“Cartographic Aggression”

Media Politics, Propaganda, and the Sino-Indian Border Dispute

✦ Reed Chervin

Introduction

The middle of the twentieth century witnessed a border dispute between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and India that culminated in war in 1962. Beyond what was happening on the ground in the border region, a war of propaganda ensued. Both governments responded to this dispute with media manipulation that fortified their positions and depicted the other country as an aggressor. In spite of their different political systems, the PRC and India used similar authoritarian approaches to control the discourse surrounding the border dispute by expanding the contents of their archives, banning books, and disseminating sanctioned publications. The two countries rationalized their actions by emphasizing national security. These activities had a two-fold purpose. The first was to create a controlled, precise understanding of the border conflict in the domestic sphere. The second was to export this perspective to the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, differences in China’s and India’s political systems determined the extent to which the two governments managed information. Because the Chinese government was, and remains, controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the party became the defender of the state. Controlling multiple media became a means of furthering national interests. “Multiple media” included maps, books, magazines, newspapers, cartoons, radio broadcasts, and film. These components had different forms of application and utility levels. Indian democracy, by contrast, facilitated discussion and debate, which rendered absolute control of the media difficult.

Even as China and India waged this information duel, a third party entered the fray—the United Kingdom, whose actions are worth examining because Britain was largely responsible for planting the historical seed for the
Sino-Indian border dispute in the first place. The British government drew up various boundary lines in Central and South Asia during the nineteenth century to create buffer zones with the Tsarist Empire. By the early twentieth century, Britain had become more concerned with China. Movements near India’s northeastern frontier by General Zhao Erfeng of the Qing Empire and resumed Chinese advances southward after the 1911 Xinhai Revolution compelled Britain to reevaluate Indian security. Thus, in 1914, representatives from Britain, Tibet, and China convened in Simla, the summer capital of British India, to discuss frontier matters. The British representative, Sir Henry McMahon, pressured the Chinese to accept a zonal division of Tibet, which included a new Indo-Tibetan boundary that ran approximately along the crests of the Himalayas. Although China refused, McMahon had secretly persuaded the Tibetans to accept his terms. From this skullduggery, the infamous McMahon Line was born. Post-independence India carried forward the British imperial legacy by continuing to recognize the boundary line as proper and established.

Because of this historical linkage, by the 1950s and 1960s the British government basically functioned as an echo chamber for Indian propaganda regarding the border with China. Britain sympathized with its Commonwealth ally and undertook research and draft reports that recapitulated Indian points of view. But the UK’s propaganda approach proved to be subtler than those of its Chinese and Indian counterparts, coming closer to impartial observation. At the same time, as in India, democracy limited the ability of the UK government to carry out domestic censorship.

**Structure of Propaganda Apparatuses**

To examine how China, India, and Britain engaged with the media, one must first understand the structure of their respective propaganda operations and who the key actors were. David Shambaugh argues that “China’s propaganda system is a sprawling bureaucratic establishment,” with the CCP Propaganda

1. This competition was known as “The Great Game.” Western readers became familiar with the term through novelist Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901).

Department at its epicenter. The Propaganda Department falls under the auspices of the CCP Central Committee and its giant party bureaucracy. Shambaugh notes that the Propaganda Department in collaboration with the State Council Information Office and the State Council General Administration of Press and Publications “are responsible for overseeing the Xinhua News Agency and domestic media.” External propaganda in the 1950s and 1960s was largely the responsibility of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration. These organs distributed propaganda in the form of books and pamphlets from embassies abroad.

Another important office in PRC propaganda was the State Archives Administration, under the General Office of the Central Committee, which worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other state agencies to provide research support for the creation of propaganda and to determine what information was fit to know.

Although the then-ruling party in India, the Indian National Congress, wielded considerable power, India’s propaganda strategy was less centralized and bureaucratized than that of the PRC. Propaganda in India came from government and non-government sources alike. The Home Ministry managed propaganda for the domestic sphere, and newspapers self-censored under threat of legal retaliation. Moreover, Indian politicians across the political spectrum issued statements to the press as a form of propaganda.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs spearheaded international propaganda efforts. This ministry’s historical division gathered materials, and top officials such as the foreign secretary set policy for how propaganda should be designed and distributed. Indian diplomats used their positions to pressure foreign governments to curtail media in those countries that negatively portrayed India.

Public diplomacy in the Third World was by no means negligible at this time. Historian Jason Parker contends that “leaders like Nehru, Nasser, and

4. Ibid., p. 30.
5. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of the organs of China’s State Council. The PRC’s Foreign Languages Publishing Administration, formerly the Central People’s Government News General Office, is subordinated to the Culture and Education Committee, which is also part of the State Council.
Nkrumah understood outreach as not just worthwhile in its own right but also as a tool for asserting independence, spreading influence and building coalitions. Public diplomacy helped Third World countries give credence to political and economic models distinct from those of the two superpowers. Furthermore, these countries used multiple media and international platforms to gain credibility and pursue national interests.

As in India, British propaganda operations consisted of both centralized and decentralized aspects. The British approach was distinct, however, in the way it created and presented propaganda. Historian John Jenks writes,

> The British government’s propaganda preferred accurate facts with which to build its cases. This was not truth for truth’s sake, but an expedient strategy to make the propaganda more persuasive and credible. When the truth was inconvenient and it was more expedient to dissemble, omit, and obscure, the propagandists did not hesitate to do so. Thus, British propaganda could be factual and effective, and credibly pass itself off as disinterested knowledge.

