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Quietly Encouraging Quasi-Alignment: US-Indian Relations, the Sino-Indian Border War of 1962, and the Downfall of Krishna Menon[1]

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In 1969, only seven years after the Sino-Indian border war that climaxed his tenure as John F. Kennedy's envoy to Jawaharlal Nehru's India, John Kenneth Galbraith published his intimate *Ambassador's Journal*.[2] Since the Harvard economist had cultivated a reputation not only for intellectual firepower and liberal politics but for trenchant opinions, cutting wit, and irreverence toward pompous institutions and individuals, readers eagerly anticipated not only insights into Indo-American relations but juicy gossip about leading personalities in both Washington and New Delhi. True to form, the lengthy tome bulged with inside dope; while finding it "tedious" and "disappointingly thin in substance," the *New York Times'* book reviewer, the managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, wearily predicted that *Ambassador's Journal* would nevertheless enjoy a careful readership thanks to "the author's venomous comments on individuals who were his colleagues in public service." Even "those who do not cross his path" were not immune from "gratuitous comments," and "those few to whom he is sympathetic" were victimized by "unconsciously condescending" remarks.[3]

Yet, there was one glaring exception to Galbraith's candor. At the beginning of his chapter on the outbreak of the border war in October 1962, he included a lengthy, somewhat apologetic footnote:

> This chapter has been edited in one important respect. I was not fond of Krishna Menon, the Defence Minister—a feeling that was deeply reciprocated as his own recollections of these days amply tell. But my feelings were unimportant, and as compared with the antipathy and suspicion with which he was regarded in Washington and equally in Indian political circles, they were almost benign. Krishna Menon was an extraordinarily resourceful politician and I was afraid that were we too forthcoming in giving the Indians military aid, he would take credit for it. He would then present himself as a transcendent figure who was respected by the Americans as by all others. This would cause great

[1] An earlier version of this article was presented to the Slavic Research Center Summer Symposium, "Alliances and Borders in the Making and Unmaking of Regional Powers," Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, 7-9 July 2011. The author thanks David Wolff and the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, for supporting research trips to gather material for this paper from the John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL) in Boston and the Library and Archives of Canada (LAC) in Ottawa; and the staffs of those archives for their cooperation in retrieving and reviewing records.

[2] John Kenneth Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969; citations from Signet paperback edition, 1970; see also Paragon paperback edition, 1988).

[3] Philip Quigg, "Ambassador's Journal," *New York Times*, 19 October 1969, pp. BR1, BR24.

> trouble in Washington and great trouble for the Indians in getting further military help, should there be a long period of hostility.
>
> I have deleted most of the references to the problem. Mr. Menon is now an old man. It would be wrong, I think, to reopen these old wounds—especially to repeat the angry comments about him which flowed in on me at the time from other Indian political leaders.
>
> I am again reminded of the rule that I formulated in offering this diary. There is no reason to spare any American. But an ambassador is hired to maintain good relations with the country to which he is accredited. Even after due lapse of time, as in this case, he should keep to the spirit of this obligation….[4]

Of course, as Galbraith himself noted, their mutual disdain was hardly a secret. A year earlier, when interviewed by a political scientist, Menon had expressed himself with characteristic causticity. Recalling their disagreement over Goa in late 1961 (when the Kennedy Administration had vainly sought to dissuade Nehru from forcefully seizing the tiny Portuguese colony on India's southwestern coast), Menon had termed Galbraith a "supercilious" and "so ignorant" tool of American imperialism who had tried to arm-twist India to do Washington's bidding. "He regarded himself as a kind of super-ambassador, like an old-time British Resident of an Indian [Princely] State," said the tart-tongued ex-minister. "At no time have I come to a worse conclusion about anybody I have had to deal with." Presuming that Galbraith's personal animus ("He wouldn't talk to me!") extended to all India, Menon contended that "to him the whole of this country was just a little worm under his feet."[5]

Galbraith had implied that he had held his fire in part out of consideration toward an "old man," but he did not elaborate on his deletions from *Ambassador's Journal* when he published his memoirs in 1981, seven years after Menon's death.[6] In 2008, two years after Galbraith's own passing, his papers at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston opened, and I thought it might be worth checking whether his unexpurgated diary might usefully expand the historical record. After all, both he and Menon were iconic figures of the era—the Indian for more than a decade perhaps the most prominent and tireless (and to Americans, tiresome) critic of US "imperialism" at the United Nations and other international forums, spouting a brand of neutralism or nonalignment that Washington found far too sympathetic and useful to Moscow; and the American not only a titan in his discipline but, for much of the second half of the 20th century, in U.S. politics an intellectual hero and oracle to liberal Democrats.

Moreover, the 1962 Sino-Indian border war—which caused Menon's downfall after five years as defence minister and a decade as India's most visible international spokesman aside from Nehru himself—was vitally influenced by personalities on all sides and the relations between them, not simply abstract national interests. Of course, shaping events at the leadership level first and foremost were the towering figures Nehru in New Delhi and Mao Zedong in Beijing (as JFK in

[4] Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 376-7.

[5] Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp. 127-8.

[6] John Kenneth Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times: Memoirs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

Washington and Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow responded to the events while distracted by their concurrent crisis over Cuba). Yet secondary figures were also pivotal: Zhou Enlai as Mao's key representative to Nehru, Galbraith as JFK's plenipotentiary on the spot, and Menon as Nehru's closest associate, collaborator, and implementer of foreign and military policy.

The shocking reports of Indian setbacks on the frontier in late October 1962, deflating cocky official predictions and public expectations of a glorious victory to push the Chinese back along the disputed border (especially in the North-East Frontier Agency, or NEFA), prompted widespread calls for Menon's ouster. Critics, including many in Nehru's own ruling Congress Party, blamed the defence minister for India's unpreparedness, listing a range of sins that included inappropriate, faulty, or outdated weapons and gear; intelligence failures; flawed strategy, and misguided priorities in weapons procurements; and excessive sympathies toward the communist and nonaligned worlds that were failing to rally to India's side. Under heavy pressure, Nehru grudgingly demoted Menon from Defence Minister to a lesser, newly-created post (Minister of Defence Production) on October 31, and a week later, after further protests, evicted him from the Cabinet altogether.[7]

Analysts and historians have long recognized that Menon's political demise removed a key roadblock to improved ties between India and the United States, and in particular opened the door to closer military cooperation, including direct U.S. aid (or even intervention), against a now-common Chinese enemy. "American officials possessed sufficient tact not to demand a quid pro quo for American aid in India's hour of need, but the Indians had enough sense to realize that certain actions would increase the likelihood of receiving what they desired from Washington…," observed H.W. Brands. "With the possible exception of Andrei Vishinsky—the Soviet delegate to the U.N. in the early 1950s, previously chief prosecutor at the Moscow show trials of the 1930s, and a thoroughly despicable character—Americans detested Menon more than any other individual who frequented the world body."[8]

Yet, Galbraith's full diary entries together with declassified U.S. documents (including the ambassador's backchannel messages to the White House), supplemented by newly-opened Canadian files and other sources, tell a story that goes beyond nasty gossip or American *schadenfreude* at Menon's plight. Besides illuminating Galbraith's scorn for Menon and the latter's slide from power, the evidence reveals a subtle, mostly hidden, yet high-level and perhaps effective U.S. intervention to prod a reluctant Nehru into finally giving him the hook; and to thereby lay the groundwork for closer bilateral relations that would not necessarily yield an outright military alliance, but at least recalibrate Nehru's prior "non-alignment" (that "tilted ostentatiously" toward Moscow[9]) toward at least a "quasi-

[7] On Menon's removal see, e.g., Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (New York: Random House, 1971; citations from Anchor Press edition, 1972), esp. 385-8; Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Volume Three: 1956-1964* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 224-5; Steven A. Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), esp. pp. 200-206; and Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India: A Strategic History of the Nehru Years* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 305.

[8] H.W. Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), pp. 104-5.

[9] David Mayers, "JFK's ambassadors and the cold war," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 11:3 (2000): 183-211

alignment" more congenial to Washington and the West.

Due to the dearth of key sources until relatively recently, this story has been missing from some important studies of Indo-American ties, such as Robert McMahon's *Cold War on the Periphery*; Dennis Kux's *Estranged Democracies*; and Andrew Rotter's *Comrades at Odds*; naturally, all mention Menon's visceral anti-American views, and the resultant exacerbations in bilateral relations, but none delve into the international maneuvering that attended his political death throes.[10] By the same token, standard works on the border war of course note Nehru's two-step dismissal of Menon, but have been hampered by incomplete sources in describing U.S. actions and perceptions.[11]

More recently, aided by additional sources, including the pertinent volume of the State Department's *Foreign Relations of the United States* (1996), several scholarly works have alluded, in passing, to Galbraith's animus toward Menon and desire during the border war to see him removed, e.g., Richard Parker's biography of Galbraith (2005) and David Mayer's analysis of JFK's ambassadors (2000).[12] Yet neither these sources, nor any others of which I am aware, detail U.S. efforts to grease Menon's slide from power just as Nehru, grudgingly, felt compelled to seek Western military help against the Chinese, and Washington eagerly eyed the possibility of luring India to its side in the Cold War once its long-term irritant had been cast aside. While still lacking essential Indian sources, the tale offers fresh insight into how Washington delicately encouraged New Delhi to move from nonalignment to a closer Cold War relationship with the West.

* * * * *

The Menon-Galbraith duel pitted two worthy adversaries who, despite the acrimony between them, shared many qualities and traits. Both were famous men of the Left, in their respective political contexts, yet not actual Communists, contrary to the claims of some detractors; considered brilliant, even by (many of) their critics; passionate believers in their politics and ideology, relishing intellectual combat, partisan politics, and polemics, each in his own fashion defending and promoting the interests of the downtrodden; exceptionally articulate and glib debaters—Galbraith a prolific and celebrated author, Menon also writing, but specializing in speechifying, once delivering in a voice described by unsympathetic American reporters as "low, phleghmy" [sic] and "rasping" a record-setting 7-hour, 37-minute stemwinder to the UN Security Council defending India's stand on

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(quotation on p. 196).

[10] Brands, *India and the United States*; Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies: India and the United States , 1941-1991* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1993); Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[11] See, e.g., Maxwell, *India's China War*, esp. 385-388; Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis*, pp. 200-206; Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, p. 305, notes Menon's dismissal but not any U.S. role.

[12] See, e.g., Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Vol. XIX: South Asia* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), doc. 185; Mayers, "JFK's ambassadors and the cold war," p. 198; Richard Parker, *John Kenneth Galbraith: His Life, His Politics, His Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 399-400

Kashmir[13]; and finally, famous for wielding their verbal dexterity not only to advance their own views but to acerbically cut down opponents.

Born in Kerala in southwestern India in 1896, Menon pursued a legal education first in India and then in England, where he continued his studies (at the London School of Economics and the University of London), entered politics (joining the Labour Party), and began energetically agitating for his homeland's independence, becoming a reporter and secretary for the India League and, fatefully, meeting in 1935 and collaborating with a fellow nationalist campaigner, Jawaharlal Nehru. After India gained its independence from England in 1947, Nehru named him to the key diplomatic position of India's high commissioner to London, where he served for five years until he left "under a cloud," accused of mismanagement and leaking to communists.[14]

But Menon really strolled on to the world stage in 1952 when he began leading India's delegation to the United Nations. For the next decade he would regularly appear there and at other major international gatherings, from Geneva to Bandung, denouncing imperialism, colonialism, and other evils and infuriating Americans and other targets (including many Indians) of his sweeping, bombastic, astringent, moralistic, didactic, often sarcastic and barbed rhetoric. As H.W. Brands noted, Menon "possessed a genius for antagonizing other people—not least other Indians"—one Indian journalist dubbed him "our [John Foster] Dulles," and a senior foreign office colleague, C.S. Jha, called him "an outstanding world statesman but the world's worst diplomat," often "overbearing, churlish, and vindictive." Eisenhower considered him "a menace and a boor" and "a master of twisting words and meanings of others … governed by an ambition to prove himself the master international manipulator and politician of the age."[15] "Highly strung, highly irascible, and highly intelligent," Menon exasperated American officials, who found his diplomatic tactics as frustrating as the Soviets'; after dealing with him in New York in the closing months of the Truman Administration to devise a formula to end the Korean War, Dean Acheson complained that Menon was "a master of putting words together so that they conveyed no ideas at all."[16] One American reporter, in 1962, termed the "gray-haired, gray-faced, decidedly violent-looking man" a "master wriggler," noting that he was a "brilliant lawyer, well-trained in logic."[17] Yet, despite despising him as a communist appeaser, U.S. officials occasionally found Menon useful, as when he facilitated exchanges with the "Red" Chinese delegation led by Zhou Enlai at the 1954 Geneva conference.[18] For the rest of the Eisenhower Administration, even as ties between India and the United States (and Eisenhower and Nehru) warmed somewhat—to the point that Ike visited India near the end of his term—Menon countered American stands on topics ranging from Suez to Hungary to Kashmir to Berlin to decolonization and nuclear weapons, and encouraged his boss's enhanced ties with the communist

[13] "low, phleghmy": Warren Unna, "War Has Trapped A Master Wriggler," Washington Post, 18 November 1962, p. A5; "rasping": A.M. Rosenthal, "China Attack a Blow to Nehru," *New York Times*, 21 October 1962.
[14] Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, p. 75.
[15] Brands, *India and the United States*, p. 78.
[16] Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, p. 76.
[17] Warren Unna, "War Has Trapped A Master Wriggler," *Washington Post*, 18 November 1962, p. A5.
[18] Brands, *India and the United States*, pp. 78-9.

world, from Khrushchev and Moscow to (until they were derailed by Tibet and the border conflict) Mao and Zhou in Beijing.

