

PELICAN BOOKS

INDIA'S CHINA WAR

Neville Maxwell, an Australian, was born in London in 1926. Educated at McGill University and Cambridge, he joined *The Times* as a foreign correspondent in 1955 and spent three years in the Washington bureau. In 1959 he was posted to New Delhi as South Asia correspondent. In the next eight years he travelled throughout his area, from Kabul to East Pakistan and Katmandu to Ceylon, reporting in detail the end of the Nehru era in India and the post-Nehru developments. In 1967 he went as a senior fellow to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in order to write *India's China War*. He is now with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Oxford University.

INDIA'S CHINA WAR

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NEVILLE MAXWELL



PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

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First published by Jonathan Cape 1970
Published with a postscript in Pelican Books 1972

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Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd
Aylesbury, Bucks
Set in Linotype Plantin

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Now, it is a question of fact whether this village or that village or this little strip of territory is on their side or on our side. Normally, wherever these are relatively petty disputes, well, it does seem rather absurd for two great countries . . . immediately to rush at each other's throats to decide whether two miles of territory are on this side or on that side, and especially two miles of territory in the high mountains, where nobody lives.

But where national prestige and dignity is involved, it is not the two miles of territory, it is the nation's dignity and self-respect that becomes involved. And therefore this happens.

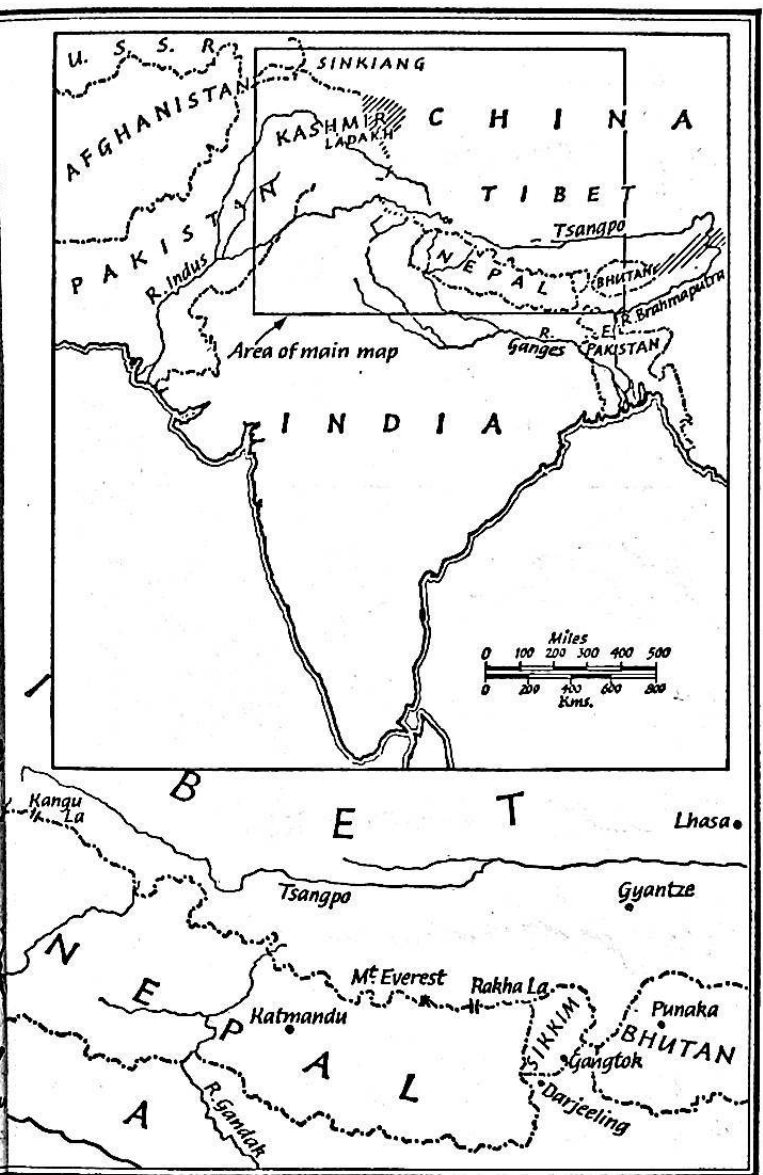
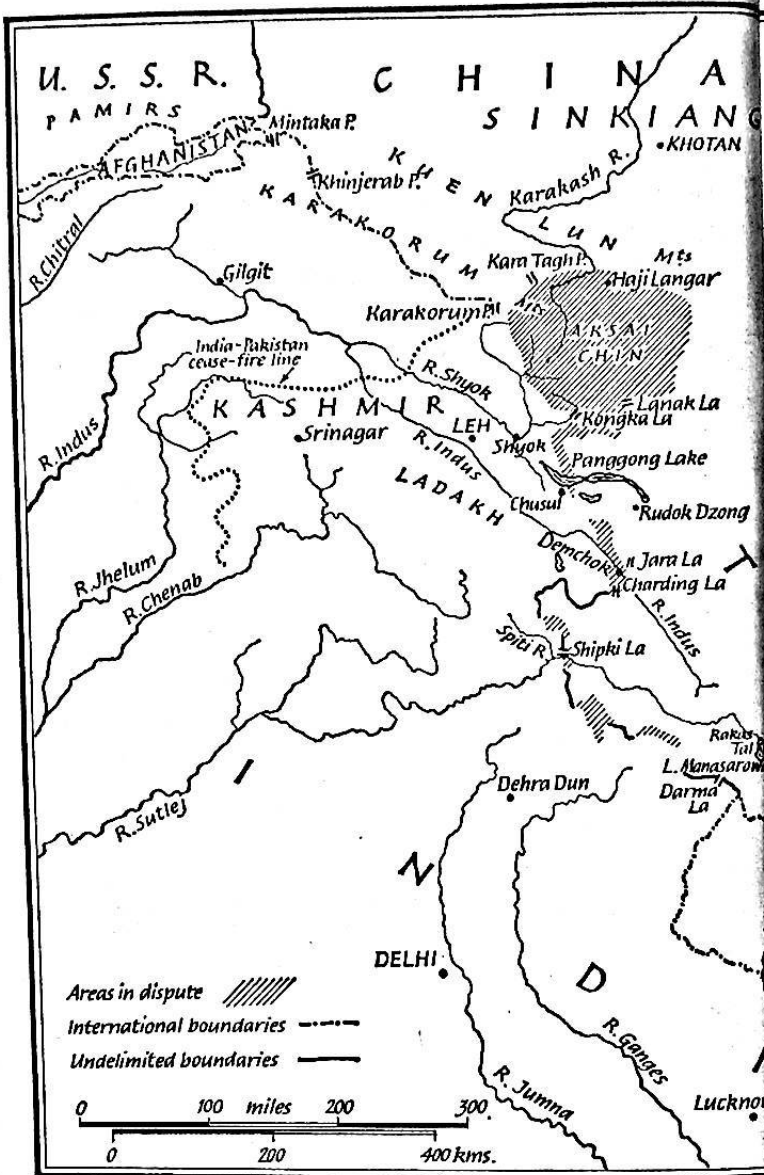
Jawaharlal Nehru, Lok Sabha, 4 September 1959