The British government enlisted the help of academics to give its contentions a tinge of objectivity. These academics worked with the Foreign Office, and specifically the Information Research Department, to produce propaganda. This department served as the “engine” of the British propaganda machine during the Cold War by examining Communist publications and documents from diplomatic and military intelligence sources and packaging this information into publications (e.g., *Digest* and *Asian Analyst*) that were disseminated around the world. Apart from this bureaucratic approach, the British government occasionally used its bully pulpit to target journalists who challenged its anti-Communist positions. For the most part, the government did so informally, typically through conversations between officials and citizens.

“propaganda” differ in the former’s emphasis on building long-term connections, my discussion here does not draw a sharp distinction between the two concepts. As Linda Risso points out: “Public diplomacy and propaganda are two sides of the same coin” since the “aims, methods, and expertise required are the same.” See Linda Risso, *Propaganda and Intelligence in the Cold War: The NATO Information Service* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014), pp. 8–9.


A comparison of Chinese, Indian, and British propaganda channels is vital for comprehending how these governments evaluated, used, and restricted multiple media. The Sino-Indian border dispute and its interpretation made these channels a potent and necessary weapon, serving as another outlet for alliance and rivalry during the middle Cold War.

**The PRC’s Use of Documents, Books, and Film as Weapons**

As China’s conflict with India became increasingly severe at the start of the 1960s, policymakers in Beijing launched an initiative to procure archival materials concerning Chinese borders. The PRC Foreign Ministry in coordination with the State Archives Administration stated that “in order to research and deal with our border problems, we need to accumulate and systemically arrange our files on this topic.” These administrative bodies asked for help in furnishing materials relating to twelve of China’s borders—with the Sino-Indian boundary receiving top priority. Local archives took this directive seriously. Archives held large-scale meetings with work-unit leaders, circulated their own requests for materials, and considered appointing project specialists to manage this assignment. In Shanghai, the local Archival Management Bureau and the Foreign Affairs Department noted their progress in a 9 May 1960 report. They wrote that “through the support of every work unit, over the past two months we have already received a great deal of material.” These organizations mentioned that despite this success, their superiors still had “an urgent need for material on the Sino-Indian border dispute.” Shanghai’s Archival Management Bureau and the Foreign Affairs Department therefore requested three maps: one recently published by the Survey of India, one of Tibet drafted by a Qing Dynasty diplomat in 1893, and one created by the nineteenth-century British geographer John Walker. The CCP sought to

10. “Shanghai shi dangan guanliju guanyu tigong bianjie wenti dangan ziliao de tongzhi” [Notice by the Shanghai Municipal Archive Management Bureau Regarding an Increase in the Amount of Archival Material on Border Disputes], 17 February 1960, in B123-4-696-14, Shanghai Municipal Archive (SMA).
11. “Shanghai shi dangan guanliju baogao” [Report by the Shanghai Municipal Archive Management Bureau], 18 July 1960, in B48-2-527-89, SMA.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
understand how the border situation had evolved, especially how the British colonial legacy had shaped its development.

China’s diplomats contributed to this quest for primary sources. Chinese consulates in locales such as Burma gathered maps of the Sino-Indian frontier. Their privileged access to foreign documents proved an asset to CCP leaders. The collection of information on the border issue remained a central part of China’s strategy even after the 1962 war. For example, on 21 October 1964, the Chinese Foreign Ministry ordered its ambassador to Sri Lanka “to research earnestly documents and maps pertaining to the Sino-Indian border conflict to become familiar with the detailed background and the merits and demerits of both sides for the benefit of our struggle abroad.” The PRC yearned to justify its claims not only militarily, but also intellectually.

The transfer of materials from local archives and foreign affairs departments as well as from overseas consulates to the PRC Foreign Ministry and the State Archives Administration, merged academic and party interests. Shanghai’s Archival Management Bureau and Foreign Affairs Department argued that strengthening archival resources would advance the party’s socialist cause. In accordance with this logic, the archives served the party, which, in turn, served the country. Offices in Shanghai maintained that the city bore a unique responsibility to provide information on the Sino-Indian border records from old political regimes (i.e., the foreign concessions and the Chinese Nationalists) that were stored in the municipal archive.

The PRC also sought to procure archival materials through espionage. A report from 6 October 1959, noted that a Chinese agent in London tried to steal a secret document about the Indo-Tibetan boundary from an Indian clerk. Although this attempt failed, it sheds light on the lengths to which the Chinese government would go to increase its archival holdings on the border issue. Purloining materials from abroad had clear political payoffs, but this tactic needed to be weighed against significant diplomatic risks.

Beijing also banned books that did not support the approved explanation of the border dispute. For instance, on 12 November 1962, Hubei

18. Ibid.
19. No. FS/991/59, 6 October 1959, in Subject File 58, Subimal Dutt Papers (SDP), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML).
Province’s Bureau of Culture dispatched a circular calling for relevant work units to stop lending the 1957 book *Yindu jianshi* (A simple history of India) because its content was deemed problematic. In addition, the nationwide Xin-hua Bookstore was notified to halt all sales of the book. Although *Yindu jianshi* was disseminated by a Chinese publisher, the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War in October 1962 caused Chinese leaders to become hypersensitive to any publication that did not entirely validate Chinese territorial claims and depict India as a belligerent. Even before the war occurred, this issue was a delicate one. In 1961, the Shanghai Department of Education Press asked the Shanghai Municipal Publishing Bureau whether publishing textbooks that contained maps of the Sino-Indian border and unlabeled pedagogical maps of India or of the border should be allowed. China feared that India could use old maps as ammunition to attack its position in the international arena.

The PRC State Council laid out these concerns in map-printing guidelines put forward in 1965 (three years after the Sino-Indian War). The council declared,

>Because of the inability of drawing techniques that would accurately reflect China's current situation regarding the border, the sale of previously published maps dealing with China’s boundary lines must, without exception, cease. As for maps drafted by each work unit, our country’s borders must be marked on a blueprint and delivered to the National Surveying and Mapping Administration for inspection before being published.

