



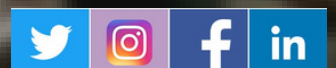
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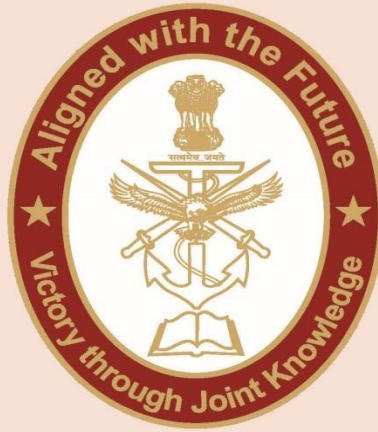
INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS: A PROTRACTED BORDER STANDOFF AND IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY

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INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS: A PROTRACTED BORDER STANDOFF AND IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

Three years have passed since the Indian and Chinese Armies clashed in eastern Ladakh. Yet another clash at Yangtse has freshened up the last wound and has brought China and India on edge. The border standoff and subsequent violent conflict in the Galwan Valley as well as Yangtse have drastically transformed the bilateral relationship and intensified the security competition between the two nations. These continued clashes indicate the failure of diplomacy to resolve the border issues with China. Nevertheless, Diplomacy works only where countries are willing to negotiate and respect the agreement. With no prospect of an amicable resolution, this paper sought to delve into the issues like what are the implications for regional security of this protracted border standoff, and how the current situation of India-China relations would lead to possible future roadmap for both countries.

Introduction

The enduring border stand-off between India and China, marked by periodic clashes and confrontations, has become a persistent source of tension in the region. Three years after the initial clash in eastern Ladakh, a recent altercation at Yangtse has rekindled the wounds and further heightened the apprehensions between the two nations. The ongoing border dispute in the Galwan Valley, accompanied by the renewed conflict at Yangtse, has not only brought about a fundamental transformation in the bilateral relationship but has also intensified the security competition in the region.

The repeated clashes along the India-China border have highlighted the shortcomings of diplomatic efforts in resolving the long-standing territorial issues between the two countries. Despite the importance of diplomacy in addressing disputes, its efficacy depends on the willingness of involved parties to engage in meaningful negotiations and respect mutually agreed-upon agreements. Regrettably, the protracted border stand-off between India and China has reached an impasse, with no apparent prospects for an amicable resolution in sight. The loss of twenty soldiers along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China was undoubtedly a tragic event that marked a significant turning point in the relations between the two countries. It was one of the most painful days for the Indian Army, and both sides have blamed each other for the incident.

The opinions of experts from both countries reflect the seriousness of the situation. Brahma Chellaney's characterisation of the incident as a "tipping point" indicates that the incident was a significant development in the relations between India and China, and its impact will be felt for years to come. Similarly, Hu Shisheng's assertion that this was the "lowest point since the 1962 border war" underscores the gravity of the situation.

Given this backdrop, it becomes imperative to delve into the implications of this border stand-off on regional security and examine the prevailing situation in India-China relations. The Key questions that this paper intends to address include. What are the far-reaching implications of the continued border standoff between India and China on regional security? How has the bilateral relationship between the two nations evolved as a result of these conflicts? Moreover, considering the absence of a foreseeable resolution, what potential paths lie ahead for India and China in navigating this challenging terrain? By exploring these critical issues, this study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the evolving security landscape and shed light on the possible trajectories that the two nations may follow as they grapple with their complex border dispute.

To achieve these objectives, this paper will employ a theoretical approach that incorporates analysis of historical, geopolitical, and strategic factors. Additionally, it will draw upon reliable sources, including scholarly research, policy documents, and expert opinions, to provide a well-rounded assessment of the subject matter. By offering nuanced insights into the India-China border stand-off and its implications, this paper endeavours to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on regional security and bilateral relations in South Asia.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of India-China relations can be examined through various theoretical frameworks within the field of international relations. Realism is such one theoretical framework that posits the absence of centralised authority in the international system. According to this perspective, states prioritise their self-interest and strive to amass power as a means of ensuring their survival. This motivates individuals to engage in

competition for the purpose of gaining influence and striving for a favourable distribution of power. The attainment of equilibrium can be accomplished through endogenous methods, such as enhancing one's own capabilities, or exogenous methods, such as establishing coalitions and cultivating diplomatic ties with other nations.

