

Focus 60 - The Untold tale of an unending border

By Dr Manan Dwivedi and Katyayinee Richhariya
18 June 2020 - ISSN NUMBER: 2406-5633



Dr Manan Dwivedi is an Assistant Professor at the Indian Institute of Public Administration International Relations. He specialises in theory, Disarmament, Indian Foreign Policy, Critical IR Theory, Internal Security, International Organizations, US Mainstream Media and American Wars, West Asian Politics, US Foreign Policy, Indo-US relations



Katyayinee Richhariya is a student of Delhi University, pursuing B.A Political Science Honours. She has been a part of the Parliament of India and the Ministry of External Affairs as an intern. She also worked for the think tank of Indian Army - Centre for Land Warfare Studies. She is currently working with the Centre for Public Policy Research as an intern at the Centre for Strategic Studies.

Abstract

This piece is an attempt to delve deep into the root causes of the Indo China Border dispute through the use of History and bring out some of the lesser known facts in this longest boundary dispute. This is an issue which has its roots as much in the treaties and history as in the current Political and diplomatic developments.

Keywords

Intrusions, incursions, macmohan line, skirmishes, perceived differences

The recent incidents at Pangong Lake and Naku-La in Sikkim along with the Chinese Chopper incursions inside Indian air space are part of a rote Chinese stratagem of keeping the Indian pecking order in perpetual state of alert and military worry and also to obfuscate its vulnerability in the maritime domain. The India Sino Border standoffs are legendary since the days of Doklam, Daulat Beg Oldie and Sumdorong Chu. The Chinese have time and again followed a strategy of clandestine aggression against the good will character of New Delhi's Foreign Policy. It has been argued time and again that this dispute emanates from the differences in the way India and China perceive their respective Line of Actual Control. The recent skirmishes are limited to the Central and Western Sectors – primarily in Galwan valley which entails the Pangong Tso Lake and the Finger area and on the other hand increasing encroachments in Demchock, Chumur, Naku La in the Central sectors. To understand these differences, we need to look at the history of how these lines were drawn.

The fact that Blood cannot rewrite borders is very well understood in the context of the Indo China border dispute. In spite of the Sino Indian Border dispute being the toughest imbroglio, no bullet has been fired on the Indo China border since 1967. This long standing border dispute is due to the varied notion of sovereignty that both the countries possess. In 1803, when the Mcarte mission of British proceeded to China to persuade Chinese to purchase British Goods, it was recorded in Chinese documents as - "A tribute of the King of the United Kingdom to the Son of Heaven".

In December 2019, Rajnath Singh Ji, the Defense Minister of India, in a visit to Tawang, referred to the people of the border areas as "**strategic assets**" (Swarjya Magazine, 2019). Quite recently China has increased its aggression on the Western front in Ladakh where India seeking to build the **Zoji la tunnel and has also constructed a road important to refurbish its supply chain across the borders- The Darbok Shyok- Daulat Beg Oldie road, a section of the Leh-Karakoram Pass**. China's People's Liberation Army had started carrying out military infrastructure development work near the **Pangong Lake in Ladakh region**, a Defense Ministry source said on 26 December 2019 (K.S Gurung, 2019). This border dispute is multifarious as it includes civilizational and historical dimensions.

A look at the historical trajectory

The relations of both of the countries date back to several hundred centuries ago and so do the boundaries. From Fa hien to Xuanzang, Scholars of China had crossed boundaries to gain knowledge of Buddhism at the epicenters of Nalanda, Valabhi, Takshshila etc. The

Pallava King Narendravarman 2 , popularly known as Mahabali took up arms to defend Chinese empire against the Tibetan and Arabian aggression. It is worth to be noted that Tibet asserted itself as an independent state in the 7th century, ruled by the Yarlung Dynasty. The relationship of China and Tibet was based on religious endowments. Initially, the Chinese empires paid a sum to Tibetan King because of their religious preponderance. The Tibetan form of Buddhism was closer to Indian traditions and Customs. Tibet has since long played an important role in Indo Chinese relations since then, as a counterbalance to Chinese hostility (Ray, 2013).

