

CHAPTER ONE

Pacifying the Border

The 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement with China

The basis of government is jugglery. If it works, and lasts, it becomes policy.

—A wazir in ninth-century Baghdad

IN APRIL 1992, Foreign Secretary Jyotindra Nath Dixit asked me whether it was possible for India to settle its dispute with China over the boundary. He was accompanying Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao on a visit to Japan, where I was stationed. Secretary Dixit also posed the question of what India and China could do with their relationship.

I had come to Japan in late 1989 from a second posting in Beijing, having dealt with China off and on for more than eight years. I had wandered into the Foreign Service as a means to see China before returning to attempt a PhD thesis on ancient Indian and Chinese kingship. In the early 1970s an Indian could see China in one of two ways: as an underground Maoist guerrilla or as a diplomat. I chose the easier course. Once inside the Foreign Service, I enjoyed working as a diplomat too much to leave. Dixit knew this background when he posed his question.

I rashly volunteered that settling the boundary seemed unlikely at that time because the gap in positions was too wide, but that China might be ready to agree to steps to maintain peace along the border based on the present status quo. Dixit asked why I thought so. I noted that the Tiananmen Square trauma was still fresh in the minds of the Chinese leadership under Deng Xiaoping. Military force had been used in June

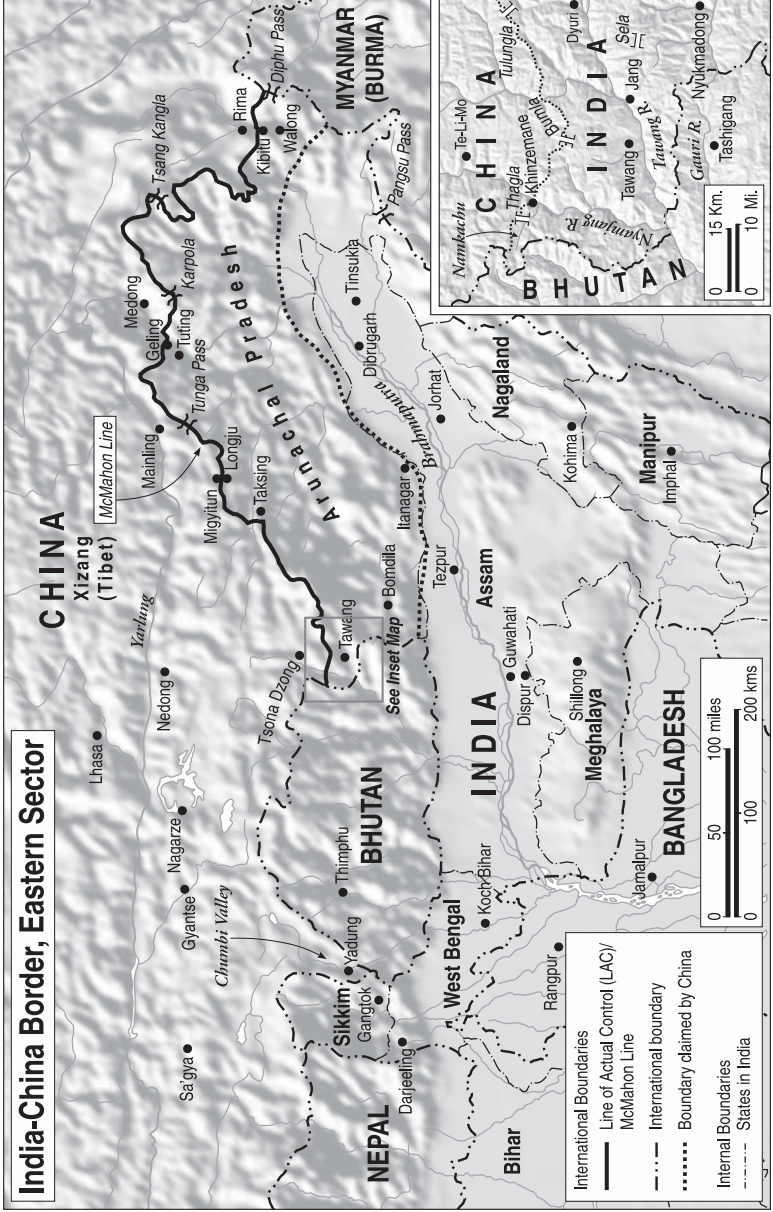
1989 in the heart of China's capital city against the Chinese people, who were demonstrating for democracy and freedom and had occupied the area for more than two months. The Tiananmen Square incident had also revealed deep divisions within the Chinese leadership. Besides, having watched the Soviet Union collapse, and concerned that China was next on the U.S. list of targets for regime change, the Chinese leadership could not make territorial concessions, which the Chinese people would see as weakness. But the same fears should make the leadership willing to ensure peace along the border with India, freeing the Chinese government to deal with more pressing concerns of internal stabilization and the United States. Later during the visit Secretary Dixit asked me to repeat to the prime minister what I had told him. Prime Minister Rao listened, thought, pouted, and said he would talk to us again in Delhi.

No good deed goes unpunished in government. By July 1992 my cocky opinions had landed me in the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi as joint secretary for North and East Asia, dealing with China, Mongolia, Taiwan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet. Secretary Dixit and Prime Minister Rao thought we should try to implement the idea of consolidating peace and tranquility along the border. Dixit had already mentioned the idea to China's then vice foreign minister, Tang Jiaxuan, after our initial conversation. The Chinese had sounded interested but noncommittal.

In essence, we proposed using the distinction between the boundary, which was disputed, and the border, or the status quo, on which we wanted to maintain the peace. Although colloquially the terms tend to be used interchangeably, a boundary is the line between two states that marks the limits of sovereign jurisdiction. In other words, a boundary is a line agreed upon by both states and normally delineated on maps and demarcated on the ground by both states. A border, on the other hand, is a zone between two states, nations, or civilizations. It is frequently also an area where peoples, nations, and cultures intermingle and are in contact with one another.

