

BERTIL LINTNER: CHINA'S INDIA WAR
COLLISION COURSE ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD
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Bertil Lintner has a formidable reputation as a journalist who has extensively explored what Nari Rustomji called our enchanted frontiers - our northeastern borderlands. His observations of the region are informative and balanced.

His latest book is titled "China's India War". It is partly a riposte to Neville Maxwell's infamous (for most Indians) "India's China War", a work published in 1970. Maxwell's work is known for its pro-China interpretation of events surrounding the 1962 conflict. Lintner rightly debunks the whole "Forward Policy" theory advanced by Maxwell as being responsible for the Chinese offensive of 1962. In fact, by 1959, after the upheavals in Tibet and the flight of the Dalai Lama, the Chinese leadership was clear that accounts would be settled with India, and cold and calculated planning was involved in achieving this goal.

Lintner is discerning too about the still-classified Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report which was made public by Maxwell in 2014. The Report is often imagined as the last word on the 1962 conflict, a kind of philosopher's stone on how bluster and braggadocio lost us the war, even listing a national rogues' gallery in this regard. Far from it. Lintner says rightly, "The question of who attacked whom, or determining who was responsible..was not even within the scope of the enquiry, which had been set up to look into four specific aspects...: possible shortcomings in training and equipment; the system of command; the physical fitness of the troops; and the capacity of commanders at all levels to influence their subordinates."

But beyond Maxwell, Lintner is a scholar of the strategic knot of borderlands that link South, Southeast and East Asia. He is acutely conscious of the rivalry and competition between India and China both in this region and in the vast maritime space of the Indo-Pacific. It is a

rivalry that runs across the spine of the continent, as the journalist Frank Moraes quoting Nehru said in 1952.

Today, the relationship between these two giant neighbors in Asia has entered an uncertain phase. Lintner's book certainly places matters in perspective. Between the two countries, there is a "New Great Game" "founded on historic mistrust and current competition". China's conflict, or war, with India is a long one: from the direct contest of 1962 it is now a proxy war: a jockeying for space along the disputed frontier, cross-border insurgencies, the sharing of water resources, a jousting for strategic influence and political weight in Nepal, in Myanmar, and in the ports and seaways of the Indian Ocean. This is an adversarial relationship where the two countries literally shadow each other.

The book is not based on new archival research. It is more an analysis drawn from published works. However, this should not detract from its comprehensive sweep and the fact that Lintner's time-tested knowledge of the vital issues involved merits our serious reflection.

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