The constructivist perspective also places a significant emphasis on the role of identities, perceptions, and norms in influencing the process of decision-making. Constructivists posit that in the realm of Sino-Indian relations, initial conflicts between the two nations engendered a perception of mutual suspicion and animosity, which was subsequently reinforced by intermittent crises stemming from unresolved matters. The concurrent rise of India and China as emerging powers, combined with their close geographical proximity, intensifies the rivalry between the two nations. By integrating aspects of both realism and constructivism, one could contend that the shared objective of achieving great power status motivates these actors to engage in competition for control over influence, resources, and markets within a particular strategic region.

Although there are indications of competition and tension in Sino-Indian relations, it cannot be concluded that the possibility of war is inevitable. Notwithstanding, there persists a strategic competition between the two nations, which has resulted in the adoption of mutual balancing strategies in international forums and the maritime sphere. India and China employ internal balancing strategies by enhancing their military capabilities, while also engaging in external balancing tactics by cultivating relationships with neighbouring countries.

India has demonstrated a heightened inclination to collaborate with the United States, as it perceives China to be the more significant menace. The conduct described conforms to Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory, which prioritises the role of threat perception in motivating balancing conduct, rather than solely relying on a balance of power. The reciprocal equilibrium exhibited by India and China is motivated by apprehension regarding the other's expanding influence and the imperative to amass power for safeguarding purposes. The aforementioned circumstance engenders a security predicament, wherein the actions and reactions of both parties culminate in heightened tensions and a sense of vulnerability.

Notwithstanding these dynamics, the policies implemented by both nations exhibit some deviation from the realist approach of balancing. The military-strategic domain is characterised by a discernible degree of restraint, as both parties exercise caution in their conduct and refrain from entering into strategic accords that may potentially result in significant conflicts. Furthermore, there exists a burgeoning economic interdependence between India and China, a phenomenon that is atypical among balancing adversaries as it commonly results in the weaker party becoming reliant on the stronger. India's notable engagement in economic trade with China is noteworthy in this context. Moreover, notwithstanding their perception of each other as competitors,

both nations engage in confidence-building measures (CBMs), demonstrating a sincere desire to enhance their relationship.

The aforementioned relationship exhibits a paradoxical strategy of restricted involvement and cautious equilibrium. According to Avery Goldstein, a renowned political scientist, China has prioritised bolstering its economic and military capabilities while refraining from engaging in external hostilities since the late 1990s. The utilisation of the "strategy of transition" by China elicits inquiries regarding its future objectives subsequent to the conclusion of its metamorphosis, thereby engendering an atmosphere of ambiguity for India. India has implemented a dual approach of engagement and balancing in response to the situation. economic and political relations with China, the country has initiated engagement efforts (Christiansen & Rai 1996).

India-China Brief Background

India and China began their diplomatic relations in 1949 following China's independence. India was the first noncommunist country to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) and established diplomatic ties with it (Kulkarni 2022). After 1962 following the Sino-Indian War, India-China relations deteriorated due to various reasons and during the second half of the 1980s, India had a military encounter with China along the Line of Actual Control (1987) in Sumdorong Chu Valley (known as the Wangdung Incident). Later, during the month of February 1987, when India granted independence to the north-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, it intensified tensions between India and China (Ramanujam 2019). The tensions continued until Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China on December 19, 1988, after an arid 34 years of diplomatic stasis, making him the first Prime Minister of India after Jawaharlal Nehru's visit in 1954. He held talks with Chinese President Yang Shangkun and Deng Xiaoping, Chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission to exchange their views on bilateral relations and on international issues of mutual trust. This visit was marked as a major event in Sino-Indian relations, and both countries agreed to restore peace to improve upon and develop a neighbourly relationship between the two countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference in other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, territorial integrity and peace coexistence (MFA 2014). The shared desires of the two countries that met the fundamental interests of the Chinese and Indian people would have exerted a positive impact on peace and stability in Asia. Rajiv Gandhi and Li Peng held discussions on the Sino-Indian boundary negotiations in detail and agreed to resolve the matter through peaceful and cordial consultations (Jain 1989).

