

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

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No. 310

Published on 15 June 2011

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Tom Maddux and

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Web and Production Editors: George Fujii and John
Vurpillat

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Vojtech Mastny. "The Soviet Union's Partnership with India." *Journal of Cold War Studies*

12:3 (Summer 2010): 50-90. DOI: 10.1162/JCWS_a_00006.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00006.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR310.pdf>

Review by **Dai Chaowu**, East China Normal University

Vojtech Mastny has a well-earned reputation as scholar of the Cold War international history.¹ This first-rate article draws on archival material that has been newly declassified by the Soviet Union, India, and the Soviet Union's former allies with data that has never been used by scholars. Mastny covers the entire history of the Soviet-Indian relationship during the Cold War, a synthesis and reinterpretation of previous scholarship that incorporates some new primary research.

Although Mastny acknowledges that the archives in Eastern Europe are "incomplete and inevitably one-sided," he discusses the impact of freer access to multi-national archives and believes these documents present a "coherent and consistent picture that is different from prevailing accounts. The documentation also shows, however, that much more research remains to be done." (51) Mastny seeks to provide a study of the differing strategic, military, and economic perspectives of the Soviet Union and India.

Unsurprisingly, he is at his best when he deals with the evolution of the discourse on Soviet policy toward India between Indian independence and the Soviet collapse. The centrality the author affords to the Soviet leadership's thinking about relations with New Delhi is interesting and provocative. Mastny also sheds new light on the role of changing ideological beliefs on the part of Soviet decision-makers. How much of a role did domestic ideology play in Soviet foreign policy? What domestic ideological concerns or

¹ The following are the major works by Mastny: *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); *The Helsinki Process and the Reintegration of Europe, 1986-1991: Analysis and Documentation* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). His *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity* won George L. Beer Prize of the American Historical Association in 1997.

international factors were most influential in determining the Soviets' role in the Sino-Indian partnership? How exactly domestic politics and external influence interacted to shape Soviet policy is an issue that will surely occupy historians for decades to come. Mastny argues that the evolution of policies within the Soviet political system resulted in a more sophisticated Soviet understanding of India.

Four distinct periods of such evolution in Soviet policy are identified with Joseph Stalin(1947-1953), Nikita Khrushchev(1953-1964), Leonid Brezhnev(1964-1982), and Mikhail Gorbachev(1985-1991). According to Mastny, the Soviet Union's highest leaders manipulated the partnership with New Delhi. Khrushchev, for example, led a "rapprochement with India," to open a "second front" of the Cold War in Asia in order to reverse Moscow's setbacks in Europe at the time (53). Thus, if the Soviet leaders played such a powerful role in the Soviet-Indian partnership during the Cold War, one must ask why and how their attitudes had been shaped to reach fruition between 1950s and 1980s. Similarly, one must assess why the partnership between Moscow and New Delhi lasted (lasted) for decades before the leaders like P.V. Narasimha Rao and Boris Yeltsin reaffirmed their friendship. The article answers these questions with an assertion that the times "changed" the nature of the bilateral relationship, because the relationship had mattered more to the Indians than to the Soviets (51, 85-88).

One of the main strengths of Mastny's article is to unite security and economics. He shows that although the Soviet Union and India differed in their perspectives on international affairs and regional security, the two sides established close economic cooperation and India followed the Soviet model of development for a long time. Although supporting the Soviets over important events in international affairs in exchange for support of Indian economic development, New Delhi had expressed its endorsement of nonalignment instead of an alliance. Mastny explains the partnership, which was a product of a unique set of circumstance in the early phase of the Cold War that are no longer relevant, as little more than a sideshow in the larger drama of the Cold War (88). In his detailed discussions, the author designates the period of Brezhnev and Indira Gandhi as the closest period between two countries in which Brezhnev envisaged Indira's India as "the Soviet Union's privileged strategic partner in the Third World" (71) . The consequence of such emulation, as the author demonstrates, "precipitated a severe economic crisis in India" with the collapse of Soviet support. Meanwhile, he puts forward a set of arguments explaining why India had fallen behind the thriving states after the end of the Cold War. Mastny offers two explanations: one is India's reluctance to accept the fact that the Soviet Union was doomed; another is that India "lost opportunities to establish lucrative ties with the former Soviet republics in the Central Asia and to recruit unemployed Russian scientists" (85). This meant it was not affinities between Moscow and New Delhi, but the changing world that made it impossible for a "renewal of the 'time-tested strategic partnership'" (85-88). Most importantly, the article also presents a history of how the *triangle* among the United States, the Soviet Union, and China affected, and was affected by, the interaction and the partnership between the Soviets and the Indians.