The Chinese government regarded internal interpretive consistency of the border issue as critically important and feared that publication of politically sensitive books and questionable maps would jeopardize China’s claims. The Ministry of Geology elaborated on this point:

>Compiling and publishing our country’s maps involves not only the issue of content confidentiality, but also issues of political principle, such as the drawing of national boundaries between our country and our neighbors. To prevent errors

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20. “Hubei sheng wenhuaju huachu zhuyi di 29 hao” [Removal Notice No. 29 by the Hubei Province Bureau of Culture], 12 November 1962, in B167-1-554-102, SMA.


22. “Guowuyuan guanyu ditu shang, woguo bianjie huafa de neibu tongzhi” [Internal Circular by the State Council Concerning Our Country’s Border Drafting Techniques on Maps], 18 January 1965, in B105-8-500-1, SMA.
of political principle and leaked secrets from occurring, [we] have devised these measures.\textsuperscript{23}

The imperative to safeguard socialism, state secrets, and lingtu wanzheng (territorial integrity) mandated how the Chinese bureaucracy processed source material.

Although Beijing restricted sensitive documents, it encouraged the diffusion of other types. In September 1959 the People’s Daily distributed a map that indicated—among other things—the Chinese border with India, the border printed on Indian maps, and “instances of Indian aggression.”\textsuperscript{24} What is more, this map described China’s territorial claims as “that printed at present on Chinese maps.”\textsuperscript{25} The British embassy in Beijing pointed out that this clever phrasing gave the People’s Republic maximal flexibility to make either demands or concessions in negotiations.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, this map served both a domestic and an international purpose.

Chinese officials referred to maps of the border when meeting foreign representatives. In a conversation with British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia Malcolm MacDonald, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai produced an early twentieth-century map from the Tibetan archive. The map, which apparently differed from Indian contentions, showed the McMahon Line at the boundary of Bhutan.\textsuperscript{27} Although Zhou’s reasons for referring to this map are not clear, he may have been seeking to cause a rift between the United Kingdom and India by suggesting Indian manipulation of how its northern frontier was delineated.

China furnished foreign publics with materials on the border problem, especially during the 1962 war. When the Chinese embassy in Rangoon, Burma (now Yangon, Myanmar) stated that the conflict had aroused the curiosity of many Burmese, the PRC Foreign Ministry authorized the embassy to provide

\textsuperscript{23} “Bianzhi chuban woguo ditu zanxing guanli banfa” [Provisional Administrative Measures for Compiling and Publishing Our Country’s Maps], 20 February 1965, in 002-017-00127, Beijing shi danganguan.

\textsuperscript{24} Memorandum from the British Embassy in Peking to the Far East Department, Foreign Office (FO), 11 September 1959, in DO 35-8819, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK).

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} Singapore No. 15 Saving Telegram to Foreign Office, 10 November 1962, in FO 371-164920, TNAUK.
them with “the most recently published materials” on the subject.28 Likewise, the CCP lent map lithographs to the Sri Lankan newspaper Forward.29 Chinese leaders eagerly disseminated information about the border area provided that appropriate government bureaus vetted it first. The CCP made certain that internally circulated materials contained no ambiguities, and government organs time and again emphasized the importance of seeking appropriate permission before documents and books were published, to avoid embarrassing questions regarding territory claimed by China.

An example of this type of vetting appeared in a 14 May 1963 letter from bureaucrat Hu Jiuming to the Propaganda Department. He informed the department that after thorough examination and after seeking approval from relevant authorities, the publication Yindu wenti mulu (Catalog of the India problem) was ready to be copied. He also noted that, due to its sensitive political content, the publication should circulate only internally.30 This exchange demonstrates how information flowed within the Chinese government—particularly regarding the Sino-Indian boundary dispute. In addition, it shows the extent to which lower strata within the bureaucracy methodically abided by guidelines coming from on high.

In accordance with this hierarchy, the CCP produced official accounts of the border war through cinema. The Central Studio of Newsreels Production and the August First Film Studio dispatched camera crews to the frontier to capture footage. Key scenes included China’s initiation of a ceasefire and withdrawal, interactions between the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the local population, and the Chinese army’s return of supplies to India. The Ministry of Culture wrote that “these films made use of indisputable facts to further report the truth of the Sino-Indian border issue, strongly refuting Nehru’s reactionary slander and chicanery.”31 Subsequently, both the Ministry of Culture and the PLA’s General Political Department gave these producers

28. “Fu guanyu neiwai tigong zhongyin bianjie ziliao shi” [Reply Concerning the Provision of Materials on the Sino-Indian Border at Home and Abroad], 8 November 1962, pp. 13–14, in 105-01490-01, FMA.
29. “Xigong qianjin bao waiqu wo zai zhongyin bianjie wenti lichang shi” [The Sri Lankan Communist Publication Forward Misrepresents Our Position on the Border Dispute], 17 January 1963, pp. 23–24, in 105-01148-03, FMA. To the chagrin of the CCP, this newspaper used China’s maps but not its interpretations.
30. Memorandum from Hu Jiuming to the Propaganda Department, 14 May 1963, in C43-1-392-413, SMA.
awards for their demonstration of bravery and patriotism.\textsuperscript{32} Their creation of this film, the authorities claimed, constituted “hard proof” of China’s benevolence during the 1962 war. The CCP could point to this evidence to convince the Chinese people of the justness of the conflict. Furthermore, the Chinese government probably desired to counter the war-reporting efforts of Western publications such as \textit{TIME}.