India has consistently believed and maintained that there is a traditional customary boundary between India and Tibet, one that also is formalized by legal agreements for most of its length, including those covering the McMahon Line, agreed to by Great Britain, China, and Tibet at the 1914 Simla Conference; in the eastern sector the Tibet-Sikkim boundary along the watershed of the Teesta-Amochu rivers, agreed to formally in the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906 affirming the Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 (which also introduced Chinese suzerainty

India-China Border, Eastern Sector



India-China Border, Western Sector

- International Boundaries**
- Line of Control (LOC)
 - India-China Line of Actual Control (LAC)
 - International boundaries
 - Boundary claimed by China

- Internal Boundaries**
- States in India, provinces in Pakistan and China

- Features**
- Selected cities
 - Border patrol facility
 - Pass

- Area under Indian control
- Area under Pakistani control
- Area under Chinese control



over Tibet); and various lines agreed to by Tibetan governments with the rulers of Jammu and Kashmir state and Himachal from the seventeenth century on.¹

When the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved into Tibet in 1950, for the first time in history the Chinese government had a permanent military presence on the border with India. Previous Chinese military and political involvement in Tibet and reprisal raids on the Gorkha kings in Nepal in the eighteenth century, during the Qing emperor Qian Long's time, had used local troops and were relatively brief. In fact, when the Gorkha kings tried to involve the Chinese in their quarrels with rising British power on the Indian subcontinent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, before the First Opium War of 1839–42, it was settled Chinese imperial policy to refrain from sending supplies, funds, or troops and to avoid entanglement, as was made clear in repeated edicts by successive Qing dynasty emperors.²

After 1950, when India made its view on the boundary clear, the Chinese did not demur. In 1954 and 1956 Nehru raised the matter of Chinese activity on what was considered the Indian side of the boundary and of the incorrect Chinese maps, and Premier Zhou Enlai responded that those were old Kuomintang maps and that the Chinese were looking into the matter. Zhou assured Nehru that China had no claims on Indian territory.³ Indeed, the 1954 Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between India and the Tibet Region of China included specific mention of several passes that would be used for border trade, which seemed to confirm the Indian view. (It was only in 1960 that China argued that mentioning mountain passes for border trade did not mean that they were actually boundary passes.)

In January 1959 Zhou first made it clear in writing that China disputed the McMahon Line in the eastern sector and the Kunlun boundary in the western sector, and said that China wanted to negotiate the entire India-China boundary line.⁴ The McMahon Line was described as an illegal vestige of colonialism. But in practice, China accepted the same line by another name as the boundary with Burma in 1960. And in 1960 Zhou Enlai came to Delhi and suggested to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that China might accept the McMahon Line as the boundary in the east if India accepted the status quo created in the west by China moving forward into Aksai Chin during the 1950s—though India still claimed Aksai Chin as its own territory. Nehru and Indian public opinion were outraged that China was effectively taking over Indian territory

through cartographic aggression and by changing facts on the ground militarily, building the Aksai Chin road from Sinkiang to Tibet and garrisoning the area in the mid-1950s. To the Chinese, the timing of India's rejection of their offer, soon after India had given asylum to the Dalai Lama in March 1959, seemed to confirm their belief that India had designs on Tibet, which was in full-fledged revolt against Beijing's rule at that time. The Chinese were convinced that the guerrilla war in Tibet from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s was aided and made possible by the CIA and Indian agencies.

For India, on the other hand, it was bad enough that the British Empire for imperial reasons had sacrificed Indian interests in Tibet at the 1914 Simla Conference, including agreeing to the McMahon Line and handing over Tibet to China to keep the Russians out. Now the Chinese were demanding even more than the gift given them by the British.

In 1962 the world's largest boundary dispute, involving more than 120,000 square miles of territory, led to war in the high Himalayas. (Strictly speaking, neither side formally declared war—the reason it is referred to as a conflict.) On October 20, China attacked isolated Indian posts that had been established to show the flag and prevent further Chinese incursions into Indian territory in both eastern and western sectors. The war was fought in two phases, in October and November. In effect, the Chinese were held at Walong near the Myanmar tri-junction. Near Tawang, beside the eastern tri-junction with Bhutan, the Chinese PLA inflicted a psychologically damaging and politically traumatic rout on Indian forces. In the western sector fighting was fierce at Rezangla and near Chushul, in Jammu and Kashmir state. Chinese troops cleared all Indian posts on what they considered their side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Chip Chap River valley, Galwan River valley, and Pangong Lake areas. On November 20, 1962, China declared a unilateral cease-fire and withdrawal to 20 kilometers behind what it described as the LAC as of November 7, 1959. During the course of the conflict, 1,383 Indian soldiers were killed, 1,047 wounded, 1,696 missing, and 3,968 taken prisoner; Chinese losses were 722 killed and 1,697 wounded. Only two Indian divisions had been in the theater when the conflict broke out, facing at least five Chinese divisions. In Namkachu, one Indian battalion faced three Chinese regiments alone, with predictably disastrous results.

THE INDIA-CHINA BORDER

The India-China border was largely unpatrolled and left to its own devices by both sides for several years after the 1962 conflict. The Chinese were preoccupied with guerrilla activity in Tibet, the Cultural Revolution, and the arduous job of building their logistics in Tibet. They withdrew in 1962 to 20 kilometers behind the so-called LAC of November 7, 1959, which they described only in general terms on maps not to scale. It was verbally described by China as corresponding, by and large, to the McMahon Line in the east (with the exception of Khinzemane) and to the Chinese boundary claim line in the western sector. In his November 1959 letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Premier Zhou Enlai said that the LAC was “the so-called McMahon Line in the east and the line up to which each side exercises actual control in the west.”⁵

In both 1959 and 1962 India had rejected the concept of a Line of Actual Control, arguing that the Chinese concept was a disconnected series of points on a map that could be joined up in many ways; the line should omit gains from aggression in 1962 and therefore should be based on the actual position on September 8, 1962, before the Chinese attack; and the vagueness of the Chinese definition left it open for China to continue its creeping attempt to change facts on the ground by military force. As Nehru said during the 1962 war, “There is no sense or meaning in the Chinese offer to withdraw twenty kilometres from what they call ‘line of actual control.’ What is this ‘line of control’? Is this the line they have created by aggression since the beginning of September? Advancing forty or sixty kilometres by blatant military aggression and offering to withdraw twenty kilometres provided both sides do this is a deceptive device which can fool nobody.”⁶

Zhou’s written response was that the LAC was “basically still the line of actual control as existed between the Chinese and Indian sides on 7 November 1959: To put it concretely, in the eastern sector it coincides in the main with the so-called McMahon Line, and in the western and middle sectors it coincides in the main with the traditional customary line which has consistently been pointed out by China.”⁷

The Chinese declaration of a cease-fire and withdrawal to 20 kilometers behind what China called the November 7, 1959, LAC after the 1962 conflict was unilateral and not dependent on Indian acceptance. It was probably caused as much by logistical difficulties in maintaining PLA troops in their forward positions in territory taken from India during the war and the Himalayan winter approaching as by the limited

military and strategic value of the territory in most places. Equally, the LAC that China said it would respect in 1962 coincided with the boundary settlement that Zhou had proposed to Nehru in 1960. This created a presumption that China was willing to settle the boundary on the basis of the status quo that emerged from the war. Even if that was true then, it is certainly no longer true today.