John F. Kennedy took office in 1961 vowing a fresh outlook toward the Third World and the nonaligned movement, moving away from myopic anti-communism and toward broader concerns, offering a fresh impetus to better relations between Washington and Nehru. As a token of his desire for good relations, JFK named Galbraith his envoy in New Delhi—tapping the tall, lanky Harvard economist known for his brashness and erudition, and more than a dash of arrogance, to deal with Nehru, a Kashmiri Brahmin product of an elite Indian and English education (Trinity College, Cambridge) used to hobnobbing at the apex of intellectual and political power.

By the time he was chosen to personify "The New Frontier" in India, Galbraith had become a leading public intellectual, even a celebrity, for best-selling yet trenchant treatises on economics and its intersections with history, politics, and society—works such as *American Capitalism* (1952), *The Great Crash, 1929* (1954) and *The Affluent Society* (1958)—and eager battles with sacred cows and economic or political opponents. A dozen years younger than Menon, he was born to Canadian parents of Scottish background in a small Ontario town in 1908, and pursued graduate studies of agricultural economics at Berkeley. In the 1930s he taught economics at Harvard, became an American citizen, and developed a liberal, generally Keynesian economic philosophy. During World War II he worked for the Office of Price Administration until he was purged for alleged "communistic tendencies," whereupon he was promptly hired by Henry Luce and came to edit *Fortune Magazine*. Since 1949 he had been a tenured professor of economics at Harvard, a post he attained only after surmounting (with the support of the university's president, James B. Conant) opposition among critics alarmed by his leftist economic views and/or offended by his work for the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) when he had heretically undercut claims by proponents of airpower seeking to establish a separate military branch that aerial raids had crippled German economic production; it had instead, he found, expanded during the bombing.[19]

After winning that battle, he had rarely shied away from others, taking a delight in skewering turgid prose, pompous officials, red tape, and glacial bureaucracies, all phenomena he would likely encounter as a diplomat—but Kennedy didn't mind. In selecting the tall, handsome, urbane Galbraith, Arthur M. Schlesinger has written,

> Kennedy deliberately chose a man who could be depended upon to bring to Indian problems his own mixture of sympathy and irony. Kennedy was delighted by Galbraith's wit, effrontery and unabashed pursuit of the unconventional wisdom, and they were now exceptionally good friends. Nor did the President appear to mind Ken's guerrilla warfare against the ikons and taboos of the Department of State. From time to time, the President took pleasure in announcing that Galbraith was the best

[19] On Galbraith's life before his ambassadorship, see Parker, *John Kenneth Galbraith*, chaps. 1-15; on his struggles at Harvard also see James G. Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), esp. pp. 610-17.

ambassador he had.[20]

Yet the hopes for a rapid Indo-US warming proved overblown. Although, as JFK calculated, Galbraith and Nehru got on well, disagreements persisted over issues ranging from Cuba to Berlin to nuclear disarmament and decolonization—and above all Washington's alliance with India's arch-enemy Pakistan (at least until China bid for the title in late 1962). In November 1961, an attempt to establish a personal rapport between Kennedy and Nehru failed when the Indian visited the United States. Despite devoting much forethought to the trip, which included meetings in Rhode Island and Washington, it fell flat: Nehru seemed tired, diffident, and indifferent to Kennedy's wit; and his daughter Indira's dinnertime conversation, rapping US policy and praising Menon, hardly lightened the atmosphere. JFK would later describe the encounter as "a disaster…the worst head-of-state visit I have had."[21] A fortnight after Nehru's trip, Menon had a predictably discordant conversation with JFK in the White House; the two sparred over Vietnam, disarmament, the United Nations, and Laos, and talking to reporters outside afterwards, the U.S. record dryly noted, the Indian "extensively restated his known views on many issues."[22] The talk hardly elevated Kennedy's view of Menon, whom he thought "a very adroit and unscrupulous maneuverer who has his finger in every pie"[23]

A month later, the gap between Washington and New Delhi was on display for all to see when Nehru, pressured by Menon, ordered the forceful seizure of Goa after rebuffing repeated U.S. pleas to delay military action to give more time for a political solution (though Washington showed scant appetite for pressuring Lisbon to concede the colony gracefully). Galbraith, who had vainly tried to dissuade Nehru from giving the final green light, could not help but note the irony when immediately afterwards, India's defence ministry contacted the U.S. embassy about buying some military equipment (which it also periodically did from the Soviets). "Menon until recently was in considerable trouble over the Chinese border incursions," he observed. "The Goa business has boosted his stock at the expense of alienating American public opinion and considerably damaging the capacity to get aid. If he could now pull off a purchase of arms from the United States, it would prove he can do business with everyone."[24]

Despite the disappointing visit to the United States and strains over Goa and other issues, Galbraith and Nehru maintained a "cordial" relationship that "never snapped, rooted as it was in personal goodwill" and shared hostility to the Chinese as the border conflict intensified. The same,

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[20] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 523.

[21] Ibid., pp. 523-26; see also Rotter, *Comrades at Odds*, pp. 215, 217. Schlesinger was perhaps more candid in relating JFK's comment because both he and Nehru were no longer alive.

[22] Memorandum of conversation between JFK and Krishna Menon, Washington, 21 November 1961, *FRUS, 1961-63*, vol. 19, doc. 63; "carrying a cane and look[ing] wan" after a recent brain operation, Menon did throw Washington a bone by admitting to reporters that the Soviets, not Americans, were to blame for recently violating the three-year mutual moratorium on nuclear testing. *Washington Post*, 22 November 1961.

[23] Brands, *India and the United States*, p. 78.

[24] Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 263-4 (21 December 1961 entry); Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, pp. 196-8; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 326-9;

however, could not be said for the ambassador's dealings with Menon, which were "deplorable," reflecting the negative views of India's defence minister that prevailed atop the U.S. government.[25] After one frustrating discussion with Menon, Galbraith recorded in his diary: "As usual, we disagreed…He can take any position and argue for it ruthlessly, with a certain moral indignation and peripheral vagueness which make him invulnerable. Presently he reduces you, or at any rate me, to impotence."[26] Bad feelings predominated in New York as well as New Delhi: facing off with Menon over Goa, JFK's ambassador to the UN, Adlai E. Stevenson, mocked his Indian counterpart ("so well known in these halls for his advice on peace and his tireless enjoinders to everyone else to seek the way of compromise") for leading the troops into the colony, an action, he charged, that contradicted the world body's founding ideals, and Menon, in turn, viewed the former Democratic presidential contender and liberal favorite as "ill-mannered" and "an 'intellectual' with a swelled head" (and a marked downgrade from Ike's envoy, Henry Cabot Lodge, who regularly disagreed with him but "never does anything that is not gentlemanly").[27]

In the run-up to the fall 1962 crisis, Menon remained a major irritant to moving forward in relations in U.S. eyes, especially as the defense minister forged a deal with Moscow to obtain Soviet MiG-21 fighter-jets. In Washington, Democratic Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri tried to eviscerate a foreign aid bill for India, clearly alluding to Menon's malevolent presence when he asked JFK, "why should we continue to give billions to India despite the steady opposition and criticism, often bordering on contempt, which we have received from the principal leaders of that country?"[28]

For Galbraith, somehow undermining Menon and the policies he embodied remained a key priority—as he wrote JFK in August in one of his periodic personal letters on relations with India and many other topics.[29] He recommended "a careful triangulation between Menon and his supporters, his opposition here and your opposition in Washington," in order to "avoid building Menon up as we have in the past." That strategy, he explained, entailed denying him hot-button issues at the UN and depicting him as "a kind of antique radical whose tactic of alienating everyone in sight is a diplomatic novelty that does more harm to India than anyone else." Galbraith likened him to a "Hindu Dulles—alienating people as he goes." (Also contemptuous of Eisenhower's secretary of state, Nehru had thought up the bon mot years earlier, cracking: "Menon is my answer to Dulles."[30])

As Nehru's health declined, U.S. officials wondered how apprehensive they should be about the nightmare that Menon might succeed him. Nor were only Americans worried. With Nehru "not well" and "losing his grip," a British Foreign Office aide judged in mid-1962, his defence minister seemed primed to gain; despite a lack of popularity in the Congress Party, he had profited immensely

[25] Mayers, "JFK's ambassadors and the cold war," pp. 195-6.
[26] 17 July 1961 entry, Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*; also Rotter, *Comrades at Odds*, pp.206-7.
[27] Brecher, *India and World Politics*, p. 89.
[28] McMahon, *Cold War on the Periphery*, 286, 301; Symington memo to Kennedy, 11 May 1962, in Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 200.
[29] Galbraith to Kennedy, 6 August 1962, in John Kenneth Galbraith, *Letters to Kennedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 108-110.
[30] Sankar Ghose, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2006), p. 274

from the Goa affair and placed loyalists throughout the armed forces: "The prospect of an India dominated by Krishna Menon was not a pleasant one," he rued.[31] Some observers considered him the aging premier's "likely heir,"[32] and with Menon energetically campaigning in 1962 to raise his domestic political standing as a member of the Lok Sabha and ruling Congress Party leadership (concurrent with his high-profile foreign policy forays), Galbraith's embassy secretly investigated that prospect. In late September, it circulated the results to Foggy Bottom. While finding Menon's influence in Indian domestic politics to be "considerable and growing," the inquiry rated his odds of succeeding Nehru as "remote"—largely because he relied so heavily on his personal tie to the prime minister, still lacked an independent political base that would allow him to challenge other plausible contenders, and because other likely successors—with the possible exception of Nehru's daughter, Indira—were unlikely to retain him in a position of prominence comparable to his present situation, to give him, in other words, "the protection and favor he has enjoyed from Nehru and which has been essential to [his] political survival." Plus, Menon's own health prognosis was questionable; he was sixty-five years old and despite "apparent mental and physical vigor" suffered from a variety of ailments, perhaps necessitating additional surgery to remove a brain clot and raising doubts as to whether he would even outlive Nehru (he would, by a decade). As the situation on the border heated up in mid-October, State passed the "perceptive and accurate" study to JFK's national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, at the White House, where it could be perused just as the precise scope, and likely longevity, of Menon's status in New Delhi was rapidly assuming greater significance.[33]

* * * * *

By the autumn of 1962, overcoming earlier ambivalence, Menon favored a more aggressive policy along the border, in line with the "forward policy" Nehru had approved to assert Indian claims and undermine Beijing's. On September 9-10, with the prime minister away—attending a Commonwealth meeting in London, accompanied by Finance Minister Morarji Desai, who often opposed Menon's policies—the defence minister presided over a meeting of senior military officers that approved a decision to strike at Chinese positions along the Thagla Ridge, an "eviction operation" given the code-name "Leghorn." In NEFA, unlike in the Aksai Chin and Ladakh, Menon and senior officers felt confident that Indian forces were poised to attack successfully. The decision reflected what turned out to be a grossly inflated opinion of Indian military potential and congruent

[31] Telegram from Canadian High Commissioner, London, to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 2801, 26 July 1962, file 9193-40, vol. 5287, RG 25, LAC; on Menon's "increased" political strength, also see Canadian High Commissioner, New Delhi, to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, numbered letter 455, "Influence in the Indian cabinet—Krishna Menon, Morarji Desai, and T.T. Krishnamachari," 16 July 1962, in same folder.

