

WDF- 32
India and China: The Great Confrontation

43, Golf Links
New Delhi 3
India
May 5, 1960

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

After Chou En-lai had been escorted through the ceremonial welcome at New Delhi's Palam airport, he and Jawaharlal Nehru took their places before a stand of microphones. Nehru, with a deeply pained expression on his face, spoke first: "Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister, in welcoming you today as our honored guest, I am reminded of your previous visits to India...It had been our firm policy previously, and it was then and later, to have a bond of friendship between our two countries...Unfortunately other events have taken place since then which have put a great strain on this bond of friendship and which have given a shock to all our people. Thus our relations have been imperilled in the present and for the future, and the very basis on which they stood has been shaken...We are thus faced with grave problems which disturb the minds of millions of people. It is a hard task to go back and recover that feeling of good faith and friendship, and yet the future depends upon this. I earnestly trust that our efforts will be directed towards undoing much that has happened and thus recovering that climate of peace and friendship on which our relations ultimately depend."

Chou, wearing many garlands of marigolds placed around his neck mostly by members of the Chinese Embassy staff and the India-China Friendship Association, responded in his high-pitched voice: "Your Excellency, Respected and Dear Prime Minister Nehru, Dear Indian friends...I am glad to come once again to the capital of our great neighbor...On behalf of the Chinese Government and people I would like to extend cordial greetings to the Indian Government and the great Indian people...We have jointly initiated the Five Principles of peaceful co-existence. There is no reason why any question between us cannot be settled reasonably through friendly consultations...The friendship between the peoples of China and India is everlasting...History will continue to bear out that the great solidarity of the one thousand million people of our two countries cannot be shaken by any force on earth. Long live China-India friendship!"

The following night, in the banquet hall of the President's House, Nehru rose to propose a toast to the Chinese visitor (with orange juice, in prohibitionist India), and said: "...It is strange and a matter of great sorrow for us that events should have so shaped themselves as to challenge that very basis of our thinking [belief in peace and in peaceful methods] and caused our people to apprehend danger on our peaceful frontiers along the

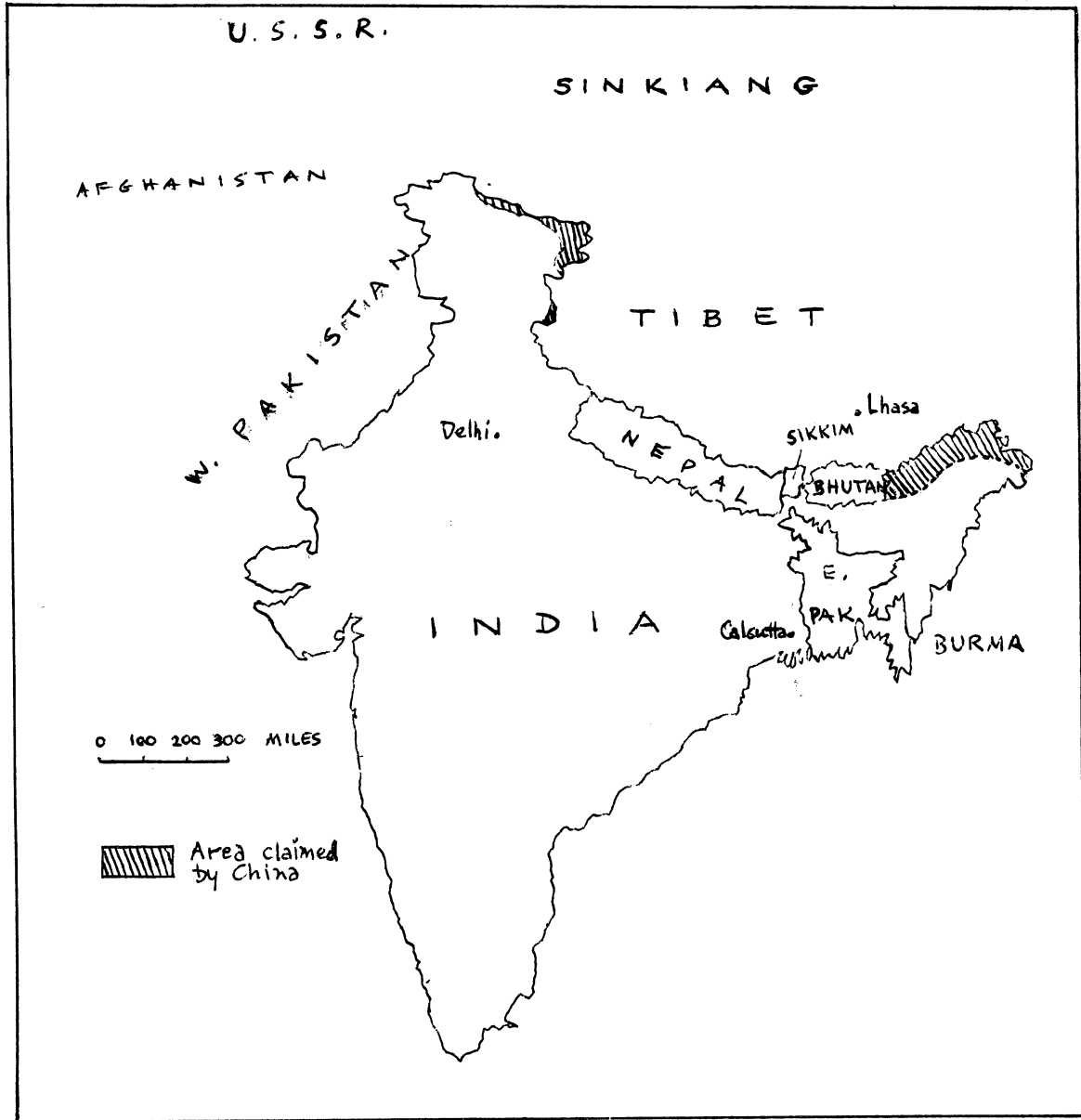
great Himalayan mountains which we have loved for thousands of years and which have stood as sentinels guarding and inspiring our people... I feel that...with our joint endeavors, we shall not only halt the unhappy deterioration in our countries' relations, but also take a step toward their betterment."