No doubt the Sino-Indian border conflict had a major impact on the Sino-Soviet split. Mastny correctly points out that the military confrontation between China and India along the disputed border ultimately shaped the Soviet partnership with New Delhi and China and “thus began to cast a shadow over relations between Moscow and New Delhi” (57). The course of Sino-Indian relations in this period was critically determined by developments in the Sino-Soviet relationship. The increase in conflict in Sino-Soviet relations was a necessary and sufficient condition for the war of 1962. Heated quarrels between Beijing and Moscow over the theory and strategy of the Communist movement rapidly poisoned their relations in which brotherhood became hostility. Mao Zedong, however, did attach “little value to the real estate in the Himalayas” (63). The Chairman went to war with India more for ideological and political reasons than over the disputed territory. For the CCP leadership, a set of major criteria were formulated to guide their decision-making when Beijing is planning its grand strategy to deal with the Cold War international system and Chinese security. To get the real cause of the Sino-Indian conflict, it is essential to understand what really led the CCP leadership to judge the Soviets as “revisionists” and the Indians as “reactionaries” respectively on the issues of Tibet and the Sino-Indian border dispute.

The Tibetan Rebellion in 1959 was the critical event, the event which the CCP leadership viewed as the “last class struggle on the Mainland.” Importantly, the Indian decision to give asylum to the Dalai Lama caused Beijing to identify India as “reactionary nationalist country” and the border dispute “became militarized” (56). Teaching Nehru a lesson and forcing him take up Beijing’s proposal for direct negotiations, for CCP leaders, were the main calculations in reaching the decision to launch attacks along the disputed border.² The “War of Self-defense Counter Attack with India,” valued by the leaders in Beijing as the “international class struggle,” would “reveal Nehru’s true face as a reactionary nationalist, debunk his peaceful neutrality and his nonaligned policy, expose the Indian reactionary’s anti-China-anti-the-people plot that were instigated by imperialists, and at the same time keep the Khrushchev clique in a trying situation.”³ For such “reactionary nationalism”, Beijing might need to teach the lesson for the second time and/or for the third time, if one was not enough for New Delhi.⁴

² Instruction from the PLA General Staff Department to Front Operational Headquarter of Tibetan Military Region, 20 October 1962, see Huang Yao, Zhang Mingzhe, et al., eds., *Luo Ruiqing Zhuan* [A Biography of Luo Ruiqing] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1996), p. 379.

³ Circular of the CCP Central Committee about the Question of the Sino-Indian Border Conflict and the Sino-Indian Relations, 14 November 1962, *Zhongyin Bianjie Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi Bianxiezhu* (The Editing Team of the Sino-Indian Border Self-defense Combat History), ed., *Zhongyin Bianjie Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi* [The Self-defense Combat History of the Sino-Indian Border] (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1994), pp. 267-268.