[32] Mayers, "Kennedy's ambassadors and the cold war," p. 196.

[33] U.S. Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), Airgram A-308, "Subject: Krishna Menon's Domestic Political Position," 25 September 1962, enclosed with William H. Brubeck, executive secretary, State Department, to McGeorge Bundy, White House, "Subject: Report on V.K. Krishna Menon, 18 October 1962, in box 107A, National Security Files, Country Files (NSF:CO), JFKL.

underestimation of China's ability and will to use force on a larger scale than the periodic minor skirmishes that had occurred in the preceding few years.[34] Exemplifying these views, a Western diplomat learned that Menon, in mid-September, had privately told associates that "Indian forces in [the northeastern border] area were well prepared and in fact anxious, if given the chance, to administer sound trouncing to Chinese," and had been authorized to act—although Menon, while sensing a "good opportunity for boosting Indian army morale," had magnanimously vowed to "soft pedal publicity" of the assured victory so as not to make the Chinese lose face.[35] Another Western envoy, noting the stepped-up activity on both sides of the undemarcated border during the summer and early autumn of 1962, recalled Menon as being "in a mood of some exaltation about the ability of Indian patrols to take on Chinese opposition on the same scale."[36]

By mid-October, however, after weeks of desultory military and diplomatic exchanges, and rising Indian public anticipation of an imminent victory, the Chinese were vigorously—and successfully—counter-attacking, not only rebuffing Indian attempts to evict them from strategic points but starting to push southwards and vanquishing outmanned Indian outposts. In public Menon stoutly insisted that India would "fight to the last man, to the last gun," to evict the Chinese from land India claimed was hers.[37] Privately, he heard military commanders, complain that they were being ordered to hold unsustainable positions, only to tell them that "public opinion would not tolerate any further loss of territory."[38] On the afternoon of October 18, speaking with "firmness" and "determination," Nehru told Galbraith, who was about to leave for a trip to London, that India had "taken the decision that the Chinese must be driven out" of Indian-claimed territory in the border region "whether it takes a year, five years or ten."[39]

Yet that very night, a "very despondent" senior foreign ministry official (and former ambassador to China) told a foreigner: "The situation in NEFA is grim and we may be in for a long struggle."[40]

The next day, October 19—as Chinese forces on the western NEFA front massed for a coordinated assault, their fiercest southward strike yet—a Canadian visitor found Menon already in a "black mood."[41] Ottawa's high commissioner, Chester Ronning, a veteran China-watcher, doubted

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[34] Maxwell, *India's China War*, esp. 297, 321-3; Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis*, pp. 121, 4-5; Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, 294-5.

[35] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 685, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute," 21 September 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[36] Paul Gore-Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect* (London: Constable, 1974), p. 293.

[37] "Menon Vows Fight by India," *New York Times*, 15 October 1962, p. 3.

[38] Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, p. 304.

[39] Telegram from U.S. Embassy New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 1279, 18 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961-63*, vol. 19, doc. 177.

[40] R.K. Nehru (Jawaharlal's cousin), quoted in telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 768, "Interview with Defence Minister," 20 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[41] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 768, "Interview with Defence Minister," 20 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC. Quotations from and accounts of the 19 October 1962 Ronning-Menon meeting are from this source unless

that China's advances portended a large-scale war, and sensed that Beijing had limited aims, but wondered if he needed to rethink those persumptions after hearing the defence minister's "pessimistic and alarming monologue."

"Don't tell anyone I said so," Menon began,

> but there are actually 4 Chinese brigades stationed on the MacMahon [sic; McMahon] Line with heavy armour, fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft batteries. They are backed by a whole division on the Tibetan plateau in addition to the 2 divisions in the Ladakh area. Trunk roads and roads to the border (solves?) logistic problems. The Chinese have invaded India in force and threaten to shoot down our aircraft flying over our own territory now occupied by them. Do you regard that as serious? There is no alternative for us but to fight and we shall fight to defend our own territory. We shall do so even if it means going down in defeat. The Chinese have greater striking power, greater resources and logistic advantages. This problem will not be solved during my lifetime. Arrogant Chinese aggressors threaten to overrun the whole of India and are already in occupation of a large portion. They have resorted to the vilest type of propaganda to isolate us from our Afro-Asian neighbours and friends. Of all people, why did they have to attack us—the most peaceful nation on Earth? Why did they not strike at the USA—because they are cowards? There is no other solution than war. I cannot open my mouth to say anything about the situation without being attacked from all sides. We have entered upon a war which will last for 10 years. [42]

After hearing out this monologue, the Canadian suggested that perhaps Menon was "fatalistically accepting a situation which could perhaps still be prevented." The shaken defence minister blurted that perhaps Canada might approach both sides to suggest arbitration—then, after Ronning dismissed that notion, he asserted that any arbitration would be "dangerous" for India.

This had been his view a few months earlier, when both Ronning and Menon were in Geneva for the conclusion of the international conference on Laos. From a talk with PRC Foreign Minister Chen Yi, the Canadian had gathered that Beijing would accept the McMahon line in the northeast (NEFA) if India, in turn, swallowed China's claims in Aksai Chin in the northwest (where it had built a strategic road linking Xinjiang [Sinkiang] and Tibet). Agreeing that Beijing's case was stronger in the northwest, Ronning felt such a swap would be a fair outcome of the dispute, but when he relayed these thoughts to Menon in July, the Indian had rejected the idea of arbitration since this would be a bad precedent for Kashmir.[43]

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otherwise indicated.

[42] Ibid. At this meeting, Menon also "urgently" requested that Ottawa expedite the sale of Caribou transport aircraft or even outdated Dakotas if available. Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 772, "Trans[p]ort Aircraft for India," 22 October 1962, file 1617-40, vol. 5034, RG 25, LAC.

[43] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 763, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute," 19 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC, Ottawa. Ronning's belief that a NEFA/Aksai Chin swap would be a fair resolution would be echoed in the historiography

Now, Ronning sensed that "Nehru's hands are tied by anti-Chinese feelings in India," which had prompted him to authorize small-scale, "relatively safe" clashes in NEFA, but that the premier in fact desired a settlement. The Canadian's hope for a compromise solution had risen slightly on October 13, when Foreign Secretary Desai, after hearing the tale of Ronning's talk with Menon in Geneva, had commented that Nehru might yet consider arbitration, which would likely lead to a trade of concessions on the eastern and western fronts.[44]

Emboldened, Ronning broached to Menon the possibility of a settlement in which China accepted the McMahon line and India relinquished the Aksai Chin—only to hear him indignantly scorn the idea. "NEFA and Ladakh both belong to India," he said. "How can we yield Aksai Chin to China?" When Ronning reminded him that Nehru had publicly said that "some arrangement could possibly be made about Aksai Chin," which after all was "17,000 feet above sea level without a blade of grass or any inhabitants," Menon implied that his boss did not know his own policy. "Did my PM say that? He gets into all kinds of difficulties with his speeches."[45] Menon hinted at the possibility that Indian forces might beat a tactical retreat before the Chinese onslaught in NEFA, but only temporarily to points further south "where they had logistic advantage and could attack on ground of their own choosing."[46]

Reflecting afterwards on the encounter, Ronning suspected that the volatile politician's emotions might be attributed to frustration at seeing his dreams of succeeding Nehru going up in smoke, as he not only had failed to capture popular support despite considerable effort but now saw the emerging military debacle threaten his standing with the Congress Party and even the prime minister. Given Menon's ambitions and conspiratorial mindset—and pinpointing a fear that would also grip Galbraith—Ronning warned that one could not dismiss the possibility that in a desperate gamble the defense minister was embellishing the plight of the Indian NEFA contingent, in hopes that he could secure military aid from the United States "to defeat the Chinese. That would make him the national hero who would logically succeed the PM."[47]

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At dawn on Saturday, October 20, the Chinese lowered the boom, attacking en masse in western NEFA, battering isolated, under-equipped, poorly-supplied, and outnumbered Indian outposts, piercing the McMahon Line, and finally shattering the rosy expectations of victory in "Operation Leghorn"—and as reports of defeat and disarray spread, the shockwaves radiated to New Delhi and

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by Neville Maxwell's *India's China War*.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 780, "Sino-Indian Conflict," 24 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[47] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 768, "Interview with Defence Minister," 20 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

beyond.[48] The Chinese advance, opined A.M. Rosenthal in the *New York Times* ("China Attack a Blow to Nehru") on October 21, constituted "the bitter end of a case history of political failure"—Nehru's and Menon's courtship of China.[49]

That Sunday morning—after being awakened by a nocturnal emergency directive from President Kennedy to return to his post—Galbraith cut short a previously planned visit to London to fly to New Delhi. The sudden change in plans was necessitated both by the grim news from the Sino-Indian border and, though he didn't yet know it, by the need to be ready to consult with Nehru regarding the impending showdown with Khrushchev over the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles to Cuba (JFK would deliver his televised speech announcing the crisis and the American blockade of the island the following evening, October 22). Before leaving London, Galbraith sent Washington his thoughts on how to approach the Indian Government regarding the clashes with China—and how to deal with Menon was at the forefront of his concerns. Though eager to relay pledges of U.S. sympathy and support to Nehru, he was leery of responding too favorably so long as Menon was still in office—and thus in a position to, conceivably, reap the benefit of American help. Galbraith wanted to aid India concretely and effectively in its hour of need, but not at the cost of throwing Menon a lifeline just as he was floundering. In a personal message for JFK, via McGeorge Bundy, he counseled:

> We should, I think, assume posture of sympathy and concern and our friends in Indian Government should not be in doubt as to whom real friends of India are. At the same time and in view of indignities of past year we should not rush forward with offers which indicate either eagerness to forgive and exculpate Menon or to suggest that we are seizing opportunity for aligning India. We should continue to make it clear that anti-Americanism of Menon remains major barrier to support of India. We should also bear in mind he is one hell of a poor defense minister.[50]

Even before leaving for London a few days before, Galbraith had laid out what he presumed would be the principles that would guide his actions in the event of an escalation in the border fighting—offer sympathy to New Delhi but not so noisily as to give the Chinese any propaganda ammunition, and let any policy reorientation toward closer ties with Washington come from the Indians themselves. When it came to any military support, in particular, "We will not offer assistance. It is the business of the Indians to ask." Only then would the United States respond favorably.[51] Having returned to New Delhi to find widespread distress over the fighting, he reaffirmed his intent to "offer quiet sympathy and encouragement to the Indians, let them know who are their true friends,

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[48] On military and political developments from this point, see, e.g., Maxwell, *India's China War*, part 4, esp. pp. 381 ff.; Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis*, part 4; Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, pp. 304 ff.
[49] A.M. Rosenthal, "Chinese Attack a Blow to Nehru," *New York Times*, 21 October 1962, p. 4.
[50] Eyes only message from Galbraith to McGeorge Bundy for JFK, in telegram from US Embassy, London (Bruce), top secret, no. 1647, 21 October 1962, 11 am, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL.
[51] Telegram from U.S. Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 1225, 15 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961-63*, vol. 19, no. 175.