In actual fact, in the eastern sector the LAC (whether of November 7, 1959, or September 8, 1962) for the most part coincided with the high Himalayan watershed—the basis of the McMahon Line—in India's view, the international boundary in this sector. The exceptions were significant in a local tactical sense in Longju and Asaphila, Arunachal Pradesh, and strategically significant where the line joined the Bhutanese boundary near Thagla and Sumdorongchu. In the western sector as well, there were differences in areas such as Sub-Sector North, and in Depsang, Demchok, and Chushul, between what the Chinese claimed was the LAC, which they professed to respect, and what India considered the actual position on the ground on September 8, 1962, on the eve of the Chinese attack. India was in no position for several years to actually assert a presence up to either the LAC or what India believed to be the international boundary. Soon after the war, each side unilaterally declared that it would not attempt to alter the status quo on the border by force, and China pledged to respect its version of the LAC.

After 1962, as India's capabilities improved with time, the country began to conduct air and satellite surveys, limited reconnaissance became possible on foot, and some military presence began to be reestablished by the mid-1970s. The Chinese had in the meantime used their easier access on the Tibetan Plateau to greatly improve their infrastructure, and by the mid-1970s the PLA no longer stayed 20 kilometers behind the Chinese version of the LAC in all places. The Chinese hold on Tibet had strengthened after Nixon's visit in 1972 had led to the CIA cutting off assistance to the Tibetan rebels, and by the end of 1974 the last remnants of the Tibetan guerrillas, the Chushi Gangdruk, had been chased by the PLA and Nepalese army through Mustang and the adjacent Himalayas and eliminated as an effective fighting force.⁸

In 1976, on the basis of the much better information regarding the border available to India, the Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs established the China Study Group under the foreign secretary to recommend revised patrolling limits, rules of engagement, and the pattern of Indian presence along the border with China. Throughout this period

each side slowly moved up to the line, asserting presence through periodic patrols in an intricate pattern that crisscrossed in areas where both states had different interpretations of where the LAC was.

Inevitably, by the mid-1980s Indian and Chinese patrols were coming into more frequent contact with each other, ultimately ending up in a face-to-face confrontation, this time in the Sumdorongchu valley, which the Chinese called Wangdong, east of the tri-junction with Bhutan and close to the location of the initial spark leading to the 1962 conflict. In May 1986 India's annual patrol of the area, which had begun in 1983, discovered that the PLA had occupied the Indian patrol point. The Chinese had chosen their ground carefully. McMahon's original map, based on limited knowledge, showed Sumdorongchu north of the line that he had drawn on the map, even though it was south of the high watershed, the principle his line claimed to follow. Indeed, McMahon had drawn his line with a thick nib in red ink, which covered a 5-kilometer swath of territory in some places. When India formally protested the Chinese presence in Sumdorongchu in July 1986 to Chinese vice foreign minister Liu Shuqing, he responded with a straight face that, just as India had done, China was improving border management and that the PLA would no longer be bound by its self-imposed limitation of staying 20 kilometers behind the LAC.

What followed in Wangdong (Sumdorongchu) is well known. India moved in troops, occupied the dominating Longrola and Hathungla heights, and set up posts meters away from those of the Chinese. It took seven years of negotiation to stabilize the situation and, broadly speaking, to restore the status quo in Sumdorongchu. The standoff, however, served a political purpose. During Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in December 1988, India and China agreed to negotiate a boundary settlement, and that pending that settlement they would maintain peace and tranquility along the border and explore ways of keeping the peace. The two nations also agreed they would not let the absence of a boundary settlement prevent them from developing relations in other spheres.

BOUNDARY SETTLEMENT

If the evolving ground situation provided reasons to explore ways to legally ensure peace on the border with China by mid-1992, it was also apparent that boundary negotiations, which seemed likely to progress as a result of Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988, were stalled.

China's position on a settlement progressively hardened, reflecting either the leadership's limited ability to change settled policy or the sensitivity of the territorial issue in a rising tide of nationalism, making difficult the give-and-take required for a settlement, even if it were just to convert the status quo into a boundary.

While visiting Delhi in 1960, Premier Zhou had suggested that China might recognize the McMahon Line boundary in the east in return for India accepting the Chinese claim line in the west, in effect moving the boundary from the Kunlun to the Karakoram watershed in the west, which would give China strategic depth along the Aksai Chin road between Xinjiang and Tibet (now China National Highway 219) and fix the status quo. The last time China explicitly raised this solution, though its proposal was not fleshed out, was in Deng Xiaoping's 1982 conversation with Gopalaswami Parthasarathi, the ambassador to China just before the 1962 conflict and a confidante of then prime minister Indira Gandhi. This Chinese proposal was not raised again during the multiple rounds of official talks on the boundary question from 1981 to Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988. Instead, Chinese officials began saying in the 1980s that Beijing would compromise only if India made major adjustments first, adding that once India indicated concessions in the east, China would indicate its concessions in the west. In 1985, China specified that the concession it was seeking in the east was Tawang, in Arunachal Pradesh, something that any government of India would find difficult to accept, as this was a settled area that had sent representatives to every Indian Parliament since 1950. The Indian Supreme Court had also held in the Berubari case in 1956 that the government could not cede sovereign territory to another government without a constitutional amendment, though it could make adjustments and rectifications in the boundaries of India. The official Indian map when the constitution of India came into force in 1950, incidentally, had shown the entire western sector with a color wash and the annotation "boundary undefined," but had shown the McMahon Line boundary as a settled international boundary in the east.