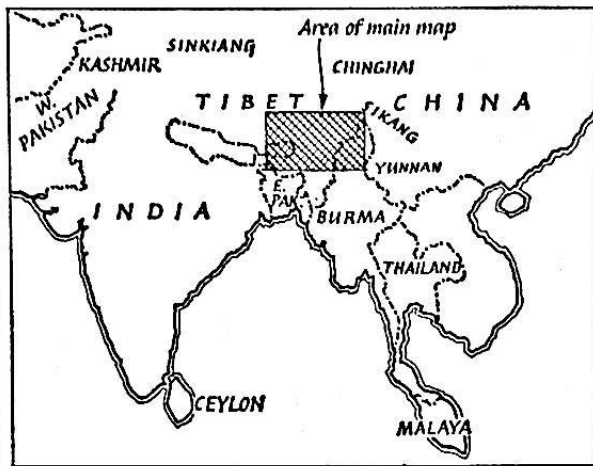
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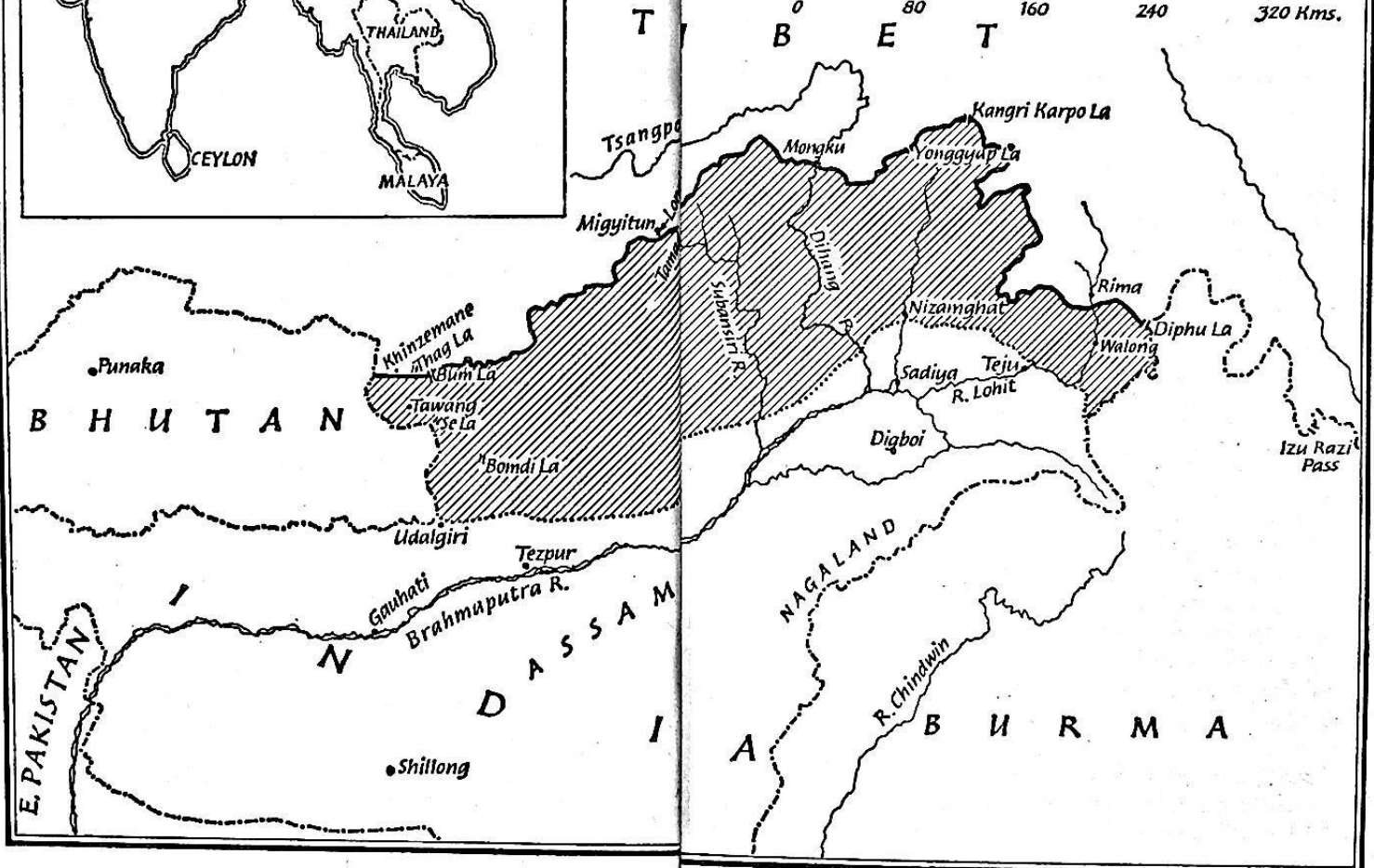
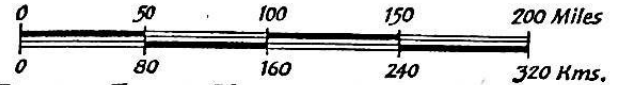