India had a positive perception of the Chinese leadership, and it had a favourable outcome after a period of time that included the rebuilding of leader-level interactions, and the formal Chinese acceptance of Sikkim as a part of India. Most importantly, during the Peace and Tranquillity agreements, in 1993 and 1996 respectively, the Chinese extended their support in reducing the insurgency groups operating in north-

eastern India and its adjoining areas (Acharya 2015). However, the Chinese have not shown any interest in settling the boundary disputes based on past events and it has also halted the Line of Actual Control (LAC) clarification exercise in 2003. India's security concerns arose after a sudden and rapid infrastructure build-up along the borders of LAC and in Tibet, while there was no hurried strengthening of borders by the Chinese happening in a volatile Jammu and Kashmir, and adding to the equation, was an unregulated flow of lethal weapons from China to Pakistan, raising various vexing diplomatic and strategic questions of an uncertain status quo between the two countries. These activities worsened the trade imbalance in the mid-2000s and also became problematic for India in maintaining a better relationship with China (Gokhale 2021). Later in the 1990s, both India and China witnessed economic growth. Subsequently, this has increased the influence of the giants in Asia at the beginning of the twenty-first century which accordingly has been reflected in their shifting foreign policy (Gokhale 2021).

The Shift in the Foreign Policy of China

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, India's foreign policy did a U-turn and shifted towards a pragmatic, neo-liberal stance. China is currently pursuing "wolf warrior diplomacy" and establishing its worldwide sphere of influence. On the domestic level, the question is whether the capitalist class can achieve social consensus, i.e., whether it takes into account the interests of the rural and urban poor masses. For instance, China faces a trade-off between establishing a local minimum wage level and standard of living for its people and becoming a global export powerhouse. Although, in 2013, the Chinese Communist Party (CPC)-led government acknowledged the crucial role that markets play in resource allocation. It eventually meant that the "marketization" revolution would result in increased economic efficiency, but at the expense of the party's political power in China. The Economist did highlight China's "Regulatory Authoritarianism" development. The Maoist slogan "Politics in charge" is the central tenet of the CPC-led government's control over Chinese lives.

The private sector comprises about fifty percent of China's gross domestic product and eighty percent of its employment sector. 70% of technological innovations are made by private companies. To combat the problem of private sector penetration in China's economy, measures such as the recent control of the internet business, private education industry, etc. have been implemented. The government is also entering private companies to blur the distinction between the private and public sectors. The private sector is therefore viewed with scepticism in China, as it has played a significant role in aggravating inequality and thereby undermining China's socialist aspirations, despite the macro-level objective being CPC's political control of China.

India-China Border Tensions

Along the border between LAC and Ladakh, the Chinese government is similarly invasive as it expands its presence within the private sector. It has made substantial investments in the construction of roads and highways in the Tibet region and has pursued a more assertive, audacious foreign policy by disregarding previous ideologies

and agreements. The border tensions have caused economic ripple consequences for India. By excluding Chinese companies from conducting 5G testing, India has reduced its dependence on the telecom industry. China has been India's top trading partner, worth 77 billion US dollars, till 2020, and it is impossible to separate the trade from the investments.

The latest skirmishes along the LAC in Yangtse come at the time when China released a warning about the US- India joint military exercise- 'Yudha Abhyas' in the Auli district of Uttarakhand which is about 100 km from LAC. China did not just oppose the joint battalion-level exercise between the US- India but also quoted that it directly violates the agreements it had with India in 1993 and 1996. The 1993 agreement addresses the issue of maintaining peace and tranquillity along the LAC with China in the India-China Border Areas and the 1996 pact was about confidence-building measures in the military field along the LAC with China.