Rajiv Gandhi therefore used much of his December 1988 conversations with China's supreme leader Deng and Premier Li Peng to explain that no Indian government could make significant territorial concessions, particularly in the east, and that only adjustments would be possible.⁹ Though discussions on the boundary during the visit were inconclusive, Gandhi's keenness to settle the boundary was evident. He stressed his

intention to do so after the general elections of 1989. (He lost those elections and was assassinated by the LTTE, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, before he could return to government and have a chance to implement his ideas.) Gandhi's visit raised the level of talks on a boundary settlement. A Joint Working Group headed by the foreign secretary and his Chinese counterpart was set up, but its discussions in 1989 and thereafter continued in the old rut of the previous official talks and made no progress toward a boundary settlement. In the aftermath of the killings in Tiananmen Square in June 1989 it seemed unlikely that a beleaguered Chinese leadership would be able to break with past positions to settle the issue. Nor were the short-lived governments in Delhi from 1989 to 1991 in any position to address the boundary issue meaningfully.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT WAS also changing rapidly, and the old certainties were no longer valid for either India or China. For China, the unipolar moment, when the United States was the sole remaining superpower, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, coincided with the display of U.S. military might and technology in the First Gulf War of 1990 and with the revelation of deep fissures within the Chinese leadership, culminating in the Tiananmen Square killings in 1989. I was living in Beijing in 1989 and had seen posters in the square during Gorbachev's May visit asking, "Where is China's Gorbachev?" It could well be that Deng's disquiet at what he saw in the Soviet experiments with glasnost and perestroika made him more ready to use force to crush the democracy movement in Tiananmen Square in 1989. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the Chinese leadership, at Deng's prodding, studied the causes of Soviet failure. They concluded that the significant causes were Soviet overreach in attempting an arms race with the United States, the weakness of the Communist Party and its leadership, and the internal economic fragility of the Soviet Union. It appeared to the Chinese leadership, and to Deng in particular, that for China to avoid these traps—at a time when the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama was declaring the end of history and the beginning of a new, liberal, free market world order—would require time and considerable effort. China, therefore, had to avoid provocation, had to give its enemies in the United States no excuse or chance to achieve regime change in China as they had in the Soviet Union and other eastern European countries. This approach was summed up in Deng Xiaoping's Twenty-Four-Character strategy of 1992: "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities

and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.”

For India as well, the collapse of the Soviet Union made old foreign policy certainties invalid. Politically, India had to come to terms with the new U.S.-led world order. India had followed a nonaligned policy since Prime Minister Nehru’s time, not joining either bloc or alliance in a world divided between the United States and the Soviet Union. But in the early 1990s it was hard to be nonaligned when there was no one to be aligned with or nonaligned against. Moreover, India had begun an ambitious attempt to open up and liberalize its own economy in 1991, and that also required an extended period of peace in which to recover from the Indian economic collapse and crisis of 1990–91 and to set the country on a new trajectory.

It was clearly time for something different in India-China relations. The international context, the evolving situation on the ground along the border, and the lack of progress in settling the boundary required change. It seemed logical that in these circumstances, it would serve both Chinese and Indian purposes to try to impose peace along the border while leaving to the future the more politically difficult task of settling the boundary.

The question for India was on what basis, apart from the status quo, could peace be maintained? No basis other than the LAC suggested itself. The status quo was the LAC, irrespective of what had been said about it in the past. But accepting the legal validity of the LAC represented a major shift in India’s stand. It took considerable persuasion to convince purists in the Ministry of External Affairs of this. Strangely, younger officials were less willing to contemplate this change in attitude toward the LAC. The iron had entered their souls, and they were less aware of the infirmities and ambiguities in the formal positions of each side. After internal discussion in 1992, Foreign Secretary Dixit and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao agreed that India would draft an agreement whereby both sides would commit not to change the status quo or use force, and to respect the LAC, without prejudice as to their respective stands on where the boundary lay. The reference to the LAC would be unqualified, making it clear that it was the LAC at the time the agreement was signed that would be respected, and not some notional idea of where it was in 1959 or 1962. (This had the unintended side effect of further incentivizing the forward creep to the line by both militaries, which had already led to the face-off in Wangdong.)

It was apparent that there were differences between China and India about where the LAC lay in some areas. Face-offs or confrontations had occurred in at least thirteen places where patrolling limits overlapped. India therefore inserted a provision that both sides would mutually agree on and clarify the LAC wherever necessary in the draft of the agreement.

This provision became one of the hardest parts of the agreement to negotiate. To begin with, the Chinese insisted they would respect the LAC of November 7, 1959, and that if there were any doubts, they would tell the Indians where the LAC lay. This arrogation was patently one-sided and unfair. Chinese Foreign Office mandarins seemed hard-pressed to justify this position to us, finally saying privately that they had no leeway as the PLA were insistent. The final solution was to accept the need for clarification in the 1993 agreement and much more explicitly in its follow-up, the November 29, 1996, Agreement on Military Confidence-Building Measures. The 1993 agreement created an expert group of diplomatic and military personnel to “advise on the resolution of differences between the two sides on the alignment of the line of actual control.”

Apart from this aspect, the rest of the negotiation went smoothly and quickly, the Chinese accepting most of the Indian draft in toto. By June 1993 we had an agreed text initialed by the negotiators, and the agreement was signed during Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s visit to China on September 7, 1993, in Beijing. Known formally as the Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas, its shorthand name is the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement.

The September 7 agreement was the first of any kind relating specifically to the border between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China. It broke new ground in many ways. It formalized in an international treaty a bilateral commitment by India and China to maintain the status quo on the border. In effect, the two countries promised not to seek to impose or enforce their versions of the boundary except at the negotiating table. This was a big decision for India, where public sentiment was still aggrieved by the defeat of 1962, when the Indian Parliament had passed a resolution demanding that every inch of Indian territory be recovered from Chinese occupation. If it were not for Prime Minister Rao’s cold calculation of national interest and his ability to quietly persuade his political allies and opponents, the agreement to maintain the status quo would have been a bridge too far, as it was initially for some of my colleagues in the Ministry of External Affairs.

The September 7 agreement effectively delinked settlement of the boundary from the rest of the relationship, and delinked it also from the maintenance of peace on the border. Both countries also formally renounced the use of force to settle the issue.