Chou, responding in a speech that touched on the unifying spirit in Asia and Africa, the paramount need in both China and India for economic development, and the "militarist and fascist forces...menacing the peace and security of the world," approached the border dispute this way: "...In the last year and more, although there occurred certain difficulties...owing to temporary differences of opinion on the boundary question between the two countries and certain unfortunate and unexpected incidents, this should not, nor can it, shake the foundation of the long-standing friendship between our two peoples... We recognise that a settlement...has its difficult aspects, because this is an extremely complicated question left to our two countries by colonialism; yet...because both our countries have attained independence and share the desire for friendly cooperation...it is possible for us not to be bound any longer by outdated ideas."

Five nights later, at the top of the grand red-sandstone staircase inside the President's House, a junior official of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs methodically passed out mimeographed copies of the Chou-Nehru Joint Communique. The pivotal word was "but": "...The two Prime Ministers explained fully their respective stands on the problems affecting the border areas. This led to greater understanding of the views of the two Governments but the talks did not result in resolving the differences that had arisen." Now, officials of both sides would meet for four months beginning in June to "examine, check and study all historical documents, records, accounts, maps and other material relevant to the boundary question, on which each side relied in support of its stand, and draw up a report for submission to the two Governments."

A few minutes later, seated at a table in a high-ceilinged loggia overlooking the President's gardens, Chou En-lai fiddled with the straw of his lemon soda while his interpreter read his Statement to the 200 reporters and photographers assembled: "...The Chinese Government has consistently maintained that since the Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited, both the Chinese and Indian sides should seek a reasonable settlement of the boundary question between the two countries through peaceful and friendly consultations, taking into consideration the historical background and the present actualities, acting on the Five Principles jointly initiated by the two countries and adopting an attitude of mutual understanding and mutual accommodation..."

Immediately afterwards, until 1 o'clock in the morning, the Chinese Premier skillfully answered questions, amiably putting blame for failure of the talks on the Indian Government: As implicit heirs to the British "imperialists," he hinted, India controls a broad area in the Eastern sector that "had once been under the jurisdiction of China... [However,] we are willing to maintain the present state of that sector of the boundary." The disputed territory in the West, he went on, has been Chinese "throughout



history," though it is claimed by India in an "undefined" manner. "We have requested the Indian Government to take an attitude towards this sector of boundary similar to the attitude which the Chinese Government has taken towards the Eastern sector of the boundary... that is to say, an attitude of mutual accommodation." But India, he regretted, had not reciprocated.