The relationships between India and China further deteriorated during the Opium Wars (1839-1860) when the Queen granted Baronet-ship to an Opium trader and Philanthropist Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and, who played an important role in providing access to Daman port for the British, a major trading port of Opium (Manuel, 2019). The next epoch in the boundary dispute came with the formation of inner and outer Buffer Zones as a precaution the expanding Tzar Empire and Russian influence over Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Merv etc. Tibet formed the Part of the Outer Ring of Buffer states (Malone, Raghavan & Mohan, 2015). Thereafter, in 1865, W. H. Johnson, a civil servant with the Survey of India proposed the "Johnson Line", (McCartney MacDonald line) that demarcated Aksai Chin in Kashmir, which wasn't acceptable to the Chinese Counterpart.

The most important of all conferences was the Simla conference of 1913 where the Tibetan emissary submitted various documents extending Tibet's claim over Chinese region which were Tibetan speaking. This came as a surprise to the British who thought that China enjoyed considerable sovereignty over the affairs of Tibet (Ray, 2013). This led to the then leading negotiator - Henry Macmohan dealing directly with Tibetan counterparts to settle the Border. The ambiguity also stems from the fact that during these talks, Henry mcmohan marked an inch on the paper map and it has to be kept in mind that 1 inch is equal to 8 miles. This explains the different perceptions (14-22 points) that India and China have on the line of actual control. The finger area, which is the hotspot of the current contention, is claimed by India in entirety i.e. from 1 to 8 mountain ranges but the actual claim extends only till 4th Mountain.

As a result, the boundary dispute lay as it is even after independence. There are two incidents which point out this ambiguity - During 1947-52, the Survey of India published maps showing the NEFA sector boundary as 'undemarcated'. And In March-April 1947, the Government of India organised the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi. A map displayed at that conference depicted Tibet as lying outside the boundaries of China. The delegate from the Republic of China (headed by General Chiang Kai-Shek) protested. The map was withdrawn thereafter. Since 1935, Indian maps have been marking the Macmohan line, which served as a boundary between erstwhile Tibet and India, while the Chinese accepted the Johnson line. (Noorani, 2010)

After Indian Independence, In 1952 the issue of unrestricted Eastern Sino Indian boundary was raised in the context of Sino-Burmese border but because of the tensions on the Tibetan border, this issue could not be resolved. In 1960, Premier Zhou Enlai publicly announced “As China was prepared to accommodate the Indian point of view in the eastern sector, India should accommodate China in the western sector.” This meant the resolution of the dispute of Tawang at the cost of Aksai Chin. But this question of "horse trading" of territories wasn't acceptable to either of the sides (Singh, 2019).

There are primarily three areas of contention: the Western Sector (includes the 38,000 sq km area of Aksai Chin), the central sector (includes Barahooti, Sikkim, Utrakhand) and Eastern sector (includes Tawang). The current contestation extends to two spots which do not figure in the list of 23 contested areas as decided by the Joint Working Groups – the Galwan Valley and the Hot springs. This adds on the gravity of the recent Chinese incursions (Stobdan, 2020).

During 1950-1962 there were 5 meetings held in Rangoon, seeking to address this issue. After the War, when the diplomatic missions were reinstated in 1976, in response to Deng Xiaoping's "packaged deal", it was made clear that the economy will pave the way forward and Political disputes will be kept aside. There have been talks at five levels between the Indian and Chinese counterparts starting from Prime ministerial talks between Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai, then expanding to Joint Secretary level, finally reaching to Foreign Secretaries (15 rounds) and thereafter the National Security Advisors (22 rounds). In 1988 the joint working group mechanism had begun, initiating a series of path breaking pacts of 1993 - Border peace and tranquility settlement (Menon, 2018). As a result of which in 1996 China agreed to share the map of the perceived border lines but in 2002 it refused to share the maps of the Western sector. In 2003 the special representative mechanism was conceived with the “Declaration on The Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation,” thereafter in 2005, Political Parameters became the guiding principle of this Border Dispute. In 2006, albeit, China started to assert itself and started negotiating over the whole of Arunachal Pradesh by calling it South Tibet. It also granted Staple visas to the people of Arunachal Pradesh and marked it on the Chinese territory, in the maps it published. This may be viewed as Chinese frustration with growing Indo US camaraderie and the Nuclear deal, which provided for commercial access of Nuclear energy to India (Menon, 2018).

This ambiguity the Eastern boundary specially was subject to exploitation by foreign powers. In the book Gorkhaland Movement: A study in Ethnic Separatism, B.T Randive of CPIM is quoted warning about the CIA's Operation Brahmaputra which sought to cut off the entire northeast from India.