The agreement spoke of military confidence-building measures to be mutually agreed to in the future, including restrictions on air activity and limits on the size of military exercises near the LAC, and the possible redeployment of forces. This last was of great interest to the Chinese. We explained that the terrain on both sides was different, access on the Indian side was much harder, and therefore, there could be no mathematical equivalence. The two sides finally agreed that confidence-building measures should be based on the concept of “mutual and equal security” rather than on parity or other simple formulas. The restrictions on air activity and military exercises were soon worked into separate agreements, and over the next decade (and more), China and India agreed on a series of detailed agreements, mechanisms, and even standard operating procedures. The much more detailed listing of military confidence-building measures in the 1996 Agreement on Military Confidence-Building Measures¹⁰ was a direct offshoot of the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement, as have been other measures the two governments subsequently agreed on to keep the peace along the border. These agreements have been respected and implemented by both sides, in the main, and exceptions have been corrected quickly.

But two portions of the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement have yet to be implemented or discussed in detail by the two countries. One is the provision that “military forces in areas along the line of actual control will be kept to the minimum level compatible with the friendly and good neighbourly relations between the two countries.” The other is the provision for “mutual and equal security,” which has not yet been discussed conceptually or explored or implemented by China and India, even though it provides a theoretical basis for mutual and reciprocal security, which could prove valuable as technology, trade and travel, and new military capabilities and an increased military presence on both sides of the border make accidents and mistakes more likely.

Did the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement serve its purpose? It certainly has in terms of keeping the peace and the status quo for almost a quarter century, and in terms of the various arrangements that have made the India-China border one of the most peaceful ones India has. Of course, this is not only because of the agreement itself but

also because the overall political and other interests that led to the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement being negotiated have continued to operate. At a time of financial and economic stress and transition for the Indian economy, India managed to keep defense expenditures around 2.4–2.8 percent of GDP through the 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty-first century.¹¹ The agreement was only one factor, if a major one, making this possible; others included the decision to become an overt nuclear weapon state in 1998. But the point is that the agreement served—and was seen by others as serving—India’s strategic interest in peace.

The Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement made legally binding reality both governments’ stated determination to move beyond the 1962 conflict. This was easier for China, for it was the victor in that conflict, while India still bears psychological scars from 1962. (Mao was wrong when he told the Politburo in October 1962 that the effects of the war would last only thirty years, a short period in the long history of Sino-Indian friendship, in which only one and a half wars had ever been fought.¹²) With the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement the two states signaled that daily state-to-state relations had been delinked from the restrictions and inhibitions of the war, and underscored their determination to keep the peace rather than to seek retribution or revenge on the border. It thus permitted the expansion of bilateral relations in other areas, despite the boundary question remaining unsettled.

Today India and China are more engaged with each other than ever before. Bilateral trade expanded sixty-seven times between 1998 and 2012, and China is India’s largest trading partner in goods. (For goods and services together, the United States is the largest trading partner for India.) We have seen joint India-China military exercises in 2007, 2008, and 2013. And there are more than 11,000 Indian students in China.

As a result of the train of events set off by the 1993 agreement, the India-China border is very different from India’s international boundary and Line of Control with Pakistan. With Pakistan, India has for the most part an agreed-upon international boundary. For the rest, the Line of Control, delineated on a map signed by the directors general of military operations of the armies of India and Pakistan, has the force and international sanctity of a legal agreement behind it. Nevertheless, both the international border and the Line of Control with Pakistan are “hot” or “live,” crossed by terrorists and militants, and regular cross-border firing occurs. With China, the LAC is a concept; neither the LAC nor the

boundary is agreed upon by the two countries, let alone delineated on a map or demarcated on the ground. Yet this is probably India's most peaceful border in the last thirty years, with no terrorists or cross-border firing. The last death on the border was in October 1975 at Tulungla, and that was by accident. The fundamental difference is that India faces a military situation on its borders with Pakistan that has been created by the Pakistan Army, whereas with China it faces a very different kind of political and strategic challenge.

Since the LAC is the basis of the peace, and peace would remain fragile without an agreement as to where the line lay, when negotiating the agreement Indian diplomats pressed for both sides to together clarify the entire LAC. Initially the Chinese agreed to clarify it only where there were differences, but subsequently they agreed to a procedure to exchange maps of where each country thought the LAC lay. This was done for the middle sector, then for the LAC in the western sector. In retrospect, this procedure gave both sides an incentive to exaggerate their claims of where the LAC lay. Once the Chinese saw the Indian map of the western sector, they balked at continuing. They argued that fixing the LAC in this manner would make it the boundary even though both sides, for different reasons, did not accept the status quo as the basis of a settlement. The process of LAC clarification has effectively stalled since 2002. India therefore does not have an agreed-upon delineation of the LAC with China. (To speak of a 10-kilometer or a 50-kilometer intrusion in these so-called disputed areas, as some journalists and officials do, is therefore not strictly accurate.)

In practice, however, the lack of clarity has not prevented both countries from keeping the peace, for three reasons. First, each side has a fairly good idea from the other side's patrolling patterns and other behavior of where the other side thinks the LAC lies. Second, both sides have, by and large, kept to their interpretation of the LAC, avoided provocation, and implemented the operating procedures and other confidence-building measures that the agreement called for. And third, both sides have not been in direct contact along most of the line. Even in the areas that both consider as lying on their side of the line, the sixteen or so areas of different perceptions of the LAC or contested areas, both sides have generally refrained from establishing a permanent presence or changing the status quo significantly.

What India has successfully done with China since Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit and under successive governments of different political complexions

has been to maintain the peace while strengthening itself, seeking partners in the extended neighborhood and among major powers, and engaging China. Finding the balance between rivalry and incentives for good behavior, between competition and cooperation, is among the hardest tasks in strategy.

That the effort has been successful so far, despite the far more assertive Chinese policy on China's periphery since 2008, was shown by the Depsang incident of May 2013. Unlike the Sumdorongchu incident, when the Chinese set up a post on the Indian side of the LAC in 1986, in 2013 India discovered the new Chinese presence on its side of the line immediately, took countermeasures and moved in force within days, and insisted that the status quo be restored before it would discuss any of the matters the Chinese tried to raise. In 1986 this resulted in a seven-year standoff, which was only partially defused on the ground. On the other hand, in Depsang in 2013, India succeeded in getting the Chinese to vacate the area within three weeks.