The next morning, as Chou's plane speeded noisily down the runway for the take-off, Nehru abruptly broke his state and, hands clasped behind his back and head down, began walking back toward his car. The reporters swarmed around him, and hemmed in by faces and notebooks and pencils, he answered questions softly and sadly: "There is no question of barter in these matters... Obviously...they have committed aggression... The basic tension remains..."

Later, at noon, in the House of the People, the Prime Minister explained to parliamentarians the cause of the failure: "...We

came up against the hard rock of different sets of facts. Our argument was that the Chinese forces had come into our territory recently. Their argument was that they had always been there... If the **basic facts** are different, there is no meeting ground..." He was "not agreeable" to Chou's proposals for settlement.

Two days later, in Kathmandu, Chou, addressing a press conference, thumped the table angrily and said, "The Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru, made a statement in the Indian Parliament after my departure from New Delhi, which was not friendly to China."

The following day, in a full parliamentary discussion of the Sino-Indian talks, Nehru remarked in his schoolmasterly way, "...when we claim that certain areas of ours have been occupied by the Chinese forces or authorities and when we ask them to retire from that area, necessarily it is not something which is likely to be appreciated or liked by the other party."

*

*

*

If the 20 hours of private talks between Chou and Nehru resulted, in diplomatic language, in a "greater clarity of views" between them, their public utterances, both bland and tart, that followed the talks resulted in complete clarity on the main point: India and China have finally confronted each other in modern times, and the result is conflict.

These two great lands with ancient and unique cultures, until recently long dulled and dominated, now alive and important again as new nations with enormous populations, problems, ambitions, and potential might, face each other across a hostile border. The former "impassable Himalayan barrier" between them has been reduced in size by the technology of airplanes and motor trucks, and the Himalayan region has been converted by rival national interests into a zone of contention.

China, as the historical nation, comes up to the Himalayan border in a seeming desire to restore, out of its new strength, the farthestmost boundaries of the continuing Middle Kingdom. China, the Communist state, apparently aims to expand its territory and influence on the non-Soviet, southern side of its periphery.

India, which has traditionally assumed the crest of the Himalayas to be the crown of the sub-continent, has been stirred by this formidable threat. India's immediate aim is to make certain there will be no further Chinese provocations that would demand a resort to arms. Its larger aim is to settle the dispute in a way consistent with Indian national pride and safety.

Ironically, the focus of conflict is some of the world's most inaccessible and dismal territory: 15,000 square miles of mountain peaks and sandy wastes, 17,000 feet high or higher, virtually uninhabited, in eastern Ladakh. The Chinese claim to 36,000 square miles in the Eastern border area was revealed by Chou in New Delhi as a bargaining point, not a serious claim. Except for a small border valley, the entire area is controlled by Indian administrators and soldiers. The Western sector, however, the Chinese found unoccupied in the early 1950's during the "liberation" of

Tibet, and in 1956-57 they built a 100-mile long road across the salt and sand flats of Aksai Chin to connect Tibet and Sinkiang. This area, though a part of India's Jammu and Kashmir State, is nearly impossible to reach from the Indian side, lying as it does behind three ranges of high mountains. Indian patrols discovered the Chinese-built road only in 1958. Last October, Chinese troops fired on an Indian patrol and killed nine men. Before last Winter's snows fell and made travel impossible, the Chinese had occupied 12,000 square miles of the area they claim. Through the furor aroused in India, the lengthy and bitter diplomatic correspondence between Peking and New Delhi, and now the Prime Ministers' talks, the Chinese have acted as though they firmly intend to keep the territory now in their possession.

This territorial dispute has seized interest, but closer to the heart of the great confrontation of China and India is the competition between the two rivals for power, prestige and consequent leadership in Asia and among newly independent nations elsewhere. Their different systems---India's constitutionally and inchoately democratic, China's ruthlessly and enthusiastically totalitarian---were a potential or perhaps latent source of conflict which the boundary dispute has tapped and developed and made lasting.

* * *

Independent India and New China are more or less the same age. Acknowledging the Communists' ascent to power and, more than that, sympathetic to a fellow "new-dawn-in-Asia" government, India was among the first nations to announce diplomatic recognition of the new Peking regime. Full of revolutionists' fervor, the Chinese rebuffed the Indians squarely in 1950 over the "liberation" of Tibet. When New Delhi suggested a "peaceful approach," Peking replied that no "foreign interference" would be tolerated. Thereafter the Indian Government took diplomatic measures to verify its special concern for the external relations of Nepal, the Himalayan kingdom, and Sikkim and Bhutan, two neighboring Indian protectorates.

