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Guest Column-By Deepak V. Ganapathy

Sino Indian relations have been frosty at best and chilly at worst. Besides a brief period of bonhomie between 1954 and 1958, India and China have spent a bulk of their 53 year diplomatic history countering each other. While China perceives itself as the de-facto regional power and a rising global power, India has never conceded to China, either regional superiority or acknowledged its global preeminence. Today, Chinese assistance to Pakistan's nuclear and missile program only adds to Indian notions of Chinese perfidy since the border war of 1962. China's decision to attack India has its origins, in Mao's personality as much as Nehru's forward policy. The objective of this paper is to assess the nature of the Chinese threat to India. After 1962, China has diligently charted India's strategic encirclement with a high degree of success. India is therefore justifiably concerned about Chinese intentions. I conclude, China as much as Pakistan, is set to pose a daunting challenge to Indian strategic interests.

After independence, the struggle for regional supremacy began in earnest. Liberal and democratic Nehruvian India was the antithesis of totalitarian and repressive Maoist China. Reclusive and introspective Mao contrasted with gregarious and outgoing Nehru. While Mao grappled with China's internal unrest and political chaos, Nehru played an architect's role in founding The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Indeed, the brief border war gave Mao an unprecedented opportunity to "cut India to size and undermine India as an alternative model for

the developing world. The swiftness and brute power with which Mao managed to humiliate India not only boosted China's image internationally, but also helped Mao to consolidate domestically when his political fortunes were weakening"(1)

"The question remains, if Mao had still been in retirement, would Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai have chosen to teach Nehru a lesson in quite so a brutal fashion? Probably not, in the light of their support to a conciliatory policy only four months earlier".(2) The former Indian Charge d' affairs, P.K. Banerjee gives the benefit of doubt to Premier Zhou even though he was personally responsible for war preparations against India.(3)

1962 was a watershed in Sino-Indian relations and Mao made good his threat of "teaching India a lesson." That, Mao never entertained serious territorial designs on the Indian North East emerges from recent disclosures in the Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project. In a conversation with Soviet Diplomat S.F. Antonov, Mao said, "We never, under any circumstances, will move beyond the Himalayas. This is completely ruled out. This is an argument over inconsequential pieces of territory."(4)

While it is undeniable that Nehru, guided by faulty intelligence and poor international political assessments adopted a "forward policy" and precipitated the war, contemporary studies have ignored the impact of domestic Chinese politics, personality cults and the international environment that were crucial to the Chinese decision. Indeed, Chairman Mao and his enigmatic personality were central to the decision to attack and humiliate India in October - November, 1962. Mao's behavior towards India flies in face of his engagement tactics with other more powerful nations from which China faced equal if not greater threat.

The fortuitous international environment also aided Mao's decision to cross the Himalayan divide. The Cuban missile crisis in October and the declining threat of KMT invasion in 1962 was central to the timing of the attack. On 26 June, 1962 President Kennedy declared that the US was determined to defend Taiwanese integrity, but in a secret State Department communication, he assured China of not supporting a KMT invasion of the mainland.

With nearly 500,000 troops amassed opposite the Quemoy Islands to repel a KMT assault, it is highly unlikely that Mao would have contemplated a two front war. (4b) India's long standing Cold War friend, USSR too, played an unbecoming role. The Soviet nod for the attack on India came on October 14, 1962 at the dinner hosted by Khrushchev for departing Chinese Ambassador Liu Xiao . (5)

So here was India in November 1962, thrashed and beaten lock, stock and barrel by China. Following the war, China relinquished its gains in North East India but retained its gains in North West India in the Aksai Chin Plateau where it had built an all weather road connecting Xianjian to Tibet.