To a great extent this was because of India's improved capabilities, which left the Chinese in no doubt that India could embarrass them. It was also because of the mechanisms and standard operating procedures that India and China had put in place since the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement of 1993. The international context helped as well, though it was never explicitly mentioned. The Chinese were aware of political support for India coming from several significant countries. I mention this in some detail because it is important that the Indian strategic community draw the right lessons from our experiences. The key to arriving at a successful outcome was keeping public rhetoric calm and steady, displaying strength, and giving the adversary a way out, which was our preferred solution. It was not tweeting or whining in public, brandishing our nuclear weapons, or threatening war, as some Indian television channels and commentators did during those three weeks in May 2013.

A SITUATION IN FLUX

The situation described above appears to be changing. Since the global financial crisis of 2008–09, China no longer seems to be following Deng's Twenty-Four-Character strategy. China's behavior in the South China Sea and East China Sea has been much more assertive. On the India-China border the picture is not so stark, but here too Chinese behavior is changing.

China improved its border infrastructure significantly in the 1980s and 1990s, while India has done so in the past decade, strengthening infrastructure and positions all along the border with China. India has done more in the past ten years to strengthen and build border infrastructure and military preparedness and to create offsetting and asymmetric capabilities than in any decade since independence. These efforts have included the first new military raisings since the 1970s of two mountain divisions and now a mountain strike corps on the India-China border; reoperationalizing advanced landing grounds (airfields) in Arunachal Pradesh, on the border with China; implementing the India-China Study Group's and General Staff's suggestions for roads (intended primarily for defensive purposes), begun in 2005; the creation of imaging intelligence and technical intelligence capabilities, including intelligence gathering through the deployment of drones; and the introduction of Su-30s fighter aircraft and heavy lift aircraft into the eastern sector. The C-130 landings at Daulat Beg Oldi, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, western sector, in 2013 were visible symbols of India's determination and improved capabilities. India has strengthened and tasked its intelligence capabilities, and has a survivable deterrent in place. But India is still playing catch-up on this border.

The situation may be changing because the balance of forces on the border has been changing, and both sides are adjusting their behavior. China and India are now in much more frequent contact. India's patrolling and assertion of presence are more conspicuous than in the past. In almost all the contested areas, India's forces are more frequent visitors than the PLA. For their part, the Chinese now find it harder to achieve their political goals on the border: to maintain undisputed military dominance, to convey a clear message to civilians and military that they are the bigger and more powerful party, and to change or create facts on the ground in their favor. While India plays catch-up in the face of a large and in some respects growing infrastructure gap, the Chinese measure themselves against the situation of unchallenged dominance that they enjoyed for an extended period after 1962.

That is why in recent years China has pressed in negotiations for an agreement that would effectively freeze the present situation on the border, preventing further infrastructure development and enhanced deployments that India might undertake. Having done what it wished to in terms of building up its capabilities, China would now like to freeze the existing imbalance. Indian representatives have naturally resisted this

effort and made counterproposals of their own seeking to limit China's assertive behavior, and have pressed for clarification of the LAC, which the Chinese reject.

Is there a way out of this impasse? The 1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement itself spoke of the goal of "mutual and equal security" and of agreement on force levels. If both countries so choose, this language could offer a way forward to consolidate peace on the border. India's diplomats will only know whether this is possible if we test the proposition in negotiations with our Chinese counterparts.

One example of a change in Chinese behavior on the LAC came during President Xi Jinping's September 2014 visit to India: the PLA entered Chumar, one of the sixteen areas where the LAC is disputed, in larger numbers than ever before, and did not leave for well over a fortnight. This was unlikely to have been a rogue PLA action, conducted without the knowledge of Xi Jinping, chairman of the Military Affairs Commission and the National Security Council. If it was a rogue action, the prospect should worry the world. Usually, Chinese negotiating postures are prepared, signaled, and matched by behavior on the ground. Since we saw similar behavior by the PLA when it intruded in unprecedented numbers during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's April 2015 visit to China, we can rule out the idea that these were the actions of a rogue or overly enthusiastic PLA commander on the ground. In any case, no one has been sacked for these actions, so far as is known. Indeed, the local commanders have been promoted.

There are three possible explanations for the timing and nature of PLA actions during the Xi and Modi visits. The most benign explanation is that China was serious about negotiating the boundary and wanted to convince the new Indian government of the need to do so to avoid future political embarrassment. The second is that China wanted to press India to accept its proposals to freeze the present situation on the LAC as the price for continued peace on the line. If either of these were actual causes of the PLA's intrusions, they should have been followed up at the negotiating table. This does not appear to have happened. We are therefore left with the third explanation—that China wished to emphasize to the new Indian prime minister its military dominance and ability to embarrass India on the border; that it was not so preoccupied by its troubles with Japan and Vietnam in the East and South China Seas as to need to make concessions to India; and that peace on the border is fragile, and China should not be taken for granted. In

other words, the third explanation is that the PLA movements were an early attempt to establish psychological dominance over a new Indian government.

What should India's strategy be in dealing with China on the LAC? India has not tried to match the PLA's strength weapon for weapon, acquisition for acquisition, or dollar for dollar. Instead, diplomatic efforts have focused on convincing China that any misadventure would result in embarrassment and pain to that country and would frustrate the leadership's political goals. This requires asymmetric actions and capabilities on the part of India. India's strategy has been to keep the peace without ceding ground, building up preparedness steadily while pushing for a settlement of the boundary as a whole.

There has been some talk of "theater switching" in Indian defense circles, of using India's strength in the Indian Ocean, should China be tempted to use its strength on the land border. The deterrence that maritime strength gives India is not directly relevant to handling the situation on the long, disputed India-China boundary, but it is certainly necessary to defending India's growing maritime interests when the Chinese are heading toward basing and other arrangements in Gwadar, Djibouti, and the Gulf and other portions of the Indian Ocean littoral.