India, while denying any accusation of breach of agreement, said "that the Chinese side needs to reflect and think about its own breach of the agreements of 1993 and 1996. India exercises with whomever it chooses to and it does not give a veto to third countries on these issues" (Singh 2022). Ironically, China has broken the agreement itself. The 1993 agreement was just a diplomatic conundrum that sought to resolve the issue at hand on an urgent basis with no solid solution for the long term. China exploited this window and executed a well-planned attack on India - twice. The timings of these attacks are remarkably related and can be connected. Since China focuses so much on pride, victory, and honour, and meanwhile its internal politics is undergoing haywire, this presented the right time to excavate the border issue to divert attention from the issue at hand- the COVID lockdown and breaking healthcare infrastructure. The victory of PLA soldiers in the Tawang attack might have boosted PLA's morale that it got successful in protecting the motherland and diverting attention from internal political turmoil, and protests against Zero-Covid Policy, reflecting the failure of Xi Jinping in addressing the national political issues. Similar situations were there in 2020. China's actions hinge on military power and no matter how many military-level talks happen; China will use force when it finds the right window to attack. Chinese attack on "agreed disputed points" along the border reflects its strategy. The timing, location, and type of attack in Tawang is the testimony that diplomacy is not the answer to China's ever-growing encroaching actions.

Due to the recent cross-border tensions, which exhibited a perfect illustration of a security dilemma in which one side's conduct would be viewed as a threat by the other, the geo-economic dynamics experienced a decrease in trade, which was once at an all-time high, have changed. The question that arises, however, is whether regulatory bodies are sufficiently flexible to reject the language of optimal regulation, which has a connotation of rigidity.

Since the Galwan incident, India has tried to build infrastructure along the border areas. This infrastructure development is taking across five verticals established - habitat, aviation, road infrastructure, operational logistics, and security infrastructure.

Significance development is the extra surveillance near the LAC and in the depth, area including satellite imagery and ground-based cameras with night vision, drones, etc. However, due to the formation of cloud satellite imagery couldn't pinpoint the troop-built-up which needs to be addressed to prevent such shortcomings in the future.

The relationship between India and China fluctuates between global collaboration and bilateral friction. The unanimity on transnational issues such as climate change, terrorism, cyber security, and the reorganization of financial institutions serves as an antidote to bilateral conflicts. Despite the fact that the growing trust deficit is intensifying bilateral competition. Only if India addresses challenges such as supply-side bottlenecks, disengagement in sensitive industries such as telecom, and capacity creation will trade dependence be lessened. Similar to how China is serving as a pot where war hysteria and xenophobia are being heated, India is also experiencing internal sectarian strife, inequality, sluggish economic growth, etc. China continues to be India's strong adversary. China's strong and audacious foreign policy is an effort to alter the regional and global balance of power. As China and India continue to compete for dominance in the international system, the cross-border tensions between the two nations continue to heighten the risk of conflict.

The surge in attacks along the border areas, continued provocations and warnings, glorification of these conflicts, and building of infrastructure in the border areas - all point to the fact that these attacks are not just related to unresolved border disputes and there is something bigger that is needed to be highlighted. The geopolitical play behind these conflicts is to soil the image of India- as a strong nation full of capabilities and capacities, powerful enough to safeguard its interests and protect its borders. India's diplomatic relations even beyond the region- Indo-pacific and West Asia can also be counted as the factor behind such actions. The increasing might of India and its diplomatic relations with China's adversaries has caused ripple effects and led China to take action against India's fragile borders- one of the most sensitive and unresolved issues of India's national security. This is a kind of coercive engagement and diplomacy- engaging in small yet impactful conflict without the intention of waging a full-fledged war. It can be taken as a way out of China's discontent and disagreement with India's foreign policy in the region and beyond, assuming that India might take into account China's indirect opposition and stop pursuing those policies. However, India has made this clear several times that normalization of ties between India and China can only happen when there's a constructive step toward resolving border disputes. Conflict in one area and cooperation in the other can't and will not go hand in hand like earlier. India is ready to negotiate and talk only when the other side is ready to listen and cooperate. Diplomacy can work only to a certain extent and not beyond that.