⁴ Conversation between Liu Shaoqi and Mrs. Bandaranaike, January 1963, Telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Embassies and the Offices of the chargé d’affaires, 11 January 1963, Department of

The primary goal of the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 was to demonstrate to Moscow the truth of Beijing's strategy on how to deal with nationalist countries like India, not just for the disputed territory. The documents from the Chinese side also show that the CCP leadership undoubtedly saw the Kremlin's actions as a "betrayal" of China. Khrushchev's pro-Indian attitude and policy may have even suggested "an Indo-Russian conspiracy to encircle China in Asia and to contain her influence elsewhere in the world." The Soviet aid to India proved "collaboration between the Soviet leaders and US 'imperialism' to ally them with India against China."⁵ New Delhi could exploit the Sino-Soviet split and use the "Soviet card" to maximum effect by maintaining better relations with Moscow. Nehru saw the Soviet Union as India's "best insurance" in dealing with Beijing. Mastny gives even more weight to the policies carried out by Khrushchev when he explores the impact of the 1962 war on the Sino-Soviet relationship, because "Khrushchev's turnabout during the war presaged his final break with China in 1963 (63). Thus, the Soviets and the Indians were thrown together by the fear of "Chinese bellicose policies." The border conflicts consolidated this logic. The successful October 1962 Chinese offensive, according to John Garver and Constantine Pleshakov, "impelled New Delhi into a close strategic alignment with the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s," a development "encircling" China with Soviet power and "laid the foundation for a Soviet-Indian anti-Chinese entente. The Soviet policy of befriending China's neighbors had started, a policy that would culminate in February 1979 when Moscow supported Vietnam during the Sino-Vietnamese border war."⁶

Mastny's article asks important questions. His research and analysis of the origins, meanings, and implications of the Soviet partnership with India is, ultimately, persuasive. The article brings us not only to an understanding of the evolution of Soviet policies toward India during the Cold War, but also to a realization of how equally important it is in our present times. The author deserves praise for his extensive research in both primary and secondary sources. His article contains detailed overviews of the general historical and political context, and his analytical framework and conclusions, which are argued succinctly and persuasively throughout, should be considered seriously by scholars working in the field. For those already familiar with the context, it is to Mastny's

Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 105-01792-08, pp. 90-92. Hereafter cited as *PRCFMA*.

⁵ The Soviet Union's Treatment to the Sino-Indian Border Question and the Soviet-Indian Relations, *PRCFMA*, 105-01272-01, April 1963, pp.1-119.

⁶ See John Garver, "China's Decision for War with India in 1962," in Alastair Iain Johnson and Robert Ross, eds., *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 125; Constantine Pleshakov, "Nikita Khrushchev and Sino-Soviet Relations," in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 240.

credit that, whatever reservations might be made, this article is a major achievement. Some of their details may still be open to challenge, but in the form that he presents them, they make a useful addition to the growing literature on Cold War international history.

Mastny's study is undoubtedly provocative; a new perspective rarely comes, however, without questions. This review covers only a portion of the issues raised in this article and a couple of final questions for the author:

(1) Did Nehru not *anticipate* or *desire* the military confrontation with China? This needs to be discussed in more detail because it is one of the critical questions for understanding the roots of the Sino-Indian border dispute and even the 1962 war. Part II, "Khrushchev and the 'Time Sever'" persuasively portrays lesser New Delhi moves as aggressive and irresponsible. Mastny's assertion that Khrushchev anticipated or desired no conflict or even war between New Delhi and Beijing over the border issues is quite reasonable (58-59). This assertion, however, does not apply to evaluations of Nehru's policies toward the Sino-Indian border issue and the archives show Nehru to have been much more aggressive. In Nehru's view, there was no border problem between China and India. The location of the boundary was very clearly displayed on Indian maps. Implicit in this was the notion that the way to a solution lay in a Chinese withdrawal from all territory claimed by India. As the Prime Minister and Secretary of External Affairs, Nehru should have known the position held by Chinese Central Government over the "McMahon Line." The Sino-Indian boundary has never been formally delimited and "historically no treaty or agreement" concerning it "has ever been concluded between the Chinese Central Government and the Indian Government," as Zhou Enlai explained to Nehru in the early 1959.⁷ As early as in 1946, 1947, and 1949, the Chinese Nationalist Government repeatedly protested against the inroads that first the British, and then the Indians, were making into the tribal areas to the east of Bhutan. They reminded the Indian government that China did not recognize the 1914 Simla Convention and the "McMahon Line." In October 1947 the Tibetans formally asked India to return to Tibet a "wide swath of territory from Ladakh to Assam, and including Sikkim and the Darjeeling district."⁸ Shortly after Beijing established itself in Tibet, New Delhi began to take a far more active interest in the "Assam Himalayas" than had even its British predecessor. Nehru never really wanted to compromise with China on the question of the "McMahon Line". He was not going to sacrifice any piece of India's claimed territory below the Himalayas. In his *The McMahon Line*, Alastair Lamb points out: "The Chinese objection to the McMahon Line, which was already being given expression on Chinese maps in Kuomintang times, was based less on the belief that the Line involved the British annexation of large tracts of Tibet (and hence