None the less, the basic Indian approach toward China seemed to be that it was not only more blessed but also more effective to be a peace-maker.

Accordingly, India acted as mediator in the Korean and Indo-Chinese wars, and became an advocate of a "rightful" place for Communist China in the U.N. Generally, China seemed to be newly reasonable and respectable. Specifically, China seemed to respond to India's persistent friendliness. Chou and Nehru signed an agreement on the Panch Shila, or "Five Principles": non-aggression, non-interference, recognition of each other's sovereignty, mutual help, and peaceful co-existence. On a lavishly hospitable state visit to China Nehru marvelled at Chinese accomplishments and spoke of India's special faculty for interpreting China to the world. When Chou returned the visit, hundreds of thousands of Indians lined to streets and shouted the slogan, "Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai!" ("Indians and Chinese are Brothers!"). Indian and Chinese officials mutually recalled "the 2000 years of peace and friendship linking our two countries."

With all this, the Indian Government found satisfaction on the essential counts: practically, India was assured an "area of peace" in Asia, and theoretically, the efficacy of its policy of non-alignment and Panch Shila was vindicated. On its part, China gained wide distribution of an image of itself as an Asian country, formerly dominated by Western powers, now, after the Korean and Indo-Chinese wars, dedicated to peace and busy with its own economic development.

Throughout this period there was general evasion of the facts that historically China and India had only limited intercourse and currently their social values and political systems were both fundamentally different and inevitably antagonistic.

Beginning in mid-1957 the underlying sense of competition with China felt in India began to rise to the surface. China's superior accomplishments in comparable Five Year Plans, once explained enviously in terms of "India's slower but democratic methods," was now attributed to "China's totalitarianism." Skepticism of Chinese motives and methods grew as Indians watched the "Hundred Flowers" bloom and be cut down; heard Peking's vituperations against the "deviationist" Yugoslavs, for whom many articulate Indians have a special affinity; and observed the "dumping" of Chinese commodities into a disrupted Southeast Asian market.

In the Summer of 1958, the mass communization of the Chinese countryside was greeted in India with surprise and contempt, and it caused a much keener awareness of the basic differences in Indian and Chinese ideologies.

The disenchantment came with the Tibetan revolt in the Spring of 1959. There was sympathy for the Dalai Lama personally, and for Tibet's lamaistic Buddhism of Indian parentage. There was shock at the vehemence of the Chinese in quelling the revolt, and distress at the end of assurance that Tibet could serve as some sort of "buffer" between China and India. When, perhaps out of pique at India's sympathy for the Dalai Lama and his followers, the Chinese charged "Indian reactionaries" with fomenting the revolt and the Indian Government with helping keep the Dalai Lama "under duress," Indian resentment flared.

The resentment then expanded. Nehru, partly due to prodding by the press, Opposition members of parliament, and a few persistently inquisitive Congress MPs, revealed that the Chinese had made armed intrusions across the Himalayan border as early as 1954. Now there was a storm of new grievances: Chinese maps which claimed Indian territory, the building of the Aksai Chin road, the alleged mistreatment of Indian representatives and nationals in Tibet, and intrusions of Chinese aircraft into Indian airspace. Well-heated Indian emotions flared again at further border incidents, and then the fatal clash at Kongka Pass. Nehru himself, who had been counseling and practicing restraint, permitted himself to accuse the Chinese of "aggression," "breach of faith," and "pride and arrogance." The Chinese responded with accusations of "slander."

In diplomatic correspondence over the past several months, the two Governments have been staking out their rival claims, and

making their counter-arguments, and doing so in more moderate language. India has maintained that the border is based on custom and tradition, follows the crest-and-watershed principle, is mostly confirmed by treaty with previous Chinese governments, and does not require formal definition. China has insisted that the entire 2500-mile long border has never been delimited, that the Indian Government has assumed "imperialist" British encroachments, and the border requires delimitation "for the first time."