The surge in Bilateral Ties

It is clear that trade and investment have played an important role in the relationship between India and China. China is a major supplier of raw materials and vital components to India, and India has been exporting minerals, chemicals, and other goods to China. However, there have been fluctuations in the bilateral trade

relationship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the geopolitical tensions between the two countries.

According to Mr. Ananth Krishnan, by July 2022, India's imports from China increased by 34.5% reaching a new record of \$57.51 billion. Exports from India to China however decreased by 45% and made up to \$9.57 billion only. (Krishnan 2022)

The embassy of India in Beijing has mentioned that between 2015 to 2021, the bilateral trade between India and China grew at the rate of 75.30% with average yearly growth of 12.55%. The overall trade of India with China increased by 43.32% in 2021 and crossed the 100 billion marks for the first time. (Embassy of India, Beijing 2022)

During the initial three quarters of 2022, India's imports from China have increased by 33.90% and touched USD 78.58 Billion mark and India's exports to China decreased by 36.70% and reached the 12.62 billion marks. (Embassy of India, Beijing 2022)

| INDIA CHINA BILATERAL TRADE (Figures in USD Bn) | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------|---------------------------|---------|---------------|-------------|---------|
| Year | India's Export to China | %Change | India's Import from China | %Change | Trade Deficit | Total Trade | %Change |
| 2015 | 13.4 | -18.39 | 58.26 | 7.42 | 44.86 | 71.66 | 1.42 |
| 2016 | 11.75 | -12.29 | 59.43 | 2.01 | 47.68 | 71.18 | -0.67 |
| 2017 | 16.34 | 39.11 | 68.1 | 14.59 | 51.76 | 84.44 | 18.63 |
| 2018 | 18.83 | 15.21 | 76.87 | 12.89 | 58.04 | 95.7 | 13.34 |
| 2019 | 17.97 | -4.55 | 74.92 | -2.54 | 56.95 | 92.9 | -2.93 |
| 2020 | 20.87 | 16.15 | 66.78 | -10.87 | 45.91 | 87.65 | -5.64 |
| 2021 | 28.03 | 34.28 | 97.59 | 46.14 | 69.56 | 125.62 | 43.32 |
| 2022 (Jan-Aug) | 12.62 | -36.70 | 78.58 | 33.90 | 65.96 | 91.20 | 16.00 |

Source: General Administration of Customs, China and Embassy of India, Beijing 2022

China is an important contributor to the global supply chain network, and India imports a range of raw materials and vital parts from China. The lockdown in China caused trade to dip by 12.4% to US\$ 12 billion in 2020's first two months compared to 2019. In April and May, during India's lockout, imports decreased to US\$ 3.2 billion. The Mid-June Galwan Valley disaster prompted calls to boycott Chinese goods. Local Circles found that 87% of Indians would boycott Chinese goods. Even in the Prime Minister's home state Gujarat, 80% of the decorative LED bulbs sold in the local markets were 'Made in China.' Chinese imports nearly reached pre-lockdown levels in July, at \$5.6 billion.

In April-August, China's share of India's imports was 18.11 percent. Organic chemicals, electrical gear, pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment led the imports to rebound in July. Organic chemicals, electrical machinery, boilers, and equipment trade-in Sept left 2016 levels behind. Pharmaceutical imports touched a new level in 2022 at US\$ 30.12 million in July, up 50.32 percent over the previous year. Surgical or medical instruments have grown. In 2019-20, India exported mainly mineral ores, by-products, and organic chemicals to China. Even after the Galwan Valley incident, China's exports have risen. Exports to China grew by 26.19% in 2020, while global exports decreased

by 21.13%. China has a 15% market share in organic chemicals exports from India, valued at \$1.34 billion. India's plastics exports to China have risen 71.8% to \$751.58 million from \$437.47 million. In Jan-Sept 2020, overall exports to China were US\$ 2.147 billion, up from US\$ 348.35 million in the same period last year. China's April-August export share is 9.1%, up from 5.3% in 2019-2020.