⁷ The letter from Zhou Enlai to Nehru, 22 January 1959, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu* [A Chronological Records of Zhou Enlai], Vol. II (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1997), pp. 201-202.

⁸ Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 61-62.

Chinese) territory than on the conviction that the British and Tibetans had no right to agree about Lines at all. Wherever the McMahon Line might have run, so long as its treaty basis was found in the events of the Simla Conference, the Chinese would certainly have rejected it. This is a point which Mr. Nehru and his advisers, some of whom should certainly have known better, appear to have failed to appreciate.”⁹

The great mistake of Nehru’s strategy was, however, to adopt the so-called “Forward Policy” towards the disputed territories in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the policy the British had enforced at the Assam frontier in 1930s. Nehru denounced openly the British policy “becomes an intense preparation for war, for the great war that is prophesied for the not distant future ... The forward policy has another aspect, a communal one. Just as the canker of communalism, fostered by imperialism, weakens and injures public life and our struggle for freedom so also the forward policy introduces that canker at the frontier and creates trouble between India and her neighbors.”¹⁰ From the late 1940s onwards, however, it was Nehru’s strategy to march and occupy the disputed territories up to the “McMahon Line” and Ladakh, the strategy which Nehru had condemned when the British did so in 1930s.

Nehru’s “Forward Policy,” in Maxwell’s analysis, was “designed to evict China from territory India claimed, by ‘dominating’ Chinese positions and thus forcing their withdrawal.”¹¹ When Indian forces initially began implementing the “Forward Policy,” the Chinese withdrew when they encountered the newly advanced Indian outposts. This “encouraged” the Indian side and led to the further acceleration of the “Forward Policy.” According to the official Indian history, “A large number of Indian posts were established quickly.”¹² Nehru’s optimism in this regard reflected several considerations. He saw China as poorly positioned for a military campaign in Tibet in the early 1960s. The failure of the Great Leap Forward, and the withdrawal of Soviet advisors, had weakened Beijing considerably. Making matters worse for Beijing was the threat of invasion from Taiwan in mid-1962.¹³ In April 1962 India accelerated implementation of the “Forward Policy” in the eastern sector, apparently because Nehru believed that the situation there favored India

⁹ Alastair Lamb, *The McMahon Line: A Study in the Relations between India, China and Tibet, 1904 to 1914*, Volume II: *Hardinge, McMahon and the Simla Conference* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1966, p. 562.

¹⁰ Statement to the Press, 22 June, 1937, S. Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Series One, Volume 8 (New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited, 1976), p. 459.

¹¹ Neville Maxwell, “India’s Forward Policy,” *China Quarterly*, No.45 (Jan.-Mar., 1971), p. 158.

¹² Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, p. xx.