[and] be receptive to requests for aid," but also to remember "the pounding that we have been taking from Krishna Menon."[52]

Galbraith wasted no time implementing that strategy. On Tuesday, October 23, after first seeing Nehru at noon to appeal for his support in the Cuban crisis (JFK had given his televised speech announcing the Soviet nuclear deployment the night before), he took up the Menon issue more explicitly that afternoon with Foreign Secretary M. J. Desai. While stressing U.S. desire to support India's independence and security and respect for its nonalignment policy, the ambassador frankly noted the obstacles caused by "the past behaviour, tactics, and actions of the Defense Minister which had alienated American public opinion sharply and thus strongly impaired our ability to help," as well as the "total disorganization" of India's military procurement operations "which would suffice only inadequately for troops of Eagle Scouts." Conceding both points, Desai agreed that the "Menon problem would have to be remedied."[53]

By Wednesday, October 24, still worse news was flowing down from the border, and Indian officials admitted that the Chinese had advanced up to 37 miles at points along the frontier, seizing multiple outposts.[54] "Reverses suffered by Indian forces interpreted by some quarters here as sign of Indian unpreparedness and accompanying this interpretation there are gloomy reports of serious deficiencies even in basic supplies," Ronning reported. "Fact remains that Indians are at disadvantage in their scattered and lightly manned forward posts in NEFA against numerically stronger Chinese forces with better logistic support and supply lines."[55] The negative news from the front fed mounting pressure on Menon. A public meeting in Calcutta demanded his resignation, blaming his "weak policy" and mistakes for the China debacle.[56] In his diary that day, Galbraith's journal includes a couple of disparaging references (in bold face) that were politely omitted from the published version:

> Fighting continues in the NEFA area and the Indians are falling back to positions well south of the McMahon Line. Evidently they lost heavily in the area of the Thagla Ridge. Probably as the result, the bell seems to have tolled for General [B.M.] Kaul; it is rumored that he has been heaved out. There are also indications that Krishna Menon is in some trouble. **For the good of India this is devotedly to be hoped.** The Indian army is without equipment, it is being said, partly because resources have gone into his highly advertised supersonic and transport planes and other gadgets, none of which are available to

[52] 23 October 1962 entry, Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 378

[53] Telegram from U.S. embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 1349, 24 October 1963, Central Decimal File (CDF), 1960-63, 691.93/10-1562, box 1398, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives II (NA II), College Park, MD; 23 October 1962 entry, Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 378; on Nehru's reaction to JFK's speech on the missile crisis, see esp. telegram from U.S. embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 1334. 23 October 1962, Digital National Security Archive (excised copy).

[54] Henry S. Bradsher (Associated Press), "Chinese Push On; India Spurns Talks On Peking's Terms," *Washington Post*, 25 October 1962, p. A22.

[55] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 780, "Sino-Indian Conflict," 24 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[56] "Menon Criticized in Calcutta," *New York Times*, 25 October 1962, p. 3.

> the soldiers on the frontier.[57]

Later in the same entry he recorded a visit from the British High Commissioner:

> Paul Gore-Booth came in and told me that the Prime Minister had been almost tearfully thankful for the warm words he had had from [British Prime Minister Harold] Macmillan. He told me, as others have during the day, that Krishna Menon is being sidetracked, and, on military matters, the line of command runs from the Prime Minister to General [P.N.] Thapar. **I am not sure that Menon is quite that dead yet.**[58]

By Thursday, October 25, amid gloomy screaming headlines, Nehru was "under increasing pressure to remove" Menon.[59] Sensing the rapidly shifting political winds, Galbraith drew Washington's attention to the "deep, indeed traumatic effect Chinese invasion is having on Indian attitudes," producing a "[f]undamental change" in the country's outlook toward the West, which the Indians now regarded as "steadfast friends in contrast with Chinese communist intruders and ambiguous Soviets." Welcome consequences of these developments included an "inevitable" "rapid reduction" in the influence of pro-Soviet forces in India, and most notably, Menon's "visible decline as a political force."[60]

That Thursday morning, Menon summoned Canada's high commissioner, Chester Ronning, to make an "urgent" request for military equipment.[61] Among the items for which the defence minister pleaded were transport and cargo aircraft (which he hoped could be supplied at "knock-down prices"), helicopters, long-range mortars reaching 10,000 yards (the British ones were insufficient, he complained, with a range of only 1,000-4,000 yards), and mountain artillery.

Besides seeking concessionary terms ("cash over counter" due to India's "desperate" need), Menon also asked Ottawa to keep quiet about the deal, evidently because he feared it would contradict the nonalignment policy he had so long and ardently promoted, and might offend Moscow as well. "Menon is most anxious to keep request secret," Ronning remarked, "as India is trying to obtain military aid from other Western sources and does not want USSR to know that India is requesting such aid."

While asking Ottawa to intercede with the USA to release tactical aircraft it had purchased from Canada (Caribous), Menon remained chary of importuning the Americans—or Galbraith—

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[57] 24 October 1962 entries in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 379, and Galbraith diary, box 588, Galbraith papers, JFKL

[58] 24 October 1962 entries in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 380, and Galbraith diary, box 588, Galbraith papers, JFKL

[59] Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, p. 305.

[60] Telegram from U.S. Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), secret, no. 1377, 25 October 1962, 5 pm, box 107A, NSF:CO:JFKL, declassified December 2011 in response to author's mandatory review request.

[61] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 782, "Indian Request for CDN Military Equipment," 25 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

directly for military supplies. Yet, despite his qualms about offending the Kremlin, he grew less reticent about approaching Washington's NATO allies, not only Canada but England, France, and West Germany. During this "twilight" period, when the dimensions and ultimate ambitions of China's forward thrust along the border (and India's reaction) were still murky, the U.K. high commissioner in New Delhi recalled that after initial hesitance, insisting that "they could manage"—since immediate pleas would have implied Menon's "stewardship" and Kaul's "generalship" were already doubted—the defeat at Thagla Ridge and threats of deeper advances opened the door to a more explicit discussion of how London could provide military help to counter the Chinese offensive. Yet the defence minister, as with Ronning, pleaded for discretion. Preparations to send British supplies commenced, wrote Paul Gore-Booth, but Menon "begged me not to make publicity out of our effort. This was manifestly a tiresome and obstructive request. But he was still Defence Minister and spoke, whether truly or not, in the name of the Prime Minister, and I felt bound (to the displeasure of our compatriots in India) to comply."[62] Paris and Bonn, too, were quietly solicited for new or expedited military shipments.[63]

Tracking these developments through his diplomatic colleagues, Galbraith informed Washington on the evening of 25 October that he still had received "no formal request for assistance"—evidently as a result of a forlorn hope that Moscow might yet restrain Beijing, "plus the reluctance of Menon to confess the total defeat of his hopes and policy"—yet that such a request was (as other ministers told him) "inevitable and imminent," especially in light of the "vastly inferior weapons" (including World War I rifles) with which the Indians were trying to hold off the Chinese.[64]

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Galbraith's talk with his Canadian colleague was especially edifying—and potentially significant.[65] He did not dispense high regard easily or casually, yet esteemed Chester A. Ronning: "Handsome, informed, confident and an old China hand, he did know the history."[66] Deeply versed in

[62] Gore-Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect*, pp. 294-5; see also Tracy Lee Steele, "The Politics of Anglo-American Aid to Nonaligned India, 1962," *Electronic Journal of International History* – Article 7 (Institute of Historical Research, University of London School of Advanced Study), and David R. Devereux, "The Sino-Indian War of 1962 in Anglo-American Relations," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 44:1 (2009): 71-87 (esp. 75-77), although the latter erroneously states (on p. 77) that Menon "quickly resigned on 26 October in response to the clear military failures of India's armed forces."

[63] See, e.g., telegrams no. 3181 from Canadian Embassy, Washington, "Indian Request for Military Equipment," 29 October 1962; no. 1388 from Canadian Embassy, Paris, "Sino/Chinese Border Question," 31 October 1962; and no. 805 from Canadian High Commission, Delhi (Ronning), "Indian Military Requirements," 1 November 1962; all file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[64] Telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), secret, no. 1384, 25 October 1962, 11 pm, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL.

[65] Unless otherwise noted, the account of this meeting in succeeding paragraphs is based on telegram no. 787 from Canadian High Commissioner, Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute," 26 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[66] Galbraith, *A Life in Our Times*, p. 433.

China's culture, fluent in the language, Ronning, now in his late sixties, was born in the southeastern port city of Fangcheng (now Fangchenggang) to Norwegian missionaries and had worked as a missionary himself before embarking on a diplomatic career and working through China's civil war as a Canadian diplomat from 1945-51, developing a cordial relationship with Zhou Enlai.[67]

Galbraith agreed with Ronning that Beijing had a "limited" military objective, but that India's already-sustained defeats would suffice to shelve indefinitely its dreams of using force "to drive out the Chinese"; and that the clashes should gradually subside (particularly if New Delhi jumped at China's offer for a mutual pull-back 20 kilometers from the actual "line of control"), leaving the issue formally unsettled. As a fellow critic of the more Manichean, unsubtle formulations of American cold war policy (favored by, for example, John Foster Dulles but also occasionally Dean Rusk), Galbraith also shared Ronning's demurral on the proposition that "Chinese pressure on India's northern border was part of a diabolic master plan to overrun and dominate the whole of India in particular and the world in general," and "deplored exaggerated reports by American correspondents as this sort of oversimplification leads to false analyses and consequent policies which cannot cope effectively with the situation." The two diplomats also agreed that, one way or another, the West had to cooperate to help India stave off either military disaster or economic collapse, which might be a greater risk should far greater resources be diverted to defense expenditures, as now seemed inevitable.

"This led Galbraith to discuss Krishna Menon, who he said was greatest obstacle to American aid," cabled Ronning, who related his own impressions of the defence minister from earlier that day. Still lacking instructions from Washington, Galbraith now improvised his own gambit (invisible in U.S. records) to enlist Ronning, and Canada, to do Washington's dirty work of getting Menon out of the way. Aware that Ronning, unlike himself, enjoyed good personal relations with Menon (who respected the Canadian as a "decent fellow"[68]), Galbraith somewhat apologetically (and not entirely frankly) said that he, personally, "could put up with" Menon and President Kennedy might also "tolerate him," but that "Congress and the American press have developed such intense antagonism for Menon that Galbraith fears unless he is remove[d] it will be almost impossible to obtain the absolutely essential increase in USA aid." Perhaps, the American ventured, Canada was "in a better position to make this clear to the Indian Government."

Ronning declined to take the bait: "I replied that while we agreed with the importance to change minister of defence, foreign intervention would be dangerous and the attempt would be counter productive. Galbraith said American authorities had almost reached the point of flatly refusing to deal with a man of this type, especially in military supplies." Despite passing up the invitation to collaborate conspiratorially, Ronning seconded Galbraith's view of the direction of Indian foreign policy, with both sensing pervasive fury at Moscow's failure to back India in the

[67] See Chester A. Ronning, *A Memoir of China in Revolution: From the Boxer Rebellion to the People's Republic* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), and also the recent volume by Ronning's son-in-law, who covered the Chinese civil war, Seymour Topping, *On the Front Lines of the Cold War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

[68] Brecher, *India and World Politics*, p. 48.

border dispute despite Menon's years of cultivation; some Indians, they mused, even wished the Soviets would back the Chinese outright to dispel any lingering illusions and hasten a ditching of the now clearly outmoded nonalignment policy. (The disillusionment would grow even sharper once word spread of a *Pravda* editorial that day which refused to take sides between India and China, and hinted at support for the latter.[69])

Galbraith, who was also quietly spreading the word to sympathetic ears in the Indian Government that Menon was the main obstacle to prompt and robust U.S. military aid, wrote that night in his diary (bold-faced words deleted from *Ambassador's Journal*):

> Word came in during the morning of more fighting, more Chinese advances and of a meeting of the Prime Minister with the Congress Party leaders. The latter were protesting that Menon was not a fit man for the Defense Ministry. Nehru said, in effect, that he was now handling this Ministry. This he cannot do. [**Of course he can't], it requires a far younger and more vigorous man. Moreover he and Menon as well are politically so encrusted that they can no longer react with any vigor to new problems of this sort**.
>
> […]
>
> Krishna Menon, whom I have not seen for many weeks, has been in touch with Ronning on arms – he is evidently still very reluctant to talk with us. When Ronning saw Menon last Friday [October 19], the latter **was frustrated, irrational, and** talked about a ten-year war with the implication that the Chinese might head for Madras. **Ronning thought that the Defense Minister was going mildly off his rocker.** Ronning had seen him today and he was somewhat more calm [**rational]**.
>
> […]
>
> **I had a frank talk with Desai about our difficulty of doing anything with the present Defense Minister -- He sees the point clearly but is by no means ready to remedy matters**.[70]

By Thursday, Ronning discerned a "rising anti-Menon tide" in large sectors of Indian public opinion, particularly in Congress Party circles and among those who favored closer relations with Washington, and the wave of criticism now began to lap perilously close to Nehru as well. The Canadian related to Galbraith that one socialist politician actually related to Menon was organizing a "march on Krishna Menon's house and a demonstration demanding termination of this communist spy"—and if the premier refused to heed the movement's demands, it would turn its wrath on Nehru

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[69] On Moscow's position on the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict, see, e.g., Mikhail Prozumenshchikov, "The Sino-Indian Conflict, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1962: New Evidence from Russian Archives" and "New East-bloc Documents on the Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959 and 1962," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, issue no. 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 251-7, 258-69; Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 150 ff.; and Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 26-32.

