests of Moscow and Washington at the end of the Cold War provided suitable conditions for an India-China rapprochement. India also realized the need to partner with Washington after the Soviet collapse and that relying on Moscow to balance Beijing was no longer a viable proposition.

Zhou Enlai's Protégé

The stellar ascent of Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, paralleled the spectacular rise of Zhou Enlai's protégé, Li Peng. Li was sidelined during the Cultural Revolution under suspicion of being an agent of the Soviet Union in the so-called 4821 Soviet espionage case. Like Deng Xiaoping, Li spent a considerable amount of time in Russia. General Secretary Hu Yaobang cleared him from the charges of revisionism after an inquiry by the powerful Organization Department of the Party headed by Song Renqiong. Within a few months of Gorbachev's rise as the General Secretary in March 1985, Li was promoted to the Politburo in September 1985 at the Fourth Plenary of the Twelfth Central Committee.

What explains Li Peng's sudden promotion? Li was a contemporary of Gorbachev and several other communist youth leaders in Moscow in the 1950s, who later became leaders of their country. Li was the only one among the 21 children of the leadership cadre sent to Moscow by the Communist Party in 1948 to be trained in technical subjects. He spoke Russian thanks to his seven years in the Soviet Union between 1948 and 1955. During this time, Li was also designated by the Chinese Embassy as the head of the association of Chinese students. While Li was in Moscow, Gorbachev was the Komsomol head of his entering class at the Moscow State University's law school (Taubman 2017).

Given his background, CPC party leaders likely thought of Li as the man for Moscow when they saw Gorbachev's elevation as the General Secretary of the CPSU. Due to tensions in

Soviet relations with China, there were hardly any meetings in person at the leadership level for over two decades. Deng, in particular, sought to improve relations and seek a solution to the Sino-Soviet boundary issue.

On 19 December 1985, a Soviet Aeroflot flight hijacked by the co-pilot had to land in a paddy field in the Gennan region of Heilongjiang province in China (Burns 1985). This intriguing incident allowed the two sides to talk at the leadership level. To resolve the issue, Gorbachev and Li met in Moscow on 26 December 1985, and the two leaders openly discussed their differences regarding the Sino-Soviet border.

Nearly four years later, when Li met Gorbachev again on 16 May 1989 during the Tiananmen protests, the two leaders agreed to settle the border issue with Deng's blessings. Li's role in the success of the Sino-Soviet border talks pushed New Delhi to work faster towards a consensus on the border as well, not only because Sino-Soviet relations were warming but also because Li was the second highest Party interlocutor in the border talks with India as well (Dixit 1997).

Li's formative years of early adulthood in Moscow also provided him with influential lifelong contacts. Many foreign and domestic student leaders in Moscow in the 1950s espoused a liberal worldview. They disliked Soviet control of speech, life, and expression. Ion Iliescu, a classmate of Li at the Power Engineering Institute, was the head of the association of Romanian students. Iliescu later became the leader of the protests, ending Communist rule in Romania in 1989. Zdenek Mlynar – an ideologue of Prague Spring in 1968 – was also Li's contemporary in Moscow (Diehl 1987). Gorbachev was friends with both Iliescu and Mlynar, and all of them were supporters of reform and liberalism (Tempest and Lauter 1989).

Unlike these Eastern European leaders, Li harbored no sympathy for liberalism (AP 1997). Li's father – executed by the Kuomintang – sacrificed his life for the cause of the Party. Perhaps that explains Li's zero-tolerance policy towards dissent, democracy, or human rights (Kristof 1989). By the summer of 1989, the popular uprising against the Soviet Union had already taken hold in East Germany, Georgia, Hungary, and Poland (Diehl 1989). The Soviet Union was unravelling. The results of Gorbachev's liberal reforms and Li's knowledge of his classmate Ion Iliescu's criticism against Nicolae Ceausescu and protests in Romania towards the end of 1987 likely made an impression on him and Deng about the need to see the Tiananmen protests as counterrevolutionary.