Spurred by these events, India went nuclear on May 8, 1974 and Pakistan followed suit. Even though Pakistan became an overt nuclear weapon state in May 1998, it had acquired nuclear weapons capability in the mid 1980's. Chinese support to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program is unprecedented because this is the only case of a state consciously assisting weaponization of another state. Though blue prints and plans for Pakistan's nuclear program were stolen by Dr. A.Q. Khan from URENCO plant in Almeo Netherlands, it is subsequent Chinese scientific and technological support from China that nurtured the fledgling Pakistani program and prevented it from fizzling out.(6)

The origins of Sino-Pak defense cooperation lie in a comprehensive nuclear cooperation agreement signed in 1986. Chinese assistance to Pakistan's nuclear aspirations predate and post date China's accession to the NPT in 1992, and the signing of the IAEA safeguards agreement in 1993. The Chinese involvement has been meticulously documented by the US Intelligence community and several Non Governmental Organizations. Chinese assistance ranges from provision of special industrial machine tools and gadgets like ring magnets, required for nuclear weapon fabrication to other ingredients like Tritium gas essential for achieving fusion in thermonuclear weapons and boosting nuclear yields. As early as 1983, China had transferred weapon design and fissile material, sufficient for 2 devices with an estimated yield of 20-25 KT.(7) From pressurized water reactors to unsafe-guarded plutonium reprocessing facilities, China has systematically planned, directed, encouraged and eventually ensured a modicum of reliability and survivability to the Pakistani nuclear weapon program.

China's assistance to Pakistan has extended to short and medium range ballistic missile capability acquisition as well. Like its assistance in the nuclear field, China's generosity in sharing missile technology is well documented too. (8) In fact, the US imposed sanctions on China in 1991 and 1993 for sale of the DF-11 / CSS-7 related technology to Pakistan. The Hatf-1, Hatf-2 and Shaheen bear uncanny resemblance to Chinese M-11 and M-9 series.

Central to China's strategic encirclement strategy of India are the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) states including Myanmar. In this regard, China's liaisons with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar deserve close scrutiny. A perilous quadrangular nuclear situation seems to be developing in Myanmar involving 3 other nuclear powers- China, Pakistan and Russia. Myanmar officially confirmed on January 21, 2002 that it is building a nuclear reactor with Russian assistance. Two Pakistani nuclear scientists Suleiman Asad and Mohammed Ali Mukhtar are known to have visited Myanmar in an advisory capacity in November 2001.(9) This came to light when US officials were investigating the Al Qaida infrastructure in that region.

India's relationship with Myanmar's military junta has largely been antagonistic. For example, former First Lady, Mrs. Usha Narayanan, wife of President R.K Narayanan is a close friend of incarcerated Burmese democratic icon, Aung San Suu Kyi. The current Indian Defense Minister, George Fernandes has long allowed exiled Burmese students to operate out of his 3 Krishna Menon Marg residence even before he assumed that post as India's Defence Minister.(10)

India's key concern about Chinese activity in Myanmar stems from Chinese activity in the Coco Islands. The island was gifted to Burma by Nehru. Air strip, signal intelligence nodes and an 85 meter jetty under construction pose an emerging threat to the Indian tri services command in Port Blair, Andaman Islands about 190 nautical miles (300 Kilometers) away. With a distance of only 22 nautical miles from Landfall, the northernmost island of the Andaman archipelago, the Coco's pose a significant ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) and SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) threat to India's missile testing range, Chandipur-on-Sea and The Sriharikota Launching Range designed to assemble, test, launch large Indian multi-stage rockets. The launch range is situated in Sriharikota Island about 62 miles, north of the South Indian city of Chennai. Chinese listening posts in Sittwe (Aykab) and Zedetkyi Kyun (St. Luke's) off the Terrasserim coast in Southern Myanmar enable China to monitor traffic in the Straits of Malacca and Phillips Channel prior to entering South China Sea. China has also pledged about US\$ 1.2 Billion worth of military hardware to Myanmar. The expansion of the naval base at Hainggyi Island could on completion support an infrastructure capable of docking Chinese SSN and SSBN submarines, including those being procured from Russia. Indian suspicions are well founded because the current ELITN, SIGINT and burgeoning naval infrastructure exceeds Myanmar's legitimate security concerns.(11) In effect, the ongoing Chinese activity in Myanmar seems to give corroborate a statement attributed to PLAN General Staff Logistics Department Director, Zhao Nanqi, "We can no longer accept the Indian ocean as India's ocean".(12) Indeed, China is trying hard to live up to the Myanmar's adulation, "paukphaw" (full brothers)(12b)

