

Henderson Brooks Report: An Introduction

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A Defence Ministry Committee is reported

gloss - a first draft of which this paper

appreciated the implications: "If Nehru had declared his intention to attack, then the Chinese were not going to wait to be attacked".² On October 20 the Chinese launched a pre-emptive offensive all along the borders, overwhelming the feeble - but in this first instance determined - resistance of the Indian troops and advancing some distance in the eastern sector. On October 24 Beijing offered a ceasefire and Chinese withdrawal on condition India agreed to open negotiations: Nehru refused the offer even before the text was officially received. Both sides built up over the next three weeks and the Indians launched a local counter-attack on November 15, arou

At the time of independence Kaul appeared to be a failed officer, if not disgraced. Although Sandhurst-trained for infantry service he had eased through the war without serving on any front line and ended it in a humble and obscure post in public relations. But his courtier wiles, irrelevant or damning until then, were to serve him brilliantly in the new order that independence brought, after he came to the notice of Nehru, a fellow Kashmiri brahmin and indeed distant kinsman.

was formally designated a 'forward policy', one conceived to extrude the Chinese presence from all territory claimed by

acted as enforcer for Kaul and the civilian protagonists of the 'forward policy', Mullik foremost among the latter, issuing the orders and deflecting or overruling the protests of field commanders who reported up their strategic imbecility or operational impossibility.

Why Chaudhuri left Palit in this post is puzzling: The Henderson Brooks Report was to make quite clear what a prominent and destruw[ve role he had played throughout the Army high command's politicisation and through inappropriate meddling in command decisions, even in bringing about the debacle in the North-east. Palit, though, would immediately have recognised that the HB/B enquiry posed a grave threat to his career, and so did all that he could undermine and obstruw it. After consultation with Mullik, Palit took it upon himself to rule that HB/B should not have access to any documents emanating from the civil side - in other words, he blindfolded the enquiry, as far as he could, as to the nexus between the civil and military.

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Roberts: "The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy not coming, but in our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable". But in this instance troops were being put in dire jeopardy in pursuit of a strategy based upon an assumption - that the Chinese would not resist with force - which the strategy would itself inevitably prove wrong.

HB/B note that from the beginning of 1961, when the Kaulist putsch reshaped Army HQ, crucial professional military practice was abandoned: This lapse in Staff Duties on the part of the CGS [Kaul], his deputy, the DMO [Palit] and other Staff Directors is inexcusable. From this stemmed the unpreparedness and the unbalance of our forces. These appointments in General Staff are key appointments and officers were hand-picked by General Kaul to fill them. There was therefore no question of clash of personalities. General Staff appointments are stepping stones to high command and correspondingly carry heavy responsibility. When, however, these appointments are looked upon as adjuncts to a successful career and the responsibility is not taken seriously, the results, as is only too clear, are disastrous. This should never be allowed to be repeated. The Staff as of old must be made to bear the consequences of their lapses and mistakes.

Comparatively, the mistakes and lapses of the Staff sitting in Delhi without the stress and strain of battle are more heinous than the errors made by commanders in the field of battle.

War and Debacle: While the main thrust of the Forward Policy was exerted in the western sector it was applied also in the east from December 1961. There the Army was ordered to set up new posts along the McMahon Line (which China
ary) and, in some sectors, beyond it.

Government reacted aggressively, decidi

disaster: Its responsible planners and architects were another triumvirate, comprised of Nehru, Mullik and again, Kaul, together with all those who confronted and overcome through guile and puny force.

Notes:

1 The series began with Himalayan Blunder, Brigadier John Dalvi[s account of the sacrifice of his 7 Brigade on the Namka Chu, a classic of military literature,