By the same token, the Chinese government sought to win hearts and minds in the international community by thoroughly examining the history of China’s southern frontier and presenting a case free of countervailing evidence. On 15 November 1962, Zhou Enlai sent a letter with accompanying maps to the heads of Asian and African countries that focused on the development of the border dispute. The letter dismissed Indian territorial claim and emphasized China’s consistent views toward the border. Zhou concluded that “all relevant facts show that the current grave Sino-Indian border conflict was wholly engineered by the Indian government, deliberately and over a long period of time.”\textsuperscript{33} These documents served the purpose of convincing foreign leaders of the righteousness of Chinese actions, while appealing for their support of the PRC’s method of resolving the dispute.\textsuperscript{34}

In February 1963, when Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi spoke on Swedish television about China’s interpretation of the border dispute, he outlined provocative posturing by India, Zhou Enlai’s rebuffed call for negotiations, and the status of the McMahon Line—among other topics. The \textit{People’s Daily} later published this interview in full to clarify both Chinese territorial assertions and China’s behavior during and after the war.\textsuperscript{35} Beijing used these interactions to promulgate its claims internationally and to emphasize its interpretive conformity domestically.

\textbf{The Indian Approach}

India’s method of constructing an interpretation of the border conflict to a large degree mirrored that of China. The Indian government made

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Memorandum from Zhou Enlai to the heads of Asian and African countries, 15 November 1962, in K. 177, Joseph Needham Papers, Cambridge University Library, University of Cambridge (JNP).

\textsuperscript{34} Soviet Ambassador to India Ivan Benediktov stated that Zhou’s letter was “very cleverly worded” and “gave a very convincing picture of the Chinese case.” See Memorandum from T. N. Kaul to Jawaharlal Nehru, AMB-190/62, 30 November 1962, in Correspondence with Nehru, Jawaharlal, T. N. Kaul Papers (TNKP) (first, second, and third installment), NMML.

\textsuperscript{35} Peking to Foreign Office, 15 March 1963, in FO 371-170671, TNAUK; and “Television Interview Given by Vice-Premier Chen Yi,” 15 March 1963, in FO 371-170671, TNAUK.
indefatigable efforts to obtain Chinese maps published around 1959, when tension between the two countries intensified. Indian Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt lamented the difficulty of this task but noted that it was to be managed by Sarvepalli Gopal, the acclaimed director of the Historical Division. This patriot-historian went to impressive lengths to secure documents relevant to the border issue. He traveled to London to access the India Office Library, the British Museum, and private papers of various British officials. Gopal was one of an elite few permitted to handle sensitive materials. After the 1959 Chinese attempt to steal a secret boundary document in London, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs restricted access even further.

Gopal’s importance to India transcended his ability to acquire archival documents. In late 1962, he and Deputy Minister of External Affairs Lakshmi Menon toured Southeast Asia attempting to persuade leaders to accept the Indian interpretation of the border dispute with China. Gopal’s credentials and knowledge made him a potent figure from the Indian side, to the extent that, during a flight from Rangoon to New Delhi, he was “physically attacked by a fellow passenger believed to be a Chinese agent.” The CCP may have figured that, if it were to eliminate this information kingpin, evidence in favor of Indian territorial claims would collapse. By the mid-1960s, however, Gopal and India’s case in the international arena remained largely unscathed.

The Indian government made heavy use of both formal and informal diplomatic channels to assert its territorial claims. Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs B. K. Acharya once told British Counselor Harold Smedley that the Indian government was upset that the UK-produced *Times Atlas* indicated the border between India and Tibet as disputed. He described this depiction as particularly unkind insofar as the British government viewed the McMahon Line as the legitimate boundary. Consequently, Acharya stated


38. No. FS/998/59, 7 October 1959, in Subject File 58, SDP, NMML.

that he “would probably draw the attention of the publishers to this.”

A similar incident occurred in September 1958. The Lok Sabha—the lower house of India’s parliament—criticized a map in the official publication *China Pictorial*, which depicted large tracts of Northern Assam and the North-East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh) as Chinese territory. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru noted that the CCP government had been asked to correct these inaccuracies. Although Nehru acknowledged that India had limited control over what China published, educating the PRC in its cartographic errors had high priority. Years after the Sino-Indian War, the Indian government continued to raise concerns about disagreeable publications. In 1965, India’s charge d’affaires in Beijing, Jagat Mehta, conveyed his dissatisfaction to British diplomat P. H. Gore-Booth that Chatham House had sponsored a book by Alastair Lamb that criticized India’s interpretation of the border dispute. These and other such incidents reflected Indian discomfort with foreign views that challenged its narrative of a fixed frontier.

Beyond making protests to foreign powers, Indian officials attempted to shape public discourse surrounding the border dispute by scrutinizing publications that circulated within India. For example, the Indian government responded sharply to political cartoons that lauded China. Two cases emerged in August 1962, prior to the war. One was a depiction of PLA soldiers giving food to Indians that appeared in the *West Bengal Daily*. This cartoon was particularly striking at a time when China was experiencing massive starvation as a result of Mao Zedong’s disastrous Great Leap Forward (1958–1962). Members of the Indian parliament denounced the cartoon, and India’s minister for home affairs noted that the Law Ministry and the West Bengal authorities would address the cartoon. The second case involved a drawing in *Swadhinata* (Freedom) that portrayed a diminutive Indian politician juxtaposed with people brandishing Communist flags. A member of the Lok Sabha remarked that it was indicative of “a pro-Chinese lobby growing in the country” and that “provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure and Indian Penal Code had been violated.” Another member argued that the cartoon was “a matter concerning national security.” These opinions were not out of the ordinary. Nehru agreed that “it was highly objectionable that such a cartoon should be

41. Lok Sabha starred question No. 915 and Q&A, 4 September 1958, in DO 35-8817, TNAUK.
42. P. H. Gore-Booth to the High Commissioner, 37/5/2, 2 April 1965, in DO 196-243, TNAUK.
44. Ibid.
Though seemingly innocuous, these cartoons called into question the oft repeated allegation of Chinese aggression.