Outer Line (Pre - 1914)
boundary of British India

Disputed areas

McMahon Line



PREFACE

THE Sino-Indian boundary dispute was one of the most dramatic passages of international relations in the mid twentieth century. It saw the world's two most populous states, Asia's great new republics, which had seemed to be set on a path of amicable co-operation in spite of their opposed political characters, fall out over tracts of desolate, difficult and useless territory, and ultimately fight a short, fierce border war. It sharply reduced the role and status of India in world affairs. Friendship with China had been the keystone of the foreign policy Jawaharlal Nehru had set for India: non-alignment, the refusal of India to throw in her lot with either of the blocks, Communist and anti-Communist, into which the world seemed then so neatly divided; self-reliance in defence, independence in foreign policy; concentration upon economic development, at the risk of allowing the armed forces to run down – all of these depended upon friendship with China, and a peaceful northern border. Hostility with China, a live border in the north demanding huge defence outlays – these would bring down the whole arch of Nehru's policies. With them would go Nehru's political dominance.

The dispute, and the border war which was its climax, confirmed the general view of China as a bellicose, chauvinist and expansionist power. When, at the end of the decade, the Sino-Soviet boundary dispute became acute and those giants began to move towards war, recollection of China's quarrel with India predisposed world opinion to accept the Russian version of the new dispute, and even encouraged the thought that China might now be getting what she deserved for her general intransigence over border questions. Of all recent quarrels between nations, none has been so fully documented as that between China and India: both sides explained their positions at great length and repeatedly, to each other and for anyone else who would listen. And yet the facts beneath the dispute seemed so obscure – and so

few were ready to inquire into them objectively – that no recent international incident has been so widely and totally misunderstood as this.

My interest in the subject began with my arrival in New Delhi to take up the assignment there as correspondent of *The Times* at the end of August 1959, when I immediately became engaged as a reporter in the events which this book recounts. The Longju incident, the first armed clash on the Sino-Indian border, had occurred a few days before I arrived; and for the next three years, until after the climax of the border war, India's dispute with China, with all its ramifications, was a staple of my work.

I first came to rewrite the story of the Sino-Indian dispute as a section of a book I had planned on India in the 1960s, hinging on the death of Nehru in 1964. Initially I saw this as a matter of recasting and elaborating the tens of thousands of words I had written on the dispute, as it developed, in my dispatches; but as I read again through the evidence in the diplomatic argument between the two Governments, set out in the long series of Indian White Papers, I realized that something much more full, fundamental and searching was required. This book is the product of my subsequent reappraisal. Its basic inspiration remains, however, my personal knowledge of the dispute as it was handled and felt in New Delhi. Personalities, in action and interaction, attitudes, even moods, played an important part in the dispute, and in the related political developments in India – and it is here, perhaps, that the journalist who watched the events has an advantage over the scholar coming later to the trail, when the evidence lies on paper only, and the smiles and frowns, the tones of injury or pride, the unregistered asides, have been forgotten.

Until I left India in mid-1967 I pursued my re-inquiry in long and repeated interviews with the politicians and officials who had been responsible for India's handling of the dispute, and with the soldiers who had tried to give military expression to their Government's policy. When I came as a senior fellow to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London to complete this study and write the book, I tried first to put the subject into historical context: to see it not only as the collision of the two greatest Asian powers of the mid twentieth century,

but also as the continuation of one hundred and fifty years of political, military and diplomatic manoeuvring across and around the Himalayas. During the 1960s historians and other scholars had done much to elucidate the history of the Himalayan zone and of the borders that lie within it, and I have drawn on their work for the first section of the book. This traces the history of the disputed boundaries, and is essential, I think, for the understanding of what follows.

The scheme of the book is roughly chronological, but there are frequent overlaps in the different sections. An incident touched upon in one may be fully developed in another; or an event told from one point of view in one section may in the next be retold from the opposite side. The section 'The View from Peking' is an attempt to see the dispute through Chinese eyes, and touches again on many of the developments described in the two previous sections. This attempt was required, I believe, because the whole dispute has so consistently been seen from the Indian point of view; and, as one Englishman observed of another early in the century, 'it is no doubt difficult to convince anyone from India that there is a Chinese point of view which deserves consideration.'*

Wherever possible, I have given references for statements or quotations; but it will be seen that the density of such notes falls off sharply in the sections dealing with the border war and its preliminaries. In those (and at some other points in the book) I have drawn on material from unpublished files and reports of the Government of India and the Indian Army: I was given access to these by officials and officers who believed that it was time a full account was put together, and who trusted me to write it fairly. I cannot, of course, name them, nor cite the documents or files from which I have drawn the material; I can only thank them, and hope they will not be disappointed.

D. R. Mankekar, in his research for a history of the post-independence Indian Army, was similarly given access to unpublished files, and I am grateful to him for allowing me to quote from his original transcription of a crucial memorandum.