Overall, however, India must continuously reevaluate its strategy, since the balance of power is constantly evolving. I am not the best judge of whether or not a mountain corps is the best military answer to the Chinese challenge on the line. The broader picture is that India faces an increasingly confident China with access to Russian military technology and energy, thanks to the West pushing Russia in Ukraine into Chinese arms; with an economy that even at a slower 3–5 percent rate of growth is still the second-largest and one of the fastest-growing economies in the world; and with an increasingly nationalist and chauvinist national narrative replacing the lost ideology and mock humility of the past. On present trends, even if China continues to spend only 2 percent of its GDP on defense, by the mid-2020s it will be spending as much as the United States. China today is pursuing Xi's "China dream," building a new Asian order from the bottom up in terms of the One Belt, One Road initiative, pipelines, roads, railways, fiber-optic cables, and infrastructure projects such as ports throughout the Eurasian land mass and the littoral of the Indian Ocean and western Pacific.

I have no doubt that China wishes to be number one in the world. As patriotic Chinese, convinced that China was number one in the world

order until the aberration of the last two centuries, it is natural that Chinese leaders will try to take the place of the United States as world superpower. A few years ago the Chinese Communist Party got CCTV to air a series on rising powers in history. This was after the Politburo had scholars study and learn lessons from previous rising powers, some of which succeeded in becoming number one, including Britain and the United States, and some of which failed, such as Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. The leadership wanted its own people to know the results of those studies. The studies showed that when rising powers made the mistake of taking on the reigning hegemon and challenging the existing order too soon, they failed—as Wilhelmine Germany and 1930s Japan had failed. The Soviet Union, for instance, made the mistake of entering into an arms race with the United States that it could not win. China's strategy today, vis-à-vis the United States, is illuminating: it privileges economy, diplomacy, and force, in that order. There is much to learn from this approach.

Whether China will succeed in its quest to become number one is an open question. China is a lonely power, geographically hemmed in, in a crowded neighborhood where others are rising too, and preoccupied with internal stability and regime survival. But it has surprised the world consistently for the past thirty years and could continue to do so.

From India's point of view, it is China's silence or ambivalence about the rise of India that poses a puzzle and a challenge. While the United States has moved from opposition to India's nonalignment in the 1950s to encouraging India's rise in the twenty-first century, China has moved in the opposite direction, from professed friendship and common cause (expressed in the 1950s slogan, "*Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai*"—"Indians and Chinese are brothers"), to the *modus vivendi* between 1988 and 2008, to the present set of Chinese actions, which constrain India's pursuit of Indian interests in the neighborhood.

Indians ask why India allows China in South Asia, and why, when China has an encirclement strategy for India, does India not have an encirclement strategy for China? Both India and China are too big to be encircled. We live today in a world in which no one can claim an exclusive zone or area of influence, a globalized world where power reaches everywhere. We should not flatter ourselves that China is fixated on encircling India. The drivers of Chinese foreign policy are likely to remain the quest for status and the acquisition of power—political, military, and economic. China has a greater goal, to become the preeminent power in

the world, and India as a major power is dealt with as part of that strategy. In other words, India-China relations do not fall into a simple binary opposition but exhibit a complex interplay in political, economic, security, and other realms.

The pattern of competition side by side with cooperation will likely continue to mark the relationship in the short term. One thing that could affect this prognosis is the fact that India and China (and Japan) have seen the rise to power since 2012 of conservative, authoritarian centralizers, conservative by the standards of their own parties and societies, with little experience of central government and foreign policy and strong ideological predispositions to nationalist, even chauvinist rhetoric. Though the leaders have been careful in their public utterances, the terms in which foreign and security policies are discussed in China and India (and Japan) have become much more shrill. Antiforeign views, jingoistic slogans, intolerant ideas, and downright bad manners are common, and not just on the Internet. These behaviors would not matter in normal times, but governments today are under stress, and could seek external release from internal difficulties.

Nevertheless, I am not pessimistic about the future of India-China relations. Both countries have shown the ability, after a disastrous start in the late 1950s and 1960s, to learn from experience and to reorient policy, and both have a long tradition of statecraft to draw on. Strategy consists of making the most of available means to achieve one's goals. India's goal is to transform India. China, like the United States, or the world economy, for that matter, is a fact of life. Indians must learn to use the rise of China to achieve our goals. Where it is a hindrance, deal with it—prevent it, eliminate it, work around it, divert it. That is strategy, not a listing of tanks and weapons. And if all else fails, wars are won by a combination of men, ideas, and weapons, not just one of those factors.

Avoiding war and attaining one's goals is the highest form of strategy by any tradition or book, whether the strategist is Kautilya (Chanakya), Sun Tzu, or Machiavelli. The Indian government's record over sixty-eight years of independence shows it has not done badly in moving toward the main goal of transforming India. And that requires that the national security calculus be continually adjusted to reality even as the overall goal is kept in view.

LESSONS OF THE BORDER PEACE AND TRANQUILITY AGREEMENT

What lessons can be drawn from the experience of negotiating and implementing the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement?

This agreement was easier to negotiate than anything else I have negotiated with China in forty-two years. Why? The fundamental goals of the negotiation were clear and agreed on from the start. Both sides knew what the problem was, solutions were expressed simply and directly in the first Indian draft, and both sides were clear on how to achieve their goals. Most important, both sides were willing to compromise long-standing positions to reach the goal of maintaining the peace.

There are lessons to be drawn about Chinese negotiating behavior, too.

It seemed very important to China that Indian negotiators accept the term “Line of Active Control” at the beginning of the negotiation. Classical scholars would call this “names being rectified” in the Confucian sense. In the classical Chinese negotiating lexicon, the ultimate goal of insisting on the acceptance of Chinese definitions and terms for a negotiation is to establish moral and psychological dominance over an adversary as a necessary corollary to the correct ordering of the negotiation. Classical Chinese texts, such as the “Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance” (資治通鑑 or *Zizhi Tongjian*), contain several expedients to achieve these goals. For the pessimist, Sun Tzu and the Thirty-Six Stratagems provide considerable material. A specific “barbarian-handling” tool box was first described by its early practitioner, the scholar and imperial adviser Lou Jing (婁敬) in 199 BCE, and has fed foreign paranoia ever since. More academically and positively inclined foreigners believe that Chinese culture for the past 5,000 years has been based on communities, strong morality, holistic thinking, and cynicism toward foreigners. Today, Chinese negotiators are comfortable if their adversaries are in awe of China’s history, statecraft, and power, or, all else failing, Chinese intellectual superiority.