Puppeteers of Tiananmen

The events in Tiananmen were not sudden but an eventual expression of the growing discontent of the people. A series of domestic protests gripped China between 1987 and 1989. Zhao Ziyang became General Secretary of the Party in January 1987 (Gargan 1987). He flirted with ‘bourgeois liberalism’ and even encouraged his political secretary, Bao Tong, to work towards the foundations of an open society (Yen 1989). With hopes and dreams of a politically free China, students in Beijing took to the square chanting slogans of democracy, unaware that they were being used as pawns in Zhao’s cynical pursuit of consolidation of power within the Politburo.

Considering the protests as an opportunity to instigate young students to oppose and outshine the Party’s elder leaders, Zhao rejected the basic principles of the CPC and actively collaborated with liberal intellectuals. The core of the Party saw Zhao’s moves as aided and abetted by hostile external forces. The CPC made mistakes, as the discontent among the people over rising prices was genuine. To counter Zhao’s embrace of liberal politics in pursuit of selfish goals, Premier Li tasked Luo Gan – the Secretary General of the State Council – with coordinating special services intelligence in December 1988.

Luo was a master of economic espionage and spoke German thanks to his seven years in Freiberg, Germany (East), where he studied technical subjects (Levine 2014). His appointment as the Secretary General of the State Council would prove crucial as the Tiananmen protests gathered momentum after the death of Hu Yaobang in April 1989. On 16 May 1989, Gorbachev visited China for discussions on the boundary question and other bilateral issues, as mentioned earlier. Students had already started a hunger strike at Tiananmen on 13 May 1989, causing embarrassment to the CPC.

On 20 May 1989, martial law was imposed. Premier Li was updated on the troops’ activities by General Xiong Guangkai, Director of the Intelligence Bureau of the PLA (Timperlake and Triplett II 1999). Before Tiananmen, Xiong was involved in training Afghan rebels against the Soviets in Afghanistan (Kondapalli 2009). He was Luo Gan’s contemporary in East Germany from 1960 to 1962, and they found themselves on the same side as Li Peng in the use of force to clear the elements creating political turmoil. It helped that the Vice Chairman of the CMC, Yang Shangkun, and the director of the political department of the PLA, Yang Baibing, agreed with them on the need to take a strong stand against counterrevolutionary riots.

General Secretary Zhao Ziyang opposed using force against protestors, causing political turmoil. Therefore, Luo Gan, Xiong Guangkai, and Yang Baibing's support and input were critical in Premier Li and Deng Xiaoping's conviction to clear the protestors from Tiananmen because factionalism had seeped into the PLA leadership as well as in the security bureaucracy. For instance, General Li Lianxiu of the People's Armed Police – loyal to Zhao Ziyang, who had crushed the Tibetan uprising wholeheartedly – suddenly found himself in touch with his humane sensitives and refused to support the deployment of troops at Tiananmen. This was also the case with General Xu Qinxian, who refused to support the mobilization of troops and enforce martial law. Indeed, Zhang Aiping, a longtime friend of America whose visit to Washington in June 1984 triggered active military cooperation between Washington and Beijing, was also against martial law.

However, if Tiananmen papers are to be believed, it was the Ministry of State Security (MSS), headed by Jia Chunwang, which produced the investigation report on June 1, 1989, laying the blame on the US for subverting the socialist State at Tiananmen square (Nathan et al., 2001). Presumably, Jia Chunwang's boss, Qiao Shi –the then-Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission, overseeing internal and external intelligence – sensed the mood shift in the Party leadership, and decided to take a hardline stance.

Qiao –himself a member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) – kept cards close to his chest. Initially sympathetic to the protestors, Qiao pretended not to notice when students of the University of International Relations, where intelligence analysts are trained, protested on 5 May 1989 (Faligot 2022). He also refrained from casting the tiebreaking vote at the PSC meetings on the use of force (Gokhale 2021). When the situation worsened, Zhao continued his grandstanding, while Qiao decisively shifted in favor of forceful clearance.