During the pandemic continues to impact global trade and economies, it remains to be seen how this will affect the trade and investment relationship between China and India. However, it is clear that both countries remain important trading partners for each other, with a range of goods and services flowing in both directions. Post-pandemic, China's economy is growing again. This surge in domestic demand has fuelled India's iron and steel exports. Indian exports in this industry have shifted from raw materials like ores to finished and semi-finished items, indicating their enhanced worldwide competitiveness. China accounted for 90% of Indian iron ore exports worth \$1.92 billion in April-September 2020, an 83.9% year-over-year increase.

Galwan Valley Incident Repercussions

India is trying to reduce its dependence on Chinese imports. Indian Railways cancelled a 471-crore deal with a Chinese firm. BSNL was advised to not utilise Huawei's equipment for any kind of network upgradation. In order to identify Chinese-origin goods, the government requires all e-Marketplace products to contain a Country-of-Origin tag. The Ministry of Power restricted imports of network systems and power equipment from China after the Galwan incident in July. In the last decade, Made in China equipment has been used to build 12,540 MW power plants. India levied anti-dumping duties and protection taxes on solar cells and modules. India barred colour TV imports in July, requiring a licence, and banned air conditioners. These moves aren't instantly measurable.

But China's exports are vital to India's economy. China imports 12%, 30%, and 26% of India's intermediate, capital, and final consumer goods. China supplies India with electrical machinery, appliances, and medication API. In recent years, some mobile businesses have moved their supply chain networks to India, which is a step in the right direction, but all the other critical high-end manufacturing components are still made in China. India has prohibited crucial imports in the electrical machinery sector, citing its own technology. However, its quality and cost-competitiveness need to be seen.

Chinese products dominate across sectors due to low prices. Fertilizers made in China are 76% cheaper, electrical circuits 23% cheaper, and DPUs 10% cheaper. These prices are hard to beat. Since the epidemic, supply chains have been diversified. Around 1,000 enterprises aim to leave China, but just 300 are serious about investing in India, according to the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce.

The current trade situation implies that boycotting Chinese goods to bring China to its knees hasn't been very much successful. LEDs, despite a 40% price increase, are still over 50% less than their Indian counterparts. India needs land and labour reforms to boost growth and investment. India needs to amplify the manufacturing of electrical

machinery indigenously as well as pharmaceuticals to reduce import levels. Without these crucial and giant reforms, the Prime Minister's appeal for 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' can't be visualized.

India- China Relations-SWOT ANALYSIS

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESS | OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
|---|---|--|--|
| China describes India as an important neighbour | Both nations are equipped with Nuclear weapons | Multilateral Issues can be the forum for both countries to come together and discover new areas of collaboration | Lack of consensus over China's Belt and Road Initiatives and CPEC's unauthorized projects in POK has created tensions between India- China |
| India has a high import dependency on China | Differences in foreign policy when it comes to regional security issues and terrorism | India's G20 as well as SCO presidency in 2023 can play a vital role in establishing a dialogue to resolve issues | Chinese anxiety over the US-led Indo-Pacific as well as QUAD which has highlighted India's role in the region. |
| Shared interests in multilateral affairs and issues like Climate Change in BRICS | Border conflicts over the years have complicated issues in general also | India- China - instead of viewing their relations through the lens of border conflicts can be sought to find other avenues for collaboration. | Chinese involvement in the Indian Ocean has made India worried about its engagement. |
| Both countries generally follow Non-Aligned foreign policy and prefer a neutral stance over international issues. | Changes in political regimes/parties of both countries have increased complexities. The influence of third parties in border issues as well as other political affairs has failed to resolve the conflicts. | Public Diplomacy can play a crucial role in creating opportunities for both countries to collaborate. Both the Asian giants have the capacity to dominate the world economy if handled carefully | Breach of border agreements and the death of Indian soldiers in 2020 have created a feeling of animosity towards China. Agreements and dispute resolutions are needed to be considered important |