Cartoons had great utility because understanding them did not require a high degree of literacy; artists could effectively convey an opinion to a large audience. Moreover, both the simplistic design of political cartoons and their minimal degree of written language made them an appealing option for external propaganda. During the war of information between China and India, cartoons emerged as an easy and frequently used weapon for both governments.

The Indian government also banned texts that supported Chinese territorial claims. The governor of the state of Bihar halted the distribution of the Hindi book Chin ki jhalak (A Glimpse of China) because it contained maps that showed Bhutan and various border regions as parts of China. Likewise, the Indian government frequently targeted issues of the magazine China Today published by the Chinese embassy in Delhi. In a typical case, Foreign Secretary Dutt objected to an issue that featured an article from the People’s Daily titled “The Revolution in Tibet and Nehru’s Philosophy,” and he castigated the Chinese embassy:

The government of India cannot permit [the] publication by foreign embassies in India of articles or other material critical of the government of the country. The Government of India hope[s] that the Embassy will ensure that in [the] future such material critical of the Government of India is not circulated.

Dutt regarded this type of publication as a threat to public order, reasoning that the distribution of anti-Indian propaganda could foment treasonous acts and damage Nehru’s proclamation that India’s northern border “should be considered a firm and definite one which is not open to discussion with anybody.”

The Indian government also banned China Today issues from 21

45. Ibid.
47. Message from S. Dutt to SOFA, 24 May 1959, in Subject File 36, SDP, NMML.
48. “Note to Secretary General and Foreign Secretary, 1 July 1954,” in Sarvepalli Gopal et al., eds., Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, 2nd ser., Vol. 26 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984), pp. 481–484. International historian Srinath Raghavan criticizes journalist Neville Maxwell for supposedly invoking this quotation without proper context, but in fact Maxwell acknowledges that Nehru on other occasions had also described India as having fixed borders not open to negotiation. When discussing maps, Nehru informed Zhou Enlai that “our borders were quite clear and were not a matter for argument” and that “there was no doubt about our boundaries.” Nehru also stated in the Lok Sabha that “the main frontier of India as also of Bhutan is quite clear and there can be no dispute about it.” See Srinath Raghavan, War and Peace in Modern India (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 242; “Note on the Visit to China and Indo-China, November 14, 1954,” in
April and 5 May 1962 because they featured articles that “question[ed] the territorial integrity and frontiers of India in a manner which is likely to be prejudicial to the interests of the safety and security of India.”

Publications by Indian government agencies faced similar scrutiny. Secretary Dutt took swift action when he discovered that a map of Assam published by the Central Board of Geophysics in 1950 showed an “incorrect” border with China. He argued that, because this map would damage India’s case by giving China the opportunity to quote from official sources, its distribution must stop. Dutt also instructed all government departments to examine publications issued after 1947 for additional errors vis-à-vis the delineation of the border. If mistakes were found, they were to be forwarded to the Survey of India for clarification.

This response by the foreign secretary had great significance because, in the case of the geophysics map, scientific knowledge was subordinated to politics. Furthermore, purging all maps not consistent with the approved delimitation of the frontier ensured a uniform governmental perspective.

Regulating objectionable publications had its limits, however. In September 1959, India’s Ministry of External Affairs made public for the first time a Chinese map that showed tracts of Indian-claimed territory inside China’s borders. The ministry did so in order to expose “the Chinese ‘cartographic aggression.’” Indian officials felt they had an obligation to inform the public about an assault on the country’s territorial integrity. The government also used the Chinese map as a propaganda tool to consolidate support for its hardline stance toward the frontier. On another occasion, a debate arose in the Lok Sabha about the possible confiscation of China Today’s 19 May 1962 issue. Some members of parliament deemed the publication subversive and demanded immediate and “drastic action by the Government.”

Lakshmi Menon disagreed. She stated that the issue in question merely contained a copy of an official Chinese document and did not constitute propaganda. The minister added that “it is easy for a dictator to close down the Press. Can


50. D.O. No. FS/1242/59, 18 December 1959, in Subject File 58, SDP, NMML.


52. This action portended Nehru’s “Forward Policy” that emerged in 1961.

we do it? We have debates. What we do is determined by our respect for freedom and our respect for fundamental rights.”\textsuperscript{54} In a similar vein, Dutt pointed out that even though a 1959 edition of the \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica} contained a map supporting Chinese boundary claims, banning the reference book in India would be inappropriate.\textsuperscript{55} Even though the Indian government detested anti-Indian publications, it dealt with them on a case-by-case basis and used established legal processes to determine appropriate action. To an extent, India’s democracy prevailed in protecting the rights of a minority opinion.

Nevertheless, bans on controversial publications continued during and after the Sino-Indian War. In the city of Gwalior, police raided bookstores and seized publications that supported Chinese territorial conceptions.\textsuperscript{56} In December 1962, the Home Ministry prohibited distribution of the book \textit{The Sino-Indian Boundary Question}, published in 1962, because it “contain[ed] ‘prejudicial reports’ that are likely to ‘instigate or incite directly or indirectly the commission or abetment of an offense punishable under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1961.’”\textsuperscript{57} Similarly, on 27 August 1963, Home Minister R. M. Hajarnavis proclaimed that the book \textit{A Brief History of Modern China} was not to enter the country because it featured a map that wrongly portrayed India’s borders.\textsuperscript{58} The Indian government feared that distribution of Chinese accounts of the border dispute would validate China’s war victory.