Chumur and Doklam

Even before the Doklam issue gained prominence, in 2014, there was a similar incident in Daulat Beg Oldi and Chumur- places of strategic importance in Ladakh. This was Important with respect to the territorial sovereignty of India because the Central sector is relatively calm, as China has largely accepted Indian suzerainty over the same. Even after the PLA troops retracted from Doklam, news reports pointed at the non stop military buildup continuing in the valley out there. Also have been noted, specific patterns of acts of aggression by the PLA. It usually happens near to the boundary talks with India or during Bhutanese election, as China aspires to enlarge its control over the Bhutanese territory in Chumbi valley, owing to its own geopolitical compulsions (MPIDSA 2018), . Chumbi Valley, a narrow strip of land only a few kilometers at its narrowest point, has been an Achilles heel for China. It drives China in its desire to delineate its boundary with Bhutan—coupled with the aim to enlarge the size of the Chumbi Valley by annexing a large portion of Bhutanese territory—is the fear of being cut off by the Indian Army from the west as well as from the east, the latter in collusion with Royal Bhutan Army.

Psychological Warfare

Sovereignty is what states perceive it to be and thus Psychology plays an important role in shaping it's conceptions. China has been involved in continuous transgressions across the borders in order to create a psychological dominance in the minds of the people. On **September 4, 2019**, Tapir Gao, a local BJP MLA, claimed that Chinese troops made an incursion into the Indian territory last month and built a bridge over **Kiomru Nullah** in Chaglagam circle. It was approximated that the Chinese troops entered almost nearly 25 kilometres inside the Indian border. According to the government data 1025 transgressions by China have been reported by the Ministry of Defense between 2016 and 2018. (Economic Times, 2019)

A few days ago, there were reports that the herders in Demchok and Chumur weren't able to access their summer pastures. To this the reply of the government was that these pastures did not belong to us. In Demchok, PLA claims about 150 square kilometers of Land while in Chumur, 80 sq. km. land is eyed by China. It had started building massive infrastructure there and a 2008 report by Ambassador Shyam Saran pointed out that India had lost 640 sq. km. of land just because of area denial by India due to increasing patrolling by the PLA.

Rising Chinese Sun

In 1963 Pakistan ceded a part of its territory occupied Kashmir to China under the Border settlement treaty. Clause 3 the article clearly mentioned that the agreement is a **temporary provision** until the issue of Pakistan occupied Jammu and Kashmir is resolved bilaterally between Pakistan and India (Raza & Malhotra, 2019). It even calls for resettlement of the existing boundary once this issue is settled. The strategic importance of this valley is such that the Karakoram Highway, along which one of the most ambitious projects of China - One belt One Road (OBOR) passes through this valley, on which a total of 920 million dollars will be sent by the China Development Bank. 20 percent of the entire territory of Jammu and Kashmir is occupied by the Chinese. This karakoram highway passes through the disputed territory of Gilgit and Baltistan which has always been a bone of contention, thus sparking India's apprehension regarding it's territorial sovereignty in the region. Gilgit Baltistan had been made a separate province in 2009 by the Pakistani authorities, which were erstwhile known as the Northern Areas. Despite UN resolution 47 which enlists Gilgit Baltistan as a Disputed Area, China agreed to fund the Diamer Bhasha dam under the CPEC scheme in May this year. This is a part of the largest Chinese ambition of transforming the 21st century as the **Century of Asia** to the **Century of China**. (Kondapalli, 2017).

Indo Pacific and the Shift to the Maritime boundary

The renaming of the Asia Pacific region as the Indo Pacific region and the strong ties of the four countries of QUAD (India, US, Japan and Australia) has irked China time and again. It regards the formation of Indo China as the **Second Cold war strategy** of America and since then had pursued heavy investments in the Indo-Pacific region. The strategy is widely popular as the "checkbox diplomacy" of China. Concerted efforts of China in establishing Ports from Gwadar, Hambantota, to Djibouti, as a part of it's **String of Pearls**

Project (Lintner, 2019). The dependence of China on vital mineral resources in the South China sea, hostilities have been observed on the part of China with regards to Philippines, Vietnam etc. The dual strategy of challenging the dominance of India in the Indian ocean and attempting to assert its role in the South China sea, indicates the conception of boundary is no longer restricted to it's continental understanding (Basu, 2019).