¹³ D. K. Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1991), pp. 96-99, 109-110, 160-61.

more. Moreover, in July 1962, Indian Army Headquarters “gave discretion to all post commanders to fire on the Chinese if their [Indian] posts were ever threatened.”¹⁴ In addition, Nehru seemed to believe that a major Sino-Indian conflict would quickly escalate to global proportions, with incalculable consequences for China. As Nehru told Parliament in December 1961, “Is it imaginable that a war between India and China will remain confined to these two countries? It will be a world war and nothing but a world war.”¹⁵

Obviously, Nehru clearly knew there was the dispute between India and China over the boundary lines, and he was interested in the early 1960s not in how to settle the boundary question with Beijing, but in how to enforce his “Forward Policy” and how to consolidate the Indian position in the disputed lands. Such strategy and policy would be bound to evoke forceful reactions from the Chinese side. Although China repeatedly expressed its frustration regarding India’s refusal to negotiate, Beijing tried from 1959 to persuade New Delhi to settle for a diplomatic solution. Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier, encouraged the negotiations between two sides with the possibility of at least *de facto* and perhaps eventually *de jure* recognition of the “McMahon Line.” Zhou himself had already proposed a summit meeting to Nehru, at which the swap could not really be excluded. The meeting in New Delhi in April 1960 turned out to be a disaster. Zhou achieved nothing. Nehru’s refusal of negotiation did have an impact on how the war was fought. It should perhaps be noted, however, that had India accepted Zhou’s 1960 offer of an east-west swap, Nehru could very probably have carried Indian public opinion with him and avoided war. Obviously, Nehru’s rejection of Zhou’s package-deal solution, plus his insistence on a Chinese abandonment of Aksai Chin, must be seen as crucial steps on the road to the 1962 war.¹⁶ Nehru could not explain how the boundary dispute could be settled if he did not want to negotiate the question with Zhou; nor could he cope with the conflicts that his attitude implied. Nehru and his advisers did not seriously expect the political aspects of such a policy to be implemented. In other words, Nehru did not *desire* the military confrontation with China over the disputed territories, but he might have *anticipated* the possible consequences of his policies, unless he was a “dilettante in foreign policy” as he is “now widely regarded even in India” (88).

(2) Mastny impresses when he argues that “it is clear enough who was in charge in Beijing,” but it is questionable when he confirms that “this does not mean that the war was predetermined” (59). Here, in particular, the author makes no reference to the archival materials from the China side, the material that confirms as early as May 1960

¹⁴ P. B. Sinha and A. A. Athale, *History of the Conflict with China, 1962* (New Delhi: History Division, Ministry of Defense, Government of India, 1992), pp. 415-416, xx.

¹⁵ *Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1961-1962), Vol. I, Part II, pp. 61-62.

¹⁶ See Garver, “China’s Decision for War with India in 1962,” pp. 103-104.

when Zhou came back from New Delhi with empty hands, that the CCP leadership had ordered the establishment of new posts in the Western Sector and renewed PLA patrols along the Sino-Indian border. With the tension along the border being escalated after 1960, the war was really “predetermined”, when the Command of Tibet Front Line was formed in June 1962 to be charged with planned “self-defense combat.”¹⁷

(3) The author disappoints when he discusses the role of Chinese domestic politics at the time and, especially, the struggle among the CCP leadership. Three major questions are involved with his assertions: Firstly, the article suggests that “China’s policy was driven by its party politics” and “In 1960 the PRC’s policy nevertheless became more conciliatory during Mao’s temporary eclipse after the disastrous impact of his Great Leap Forward” (60). Mastny is correct to pay more attention to the party politics, but his analysis neglects the documents that point to Mao’s control over the party. To fully understand the nature of China’s policy during this period, one must place the role of Mao in proper historical contexts. The Great Forward Leap, according to Thomas P. Bernstein, was Mao’s effort to “chart an independent developmental and ideological road by breaking with the preceding years of emulation of the Soviet model,” though other students such as Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard argued that Mao’s “actual policies tented to intensify rather than to weaken the basic pattern of the Soviet strategy.”¹⁸ Although the failure of the Great Leap Forward drew Chinese leaders’ attention to urgent domestic problems and though Mao himself had drawn criticism, he never lost his autocratic control over the party for such a reason. Mao disagreed with the other leaders’ bleak assessment of the socio-economic situation. He did admit that there were problems but believed that the appraisal was too pessimistic. As a symbol of Chinese communism, he still enjoyed an enormous amount of authority and respect among party officials at all levels as well as among the people. Most important, Mao continued to enjoy the supreme power over decision-making in both Chinese foreign policies and the domestic issues,¹⁹ as he did so when he had made the initiative of China’s entry into the Korean War in 1950 and ordered the shelling of Quemoy and Matsu in 1954-1955 and in 1958. Mao did not have to *reassert* “his authority at a secretive party conference” at Baidaihe in August 1962.