India even restricted publications from the Republic of China (Taiwan). The 1963/1964 edition of the Taiwanese government-produced \textit{Zhongguo nianjian} (China Yearbook) reaffirmed territorial claims articulated by the CCP. Indian Minister of External Affairs Sardar Swaran Singh noted that the book was not allowed to enter the country because it “question[ed] the territorial integrity of India [which] is prohibited under Indian laws.”\textsuperscript{59} India used statutes such as the Criminal Law Amendment Act not only to stifle dissent but also to bolster its international standing by demonstrating that the literature supported its claims. Official conceptions of territory remained sacred both in custom and in law, and India was quick to equate disagreement with an offense.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} External Affairs document, 7 January 1960, in Subject File 41, SDP, NMML.


\textsuperscript{58} Rajya Sabha unstarred question No. 90, 27 August 1963, in C/125(124) CH/63, Ministry of External Affairs, National Archives of India.

\textsuperscript{59} Rajya Sabha starred question No. 157, 24 November 1964, in DO 196-243, TNAUK.
Academic freedom deteriorated as well. Major General S. S. Sokhey wrote in a private letter that the border war “changed the whole course of Indian thought [and now] one cannot even write or talk about it [the border dispute].”\textsuperscript{60} Indian scientist J. B. S. Haldane persuaded biochemist Joseph Needham not to give a lecture in India because he would be browbeaten for his pro-China views.\textsuperscript{61} On these and other occasions, even the most educated members of Indian society succumbed to the spell of nationalism. The dispute with China created an intellectual culture in India that made both Indians and foreign guests afraid to engage in critical dialogue.\textsuperscript{62}

Indian propaganda that countered pro-Chinese media was spread widely to discredit China. Dutt outlined provisions of a pamphlet for a general readership to be distributed in other countries. Its specifications included a description of “general principles which govern the boundary between India and China[,] the basis of delineation of the border in different sectors [and references to how the] Prime Minister has dealt with discussions with the Chinese.”\textsuperscript{63} Dutt also noted that Indian missions abroad could play a role in distributing pamphlets.\textsuperscript{64} The Indian embassy in Paris followed this advice and began producing French versions of pamphlets for distribution in West Africa. In addition, India’s Ministry of External Affairs translated materials into Arabic and Spanish.\textsuperscript{65} Delhi also launched an initiative to counteract Chinese propaganda in Tibet. The Indian government established a printing press, broadcast radio programs, and set up a research institute in the border region. According to Indian diplomat Apa B. Pant, such actions were necessary because Chinese Communist ideology could spread beyond the frontier.\textsuperscript{66}

When the Sino-Indian War broke out in late October 1962, Nehru used the medium of radio to convey his government’s version of events at the frontier. He stipulated that, in spite of China’s acknowledgment of the ancient border and India’s policy of peace and cooperation, the Chinese had resorted

\textsuperscript{60} Memorandum from S. S. Sokhey to Joseph Needham, 26 November 1962, in H. 186, JNP.
\textsuperscript{61} Memorandum from J. B. S. Haldane to Joseph Needham, 22 November 1962, in H. 186, JNP.
\textsuperscript{62} The border war—especially criticism of the Indian government’s role in the conflict—remains taboo in India to this day. A scholar from the United States told me that he has refused to write on the Sino-Indian War out of fear that he would be denied a visa to India.
\textsuperscript{63} Memorandum from S. Dutt to DSE, 26 November 1959, in Subject File 38, SDP, NMML.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Memorandum from Mark Allen, British High Commission, to E. J. Emery, Commonwealth Relations Office, 14 March 1963, in FO 371-170670, TNAUK.
\textsuperscript{66} “Cultural Activities along the Indo-Tibetan Border,” 1962, in Subject File 10, Apa B. Pant Papers, NMML.
to war. This particular broadcast succeeded in coalescing domestic opinion. *The Hindu* published an editorial praising Nehru’s speech and calling for total support of the government in defending the Indian frontier. Radio for internal consumption represented another means to stoke the flames of nationalism.

India used radio for international purposes as well. In the spring of 1963, Indian officials approached the U.S. and British governments for transmitters that would increase the range of the state-run All India Radio. A British report remarked that the Indians did so because they became “conscious of the mounting criticism of the presentation of [their] case following the Chinese aggression of late October/November.” Professional, external communication of India’s interpretation of the border dispute and the history of the Himalayan frontier seemed increasingly pressing after its defeat in the 1962 conflict. Radio developed as a medium for reaffirming Indian claims and for lambasting the People’s Republic overseas.

Political figures not affiliated with the Indian National Congress joined in this effort. Prominent member of the Praja-Socialist Party Hari Vishnu Kamath wrote in a 1959 article that Mao Zedong had prepared a blueprint for conquering the Himalayan states, thereby extending China’s frontier. The Indian newspaper, *The Statesman*, repeated this supposition. The veracity of Kamath’s claim was questioned by British intelligence, however. Baronet Rivett-Carnac maintained that the assertion “had little or no hard evidence to support it,” and the Information Research Department mentioned that it was unable to locate the material Kamath had cited. Despite the dubious basis of this propaganda, it contributed to India’s suspicion of Chinese intentions and served as an ex post facto explanation for the border war.

The Indian government actively produced propaganda after the Sino-Indian War and distributed it to foreign governments. Upon the suggestion of Soviet Ambassador Ivan Benediktov, the Indian government reacted to Zhou Enlai’s circular of 15 November 1962 to Asian and African leaders by producing a pamphlet of its own. Indian Ambassador to the Soviet Union T. N.

67. Inward cablegram I.26217 to the Department of External Affairs from Australian High Commission, New Delhi, 23 October 1962, in A1838, 915/10 Part 1, National Archives of Australia (NAA).
70. “Sino-Indian Border Dispute,” inward cablegram from Australian High Commission, London, 6 November 1962, in A1838, 915/10 Part 1, NAA.
Kaul argued that this effort would clarify the true nature of China’s position.\textsuperscript{71} The resulting brochure, titled \textit{Chinese Aggression in Maps}, similarly traced the evolution of the border conflict through graphics and accompanying textual descriptions. Two maps explained that the McMahon Line merely confirmed the traditional line of separation between China and India, which ran across the Himalayan watershed, but that the Chinese disregarded it in order to control key mountain passes.\textsuperscript{72} The publication was important in featuring many official maps and letting readers know how to interpret them.