Source: Author's compilation

Indo-Pacific Conundrum

India's geostrategic importance in the Indian Ocean region has deployed its strong naval forces in securing the region from any traditional threats like terrorism, cybercrime, etc. And non-traditional threats like drug and human trafficking, and transnational crimes from external forces. The evolving contemporary geopolitical dynamics, it has given America no choice but to co-opt New Delhi as its regional strategic partner. India has witnessed a transition while considering its defence partnership with major powers, especially during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Government signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)

in 2016 and the Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018 with the United States (Kaura 2020). Alongside these developments in the Indo-Pacific, It is important to understand the effort of Shinzo Abe, the former Japanese Prime Minister, who invented the term 'Asia-Pacific' in 2007 and later it took shape in the form of collective security dialogue known as QUAD, which includes four major democratic nations of the world namely the United States of America, India, Australia, and Japan. A decade later, during the ASEAN conference, the talks on Asia-Pacific were discussed and later renamed to Indo-Pacific and were updated in the foreign policy lexicon of the US, Australia, India, and Japan. The Modi government also created a new 'Indo-Pacific division' in the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi (Kaura 2020).

Over a period of time, the discussion on Quad got elevated into policy by strengthening the informal framework to an institutionalized front on various regional security issues, mostly focused on China's increasing economic influence, military power, and diplomatic steps in the Indo-Pacific (Kaura 2020). The resurgence of the Indo-Pacific reflects mounting concerns about Chinese President Xi Jinping's strong foreign policy throughout the world (Scott 2019). Quad gained its prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic by financially supporting and providing vaccines to developing countries. Further, it has extended its cooperation to a 'Quad-Plus' engagement with the involvement of Brazil, Israel, New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam as its new members. This expansion to other member countries has created a strategic consultative framework for the quick construction of Indo-Pacific alignment that is not necessarily bound by the US-led alliance structure (Panda 2020).

India and other member countries of the Indo-Pacific have reaffirmed their commitment to promoting an open, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific alongside committing themselves to shared values and cooperation on maritime security, infrastructure, and connectivity in support of rule-based orders (Scott 2019). In every ministerial-level meeting, varied policy responses are made available to the Quad members, such that in recent times Blue Dot Network (BDN), a multi-stakeholder effort initiated by the US, Japan, and Australia, was one such opportunity for India. It is a multi-stakeholder program aimed at strengthening the economic framework for quality infrastructure promotion throughout the Indo-Pacific region (Panda 2020). The Blue Dot Network would also help New Delhi to enhance its "Act East Policy" strategy, but India is hesitant to join the initiative wherein it would emerge as a critical factor given New Delhi's opposition to China's Belt and Road Initiative (OBOR Europe 2020).

The virtual summit held in March 2021 established Quad's core objectives and specified concrete targets, as well as formed an expert working group in various fields (Munjjal 2022). Due to the pandemic, the summits were carried on virtual mode, later this year during 24-26 May 2022, Quad member countries held a summit in Tokyo which announced several new initiatives to its members. The leaders of Quad have announced the development of the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) as a level of collaboration target for an inclusive Indo-Pacific region. IPMDA will help to build a faster, wider, and more accurate maritime image of

real-time activities in the water (Bhattacharjee and Peri 2022). During the summit, President Joe Biden also unveiled the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) to bind the countries in the region through common standards in the areas including supply-chain resilience, clean energy, infrastructure, and digital trade (Munjal 2022). Along with India, 12 more countries have joined this initiative. As Scholars opined, unlike US previous initiatives like Blue Dot Network and the Build Back Better Initiative have made little changes in the infrastructural needs of the region. The IPEF and other initiatives unveiled in the recent summit should make some changes to the member countries' growing needs and infrastructural developments. Mr. Wang Yi criticized the US initiative Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for prosperity (IPEF) as the "political tool for the United States to maintain regional economic hegemony and deliberately excluding specific countries" and condemned Washington's actions of "gang up with small circles and change China's neighbourhood environment" (Krishnan 2022).