[70] 25 October 1962 entry in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 382, and Galbraith diary, box 588, Galbraith papers, JFKL

instead.[71] Journalists in New Delhi reported "intensifying" calls for Menon's resignation due to the "angry realization that India's forces" could not match China's.[72]

Despite the major crisis in India, Galbraith felt isolated from Washington. Sensing that the Cuban crisis had seized the attention of the president and his top advisors, feeling increasingly desperate to obtain some authoritative instructions—and more sensible advice or directives than he expected to receive from the State Department, particularly Phillips Talbot, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, for whom he had limited regard—Galbraith began to resort to a private direct backchannel to the White House that he had set up, using CIA rather than State communications. (After Dean Rusk had insisted to McGeorge Bundy that all such messages go through Foggy Bottom, the ambassador successfully resisted, objecting that "communicating through the Department would be like fornicating through the mattress.")[73] On October 25, he sent JFK a personal message (the bold-faced section was censored from Galbraith's *Letters to Kennedy* when published by Harvard University Press in 1998):

> Knowing your preoccupations [i.e., the Cuban Missile Crisis], I have tried to keep local [Sino-Indian] war off your hands. Moreover our course and decisions which I have been reporting have seemed fairly clear. However as you will have sensed, things have been moving at a very rapid pace here and I now foresee the need for a major political decision in the next couple of days on which I need your judgment as well as frank protection.
>
> We are now certain to be asked for military assistance in considerable volume. This involves no immediate response and, indeed, we should show ourselves to be deliberate on the matter. (I have no doubt in the end that we must help.) We must also make clear, as I have already started doing, that any help will require Indians, in their own interest, to be more considerate of our political and public opinion than in recent past. However, the immediate question concerns Menon. **Does important American assistance require his effective elimination from the defence-UN scene? We must be careful not to overplay a good hand. I must not be tagged with having forced a change on Indians and** Menon has supporters and a loud press. Against this is the favorable effect on American public opinion and on our ability to work with Indians and prospect of strengthening administration hand in dealing with public and Congress on behalf of India. I especially need your assessment of latter prospect. You will sense that this is a matter for more than routine guidance.[74]

The next day, October 26—still frustrated by the absence of high-level communications regarding a perhaps imminent Indian request for arms, worried that Washington did not appreciate the

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[71] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 787, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute," 26 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC. The politician was "Mrs. Trikan Das, prominent member of the Praja Socialist Party and relative of Krishna Menon."
[72] "Menon's Ouster Sought," *New York Times*, 27 October 1962, p. 2.
[73] Galbraith, *Letters to Kennedy*, pp. 3-4.
[74] Ibid., p. 114; Galbraith message, with "10/25/62" written on it, box 111A, NSF:CO, JFKL (JFK or Kaysen apparently wrote: "Let them do it" on it).

need to impress upon Pakistan the "seriousness of Communist threat," and exasperated by the State Department's refusal to approve his request to publicly endorse the McMahon Line as India's boundary (it soon agreed)—he sent another White House backchannel message pleading for guidance and adding: "I am also keenly anxious for President's view on strategy re Menon."[75]

That Friday evening, a revelatory conversation with Indian President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan gave Galbraith his most authoritative insight yet into the revolt against Menon in Nehru's inner circle, threatening to turn against the premier himself, and the hardest evidence that, one way or another, the defense minister was likely to be on the way out. Alerting the American that the Indian government was about to declare a state of emergency, the agitated president—"I have never seen him so tough and angry," Galbraith noted—was "bitterly critical" of Nehru's "inadequate" handling of the crisis, primarily because of his retention of Menon. Virtually the entire Cabinet, he confided, had called on the prime minister to fire him; the president himself had repeatedly done so, citing, among other reasons, Menon's "playing politics with defense, destruction of the morale of army, quarreling with the generals, [and the] absence of elementary supplies including winter clothing." Despite Nehru's reluctance, Radhakrishnan firmly predicted that Menon "would go," and Galbraith gingerly encouraged the belief that this was a prerequisite for the American military help that New Delhi "desperately" desired—"I made guarded reference to the problem of providing aid while the DEFMIN is in office - - American inclination is to help India, not Krishna Menon."[76]

* * * * *

As Galbraith's report of his talk with Radhakrishnan (top secret, eyes only for JFK and Rusk) clattered into Washington early Friday evening, President Kennedy was turning to the subcontinent, taking a brief respite from intense discussions on the Cuban situation. At the White House, he welcomed to his office India's ambassador to Washington, B.K. Nehru, for a discussion of the Sino-Indian crisis. The ambassador, who had come to deliver a letter from his prime minister seeking support in general terms, was regarded by U.S. officials as a fairly sympathetic figure, and certainly not in Krishna Menon's camp. In a talk a few days earlier with deputy national security advisor Carl Kaysen, B.K. Nehru had been critical of the defence minister, remarking that India's army was "ill-equipped, and Menon had done a poor job."[77]

The president's chief purpose, in his conversation with Ambassador Nehru, was to convey a message to Prime Minister Nehru of U.S. "sympathy and support" that would soon be expressed in a formal reply—sentiments to be translated into concrete means in talks to be conducted in New Delhi by Ambassador Galbraith. Without explicitly conditioning military aid on Menon's firing, JFK made

[75] Galbraith message, n.d. [26 October 1962], box 111A, NSF:CO, JFKL; Galbraith, *Letters to Kennedy*, pp. 114-15; date from Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 385.
[76] Telegram from U.S. embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 1340, 11 p.m., 26 October 1962 (rec'd 6:23 p.m.), CDF 691.93/10-1562, Box 1398, RG 59, NA II.; Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 385 ("tough and angry").
[77] Kaysen, memo for the record, "Subject: Conversation with Ambassador B.K. Nehru, October 22, 1962, 1:00 P.M.," 23 October 1962, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL.

clear his belief that his presence at Nehru's side stood in the way of opening the military supply line.

"What about Krishna?" he asked. "Is he going to continue to be the grand mogul of this?"

The Indian responded equivocally: Menon might remain formally as defence minister as it would be difficult for political reasons to fire him, yet Nehru had largely taken over responsibility for military matters, advised by a group of anti-Menon officers, an arrangement he conceded was "curious" ("very peculiar," Kaysen thought).[78]

Later in the conversation, JFK reiterated that he would send Nehru a sympathetic letter and allow Galbraith and he to discuss "more precise terms," which might include "transport and light equipment, but that is for them to say." But then—the president insisting, rather farcically, that he was speaking personally rather than officially—he raised Menon again:

> **President Kennedy**: […] Now the problem is, of course. This is now. We remove ourselves from this conversation. We talk just privately about government leaders. We don't want to, in any way, put, have Krishna enter into this. This a matter for India, not the United States, particularly at this time when everybody's hard pressed. Of course he is a disaster and makes all the thing much more complicated. Your judgment is that he will continue, however, as defense minister.
>
> **Nehru**: Yes. I don't think we can—apart from the prime minister's personal feeling that he is politically….
>
> **President Kennedy**: exactly now, when he would be looking as if he's picking a scapegoat?[79]

More coherently than the verbatim transcript, Kaysen summarized the exchange as follows: "The President then said that, on a purely personal basis between himself and the Ambassador, and not speaking governmentally, he wished that Krishna Menon were not Defense Minister."[80]

While distressed at the Chinese military successes, the two men may have also shared a certain glee at Menon's squirming—he was, after all, just as unpopular among many Indians as he was to Americans. As JFK walked the diplomat to the door, the transcript reads that there were "Unclear exchanges, accompanied by much laughter" before Nehru said: "He's under great fire at the moment."[81]

* * * * *

The president had most likely read Galbraith's backchannel messages, and taken precisely the action to reinforce the need to oust Menon that he would have favored. But Galbraith didn't yet know about the president's exchange with the Indian envoy on Friday evening in Washington, and on

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[78] Transcript of tape-recorded conversation between President Kennedy and Indian Ambassador B.K. Nehru, 6:03-6:19 p.m., 26 October 1962, in Philip Zelikow and Ernest R. May, eds., *The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises*, vol. 3 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), pp. 337-344 (quotation on p. 339).
[79] Ibid., p. 341.
[80] Carl Kaysen, record of JFK-B.K. Nehru meeting, 26 October 1962, secret, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL.
[81] Zelikow and May, eds., *The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises*, vol. 3, p. 344.

Saturday, October 27—as the missile crisis climaxed, dominating all-day "Excomm" discussions involving JFK and his top aides—the anxious ambassador in New Delhi earnestly importuned both the White House *and* the State Department regarding Menon.

At noon that Saturday, he sent Rusk (and McNamara) a lengthy cable predicting "political changes of great magnitude" in India, reporting wide disillusionment with the Soviets (especially since the *Pravda* editorial on Thursday) and a "a much more alarmist view of Chinese intentions" at "high government levels"—a combination that put added pressure on Nehru to ask the United States for arms and to take a corresponding decision, finally, to ditch Menon. For the moment, the ambassador reported, Nehru still clung to him—partly out of a fading hope that Moscow might still come to the rescue, partly to avoid a backlash from the pro-Menon press, "but most of all because the discharge of Menon signalizes as nothing else a break with the policies which he has so long avowed." At the same time, while quietly appealing to Canada, England, and France for military aid (to show he was "doing something to supply the fighting troops"), Menon had stubbornly resisted asking Washington. Yet Galbraith believed it was only a matter of days before Nehru succumbed to the inevitable, taking over the defence ministry at least temporarily, shaking up the army high command, and turning directly to the United States. Seeing the "next few days" as "critical" to future relations with India, Galbraith made clear his bottom line:

> In my view Menon must go. This does not reflect personal animus or distaste for his sympathies. It is the only hope for effective defense. Were he a competent left-wing patriot with accompanying dislike of the US we could live with him. But he is a disastrous man in his post, a divisive influence in the country and has a demoralizing impact on the army. He is also a main obstacle on this side to a reasonable policy toward Pakistan. And, of course, American public opinion and enthusiasm will be at a low ebb while he is in office.

Laying out his calculations on the issue, Galbraith noted the obvious, that if Menon left before India requested arms from Washington then "our task will be clear." The dilemma would arise if Menon, before being sacked, "turn[ed] to us directly or through intermediaries in a last effort to save himself -- to prove that he can do business with Americans." Embracing such a request, Galbraith warned, "would do more harm than good for the Indian defense effort"—as would a "premature" offer, which would validate charges in the "Menon press" that the Americans could hardly wait to try to lure Nehru into a military alliance that would destroy his principled nonalignment policy. In this "Alice-in-wonderland world," the ambassador continued, Menon could even pose as a protector and guarantor of India's traditional status.

With such considerations in mind Galbraith advanced two propositions: first, that Washington should refrain from volunteering military aid to India, and second, that should the Indian Embassy inquire about the possibility of such support, it should be informed politely but firmly "that we hold no rancor and indeed wish to help but that Menon's past record of venom and insults has greatly damaged the will and enthusiasm of the American people and the Congress and makes our task unnaturally difficult." Galbraith proposed to take the same tack should Menon approach him in

New Delhi:

> I propose to tell him we have only the friendliest feeling for India and are fully cognizant of the urgency but that as he will surely realize his past statements and actions have made it very difficult to work through him. Alternatively depending on my sense of the situation I will listen and say that I must take the matter up with the Prime Minister and then make the same point to him. This will not be compliance or denial which, of course, I will pass to Washington but a clear indication of relation of Menon to the problem. My sense of the situation is that this won't save him whereas acquiescence might. There are dangers here but these are less than saving Menon. Nothing could be more unfortunate for India herself. And indeed such is the anger against Menon in the country we would ourselves be severely criticized if we bailed him out.[82]

After sending the cable to Foggy Bottom, Galbraith dispatched a shorter yet parallel message on the private channel to the White House (a missive conspicuously omitted from *Letters to Kennedy*). Expressing thanks for instructions received on several points after several days of silence—"I did not think you were asleep but I did feel like a general who had rather outrun his communications"—the envoy noted the precipitous fall in Khrushchev's prestige since the *Pravda* editorial and predicted that the MiG deal negotiated with such fanfare by Menon would never come to fruition, or, if it did arrive, would be a mere "relic of the era of illusion" amid "the new realities of Indian life."[83] Nevertheless, Galbraith still felt the need for concrete guidance on how to deal with Menon—who still, for the moment at least, remained in his post—while simultaneously exploring the possibility of offering U.S. military support.