Way Forward

In the twenty-second round of talks at the national security advisor level India has attempted for **early harvest** regarding the boundary dispute, both countries decided to maintain peace along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Also, a consensus has been reached upon the Sikkim Boundary (Eastern Sector), so that no skirmishes remain. Also, the creation of some specific zones of contention have been agreed upon which will cater to the 8-14 zones of difference at the Line of Actual Control. For this, it has been decided that Uttarakhand Boundary will be marked by the Indian Side. However this has resulted in another conundrum. India, as per its stated position, has marked **Kalapani** inside its boundary. However Nepal deems Kalapani as a part of its territory, leading to Public outrage against India (Jha, 2019). The Kalapani issue emanated after the 1962 war, when owing to its strategic position, India placed its troops at Kalapani. This **early harvest** is however in stark contrast to the **packaged deal** of Zhou Enlai. Therefore, **resolution of one border dispute may also lead to triggering the other**. India, however, has been careful in maintaining respect for the sovereignty of China which was evident when in 2016 it denied Visa to Dolkun Isa, the Uighur Leader, Visa to attend the World Uyghur Summit at Dharmshala. The same amount of respect is expected from China when it comes to matters like Article 370 or the 5G telecom expansion in India. (Prabhash 2017)

Professor Srikanth Kondapalli, an expert on China has observed that a perceivable pattern of negotiations as far as the resolved boundary disputes with China are to be considered. Chinese have placed claims on territories of 23 countries when they have borders with only 14, out of which 12 have been solved. All the disputes resolved so far have been land disputes, and no maritime boundary has been resolved. The ratio of territories negotiated was 40:60 where Chinese counterparts got forty percent of their staked claims. For this compromise and bargain to take place, he argues, the rising jingoistic fervor in both the countries is a cause of concern..

The boundary dispute is subject to resolution upon what India has to offer to China in terms of geo strategic influence and also if it converges with the needs of the Chinese at the moment. For example in 1960, when Myanmar was contemplating to join SEATO (South East Treaty Organization), Zhou Enlai agreed to resolution of this dispute on Burmese terms and conditions, to restrict the increasing sphere of influence of United States of America, as he stated in a speech that Myanmar was a different case. The bargaining capacity and the diplomatic acumen of India will thus pave the way forward for the resolution of this dispute.

With these apprehensions, the Lieutenant General level talks will commence today. However, just a night before the talks, Chinese authorities changed the Lieutenant General of the Western Theatre command of the PLA, where the entire imbroglio is situated. Lt. General Xu Qiliang became one of the two Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Chinese

Communist Party and also a member of the CPC central committee (Chinavita, 2018). He was the first officer from PLAAF to acquire the rank of Vice Chairman in 2012, a post of the two highest ranking military professionals in China (Dittmer, 2015). This last moment change is unprecedented and as confounding as a Chinese website publishing China's territorial claims over Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (WION, 2020). As they say in Chinese "when winds of change blow, some people make walls while others, windmills" and China seems to be building both, as nobody is prescient enough to predict the uselessness of either in these times of excessive uncertainty.

References

Bagchi Indrani. (2019, August 14). India China border news: Boundary talks soon, China looking at an 'early harvest'. The Times of India.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/boundary-talks-soon-china-looking-at-an-early-harvest/articleshow/70667838.cms>

Basu, P. (2019, November 22). High tide in the South China Sea: Why the maritime rules-based order is consequential. ORF.

<https://www.orfonline.org/research/high-tide-in-the-south-china-sea-why-the-maritime-rules-based-order-is-consequential-58052/>

Chaudhary, D R. (2016, April 26). India cancels visa for Uyghur dissident Dolkun Isa. Economic Times.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-cancels-visa-for-uyghur-dissident-dolkun-isa/articleshow/51986138.cms?from=mdr>

China vitae : Biography of Xu Qiliang. (2018, March 5). China Vitae.

http://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Xu_Qiliang/full

Chinese army augmenting its position; Digging tunnels, denying Indian troops movement near disputed region of Ladakh (2019, December 26). Swarajya Magazine.

<https://swarajyamag.com/insta/chinese-army-augmenting-its-position-digging-tunnels-denying-indian-troops-movement-near-disputed-region-of-ladakh>

Dittmer, L., & Yu, M. (2015). Routledge handbook of Chinese security. Routledge.

Doklam and the Indo-China boundary. (2018). Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Journal of Defence Studies.