What followed was the systematic clearance of the protestors from Tiananmen Square on 3 June 1989 by the 27th group army on the very night that Ruhollah Khomeini breathed his last in Iran (Burgess and Southerl 1989). In Tehran, as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani guided the Iranian assembly of experts, presiding over the election of the new supreme leader Ali Khomeini, the people of China woke up to a sense of grief and shock on 4 June 1989.

The collective psyche of Chinese leaders – in the Politburo, military, and intelligence security apparatus – shaken in the aftermath of the Tiananmen events, likely came to the sober realization that internal security threats could be better dealt with by reaching an agreement

with India to keep the border safe, calm, and predictably peaceful. Well before the Tiananmen protests, the Secretary (Research) in New Delhi, A.K. Verma, established a backchannel with China's MSS headed by Jia Chunwang and his boss Qiao Shi, seeking a breakthrough on the border issue (Balachandran 2016).

Arrangements were also made for India's Prime Minister to talk to China's ambassador, Li Lianqing, in New Delhi (Varma 2017). These moves facilitated Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988. When the leaders met, Deng said to Gandhi, "let us forget unpleasant things of the past" and "look to the future" (Varma 2017). According to the then-Indian ambassador to Beijing, C.V. Ranganathan, the visit was a positive development and led to the setting up of a joint working group on the border issue (Ranganathan 1998). This visit was a landmark event and created major change, according to M.K. Narayanan, the then-Director of the Intelligence Bureau (Sitapati 2016).

The visit was the turning point, according to Zeng Xyyong, a former Chinese diplomat in India (Varma 2017). Rajiv Gandhi consulted opposition leaders A.B. Vajpayee and Jyoti Basu to seek their input, and these leaders kept political differences aside and supported Gandhi's visit to China. According to Shivshankar Menon, the then-Joint Secretary of North-East Asia at the Ministry of External Affairs, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao consulted opposition leaders as well before signing the 1993 agreement (Menon 2016).

Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China must also be seen in the context of India's internal security troubles. Khalistan movement had just been countered with Operation Black Thunder in May 1988. The movement received external backing, most notably from Canada under Pierre Trudeau, in the form of safe havens for some of India's most wanted criminals. The Sri Lankan civil war, despite the 1987 accord, seemed unfinished because the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran did not seem satisfied by the July 1987 accord, and troubles in Kashmir also began by July 1988. Under those circumstances, peace with China in the Himalayas was of pressing importance to India.

Malabar and the United States

Despite minor irritants, momentous changes occurred during this period in India's relationship with the US. Caspar Weinberger became the first Defense Secretary to visit India in October

1986. Although this visit was at the height of the Sumdorong Chu crisis, US military-technical cooperation with China was peaking. Arriving on a US Air Force plane from China, Weinberger expressed willingness to work with India on defense and flew to Pakistan after meeting Rajiv Gandhi (Moore 1986).

Over the next four years, Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan unleashed terror and violence in Kashmir, and India's relations with the US were slowly warming (Lewis 1987). Rajiv Gandhi's meeting with Ronald Reagan in October 1987 brought out differences but also helped boost bilateral trade and speed up technology transfer, thanks to Gandhi's personal friendship with the then US Ambassador to New Delhi, John Gunther Dean, who was rather sympathetic to India.

However, the responsibility to cultivate New Delhi's friendship with Washington fell on the shoulders of P.V. Narasimha Rao after Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in the midst of elections in May 1991 (Crosette 1991). With the appointment of J.N. Dixit as the Foreign Secretary in November 1991, New Delhi began re-drawing strategic partnerships under Rao's leadership in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Baru 2016). Rao's first bilateral visit as Prime Minister was to Germany on 5 September 1991, followed by a visit to France in November 1991. Dixit offered to improve relations with Israel on 22 January 1992 (Kumaraswamy 2010). After displaying reluctance for a week, Dixit sent a message to the Israeli Consul General in Mumbai by eventually fulfilling a historical promise on 29 January 1992 (Blarel 2014), upgrading ties to full diplomatic relations (Yagar 2010). Rao became the first Indian Prime Minister to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos in February 1992. This was a positive turn to the Western allies of the US and New Delhi's acceptance of the unipolar world, not only politically and economically but also in the field of defense cooperation.