> The important question of Menon is not whether we force him out but whether we save him. We might save him if we forgave, forgot and showed that after all his sympathies and ambiguities we were willing and eager to do business with him. For this we would [not?] be forgiven by those who rightly believe that he must go and that is almost everyone. In this connection while expressions of sympathy and support for the Indians from the President will be much welcome offers of aid most unwise at this moment and official talk of aid should be squelched at least for the next day or so. The left is saying we cannot restrain our enthusiasm to rush in. Offers before we are asked are proof that Menon or anyone is acceptable to Americans. Note the elimination of Menon is a vital step to getting reconciliation with Paks by which I set great store. I do not like Menon but would emphasize no personal animus is guiding this strategy even though personal animus not wholly foreign to my nature.[84]

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[82] New Delhi embtel 1417 (Galbraith), sent 27 October 1962, 7 p.m. (rec'd 27 October 1962, 12:53 p.m.), box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL.
[83] In fact the MiG-21s did later arrive and became a mainstay of the Indian Air Force (IAF) for decades to come; see Wikipedia entry on the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21, accessed on 2 July 2011.
[84] Galbraith message, 27 October 1962, box 111A, NSF:CO, JFKL.

On Sunday, October 28, Galbraith's repeated entreaties for guidance on handling Menon finally yielded authoritative responses from both the White House and State Department. First (late Saturday night) a summary of Kennedy's conversation with Indian ambassador B.K. Nehru arrived, including a brief summary of the president's negative comments on the defense minister ("not an Indian asset").[85] With JFK and his national security team seized by Cuba, Galbraith's messages through the private channel were fielded by Carl Kaysen, a fellow Harvard economist who had left Cambridge to serve the Kennedy Administration as Bundy's top aide.[86] Replying both to Galbraith's backchannel message and his cable to the State Department, the deputy national security adviser relayed the White House's agreement with his "assessment of the value of getting Menon out and the possible effect of the timing of our moves in bringing this about." But Kaysen cited the ambassador's own assessment that "political changes of great magnitude are in the wind" to argue that "Indians themselves will take care of Menon sooner rather than later." Kaysen then made a virtue of the vague promise of support contained in JFK's forthcoming letter to Nehru, which Galbraith was to deliver, leaving it up to him to fashion the best strategy to ensure that Nehru, not Menon, received any political credit accruing to the obtaining of effective military help from Washington. "We again urge the importance of avoiding the slightest appearance of U.S. initiative and responsibility in removing Menon," he stressed. In particular, he hoped Galbraith would "move with discretion and without any public indication or explicit communication to the Prime Minister that Menon unacceptable to U.S. By timing of your moves after you deliver the President's letter to Nehru, you can help to bring about results you desire."[87]

Kaysen also informed Galbraith that he was coordinating closely with Phil Talbot, who would shortly be transmitting the State Department's own reply to Galbraith's separate cable. In a gentle rebuke, Kaysen suggested that the agitated envoy in New Delhi "avoid use of private channel unless absolutely critical," both to preclude confusion and because every official senior to Talbot and himself were "preoccupied with other matters," i.e., Cuba. Still, he assured him, the President remained interested, concerned, and "fully" abreast of the South Asian situation "as his time permits."

As Kaysen predicted, State's follow-up cable, which arrived in New Delhi on Sunday, echoed this advice to keep U.S. fingerprints off of Menon's plunge to oblivion:

> We fully agree with your analysis of Menon and disaster which continuation of Menon in present position constitutes for India. At this critical juncture, however, when Menon is fighting to save himself and likely to be most dangerous, it might easily prove fatal for our objectives if we were to inject ourselves into political jungle warfare now going on. Despite temptation to save Indians from themselves, we believe only hope for their salvation is to give enough rope for Menon to hang himself or for Indians to do it.

[85] Deptel 13499 to U.S. Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), 2:20 pm, 27 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 691.93/10-2762, box 1398, RG 59, NA II.
[86] Galbraith *A Life in Our Times*, p. 428.
[87] Kaysen backchannel message to U.S. Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), top secret/sensitive, eyes only for ambassador, 27 October 1962, box 111A, NSF:CO, JFKL.

> From this we conclude that you should continue maintain minimum correct relations with Menon which his position requires. We all should be mindful of the danger that too abrupt or too visible an attempt to cut him out of the discussions on your part may bolster him up rather than accelerate his downfall.[88]

Washington's advice to Galbraith (both from the White House and State Department) to let nature take its course regarding Menon was clearly wise. It is not known how or in what form the Indian prime minister learned of JFK's comments regarding Menon to B.K. Nehru on Friday evening in Washington, but it seems safe to assume that the envoy in one way or another got the message across. By Sunday, Jawaharlal Nehru was writing bluntly to Menon that they could not evade or deny the angry charges that the border clashes had exposed severe deficiencies in India's readiness for combat: "I do not know how I shall explain to Parliament why we have been found lacking in equipment. It is not much good shifting about blame. The fact remains that we have been found lacking and there is an impression that we have approached these things in a somewhat amateurish way."[89] Still defiant, the besieged Menon that Sunday publicly admitted setbacks and warned of sacrifices, yet "pledged that the country would not rest until the invaders had been pushed back."[90]

* * * * *

Monday, October 29, climaxed the international intrigues surrounding Menon—and Washington's (and Galbraith's) delicate effort to respond affirmatively to India's need for military support yet without bolstering its beleaguered defense minister, still clinging to his post. Armed both with authoritative guidance from Washington and JFK's sympathetic letter of support to deliver to Nehru, Galbraith awoke primed to implement this two-pronged strategy, and, he reported to Washington at the end of that eventful Monday, "Things conformed immediately to script this morning" when he arrived at the office to find an "urgent call from Menon" who wanted to see him immediately, either at his office at the ministry, or (unusually) at the Chancery. Menon was, Galbraith at once calculated, "seeking the publicity boost which would come from asking [for] and presumably receiving military aid from the Americans. The turnaround would moreover be much less of defeat for his policies if he made it. (We would also have the headlines about helping Krishna Menon.)" Determined to defeat Menon's gambit, Galbraith insisted that he must first deliver a letter from President Kennedy to Prime Minister Nehru, also dealing with the subject of U.S. aid that he assumed Menon wished to discuss. Menon tried once or twice to convince Galbraith to defer the session with Nehru and see him first, then gave up; the ambassador then confirmed an appointment with the prime

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[88] Deptel 1689 to U.S. Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), 2:59 pm, 28 October 1962, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL. Drafted by C.C. Laise, approved by Talbot, cleared by Kaysen.

[89] Nehru to Menon, 28 October 1962, quoted in Gopal, *Nehru: A Biography*, vol. 3, p. 224; Gopal, who had access to PM Nehru's records, did not mention or cite any record of JFK's 26 October 1962 comment to Ambassador Nehru regarding Menon..

[90] "Chinese Attack on a New Front," *New York Times*, 29 October 1962, p. 12.

minister for noon.[91]

Cold-shouldered by Galbraith, Menon poured out his frustrations that morning to Ronning, who called on him to deliver Canada's essentially positive reply to his earlier request for support. After brief discussion of India's military needs (any available Canadian equipment "at lowest possible prices on easy terms"), the defence minister asked Ronning "to sit for a while" and turned to the dual plights that he faced politically and that his army on the frontier confronted militarily. "Menon is a harassed man," the Canadian high commissioner concluded afterward:

> He said he was being attacked from all sides "including my own cabinet colleagues who in making a scapegoat of me fail to comprehend that the government as a whole must be held responsible for the military setbacks." He complained bitterly about "the political activities of Americans in India to force Krishna Menon out." These efforts he said are becoming increasingly successful with all those who want India in the American pocket. He said the Chinese have set back the progress of socialism in India for at least 15 years and added: "Even if we succeed in ultimately reaching a negotiated settlement, India will continue to be intensely nationalistic and continue a military preparedness programme which will delay for a long time raising the standard of living of the Indian people."

Lashing out at the country he (and other Indians) had less than a decade earlier lauded in the halcyon days of "Panch Sheel" and "Hindee-Chinee Bhai-Bhai," Menon described the situation on the northern frontier as "so desperate that India might be forced to take drastic action including the use of 'flame throwers to burn out the Chinese.'" Citing one clash in Ladakh in which 17 Indians and 250 Chinese were killed, he said the enemy had "no regard whatever for losses of life and come in human waves." He bemoaned logistical problems in supplying Indian forces in NEFA, who were clearly outmanned and outgunned, yet insisted that if only they could hold the Chinese in their present positions for ten days, "preparations would be completed to drive them back from some of their new forward positions."[92]

As Menon twisted in the wind, Galbraith went to see Nehru to deliver Kennedy's letter, which expressed America's wholehearted sympathy, praised the Indian leader's "forbearance and patience in dealing with the Chinese," and contained this operative paragraph, which euphemistically yet unmistakably referred to military aid:

> I want to give you support as well as sympathy. This is a practical matter and, if you wish, my Ambassador in New Delhi can discuss with you and the officials of your Government what we can do to translate our support into terms that are practically most useful to you as soon as possible.[93]

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[91] Telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 11448, 29 October 1962, 7 pm, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL; also Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 389-90.

[92] Telegram from Canadian High Commission, Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 794, "Military Equipment for India," 29 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[93] Kennedy to Nehru, 27 October 1962, transmitted from State Department to U.S. Embassy, New Delhi, on 28 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961-63*, vol. 19, doc. 187.

Complimenting Nehru's elevated status to Americans—"he must know he is loved in the United States as no one else in India"—Galbraith stressed that any request for U.S. military support must come from him personally—and not, he scarcely needed to say, from the Indian that Americans loved to hate. Nehru, in turn, declared that India indeed needed military help, and it must come from the United States. Though Galbraith disclaimed any U.S. desire to ensnare India in a military alliance or to undercut India's traditional nonalignment policy—Nehru had just mentioned that the Soviets had expressed the hope that it would remain in place—it was a landmark moment.[94] Under great stress (though greater was soon to come, a few weeks later, when the Chinese seemed to threaten a far larger military breakthrough), Jawaharlal Nehru, in a move quickly endorsed by his Cabinet, had significantly diverged from the policy of distancing India from the two rival military blocs that he had determinedly followed for more than a decade. As Michael Brecher has written, "it was the first time since independence that India had accepted, in fact, actively sought, large-scale military assistance from a superpower, a decision long rejected as inconsistent with nonalignment."[95]

Then Galbraith and his deputy, Benson E.L. (Lane) Timmons, briefly met with Menon, whose "impatience was nearly uncontrollable" and who gave the impression "of a man near the end of his nervous tether."[96] When the doomed defence minister, "obviously under great tension," began "nervously" reeling off various requests—"long-range mortars, automatic weapons, Fairchild packets, tanks and the wherewithal to make small arms ammunition and the like"—Galbraith interrupted him and curtly requested that he put India's requirements "in such form as to make sense, that there would have to be a clear distinction between what they needed immediately to stop the Chinese and such less urgent items as tanks which would only reach here by ship"—and definitely not assistance on manufacturing or other "diversionary activities of this sort" (such as advanced big-ticket weaponry which were Menon's pet projects) that would have no impact on the border conflict with China.

"I want a specific written list and no nonsense," the American said brusquely, according to the account he gave shortly afterward to Ronning.[97]

Confident that he had the upper hand, Galbraith also cut Menon off when he mentioned that "he of course knew of my meeting with the Prime Minister and implied that he in effect was taking it over." No way the Americans would let that happen. In his cable to Washington, Galbraith described the meeting as "polite," but his diary hints at the tension in the room. Galbraith recorded that he told Menon pointedly that "the time for illusions was past; the Chinese were not being driven back by the supersonic aircraft so much publicized by his Department. He barely controlled his anger at this particular point; under any other circumstances, it would have produced a towering explosion." In his

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[94] 29 October 1962 Galbraith-Nehru meeting: Telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 11448, 29 October 1962, 7 pm, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL; and Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 390.

[95] Michael Brecher, "Non-Alignment Under Stress: The West and the India-China Border War," *Pacific Affairs* 52:4 (Winter 1979-80): 612-30 (quotation on p. 614).