<https://idsa.in/jds/jds-12-1-2018-doklam-indo-china-boundary>

Dutta, Prabhash K. (2017, August 31). How India, China compromise: A look at how standoffs before Doklam were resolved. India Today.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/doklam-standoff-india-china-compromise-demchok-chumar-daulta-beg-oldi-1034861-2017-08-31>

Fravel, M. T. (2019). Active defense: China's military strategy since 1949. Princeton University Press.

Gurung, S K. (2019, December 30). India begins work on tunnels along the border with China. Economic Times.

https://m.economictimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-begins-work-on-tunnels-along-border-with-china/amp_articleshow/73023844.cms

J. Manoj. (2018, June 26). The Wuhan summit and the India-China border dispute. ORF.

<https://www.orfonline.org/research/41880-the-wuhan-summit-and-the-india-china-border-dispute/?amp>

Jha, H. B. (2019, December 20). Addressing the Kalapani issue between Nepal and India. ORF.

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/addressing-the-kalapani-issue-between-nepal-and-india-59377/>

Kondapalli, S. (2017, May 15). Why India is not part of the Belt and Road initiative summit. The Indian Express.
<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/why-india-is-not-part-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-summit-4656150/>

Lintner, B. (2019). The costliest pearl: China's struggle for India's ocean. Oxford University Press.

Malhotra, I. C., & Raza, M. (2019). Kashmir's untold story: Declassified. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Malone, D. M., Mohan, C. R., & Raghavan, S. (2015). The Oxford handbook of Indian foreign policy. OUP Oxford.

Manuel, T. (2019, May 4). The opium trader who became one of India's richest men. The Hindu.
<https://www.thehindu.com/society/history-and-culture/jamsetjee-jejeebhoy-the-opium-trader-who-became-baronet-of-bombay/article27033135.ece>

Menon, S. (2018). Choices: Inside the making of India's foreign policy. Penguin UK.

Noorani, A. (2010). India-China boundary problem 1846-1947: History and diplomacy. Oxford University Press.

Panda, A. (2019, January 30). M. Taylor Fravel on how the people's liberation army does military strategy. The Diplomat
<https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/m-taylor-fravel-on-how-the-peoples-liberation-army-does-military-strategy/>

Ray, J. K. (2013). India's foreign relations, 1947-2007. Routledge.
Sibal Sidhant. (2020, May 11) Now, Chinese websites claim Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan part of China; draws ire of Central Asia. WION.
<https://www.wionews.com/india-news/now-chinese-websites-claim-kyrgyzstan-kazakhstan-part-of-china-draws-ire-of-central-asia-298057>

Singh, Z. D. (2019, October 23). Leaving the door open to a border settlement. The Hindu.
<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/leaving-the-door-open-to-a-border-settlement/article29771428.ece>

Sivapriyan, E T B. Modi-Xi summit: Mamallapuram-China ties 2,000 yrs old. (2019, October 11). Deccan Herald.
<https://www.deccanherald.com/national/modi-xi-summit-mamallapuram-china-ties-2000-yrs-old-767725.html>

State and society. (n.d.). Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/place/China/State-and-society>

Stobdan, P. (2020, May 26). As China intrudes across LAC, India must be alert to a larger strategic shift. The Indian Express.
<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-ladakh-warning-india-china-border-dispute-6427131/>

15th round of talks between the special representatives of India and China on the boundary question. (2012). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. [Press Release].

<https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/17892/15th+round+of+talks+between+the+Special+Representative+s+of+India+and+China+on+the+Boundary+Question>

18th round of talks between the special representatives of India and China on the boundary question. (2015). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. [Press Release].

https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/25002/18th_Round_of_Talks_between_the_Special_Representatives_of_India_and_China_on_the_Boundary_Question

20th meeting of the special representatives of India and China (2017). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/t1522076.shtml

21st meeting of the special representatives of India and China. (2018). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. [Press Release].

<https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30634/21st+Meeting+of+the+Special+Representatives+of+India+and+China+November+24+2018>

22nd meeting of the special representatives of India and China. (n.d.). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. [Press Release].

https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32234/22nd_Meeting_of_the_Special_Representatives_of_India_and_China

1025 Chinese transgressions reported from 2016 to 2018: Government data. (2019, November 28). The Economic Times.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/1025-chinese-transgressions-reported-from-2016-to-2018-government-data/articleshow/72262114.cms?from=mdr>

19 Avenue des Arts 2nd floor, 1210 Brussels, Belgium
E 0833.606.320 RPM Bruxelles
Email: info@sadf.eu Web: www.sadf.eu