Like Myanmar, Bangladesh too is emerging as a frontline state in China's effort to strategically suffocate India. Ironically, Bangladesh in spite of Indian military intervention in 1971 to avert its humanitarian tragedy and facilitate its independence, remains categorically anti Indian. In deferment to the sensitivities of Pakistan, China refused diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh until four years after its birth in 1975. Beijing described Bangladesh's emergence as a product of Indo-Soviet machinations and consistently called for an "independent foreign policy" and "opposition to outside interference"(13) Only on the assassination of the pro India, Bangladeshi Prime Minister, Sheikh Mujib on August 31, 1975, did China accord diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh, 15 days thence.

The principal bone of contention between the two countries is illegal immigration. According to Lt. Gen (retd.) S.K. Sinha, former Governor of the North Eastern State of Assam, illegal migration from Bangladesh accounted for approximately 22% of the growth differential between the Islamic community in the Assam (77%) and the rest of India (55%) between 1971 and 1991.(14) Given the problem of religious fundamentalism, the presence of an estimated 5 million illegal Bangladeshi migrants and the right wing Hindu BJP, the problem of illegal migration has assumed destabilizing proportions. It is against this backdrop that Bangladesh's first and only Defense Cooperation Agreement was signed during the visit of the current Prime Minister, Begum Khalida Zia in December 2002. "This agreement ambiguous in wording includes at least military training and defense production without specifying as to whom China and Bangladesh might be cooperating against or what weapons are sought for joint production."(15)

The Dragon has not left any unturned stones. In stalking India, it has made assiduous efforts to cultivate the remaining SAARC countries of Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. Nepal despite its strong cultural affinity to India has sought to remain equidistant between the India and

China. On more than one occasion in its history, Nepal has played one country against the other, complicating India's National Security Management Strategy. In the 1960's, King Mahendra agreed to the construction of Kathmandu-Kodari highway linking Tibetan Lhasa with Nepalese Kathmandu. Though the Chinese proposal may have been presented to bait Nepalese acceptance of Chinese proposals on the Sino-Nepalese border issue, the strategic ramifications for India was immense.(16) Bounded by India on three sides and high Himalayas on the fourth, the Lhasa-Kathmandu highway freed landlocked Nepal of its India dependence for trade and commerce. The new highway provided China with its second all weather strategic road access to South Asia. The first one being Karakorum Highway, linking the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi to the Kashgar in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. The importance that China attaches to Nepal is self evident from examining the level and frequency of CCP functionaries visiting Nepal since the diplomatic relations were established on August 1, 1955.(17)

The reclusive Kingdom of Bhutan, too hasn't escaped China's overtures. However, the effects, thus far have remained benign largely due to India's scrupulous adherence to Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, 1949. Being adjacent to the disputed Tawang Tract, in Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, also claimed by China, Bhutan serves a buffer function. Bhutan therefore has significant strategic leverage with India. In return for acceptance of India's advice on external relations, as per Article 2 of the 1949 Treaty, the Bhutanese Kingdom remains free to pursue a domestic policy of its liking. Bhutan, like India has unresolved border issues with China.(18). Given the 1949 treaty, Chinese efforts in solving the border problem directly with Bhutan are unlikely to succeed. The Northern Bhutanese border is an extension of The McMahon line, acceptable to India but unacceptable to China. Until the seventies, Bhutan's border issues with China were incorporated with in the scope of Sino-Indian border discussion. The Chinese stand remained that the Sino-Bhutanese border has never been officially demarcated and it would like to do so "through friendly consultations", the matter "concerns China and Bhutan alone" and "the Indian government has no right to intervene in it"(18b) . Since 1984, the two countries commenced direct border talks. In 1998, during the twelfth round of border talks, the two countries signed "Agreement to Maintain Peace and Tranquility on the Bhutan-China Border". After 16 rounds of border talks, the Sino-Bhutan border remains tranquil yet under dispute.(19)