It was the Chinese Premier who first sought a "face to face" meeting with his Indian counterpart. Nehru rejected two invitations with the hint that China should take some "necessary preliminary steps" to heighten the chances of success. Then Chou was invited to New Delhi by Nehru, who wrote he still did not see "any common ground between our respective viewpoints," but nevertheless thought it "might be helpful for us to meet." Unsaid was Nehru's invitation to Chou to remove Chinese troops from Indian soil, and Chou's counter-offer to Nehru to accept the status quo. Now, after the talks, with the Indian rejection of the Chinese offer to give up their bogus claim to the Eastern border area in exchange for China's remaining in the Western sector, the deadlock is secure.

It is unlikely that either the Indian or Chinese Government will use the forthcoming officials' meetings this summer to relax their positions. For China, desiring to extend its communications network up to and along its borders, eastern Ladakh, with its Aksai Chin road, is a corridor connecting northwest Tibet with southeast Sinkiang. Perhaps the Chinese Government calculates that the gaining of this strategic advantage offsets the loss, or reduction, of the advantages of Indian amicability. On the other hand, it is possible that the enmity China has acquired by its belligerent acts in the Himalayas may be compensated for by the impression of Chinese power created in Indian and other Asian minds.

For India, unable to remove the Chinese from its territory by either arms or diplomacy, the prospect is resignation to the status quo. The reasons are sunk deep in the Indian mentality, and lie in plain view in the light of India's recent foreign affairs. India acts out of its fundamental cultural values---tolerance, moderation, mediation, non-violence, fatalism---as well as out of the expediences born of national experience and self-interest. Contradictions arise: Nehru could condemn "aggression" in Suez, and regret the "unfortunate events" in Hungary. Nehru could reject a proposal to take the Tibetan issue to the U.N. on the grounds that it would only lead to "an expression of strong opinion," and later condemn the South African police firings "lest restraint should be mistaken for lack of strong feeling." The Indian Government could use armed force to meet a challenge to its view of Indian sovereignty in Hyderabad and Kashmir, yet continue to tolerate the Portuguese enclave of Goa though it could easily be overrun with troops. The aims of the Indian Government in this case are to keep peace with a rampageous China and to avoid loss of the territory now in Chinese control. While India has gained a world-wide reputation for emphasizing the moral aspects of international affairs, it faces, along with other nations, the necessity of adjusting moral rightness to the wins and losses of international politics. Satis-

faction with the rightness of acting peaceably toward China would enable the Indian Government, and the nation, to face the continuing Chinese presence on Indian soil with reluctant but inevitable acquiescence.

None the less, for many Indians the "China crisis" has been the most sophisticating episode in independent India's history.

The Kashmir war with Pakistan involved a threat to India, to which the nation responded forcibly; but in a real sense it was an "internal" affair, an extension of the strife that accompanied the Partition of India in 1947. However, though India has been, since then, a spectator, commentator, mediator, and even peripheral participant in a number of international conflicts throughout the post-World War II period, the China crisis marks the first time that India has been subjected to a direct external threat to national security. The crisis has stirred thinking and debate regarding the very fundamentals of India's foreign policy.

Reduced to a formula, India's foreign policy is "Non-alignment in the Cold War, and peace through Panch Shila." India not only wishes to remain non-involved in the conflict between the American and Soviet "power blocs," but urges as a substitute for the "hatred and violence" of the Cold War, the "universally valid" Five Principles of peaceful co-existence. But in the face of the direct challenge from China, old opponents and new doubters have criticized and denounced the policy of non-alignment and Panch Shila on the basis of its actual effectiveness.

The dissident voices have been those of non-Communist Opposition politicians, newspaper editors and columnists, defiant members of Nehru's own Congress Party, students, and intellectuals; military officers have been silent but stirred. The charges, in slogan form, are "lack of realism," "complacency," "appeasement," and "failure." The complaints are that the "dogma" of non-alignment has "isolated" India internationally in a time of need, and that Chinese "repudiation" of Panch Shila has "destroyed" Panch Shila for once and for all. Reasonable alternatives, though, are lacking.

Nehru's answer has been that to abandon non-alignment is to "take shelter under somebody else's umbrella, seek help of others to defend yourself, to protect you because you are weak, you cannot do so;" similarly, Panch Shila, he has replied, is a "right" code of behavior, a "correct" set of principles, and "we shall endeavor to act up to them whatever other countries may or may not do."