India and the US started a bilateral naval exercise named Malabar in May 1992, on the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' famous voyage of 1492, which culminated in the discovery of America. Upon landing in America, Columbus believed falsely that he was on the Malabar coast of India. For centuries, Malabar had been the gateway to India and a home away from home for immigrants, merchants, and imperialists. In fact, Russian merchant and adventurer Afanasy Nikitin had already visited the Malabar coast two decades before Columbus's voyage. In essence, while the then-Finance Minister Manmohan Singh was opening India's economy, Rao and Dixit were expanding India's strategic engagement with the world, driven by pragmatism and informed by a profound nuance of history.

India and US joint drills were unthinkable even one year before the first Malabar naval exercise in 1992. In March 1991, a war game by General Dynamics painted a scenario where the US would intervene and strike India on behalf of Pakistan (Sirohi 2023). As the Cold War ended, New Delhi signalled to the world that India was prepared to adapt to the new global order by starting a strategic partnership with the US. Indeed, the definitive turning point was India crossing the Rubicon in 1992 (Mohan 2004). The joint Malabar exercise undertaken by India and the US in May 1992 certainly unnerved the Chinese enough for them to seek a consensus with India on the border in September 1993.

Conclusion

No single cause can sufficiently explain why the India-China border agreement took more than 12 years of negotiations, or why a full boundary settlement did not materialize, or, indeed, why it was signed in 1993. As with historical events, the 1993 border agreement was also influenced by multiple factors. This paper demonstrates that historical forces shaping global politics and intelligence agencies of third-party States, sometimes working independently and at other times, in tandem with Beijing and New Delhi, influenced simmering conflict, negotiated peace, and armed status quo on the Himalayan border towards the end of the Cold War.

Intelligence agencies of third-party states can influence bilateral negotiations between adversaries in at least four different ways. First, through military-technical cooperation and arms deals as the CIA did with the PLA in the 1980s, the Chinese side remained dependent on American technology. Second, through selective intelligence cooperation. The CIA-PLA cooperation on Soviet missile tests aligned Chinese interests more in sync with the US than with India. Third, through disinformation, as the KGB did during the 1980s, to secure India's support for the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and to keep India fearful of Pakistan and the US. Finally, by exploiting internal security dilemmas. CIA's influence in the removal of the democratically elected Communist government in Kerala and KGB's role in creating anxieties for Indian leaders by Western support for Khalistan are examples of third-party States exerting a certain degree of influence over domestic politics in India and China, which eventually impacted Sino-Indian peace negotiations.

The roles of political leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev, Deng Xiaoping, Rajiv Gandhi, Li Peng, and P.V. Narasimha Rao require special mention due to their choices as agents of human

history at the sunset of the Cold War. However, this paper also highlights the limitations of individual personalities. Historical forces and global politics delayed a *modus vivendi* on the Sino-Indian border, although the political leadership in Beijing and New Delhi endorsed the desire for such an agreement.

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About the Author

Sreejith Sasidharan is an independent analyst of Russian and Chinese foreign policy. In particular, the study of the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of State Security and their perception of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. He is also researching the multi-layered and deep political, military, and economic cooperation between China and the US (1969-1989), as well as Beijing's continued quest for a mutually beneficial relationship with Washington in the new era.

Contact: sreejithswork@gmail.com

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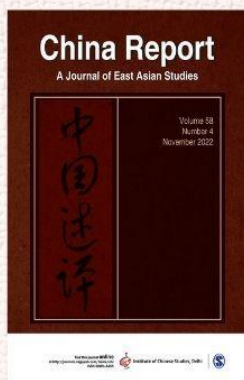


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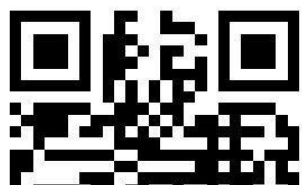
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