Thus we have seen that the "Ghost of 1962" is yet to be exorcised. Following the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959 and India's crushing defeat in 1962, it seems concerns of Tibetan nationalism has driven China to adopt a policy of unremitting hostility towards India. Like an iron hand clothed in a velvet glove, China's success has been the successful petrification of the Indian strategic community. By flouting international nuclear and missile proliferation protocols, China is singularly responsible for the nuclearizing Pakistan, which defines its *raison-d'etre* in anti Indian terms. China has actively courted a strategic relationship with India's satellite neighbors like Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. Of all regional states, Myanmar is emerging as the single largest threat to Indian strategic interests in South East Asia. Burgeoning Chinese naval capability in Myanmar, may in a few years allow China to interdict regional Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC). It is also possible that China will persuade Bangladesh to develop Chittagong as a deep water port on the lines of Gwadar in East Pakistan.

Chinese aims have not fully succeeded in the SAARC region because of the geographical location of these states. No matter what, China's

efforts are at a conventional level, Indian leverage in facilitating overland trade and commerce, vital to SAARC countries is a geographical reality. The dependence on India ensures a degree of leverage that China will find hard to match. Having said that, the long-term trend indicates a growing penetration of what once was an undisputed Indian sphere of influence.

After 14 rounds of border talks between India and China, The Joint Working Group has not produced any progress except meaningless platitudes⁽²⁰⁾ It is surprising that, in spite of vigorous affirmations after every round of a Joint Working Group meeting, The McMahon Line comes no closer to resolution in 2003 than it was in 1914, when Lonchen Shatra, the Tibetan Plenipotentiary and Sir Henry McMahon, Secretary to the British Indian Government initialed the fateful documents.⁽²¹⁾

Though maps of the least disputed “middle sector” falling under the newly formed Indian state of Uttaranchal have been exchanged, it seems China is on the look out for unilateral concessions that it has in the past. ⁽²²⁾ During the Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh’s visit to Beijing in March 2002, it was decided to complete delineation of the LAC (Line of Actual Control) in the western sector by the year end. Yet no progress has been made.⁽²³⁾ India’s bugbear Pakistan seems to have crept into the picture again. The western sector is complicated by Pakistan’s secession of 5180 sq km Indian territory to China in 1962. By discussing this sector, China risks opening up the Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement, which it ostensibly will try to avoid. India on its part has steadfastly refused Chinese hints that the western sector be considered sans the Pakistan ceded territory. Nothing seems to have happened in the 40 years since the ill-fated border war to indicate Chinese intentions toward India have turned benign. The Dragon is on the move in Tibet also. In December 2001, China successfully completed two sections of the first railway tunnel of the Qinghai-Tibet link, in pursuit of the 1118 Km Gormu-Lhasa railway line. The railway link while connection Lhasa-Beijing and Shanghai, will reduce travel time between Gormu to Lhasa from 72 to 16 hours. Furthermore, the railway link provides the first reliable transportation means to haul back Tibetan mineral resources to mainland China. Militarily, on completion of the railway line, China can mobilize approximately 12 Divisions or 120,000 men in less than 2 days.⁽²⁴⁾ Thus, India’s strategic future is fraught with great danger.

India’s problem remains its discomfiture with its preeminent size and its false pretensions of being an “emerging great power”. Sadly, India lacks the stomach and the spine to be one.⁽²⁵⁾ Under these circumstances, I am, but, forced to conclude that the Chinese containment efforts shall continue till India concedes or India miraculously grows a part of its autonomy that it seems to have lost since 1971. Between the two scenarios, it is likely that India will continue her pathetic existence, scorned, abused and treated inconsequentially by great and small powers alike.

¹ Prof. Brahma Chellaney on Sino-Indian Conflict. Source:

www.rediff.com/news/2002/oct/19brahma.htm [1]

² The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, Vol 3, Roderick MacFarquhar.