These appeals by Nehru to pride in independence and idealism, and to unity in time of crisis as well, have had some effect. But as the debate has drawn on, it is obvious that Nehru has been more influenced by his critics than vice versa. The leader of the nation has been led. Criticism of Nehru has had the effect of pulling him down from his larger view of world affairs, down to India. Without by any means doubting Nehru's patriotism, Nehru's critics have had the effect of putting his patriotism to the test. For all Nehru's freely articulated concern for the "far-reaching aspects" of the quarrel with China, by the time of Chou's visit to

New Delhi, Nehru showed his awareness that the single most important aspect was the preservation of Indian national integrity and security.

* * *

The year of difficulties with the China has seen some shifting in the currents of India's relations with some other countries, and in internal processes as well. For one thing, the Indian Government has proclaimed in the strongest terms its vital interest in the Himalayan states of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Any aggression against any of them, Nehru announced, would be taken as aggression against India. What steps India has taken to resist Chinese infiltration and covert subversion is another question. Toward Pakistan, now replaced by China as India's leading foreign bête noire, there has been the beginning of offers of rapprochement. There is talk of the "practical necessity" of solving the Kashmir problem, and reference made in conversations of the "common past history" with Pakistan. Toward the United States there is a warmer feeling, apparently for these reasons: the U.S. is assisting India in the economic growth that is fundamentally India's best long-term defense; there is the growing opinion that perhaps America's attitude toward Communist China has not been so unreasonable after all; in the last resort, the U.S. would be a source of military assistance. The stock of the U.S.S.R. has gone up too, for taking a neutral stand between its Communist ally and India; however, this has been limited by Russia's "failure" to be an effective mediator in the dispute.

Internally, the year has resulted in Prime Minister Nehru's being subjected to the most serious and sustained criticism in his career. Taken up in Parliament for not taking the House into confidence on border incidents that took place as long ago as 1954, Nehru explained that he wished to deal with the Chinese Government "without too much publicity," then apologized for his "error" in not telling the Parliament at the time. As rarely in its 13 years in power, the Government was obliged to answer critical questions from the Congress, as well as the Opposition, benches. And rarely too, the Prime Minister was given frank advice by his close colleagues, notably the Vice President, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, and the Home Minister, Pandit G.B. Pant. Increasingly outspoken criticism of Nehru by the press has had an important influence on the public and undoubtedly also on the Prime Minister, who has been piqued occasionally to denounce "some newspapers" as "completely irresponsible."

In a running debate during which it often seemed that opposing Indians were more angry at each other than at the Chinese, the most vehement disapproval was inflicted on the Communist Party of India, and V.K. Krishna Menon. Linked with their Chinese "comrades," the Communists were obliged to share Indian disgust. Divided among themselves into "nationalists" and "internationalists," they have still managed to keep silent when Nehru has criticized China, and to parrot his words when he has been conciliatory.

Krishna Menon, the Defense Minister, whose sharp tongue, surmised leftist leanings, and persuasiveness with Nehru are resented even among fellow-members of the Congress party, aroused suspicion among his foes by his long silence on the Chinese threat to the

Northern border, and then touched off alarm by declaring the inviolability of any "Indian-administered territory"---after the Prime Minister has described eastern Ladakh as an "unadministered" area. He also went against the grain by urging the nation to defend the "entire 9000-mile boundary" (6000 of land, 3000 of sea), most of which involves Pakistan, when it was the 2500-mile border with China that the nation was concerned about. Against criticism, Krishna Menon has rarely defended himself. That job is done by the Prime Minister, who has vouched for Krishna Menon's patriotism and competence.

Among other changes that the year has brought about is that the mountainous border areas, formerly thought of as "beautiful" or "backward," are now acknowledged as "strategic." There have been military and administrative changes accordingly. The Army now has immediate responsibility for defense in most areas, having taken over from the more casual frontier constabularies. And the border districts are reorganized, put in charge of capable and senior civil servants, and given greatly increased allocations for the building of roads, installation of telecommunications, and general social and economic development.

* * *

Through all of this year of challenge there has been much change: new disillusionment, new watchfulness. There is also much that has remained the same: the Government will maintain its faith in non-alignment, Nehru will continue to advocate Panch Shila, Members of Parliament will still speak of the "importance of Sino-Indian friendship to world peace," the U.N. delegate will continue to support the membership of Communist China in the General Assembly, though probably not with excessive ardor.

But the changes seem more important, and these two the most important among them: a new concept of and feeling for India as "our country," and a new "location" for India in the world.

Walter Friedenbergr

Received New York May 13, 1960