I have tried to understand what motivated both parties in the

* See p. 42 below.

dispute – and believe I have succeeded to the extent, at least, that it can be seen that sometimes misunderstanding of the other's position played its part in accentuating the differences between New Delhi and Peking. My intention has been only to narrate and clarify a historical incident which I believe has been widely misunderstood, and which I myself misunderstood while it was happening. I have not meant to indict either side and indeed believe it can be seen that both often acted from motives of injured rectitude – which of course served only to sharpen the conflict.

One unavoidable imbalance in the book derives from the fact that my access to information has been immensely freer on one side of the dispute than on the other. India must be one of the most open societies in the world so far as its political processes are concerned, and in my research for this book I have greatly benefited from that virtue. But in this instance the Indian Government, in the short run at least, has perhaps suffered by its openness. A close scrutiny of the relationship between public words and private – indeed secret – attitudes rarely puts any government in anything but an invidious light; and Nehru, whose on-the-record utterances were so prolific, must be particularly vulnerable to the count of inconsistency, and transparent in his deliberate ambiguities. In contrast, no government is more secretive as to its inner processes than that of the People's Republic of China, and in tracing Chinese policy formulation I have had nothing to go on beyond what is on the public record. That is unusually full, but of course it must wholly omit the evidence of hesitation, inconsistency and division – and even dissimulation – which sometimes emerges from the record of the inner deliberations of the Indian Government and military. China's policy therefore probably looks far more monolithic, perhaps even more pragmatic, than it would if one had in Peking the sort of access I have had to Indian records. Perhaps future students of these events will be able to repair this imbalance, and, with fuller documentation at their disposal, will reveal inadequacies in the narrative and errors in interpretation.

I owe the opportunity to devote nearly two years to writing this book to the School of Oriental and African Studies of London University, and especially to its director, Professor

C. H. Philips, whose interest, encouragement and advice were invaluable to me.

Among others whom I especially thank are: Ronald Segal, who has encouraged and counselled me in many matters concerning this book; Dr S. Gopal, whose encouragement to write the book has never been weakened by his certainty that he will totally disagree with it; Professor Michael Brecher, for a rigorous reading of the MS.; Professor Alastair Lamb, who also helpfully read the MS., and let me cite an unpublished paper of his on Aksai Chin; and Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, who from his own immediate knowledge of these events pointed out some errors of detail and emphasis. Miss Dorothy Woodman allowed me to draw on some new material in her *Himalayan Frontiers*; Kuldip Nayar gave me an advance reading of his book, *Between the Lines*; Professor Robert Huttenback read and commented upon my historical introduction; David Wilson, editor of *China Quarterly*, and Richard Harris, Far East specialist of *The Times*, read and commented upon my section on the Chinese view of the dispute; John Addis permitted me to quote from his unpublished Harvard paper on the Sino-Indian dispute. The maps are by D. R. Baker. Graham C. Greene's interest in my writing, long sustained, has been a steady prop. Dr A. P. Rubin helpfully read my final draft. I am grateful to all these.

Responsibility for errors or misjudgements remains, of course, my own.

London, December 1969



published by Penguin Books

This is one of those rare books that puts an entirely new light on a chapter of history¹, and it must be read by anyone concerned with international affairs². Although cool and scholarly³ it unrolls like a fascinating thriller⁴. It is an important work of revisionist history and a gruesome case study of the way in which wars start⁵, superbly documented (largely from official Indian sources but also from secret Indian papers)⁶ and beautifully sustained⁷. By showing how India led the world up the garden path⁸ it demolishes and throws to the wind a pillar of the 'contain China' doctrine – the belief that in 1962 India was the victim of unprovoked Chinese aggression⁹. Maxwell's book is magnificent on every count, an historical achievement of the first rank¹⁰.

This Pelican edition includes a Postscript specially written by the author to cover new material on the Sino-Indian dispute.

1. *Sunday Oregonian*. 2. *Foreign Affairs*. 3. Michael Edwardes, *Encounter*. 4. *Military Review* (USA). 5. Michael Howard, *Sunday Times*. 6. Bernard Nossiter, *Book World*. 7. Charles Elliott, *Life*. 8. Rohan Rivett, *Herald* (Melbourne). 9. John K. Fairbank, *New York Review of Books*. 10. A. J. P. Taylor, *Observer*

Cover design by Patrick McCreeth

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Canada \$4.25

World Affairs

ISBN 0 14
02.1604 9