A.G. Noorani in The Frontline, Vol 15, Dec 5 1998. www.flonnet.com/fl1525/15250740.htm [2]

³ Ibid , Pg 4, A.G. Noorani. See Foot Note on Following Page

⁴ Statement made on October 14, 1959. Bulletin 3, Page 56.

Bulletin authored at Woodrow Wilson International Center, Washington D.C.

Also see A.G. Noorani in The Frontline, Vol 15, Dec 5 1998.

www.flonnet.com/fl1525/15250740.htm [2]

Even though “The Seven Thousand Cadres Conference” in January 1962 had criticized Nehru as a “modern revisionist”, former Chinese Ambassador to USSR, Wang Jiaying continued to recommend a conciliatory line to US, USSR and India. On two occasions, on February 27, 1962 and June 29, 1962 Ambassador Wang wrote to party elders about his views. In the first instant, Ambassador Wang after concurring with Liu Shaoqi, and seeking the approval of Deputy Directors of the International Department, Liu Ningyi, and Wu Xiuquanto, addressed a letter to Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yi, calling for a conciliatory policy towards U.S., U.S.S.R and India to avoid conflict and concentrate on economic development. The Peoples Daily had published a positive editorial on June 3, 1962 inspite of the gathering war clouds. In the second instant, on June 23, 1962, Ambassador Wang made yet another plea for restraint. In the midst of these happenings, Robert MacFarquhar describes Zhou Enlai as always taking the line of least resistance, bending with whatever Maoist wind was blowing, be it a leftist gale or rightist zephyr”. Robert MacFarquhar’s assessment of Zhou is vindicated by P.K. Bannerjee in his book, “My Peking Memoirs”. My Peking Memoirs tends to identify Zhou as Mao’s hatchet man. This explanation may perhaps be extended to Li Shaoqi who presided over a conference on July 14 after which the PLA general staff issued mobilisation orders. MacFarquhar also on pages 270 says Deng like Liu had supported Wang.

^{4b} The Harvard Political Education Program (HPEP) Documents. Also see Footnote 5, Pg 3 Source <http://hcs.harvard.edu/~hpep/boston/> [3]

[briefings/hist_geopolitics.pdf](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hpep/boston/briefings/hist_geopolitics.pdf) [3]

⁵ A.G. Noorani in The Frontline, Vol 15, Dec 5 1998. www.flonnet.com/fl1525/15250740.htm [2]

Review of The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, Vol 3, Roderick MacFarquhar. In a study titled Security without Nuclear Weapons; Indo Soviet Dialogue published by Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, India and Lancer International Publishers, the Soviet side claimed that this was a fabrication and the matter needed investigation. On October 20, 1962, Nehru had received communication from Khrushchev urging negotiations with China. Discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba was made public on October 22, by President Kennedy

6 Source: Plutonium Investigations

See:<http://www.wise-paris.org/index.html?/english/> [4]

[ournewsletter/11/page5.html&/english/frame/menu.html&/english/frame/band.html](http://www.wise-paris.org/ournewsletter/11/page5.html&/english/frame/menu.html&/english/frame/band.html) [4]

⁷ Source: Monterey Institute of International

Studies data base on South Asia.

<http://cns.miis.edu/research/india/china/npakpos.htm> [5], <http://cns.miis.edu/research/india/china/npakchr.htm> [6]

Also see CRS Issue Brief : September 29, 1995. Page 9.

Chinese Missile and Nuclear Proliferation: Issues For Congress. Robert Shuey and Shirley A.Kan

⁸ Source: Federation of American Scientists. <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/pakistan/missile/index.html> [7]

⁹ Source: Myanmar Govt. Website.

www.myanmar.gov.mm [8].