[96] Unless otherwise noted, the account of the 29 October 1962 Galbraith-Menon meeting is based on telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 11448, 29 October 1962, 7 pm, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL; and Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 390-391.

[97] Telegram from Canadian High Commission in Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 795, "USA Military Aid to India," 29 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

cable, Galbraith noted with some satisfaction that Menon would have "very great difficulty taking any credit" for the forthcoming U.S. military aid "and my references to the HF-24 [the Hindustan Fighter-24, an Indian-made fighter-bomber], and the AVRO [a British-designed plane that Menon wanted to manufacture] will make it emotionally difficult for him to do so."

Hastening to sabotage any potential Menon intrigues, Galbraith then met with foreign secretary M.J. Desai to clarify that his substantive discussion of assistance was with Nehru, not Menon, and that this was the line that should be taken in briefing the press. Continuing his coordination with key allies regarding Menon and military aid, he also filled Gore-Booth and Ronning in on the day's momentous developments.[98]

* * * * *

Despite Menon's misfortunes, some U.S. officials still feared the "master wriggler" might yet evade what seemed to be a closing trap around him. In Washington that Monday, the State Department's director of South Asian affairs, Turner Cameron, lamented the "considerable liability" Menon's continuation in office posed (particularly on Capitol Hill) to any U.S. effort to augment military aid for New Delhi and expressed uncertainty to a friendly diplomat as to how he might emerge from the evolving situation. "Cameron intimated that he had a healthy regard for Menon's political sagacity and would not rule out the prospect that Menon would be able to ride out, and indeed, turn to his own advantage, the present storm about his ineffectiveness as defence minister."[99]

On Tuesday, October 30, amid fresh demands in the Indian press for Menon's ouster.[100] Galbraith maneuvered carefully to avoid giving him any eleventh-hour support and, indeed, to if possible accelerate his doom. As shown below, Galbraith's published diary entry for that Tuesday omitted actions he took with senior Indian officials to further isolate and undercut Menon:

> At noon [U.S. Embassy economics officer] Ty Wood and I saw [Finance Minister] Morarji Desai. **I gave him an outline of the activities of yesterday—the Indian government at the moment is so uncoordinated that he had not yet heard about my dealings with the Prime Minister or Defense Minister. The Defense Minister had asked me not to take up the question of financial arrangements with Morarji. I did so any way; to do otherwise would be to play Menon's game and under cut Morarji**. As an indication of how important events can be handled or mishandled, the Finance Minister was under the impression that, when I visited him last week, he had made a formal request for aid. Since neither items nor amounts were mentioned, this had not registered on me. But apparently he had been told by the Prime Minister to approach me. This, in turn, explains some statements by the Prime Minister over the weekend to the fact that major countries, including the U.S.,

[98] Telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), secret, no. 11448, 29 October 1962, 7 pm, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL.
[99] Telegram from Canadian Embassy, Washington, to Department of External Affairs, Ottawa, no. 3180, "Sino Indian Border Dispute," 29 October 1962, file 6083-40 pt. 8.1, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.
[100] "Indian Forces Move in First Major Attack," *Washington Post*, 31 October 1962, p. A14.

had been approached.

After leaving Desai, Timmons and I saw M.J. Desai, the Foreign Secretary. We told him of the difficulties we were having with the requirements list and of the shambles in the Defense Ministry. Without mentioning Krishna Menon this seems to be a sound way of indicating the damage is due and I had previously made the same point to Morarji. M.J. said that at a meeting at 3:00 this afternoon, evidently a continuation of yesterday's, a final decision would be taken on a supply organization. I hope so. In the course of the day, I learned the fate of the famous MIG's. In principle the Russians are committed to supply a squadron and go in for manufacturing. In practice, they have told the Indians that because of the serious international situation they may not be able to keep the commitment. The Indians do not know whether it is Cuba that is serious or China; they think it is the former, I would guess it is China.[101]

Finally, on October 31, after a tumultuous meeting of Congress Party leaders with Nehru to demand Menon's ouster for bungling the border conflict, the prime minister replaced Menon as defence minister (and gave him, temporarily as it turned out, the invented post of minister of defense production). According to Nehru's sympathetic biographer, the prime minister detected Menon's hesitation and delay in notifying U.S. officials what was needed militarily, and "must have noted too that Menon's nerve was cracking."[102] Nehru acted also at least in part to preserve his own standing; during the tense showdown, angry Congress members reportedly warned that if he did not fire or at least demote Menon, he himself would be targeted next. "This was perhaps the nearest Pandit Nehru ever came to disaster during his seventeen years of Premiership," London's high commissioner Paul Gore-Booth later judged. "There was no doubt that Menon was a special friend of the Prime Minister but there was no rescuing him now."[103]

After learning unofficially of Menon's demotion that evening from foreign secretary Desai, Galbraith relayed the news to Washington. In a terse cable, he pledged that the embassy would confine comment to noting that this was an internal Indian matter, and "Urge[d] equally dry comment elsewhere and needless to say no indication of satisfaction"—an abstemious vow that resembled JFK's own admonition to aides that week not to crow to reporters over their boss's victory in forcing Khrushchev's climb-down over Cuba. Warily, Galbraith thought it unlikely that Nehru would send Menon back to his old stomping ground at the UN, but could not be "absolutely" certain.[104]

The embassy's first hint of the imminent shake-up came around 5 p.m. when an officer learned from the editor of a traditionally pro-Menon (and hence virulently anti-American) publication, *Blitz*, that it was suddenly reversing course and adopting a pro-Washington, pro-Kennedy, and pro-Galbraith line. "The honor among thieves can be of a very high order as compared with the alliances

[101] 30 October 1962 entry, in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 393, and Galbraith diary, box 588, JKG papers, JFKL

[102] Gopal, *Nehru: A Biography*, vol. 3, pp. 224-5.

[103] Gore-Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect*, p. 29

[104] Telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (JKG), secret, no. 1505, 31 October 1962, 9 pm, box 107A, NSF:CO, JFKL.

between **Menon and his bad propagandists,"** Galbraith wrote in his diary (*Ambassador's Journal* softened this to "between politicians.") Discussing Menon's demotion with his Deputy Chief of Mission Lane Timmons, Galbraith disagreed with his deputy's prediction that the new minister of defense production would use his new post "to fight back up." Instead, reassured by Desai's description of Menon's new slot as a mere "stopgap" measure "of great inadequacy," Galbraith guessed that "the jackals will now close in."

Ruminating on the news in a key passage of his private diary deleted from *Ambassador's Journal*, he was even more expansive:

> It has been hard in these last few days for me to avoid preoccupation with Menon. **And yet it is not excessive. He is the barrier to any warm-hearted support of India by the United States; he is the proponent of the hate-Pakistan policy; he is ambiguous toward the Chinese; and most important of all he has been a disasterous Defense Minister. He has played politics with the Army, worse politics with army procurement, probably diverting some revenues from defense contracts into the support of Link magazine. All of these crimes are enough for one man. I can see him go with a remarkable absence of sorrow. I think also there is no serious likelihood that I will be blamed for his departure at an hour in the future. Nor should I be. While I have quietly made clear that I thoroughly regard him as a disaster and while I took pains to see that he did not get credit for American aid, I have not been otherwise involved.** I have told our staff to confine all comment to saying that these were internal arrangements of the Indian Government.[105]

The next day, November 1, Galbraith optimistically told Washington that Menon's departure had undoubtedly improved prospects for reconciliation between India and Pakistan, as he had been "the principal focus of the hate Pakistan poison." While stressing that as instructed by the Department he had "kept carefully clear of the drive against Menon and am even less anxious for any ex-post identification of the United States with the change," he felt it "safe and important" in private conversations with Indians to highlight the possibility that Menon's sidelining could pave the way toward a better understanding with India's Moslem neighbor.[106] In a further cable later that day, he distilled his feelings and judgments about the rapid political descent over the past ten days of the man who had—and Galbraith would find the word apt—bedeviled U.S. foreign policy for over a decade:

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[105] 31 October 1962 entry in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 395-7, and Galbraith diary, box 588, Galbraith papers, JFKL. The fuller diary also restores previously omitted passages in another section of this day's entry. Describing a meeting with U.S. reporters, he noted: "**I can be a good deal less cagey than I was and I think I managed for once to impart a certain amount of information**." Then, noting his ambivalence about agreeing to a television interview because he feared it might be juxtaposed with a "film that Krishna Menon had just done," Galbraith wrote: "Menon, **who is absolutely shameless,** had talked for twenty minutes with the American television audience. It could be damaging [**There is possibly no one who could do more damage**.] and I would share the liability. However, I concluded that a brief interview would not hurt…."

[106] Telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 1515, 1 November 1962, 4 pm, box 108, NSF:CO, JFKL.

> It is hard to avoid a devil theory in dealing with this man. He was in order of current importance the principal proponent of demagogic hatred of Pakistan, a major source of confusion and despair in the whole defense establishment, the proponent of ambiguity in relation to China and the Soviets, and the focus and probable source of finance for anti-Americanism and its responding emotion in the United States. His demotion is, thus, a development beyond that usually associated with any single political personality.

Also repeating the sentiments of his previous night's diary, Galbraith relayed M.J. Desai's assurance that Menon's new post, such as it was, would not involve any contact with American supply or military operations, and predicted that despite some fears that he might use his new slot to restore his power base, "with this setback the political jackals will close in and for the immediate future he will have to fight for what he has." Further reducing the odds of a comeback, Galbraith noted signs of panic in the traditional pro-Menon press, which seemed to be changing their political tune (and conductor). All in all, Galbraith cautioned that Menon's apparent political exit was no panacea, but certainly helped: "It would be silly to suppose that our problems in dealing with the Indian defense establishment will soon be solved," Galbraith concluded. "But now, at least, we can solve them."[107]

Galbraith naturally elaborated that day on Menon's relegation in his diary, and slightly softened the entry when it appeared in *Ambassador's Journal*:

> At the morning meeting I again laid down the line on Menon's withdrawal—**purely an internal matter of the Indian Government**, no expression of satisfaction, however difficult this is to enforce on the soul. [**But I am afraid the latter point is not going to be easily enforced on the soul**.] Then we talked a bit about press problems. It is important to get reporters up to Tezpur and the other fighting areas as soon as possible, otherwise they will boil over in frustration and criticism here in Delhi. The Indians are naturally secretive about **these matters and unquestionably Menon wants to prevent anyone from seeing** the sad state of their supply. Even on elementary quartermaster equipment, this apparently is pretty awful and the incidence of frostbite seem to have been very high.[108]

Although many Indian and foreign detractors of Menon implored Nehru to fully dismiss him from the government—fearing he might yet make a comeback even from his diminished position, and that clinging to Menon meant clinging to the illusions he embodied—by November 5, Galbraith felt decidedly more confident that Menon would not rise again. This time, the published journal just slightly understated his satisfaction:

> Today Menon was formally reduced to a small section of the Defense Ministry. The rest was taken over

[107] Telegram from US Embassy, New Delhi (Galbraith), no. 1520, 1 November 1962, 7 pm, box 108, NSF:CO, JFKL.
[108] 1 November 1962 entry in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 397, and Galbraith diary, box 588, JKG papers, JFKL

> by the Prime Minister. After he had denied that anything had changed, he had then had denied his denial. It is not pleasant to see a man engaged in a death struggle of this sort but perhaps more tolerable [the original reads, "**it is a lot more pleasant"** rather than "perhaps more tolerable"] in the case of Menon than anybody I have ever seen before.[109]

Reporting the "mounting tide" of criticism that continued to engulf the half-deposed Menon, Ronning cited as an example of the "complete mistrust of all those around him" the fact that Indian foreign ministry aides had separately approached American, British, and Canadian diplomats "plea[ding]" to be told what weapons the defense minister had sought to acquire from them. In seeking the information, one aide "made a vitriolic attack on Menon which showed clearly how taut are the nerves of those who have watched Menon operating since the conflict accelerated."[110] Worn down by Menon's enemies in the government, ruling party, and other sectors of political opinion (who were additionally incensed by Menon's "bragging statements that he retains all power"), Nehru was reported to be wavering in his support for the embattled figure—"at last emotionally prepared to see Menon go (he has given up getting angry with representations)," one diplomat reported, the prime minister nevertheless still found him a useful "symbol of non-alignment" and hoped a momentary lull in border fighting might ease pressure for his removal.[111]

Finally, on November 7, under insistent pressure from Congress Party leaders (16 of the 24 members of the party's parliamentary executive council signed a letter demanding his complete removal), Nehru relieved Menon of his hastily-improvised ministerial title, and removed him from the cabinet altogether.[112] "Half measures" had failed, the *New York Times* commented approvingly. "In view of his record of official incompetence and his pro-Communist views, his continuance in a post of prominence was intolerable to Indian opinion."[113] Yet Galbraith still felt unease, fearing that Menon might yet haunt Americans…in New York! As he wrote in his diary (bold-faced words omitted from *Ambassador's Journal*):

> … It was announced during the evening that Krishna Menon had been finally [**and fully expelled from]** relieved of all jobs. **There is talk that he still might go to the UN. If the Prime Minister thinks he can pan him over on us, on that he is mistaken. I shall personally protest against any such action. Indeed, I will do so even though I am instructed to the contrary.**

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[109] 5 November 1962 entry in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 401, and Galbraith diary, box 588, JKG papers, JFKL

[110] Telegram from Canadian high commissioner in New Delhi (Ronning) to Department of External Affairs, no. 812, 5 November 1962, file 6083-40, pt. 8.2, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[111] Telegrams from New Zealand high commissioner in New Delhi (Pukatea) to Minister of External Affairs, Wellington, no. 192 ("bragging"), 6 November 1962, and no. 193, 7 November 1962, both file 6083-40, pt. 8.2, vol. 5201, RG 25, LAC.