¹⁷ Telegram from Zhou Enlai to the CCP and Mao Zedong, 4 May 1960, Li Ping, *et al.*, ed., *Zhou Enlai Nian Pu, 1949-1976* [A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai, 1949-1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1979), Vol. III, pp. 315-316.

¹⁸ Thomas P. Bernstein, “Stalinism, Famine, and Chinese Peasants: Grain Procurements during the Great Leap Forward,” *Theory and Society*, Vol.13, No.3 (May 1984), p. 341; Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard, “Paradigmatic Change: Readjustment and Reform in the Chinese Economy, 1953-1981,” Part II, *Modern China*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), p. 257.

¹⁹ Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, *et al.*, eds., *Mao Zedong Zhuan, 1949-1976* [A Biography of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2003), Vol. II, chapters 22-30.

Secondly, was “san he yi shao” the “the prevailing view among China’s ruling elite” as late as 1962? “San he yi shao” was advanced by Wang Jiaxiang, former ambassador to Moscow and then-head of the International Liaison Department. This notion was called later by Mao as “three conciliations and one reduction”, that is, conciliation with the imperialists, the revisionists, and reactionaries, and reduction of aid to the world revolutionary struggle. Wang presented a report to Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Chen Yi in early 1962, in which he argued that China should try to create a peaceful environment for its domestic economic development, ease tensions in China’s external relations, and consider China’s real capacity in giving foreign aid. At same time, Wang argued that peaceful coexistence was possible even between socialist countries and capitalist countries and that China should do everything possible to strive for peace. Mastny argues that this notion was “the prevailing view among China’s ruling elite.” (60) In order prove this assertion one must first define what one means by “ruling elite.” Actually, the “ruling elite,” led by Wang Jiaxiang, was the minority among the Party, their idea of “san he yi shao” was just a suggestion to the CCP leadership. Never was it the “prevailing view” as long as Mao was in command of the foreign policy.

Thirdly, related to the above questions, the argument that the Party conference at Baidaihe in August 1962 gave Mao a “green light to demonstrate that his revolutionary strategy in foreign policy was superior to Soviet strategy” is absolutely right (60). The article, however, ignores the fact that the “green light” had been given to Mao when he decided to bomb the Offshore Islands in 1958; the bombardment had originated in Mao’s desire to show that his “revolutionary diplomacy” was superior to Khrushchev’s strategy.

(4) The article argues that “Nehru’s desperate call for help to Washington on the day in-between finally moved Khrushchev to rally behind India” (63). The short response is no. Mastny illustrates the Indian desire for collaboration with the Soviets as the war broke out, arguing that Nehru was disappointed when *Pravda* published its editorial in support of the Chinese action. The first reason for doubting that Nehru’s call for U.S. military support was responsible for Khrushchev’s rallying behind New Delhi is the significant fact that no document reveals that Khrushchev was told of Nehru’s appeal to JFK at the time. After failing to get Soviet support, Nehru had to make his decision to beg for backing from Washington and London, even without consulting his closest advisers. The fact is that China’s accusations of Soviet mishandling of events in the Caribbean Sea absolutely contributed to Khrushchev’s siding with the Indians again.

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(Beijing: Social Science Document Printing House, 2003); *American Diplomatic Thoughts in History* (Beijing: Renmin Press, 2007). He is currently working on the research project of *Mao Zedong, Nehru, and the Sino-Indian Border War of 1962*. Professor Dai received his Ph.D. from Northeast Normal University in 1996.

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