During an altercation involving alleged Indian intrusions into Tibet in 1965, the Ministry of External Affairs distributed a report containing notes of protest sent between India and China and describing Chinese actions as “[some] of the most unique and blatant incidents in international politics since the end of the Second World War.”\textsuperscript{73} Repeating allegations of extreme Chinese aggression, the report depicted the ongoing Sino-Indian border dispute as a showdown between good and evil. Moreover, the notes of protest included in the report mentioned the “well-recognized borders of India.” Referring to India’s definition of the border as the international boundary had the potential to persuade foreign governments to accept the Indian case.

The Indian government produced anti-Chinese propaganda indirectly as well. In 1964, then Foreign Secretary Y. D. Gundevia instructed a cartoonist working under the pen name “Ahmed” to create a booklet titled \textit{Bandung Gentleman on an African Safari}, which lampooned Zhou Enlai. The booklet featured two cartoons of Zhou pointing guns at India with the words “Colombo Proposals” in the background.\textsuperscript{74} Widely distributing a publication satirizing the Chinese interpretation of the Bandung spirit—the booklet ended up in the hands of the British government and likely many others—served as a reminder of China’s supposed great betrayal years after the Sino-Indian War had concluded. Preserving the image of the treacherous and violent Chinese could score India sustained moral and material support. Overall, Indian counterpropaganda measures paralleled China’s strategies in terms of content and medium.

\textsuperscript{71} Memorandum from Kaul to Nehru, AMB-190/62, 30 November 1962.
\textsuperscript{72} “Chinese Aggression in Maps,” 2 December 1962, in CO 1054-64, TNAUK.
\textsuperscript{73} “Documents on China’s Ultimatum to India,” n.d., in LONB 69/44/2, Archives New Zealand.
\textsuperscript{74} Memorandum from J. G. Walmsley, British High Commission, New Delhi, to Desmond M. Kerr, South Asia Department, Commonwealth Relations Office (with attached “Bandung Gentleman” booklet), 17 April 1964, in DO 196-242, TNAUK.
British Support of India

The British government had a vested interest in bolstering Indian claims and explicated them through multiple media. This practice had its roots in the actions of British administrator Olaf Caroe, who fabricated maps and doctored documents that dealt with the 1914 Simla Conference. Britain continued to propagate India’s inherited territorial claims to preserve a connection to a key member of the Commonwealth, to expand its Cold War strategy in Asia, and to save face.

Throughout the Sino-Indian border dispute, the UK actively assisted the Indian historian Gopal in procuring maps. British Ambassador to Indonesia Leslie Fry pointed out that a map created by McMahon and an “ancient map of Ladakh” might reside in the India Office Library and that Indians could use them to “disperse the Chinese fog.” On another occasion, A. M. Simmons from the British High Commission in Delhi suggested that he could provide Gopal with important Foreign Office materials if these were reciprocated. This proposed exchange would increase the amount of evidence corroborating India’s case and would have the added benefit of filling gaps in British intelligence toward the region. British and Indian officials cooperated closely to legitimize the so-called rectification of India’s northern boundary, which had resulted from foreign policies executed during the era of colonial rule.

British officials also endeavored to intercept Chinese propaganda. In December 1962, K. M. Draycott drew attention to a special issue of China Youth Bulletin that advanced the Chinese interpretation of the border dispute. He noted that although the bulletin was distributed in underdeveloped French- and English-speaking countries, the British struggled to obtain it. Obtaining this publication would allow the British to gain insight into how the Chinese propaganda system operated and how the PRC was attempting to appeal to the Third World. Regardless of whether British officials succeeded, Draycott suggested that Britain ought to notify the Indian government about recent propaganda activities in China, where key publications remained illegal.

76. Memorandum from Leslie Fry, British Embassy, Djakarta, to F. A. Warner, Southeast Asia Department, Foreign Office, 28 November 1962, in FO 371-164924, TNAUK.
77. “Sino-Indian Relations,” PL 5/43/1, 4 December 1964, in DO 196-243, TNAUK.
78. “Special Propaganda Efforts by CPR to Publicize Her Case on Sino-Indian Border Dispute and on Cuba,” 11 December 1962, in FO 1110-1499, TNAUK.
Helping India to police its media and, in turn, stamp out anti-Indian publications indicated the strength of the bond between the two countries. Britain, a purported beacon of democracy, ended up settling for political expediency over freedom of speech.

What is more, the roles of British administrators and academics overlapped considerably. The diplomat and international relations scholar John Addis discovered the “Caroe Fabrication” in 1963 when examining two copies of the 1929 volume of *Aitchison’s Treaties* at Harvard University. Neville Maxwell describes the incident:

> On the Widener Library’s shelves he found two copies of the 1929 *Aitchison’s Treaties* and was surprised to note that the two were not exactly identical. Curiously, the differences lay in only one passage, on the pages describing the outcome of the Simla Conference of 1914. One of the two volumes reflected the failure of this attempt, the other claimed some success.\(^79\)

Addis did not publicize his findings and instead provided to members of the British government a private circular titled “The India-China Border Question,” which dealt with the “Caroe Fabrication” as well as China’s and India’s sides in the border dispute. Although some officials, such as McKenzie Johnston, deemed the paper “a balanced and factual study,” they distanced themselves from its argument.\(^80\) Addis clearly became aware of the paper’s potential to damage UK-Indian relations and therefore self-censored in kind. In a letter to the Foreign Office, he asserted:

> The primary purpose of my paper was to analyze the motives and intentions of the Chinese Government. In the revised version I have tried to restrict myself more rigorously to this purpose and have therefore cut out much material that would on the one hand have put the behavior of the Chinese government in a more favorable light and on the other hand would have shown up the weaknesses of the Indian Government’s case. And in quotations from documents I have omitted a number of passages which give a poor impression of the Indian Government’s good sense and good manners. The final version thus reflects even less accurately than the first draft the extent to which the Indian Government’s presentation of their case to the Chinese government has been arrogant and dogmatic, laying down the law and admitting no argument, magisterial and condescending, endlessly repetitive and never letting the overworked point go, quibbling and argumentative for the sake of arguing, and withal inconsistent

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80. Memorandum from McKenzie Johnston to FO, 27 May 1963, in FO 371-170671, TNAUK.
and mendacious and applying different standards to the Chinese case than their own.  

Although initially willing to fulfill his scholarly duty and expose the truth, Addis was constrained by Cold War politics. In the end, he failed to reorient British foreign policy and instead, like Caroe, advanced the party line.

Despite Addis’s failure, diplomat M. P. Buxton lauded his efforts. He wrote candidly that “the steady and deliberate distortion [of the historical record], even by academic figures whom one would hope to respect, was most apparent in [the] Western treatment of the Sino-Indian dispute. Mr. Addis was aware of the nature of Western reports and anxious to counteract these distortions.”

Buxton’s praise demonstrates that certain members of government admired the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Yet, these individuals remained part of a larger machine responsible for suppressing information that did not conform with Britain’s goals as defined by the geopolitical realities of the time. Disseminating information that supported the Indian case remained the only viable option. One official summed up this situation by stating that “we [Britain] and the U.S. have already publicly ranged ourselves on the Indian side. We must obviously follow this up in all ways we can, including our propaganda.”

On at least one occasion, however, Indo-British cooperation faced public scrutiny. At the request of Indian High Commissioner M. C. Chagla, Secretary of State for the Colonies Duncan Sandys protested to The Times of London over a map that the newspaper featured depicting the pre-McMahon Line frontier between China and India. In a private letter to the editor of The Times, William Haley, Sandys mentioned that he knew that former diplomats Caroe and Hugh Richardson had also written to the newspaper, and he urged the publication of their letters to redress the alleged pro-Beijing bias. Curtailing the inclusion of information supporting China’s position remained the modus operandi of the British government.

The Times responded with a blistering editorial declaring that Sandys had no business acting as a messenger for the Indian diplomat and that the British government had no right to determine what was published in the news. Haley stressed that “the map had no other intention but to show where the earlier

81. John Addis to C. M. MacLehose, 23 May 1963, in FO 170673, TNAUK.
82. Confidential minutes by M. P. Buxton, 15 January 1964, in FO 170675, TNAUK.
83. Confidential minutes by G. L. Merrells, 24 April 1964, in FO 170675, TNAUK.
84. Memorandum from Duncan Sandys to Sir William Haley, 10 December 1962, in Duncan Sandys Papers, DSND 8/12, Churchill College Archive Center, UC.
line of administration lay” and that it “thus in no way supported Chinese claims or questioned the legality of the McMahon Line.” This reproach by The Times demonstrates the limits of British government control over the media. Newspapers continued to publish maps and articles that elucidated the border dispute. Nevertheless, as one can deduce from The Times’s editorial, British media overwhelmingly sympathized with India and recapitulated the Indian case.

Conclusion

China and India had markedly different political systems, but they adopted surprisingly similar approaches for dealing with information relating to the Sino-Indian border dispute. Each country collected documents, policed its media ruthlessly, and used assorted types of propaganda to advance political objectives. In contrast to China, India’s democratic system checked government overreach and allowed limited deviation from official stances.

Britain played a crucial role in helping India to promote its claims in the international arena. The Foreign Office redoubled its intelligence-gathering efforts to obtain documents from both its own archives and abroad. The British government played a significant part in aiding Indian researchers such as Gopal to procure maps. Furthermore, its use of a taskforce made up of academics and policymakers to write reports on the border dispute lent additional authority to Indian statements. These individuals passed as unbiased specialists, but in reality they served the bureaucracy. Although instances arose when researchers contradicted official stances, inconvenient information was discarded in the interest of geopolitics. In this context, governments used expert knowledge strictly to defend official statements and international political positions.

The three governments employed multiple media operations to achieve their political and diplomatic goals. Building up archival collections, censoring publications, and distributing propaganda could benefit national security and strengthen international alliances. Academic freedom suffered as a necessary byproduct of this exercise. The Sino-Indian conflict represented much more than a war of territory. It was also a war of information.

86. Yet, in February 1960, The Times of London refused to publish an article by Caroe on the Sino-Indian border dispute. Secretary Dutt reacted by calling the newspaper’s perspective consistently “anti-Indian.” See No. FS/183/60, 23 February 1960, in Subject File 59, SDP, NMML.
Addendum

The current status of China’s and India’s archives eerily resembles that of the 1950s and 1960s. The effective closure of China’s Foreign Ministry Archives seems to stem, at least in part, from the CCP’s fear of foreign researchers finding inconsistencies in Chinese territorial claims. For example, in 2015, the Japanese Foreign Ministry published a map created by a Chinese government bureau that referred to islands in the East China Sea by their Japanese name. Even at non-shuttered archives in China, documents on the Sino-Indian border from the period in question are rare. The same can be said regarding archives in India. Although finding aids at the National Archives of India highlight an impressive collection of materials on this topic, researchers are frequently told that files have “not been transferred” (i.e., they are unavailable). What is more, at neither the National Archives nor the Nehru Library may maps be photographed or copied.

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