[112] "Menon Proposes He Quit Cabinet", "Menon's Ouster Demanded," *New York Times*, 7 November 1962, p. 8; Henry S. Bradsher (AP), "Red Chinese Stab Twice Into Undisputed Areas," *Washington Post*, 7 November 1962, p. C9. On this final act, see esp. Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis*, 202-206.

[113] Editorial, "All the Way Out for Menon," *New York Times*, 8 November 1962, p. 38.

> News also came during the course of the evening that another expendable politician was gone. Nixon was defeated [in the race for governor] in California…..[114]

Yet, four days later, Galbraith still fretted that Nehru—in another passage omitted from *Ambassador's Journal*—was "**still nostalgically wedded to his past policies"** and had told American reporters that Moscow would still supply MiG fighters and facilities to manufacture them, a deal Galbraith (erroneously) felt would never come to fruition.[115]

The next day, November 13, in a personal letter to President Kennedy describing what he considered "no doubt the greatest change in [Indian] public attitudes since World War II," Galbraith reflected extensively and candidly on the significance of Menon's political demise (and the impact of the crisis on the prime minister), in passages censored from both *Ambassador's Journal* ("for reasons of taste") and *Letters to Kennedy* yet published in their entirety in the *FRUS*.[116]

> **The departure of Menon is an enormous gain. I have little doubt that in recent years he was an immediate and efficient channel of communications to the Soviets and possibly even to the Chinese. His departure means, among other things, that we can work with the Indians on sensitive matters—things which I resisted before because of the insecurity involved—although the Indian Government remains a sieve and his men are still around. More important he no longer has the capacity for stirring up action against us or for the Communists. Many people here think that in recent years whenever the Chinese penetrated a little further in Ladakh, Menon arranged some shooting on the East Pakistan border as a diversion. I have no doubt that the march on Goa last year was timed to take peoples minds away from the anti-Chinese syndrome which was developing as the result of last summer's penetrations. It worked. Within a few days last December China disappeared from the headlines and the liberating forces of Menon became the center of attention. The U.N. job was an admirable complement to all this for it made him the defender of Kashmir and gave him a forum for whipping it up against us.**
>
> **In the United States we no longer think of an individual having this much power. But there is still a role here for a Rasputin. And all of this is apart from Menon's utter incompetence as a Defense Minister and his deeply divisive political influence on the Army.**

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[114] 8 November 1962 entry, in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 405-6, and Galbraith diary, box 588, Galbraith papers, JFKL

[115] 12 November 1962 entry, in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, p. 411, and Galbraith diary, box 588, Galbraith papers, JFKL

[116] Gallbraith to JFK, 13 November 1962, in Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 412-415; Galbraith, *Letters to Kennedy*, pp. 115-18; and *FRUS, 1961-63*, vol. 19, doc. 196.

> **At one juncture, I feared that Menon might engineer the turnaround and get credit for the appeal to the United States for aid. And it is a measure of conscienceless gall that he made the effort. I managed to forestall this without any suggestion, even from the Menon kept press, that we had a role in throwing him out. In the absence of your counsel on the matter I might have pressed the point a little harder. But I was also desirous that no one in Washington, yourself included, would think me at all anxious to rush arms to a ministry headed by this man.**

Galbraith, in other formerly sanitized comments, offered more general comments on the Indian government ("currently in disarray") and Prime Minister Nehru ("old and tired and angry with events that have treated him so harshly"), but in his over-all assessment of the direction of New Delhi's policy laid special emphasis on the impact of Menon's departure. "Much so-called nonalignment went out the window **with Menon**," he judged. "**In his pro-Soviet maneuvers and his articulate anti-Americanism he was the counterbalance for five ordinary pro-Western ministers.**"

In late November—as U.S. military aid flowed in after a further Chinese advance—Galbraith had a chance to drive one more stake through the heart of his old nemesis. Meeting on November 24 with Menon's replacement, Y.B. Chavan, the American used the occasion to "settle an old score" with Menon "**in as brutal a way as I could devise** (bold-faced words omitted from *Ambassador's Journal*). The means of further undercutting the deposed defence minister involved the secretary of the ministry, H.C. Sarin, whom Galbraith described in his original diary as "**a carry-over"** and **"a stooge"** of Menon who "had been carrying on [**his policies to the best of his abilities]** the old policy of making life difficult for me**."** (The published diary entry omitted the words in bold face and all references to Sarin's name.) In fact, recalled one Indian official, there was indeed an "unholy alliance" between Menon and Sarin, whom he termed "Menon's Alter Ego," and Menon's last act as defence minister had been to promote Sarin to preserve some residual influence. Galbraith had been outraged when, two days earlier, Sarin prevented photographs from being taken of Indian military officers speaking with American military personnel who had flown in to discuss the delivery of aid: "This was considered rather disgracing by our brave men." Pleased to embarrass the Menon protégé responsible for this blatant attempt to conceal or minimize American help, Galbraith complained about the incident to Chavan "in the honoring presence of the official yesterday [**in Sarin's presence]** without indicating that I knew [**it was Sarin]** who had issued the order. Chavan promised to reinstruct whichever official was involved."[117] India's new defence minister was no longer squeamish about acknowledging American support against the communist Chinese.

[117] 24 November 1962 entry (written the next day), Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, pp. 430-31; Galbraith diary, box 588, JKG papers, JFKL On the "unholy alliance" between Sarin and Menon, see R.D. Pradhan, *Debacle to Revival: Y.B. Chavan as Defense Minister 1962-1965* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Ltd., 1998), chap. 13 ("Krishna Menon's Alter Ego").

CONCLUSION

Washington's stealth campaign in late October 1962 to assure Menon's downfall—subtly waged through carefully dropped comments by Galbraith, JFK, and perhaps others at least implicitly linking his departure and accelerated U.S. military aid to combat the Chinese—was most likely superfluous. Domestic Indian fury, particularly within Nehru's Congress Party and among the defence minister's many rivals within the government, appears to have been sufficient to assure that the prime minister would cast his long-time partner aside. Moreover, Nehru and other senior officials hardly required additional reminders of Menon's pariah status with the Americans, or of the potential awkwardness of trying to forge a new military relationship with the United States with him still running the defense establishment. And Nehru and especially his ambassador in Washington well understood that U.S. government, congressional, and public distaste and distrust toward Menon would hamper efforts to gain approval for any substantial increase in military support for India, no matter how strategically advisable it might appear to enlist India more fully in the great cold war crusade against communism.

Yet, the American hints and more explicit statements in the immediate context doubtless confirmed and reinforced the belief of Nehru and the relatively pro-Western members of his government that jettisoning Menon was a precondition for receiving the maximum amount of American military assistance that was deemed essential to rebuff the Chinese on the frontier. And in this case, the nationalist impulse to defend India's territorial integrity transcended loyalty to the letter or spirit of Nehru's and Menon's long-proclaimed policy of nonalignment. Further damaging Menon's cause, the Kremlin, despite years of cordiality and summitry between Nehru and Khrushchev and their senior associates, failed to come through in the clutch—instead edging to Beijing's side in the dispute (as shown in the October 25 *Pravda* editorial) exactly as Indian calls for Menon's head rose, and Washington, by contrast, warmly expressed support and a readiness to come to the rescue should India—or more specifically, *Nehru*—formally request its help. Menon, comments David Mayers, "was the victim of Soviet unwillingness to side openly with New Delhi against China, at a time when the Americans were rushing aid to India, thus discrediting his version of nonalignment. Neither MIGs nor other Soviet comfort was forthcoming as Moscow tried to salvage what remained of the tattered Sino-Soviet alliance. Galbraith contributed to Menon's undoing by telling Nehru and high ranking military officers that US aid could not be reliably delivered whilst the defence minister, demonstrably incompetent as well as otherwise odious, stayed in office."[118] As noted above, while it's not clear whether Galbraith *explicitly* linked the provision of U.S. military aid to Menon's departure when he spoke to Nehru on October 29, the American campaign extended beyond that—to Galbraith's attempt to recruit Canada's Chester Ronning to indirectly hammer home the message to Nehru, and above all, to JFK's authoritative, disparaging comments about the "grand mogul" to B.K. Nehru in Washington on October 26.

In the end, Nehru's swerve toward the United States did not mark the beginning of a formal

[118] Mayers, "JFK's ambassadors and the cold war," p. 198.

military alliance, or an end to his nonalignment (contrary to Galbraith's belief that it had gone "out the window" with Menon), and the blossoming of a new relationship was sidetracked by, among other factors, Washington's futile efforts to use its new influence in New Delhi to try to bring India and Pakistan together to achieve a settlement of the snarled Kashmir issue. Moreover, as the situation along the disputed frontier settled into an uneasy but fairly stable stalemate (where it remains today, a half century later), the seeming urgency of preparing militarily and politically for a large-scale war against China dissipated—although memories of the debacle remained strong, and doubtless contributed to India's quest, after Nehru's death in 1964, to attain a nuclear capability, which it did a decade later. Within a few years, moreover, sharp disagreement between Washington and New Delhi over the U.S. escalation in Vietnam dimmed any brightened prospect of cooperation against perceived Beijing-backed communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Nor did Menon's absence preclude prickly personal relations between Indian and American governments, as the acrimonious dealings between Indira Gandhi and Richard Nixon would demonstrate. In sum, this "golden opportunity" to advance Indo-American relations (as JFK aide Robert Komer discerned it) did not usher in a "golden age" in relations between the two countries. Yet, Menon's effective departure from the diplomatic scene, combined with lingering Indian hostility toward Mao Zedong's China, at least put the inevitable disagreements between Washington and New Delhi on a less emotional, more manageable footing.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
Kabul
AFGHANISTAN
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Delhi
NEPAL
BHUTAN
INDIA
MYANMAR
BANGLADESH
SRI LANKA
0 500 1000km
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
Kangri Karpo La
Yonggyap La
Lhasa
Tamaden
Rima
Migyitum
Walong
Gyantze
Thag La
Nizamghat
Diphu La
Bum La
Longju
Teju
Sadiya
Izu Razi Pass
BHUTAN
Tawang
Se La
Digboi
Thimphu
Bomdila
Udalguri
Tezpur
Guwahati
MYANMAR
INDIA
Shillong
BANGLADESH
0 100km
Areas in dispute
McMahon Line
Outer Line boundary of British India (Pre-1914)
TAJIKISTAN
Pamir
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region
Khotan
AFGHANISTAN
Kunlun Mts.
Karakorum Mts.
Karakorum Pass
Gilgit
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
Haji Langar
Aksai Chin
India-Pakistan cease-fire line
Indus River
Srinagar
Kongka La
Leh
Jammu and Kashmir
Islamabad
Chusul
Tibet Autonomous Region
Demchok
PAKISTAN
INDIA
Areas in dispute
0 300km
Delhi
Ganges River
NEPAL