In a press conference dated January 21, 2002 the Burmese govt.

denied the reports on Pakistani scientists

Source: <http://www.myanmar.gov.mm/press/> [9]

[Press2002/jan/jan21press.html](http://www.myanmar.gov.mm/press/Press2002/jan/jan21press.html) [9]

Also See: Global Security Newswire, Reports Dated :

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Global Security Newswire, Report Dated: 26 November 2001 http://www.nti.org/d_newswire/issues/2001/11/26/6s.html [11]

¹⁰ Source: <http://www.himalmag.com/99Mar/mail6.htm> [12]

¹¹ Myanmar: A Chinese Satellite in the Indian

Ocean. By Vijay Sakhuja, Maritime Security Analyst, JNU, Delhi

Source: Division of Strategic and International Studies, Taiwan Research Institute

<http://www.dsis.org.tw/peaceforum/papers/> [13]

[2003-01/AP0301001e.htm](http://www.dsis.org.tw/peaceforum/papers/2003-01/AP0301001e.htm) [13]

¹² The Strategic Significance of the Andaman's By Prakash Nanda.

Source: Bharat Rakshak Monitor - Volume 5(3)

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Source: <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/> [14]

[MONITOR/ISSUE5-3/nanda.html](http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/MONITOR/ISSUE5-3/nanda.html) [14]

^{12b} Peoples Daily, January 14, 2003

Source: <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200301/14/> ^[15]

[eng20030114_110091.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200301/14/eng20030114_110091.shtml) ^[15]

¹³ Sino-South Asian Ties: Problems & Prospects. By Swaran Singh, Research Fellow

Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis, India.

Source: www.idsa-india.org/an-apr-03.html ^[16]

¹⁴ *The Rediff Interview/* Lt General (ret'd) S K Sinha: 'National security

is being seriously threatened' Source: <http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/jul/26inter.htm> ^[17]

¹⁵ Dragon in the Indian Ocean By William C. Triplet III, The Jamestown Foundation. Source: http://www.jamestown.org/pubs/view/cwe_003_004_002.htm ^[18]

¹⁶ Sino-South Asian Ties: Problems & Prospects.

By Swaran Singh, Research Fellow, Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis, India. Page 6.

Source: www.idsa-india.org/an-apr-03.html ^[16]

¹⁷ Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples Republic of China. Premier Zhou Enlai- January 25-29- **1957**: Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier Chen Yi, April 26-29, **1960** Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping - February 3-6, **1978**: Premier Zhao Ziyang - June 4-7, **1981**: President Li Xiannian - March 19-23, **1984**: Vice Premier Qiao Shi - May 28-June 1, **1987**: Premier Li Peng - November 19-21, **1989**: Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, Li Ruthann - November 25-29, **1993**: Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen - July 19-20, **1994**: President Jiang Zemin - December 4-5, **1996**: Chi Haotian, Vice chairman - Central Military Commission of the CPC - February **2001**: Premier Zhu Rongji - May 14- 16, **2001**. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/4402.html> ^[19]

¹⁸ Source: Bhutan News Online. See: <http://www.bhutannewsonline.com/treaties.html> ^[20]

18b Ibid

19 Sino-South Asian Ties: Problems & Prospects. By Swaran Singh, Research Fellow,
Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis

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20 Source: Ministry of External Affairs, India. Press Release, 11/22/2002

See: <http://www.meadev.nic.in/news/official/20021122/official.htm> [21]

21 For Text of Convention between Great Britain, China and Tibet , Simla, April 27,

1914 See Alistain Lamb. The

McMahon Line, Volume 2. Pg 620. Also Refer Chapter 25, Pg 507

22 Source: Ministry of External Affairs, India. Press Release, 03/20/2002

See: www.meadev.nic.in/news/clippings/20020330/ht.htm [22]

23 Source: The Week, India. December 1, 2002. Chinese Chequers By Rashmi Saksena

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24 Source: Tibetan Environmental Watch

See: www.tew.org/development/rail.india2.html [24]

25 See: Prof. Brahma Chellaney on Sino-Indian Conflict (Remembering the War)

Source: www.rediff.com/news/2002/oct/19brahma.htm [1]

(email-gd2024@columbia.edu ^[25])

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