The term “Line of Actual Control” was useful to China from the 1950s until the late 1980s in providing a shifting, open-ended concept of the status quo that China could use to prevent the border from becoming militarily live except where China wished it to be. By 1992 it was clear to both countries that the status quo on the border was unlikely to be changed militarily in the immediate future. Troops from both sides

had moved back up to the line and were in contact at most militarily significant points. It had now become the common interest of both India and China to maintain the de facto status quo in practice. (The broader political causes for this shift were external to the negotiations and included India's economic reforms, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tiananmen killings, and so on.) The LAC was therefore the basis of the commitment not to use force to alter the situation in the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement of 1993, the first ever exclusively border-related agreement negotiated between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China.

Did the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement delay a boundary settlement? This point is debatable. It certainly reduced the immediate incentive to settle the boundary to keep the peace. But the fundamental reason the boundary settlement is taking so long, to my mind, is that both sides think that time is on their side, that their relative position will improve over time. Both cannot be right. But so long as both believe this, a settlement will move forward only very slowly.

An assertive China is unlikely to seek an early settlement of the boundary issue no matter how reasonable India may be, even though the technical work has all been done. Fifty years of stability on the border suggests that give-and-take on the basis of the status quo is the logical way forward. However, China's other interests, including its relationship with Pakistan, its suspicions about Tibet, and its desire to maintain levers in its relationship with India, suggest that a boundary settlement is not a Chinese priority at present. Add to this China's dependence on the Indian Ocean and its suspicions about India-U.S. defense cooperation and strategic coordination, and forward motion seems unlikely.

Taken together, these factors make it likely that China will keep the boundary issue alive as a lever in its relationship with India. Nor would a leadership that increasingly relies on nationalism for its legitimacy find it easy to make the compromises necessary for a boundary settlement. (This is equally true of India.) That is one reason why public Chinese rhetoric on the boundary has become harsher in the last few years, and why China has increased its demands for Tawang, which no Indian government could concede, even as the Chinese military posture on the border has not changed. In other words, settling the boundary, though technically possible, is politically unlikely.

But there is more to India and China than the boundary. In fact, the overall salience of the boundary in the relationship has diminished

considerably over time, now that the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement of 1993 and subsequent confidence-building measures have stabilized the status quo, which neither side has tried to change fundamentally in the last thirty years, even as each side has improved its own infrastructure, capabilities, and position.

Bilaterally, China is now India's largest trading partner in goods, while India competes for global markets. Today, more than 11,000 Indian students study in China, and mechanisms are in place to deal with issues such as transborder rivers and the trade deficit. And on several global issues in multilateral forums both countries have worked together, each in pursuit of its own interests—the WTO, climate change negotiations, and so on. So even if India and China do not settle the boundary, there is much to be done and addressed bilaterally and by working together on the world stage.

I am convinced that we are in a moment of opportunity for India-China relations as a result of the rapid development of both countries in the last thirty years, of what we have achieved bilaterally in this period, and of the evolution of the international situation. I would go so far as to say that each country could benefit its core interests by working with the other. But to realize that potential, it is essential that both countries understand each other and the reality and perceptions that guide each other's actions.

Are there broader lessons to be drawn about India's foreign policy from this experience?

Thirty years after a traumatic defeat in war, India was willing to put the past behind it and move on, pragmatically accepting reality for larger reasons of state. The government of India was willing to change its stand on the LAC in return for the freedom to concentrate on other internal and external priorities, the most important of which was the stabilization and reinvigoration of the Indian economy through opening up and liberalization.

This shift, given the emotional baggage carried by the relationship with China and the trauma of 1962, was only possible because of some hard work and clever politics outside the public gaze at Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's behest. When we began negotiating the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement in July 1992, Prime Minister Rao asked me to regularly brief former policymakers and opposition leaders, including Gopalaswami Parthasarathi, Kocheril Raman Narayanan, Inder Kumar Gujral, A. B. Vajpayee, and others. Each of them was a potential

opponent of what we were proposing. At the very least, they would ask, “How can you trust the Chinese?” I pointed this out to Prime Minister Rao and said I really had no answer for them, not even, at that point, having an agreement or a negotiating text. The prime minister said, with a half smile, “Go and tell them what you want to do and ask them what they think you should do. Then go and do what we have agreed. And keep seeing them every two months or so.” During these conversations, I learned a great deal and got ideas for the negotiation. Interestingly, it was not the China experts, such as Narayanan or Parthasarathi, who gave me the most ideas. It was A. B. Vajpayee, invariably supportive, who suggested a political way forward by asking me whether the idea of equal security for both India and China could be reflected in the agreement. This was essential for the Indian people, he said, after the trauma of the 1962 conflict. The result was the principle of equal and mutual security, reflected in the agreement and in subsequent confidence-building measures. Whenever I brought a fresh suggestion or idea to him, his first question always was, “Do you think this is good for India?”

With Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee, one always got the feeling that he thought of a greater good than immediate party political advantage, and that he had a larger sense of India’s destiny and of the historic nature of what we were doing. He was good enough to send me to China as ambassador in 2000 when our countries’ relations were in cold storage after India’s 1998 nuclear tests, and to Pakistan as high commissioner when we resumed relations at that level in 2003 after the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament (by jihadi terrorists with Pakistani ISI support), and the military buildup on the border. In both cases Vajpayee’s instructions were simple and clear: “You are responsible for changing this relationship. Tell me what we can do, and do what you consider is right.”

As a result of the conversations with political leaders, when the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement was announced in India on September 7, 1993, initially there was deafening silence, and then voices in support of the agreement came from across the political spectrum. There seemed to be more disquiet in the ranks of Congress and in the prime minister’s own party about abandoning Nehru’s legacy. But the main elements of the agreement—abjuring the use of force to settle the boundary, and respecting the status quo—had been declared in Parliament by Nehru himself in the dark days after the 1962 war.

It became clear that opinion in the country had moved on. While a boundary settlement giving up our territory was still a highly sensitive

issue, no one wanted another live border when Pakistan was doing its best to foster terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir state and militancy there was at its height. And Prime Minister Narasimha Rao had shown wisdom by leading public opinion while building consensus and bringing along his political opponents as well.