The Indo-Pacific is one area where India as well as China- are suspicious of each other's activities and ambitions. China is suspicious of India's continued collaboration with the United States in different aspects. India has always objected to China's maritime silk road and its different projects. However, as stated by Harsh Pant- "it is possible that the construction of these ports and facilities around India's periphery by China can be explained away on purely economic or commercial grounds, but for India, this looks like a policy of containment by other means." (Pant 2014). This perspective is likely to complicate India-China relations greatly. There's a need to decouple different issues in India-China relations instead of interconnecting one issue with the other which leads to extra complexities.

What is the Future of Sino-India Relations?

As a result of the war in 1962, the relationship between the two countries was irreparably damaged. It took them years to approach normalcy. In 1988, then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China. His historic visit led to the resumption of bilateral discussions that had been interrupted by the war. In 1993, the historic "Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity Along the Line of Actual Control" was signed in the border regions. This was a significant step that clearly reflected peace and stability. And, this Agreement allowed the Chinese to have a greater sense of security and allowed them to build infrastructure without Indian objections (Acharya 2015); Since the Indian market was open, China became one of India's largest trading partners and gradually its bilateral ties in exchange goods and services surged (Garver 2001).

The above information demonstrates that establishing and maintaining bilateral relations is not simple. As most economies were closed in the past, keeping relationships was not a priority. Globalization has affected everything today. Currently, nations are dependent upon one another. Whether it be between the United States and China, the United States and Russia, India and China, etc.

In addition, the Sino-Indian scenario now is very different from that of the 1962 war. Today, India is a nuclear nation and an Asian superpower. According to the OECD and

IMF, the post-COVID-19 recovery has been the quickest relative to other afflicted nations. The manner in which India addressed the Galwan valley issue has demonstrated to the Chinese that circumstances have changed. According to Ashley Tellis, India's "Slow drip campaign of economic pressure" has harmed China in some fashion. And it should not be forgotten that India currently enjoys superior worldwide prestige to China. India's vaccination diplomacy has been highly successful.

The banning of a number of Chinese mobile applications and the tightening of regulations for Chinese companies seeking to do business in India demonstrate India's hard stance on the matter. As a result of China's aggression, India, Japan, and Australia created the "Supply Chain Resilience Initiative" to lessen their dependence on China for particular items, such as API. Nonetheless, India must not forget that we share a 3488-kilometer border with China. And this makes it much more crucial to restoring peace to prevent future damage.

The relations between India and China will only improve for a while. However, the Galwan conflict has cast doubt on the various meetings between the presidents of the two countries, such as the 2018 Wuhan summit and the most recent summit conducted in Mamallapuram, etc. And getting back will undoubtedly require numerous productive discussions.

Overall, it is anticipated that relations between India and China would be hostile and gloomy. They will not be the same as they were prior to 2020. According to Shivshankar Menon, the situation has become increasingly antagonistic and contested. Though past experiences give us a distinct perspective, strong leadership on both sides and nationalism in the background will prevent bilateral relations from normalizing so quickly this time around.

The continued betrayal of trust and agreements by China from time to time has led India to not believe in the diplomatic exchange of words and better be prepared for these kinds of conflicts which, are not normal, yet a frequent sighting now. What else can be done is the immediate reporting of such incidents. The incident happened on 9th Dec and was publicized by the media around 4-5 days later. A timely report of the event will help in numerous ways- will help to glorify the Indian Army's valour and support them by praising their actions- as China did after Galwan for its PLA Soldiers. This will help in highlighting Chinese activities at the national and international level and also defeat China in its own mind game and manipulation of the narration of the conflict. Also, highlighting the conflict immediately will help in understanding the drawback of our critical security infrastructure available at the site and present a solution to it. Media can play a crucial role in this aspect- building and forming the opinion for the Tawang attack and painting China in a reactive mode- attacking India while dragging the dispute resolution process unnecessarily and meanwhile preparing for another pre-emptive strike at any other disputed area along the LAC.

Way Forward

A discussion between India and China should happen before thinking ahead for the future roadmap of Sino-India relations.

- a. Even after the 18th round of corps commander talks, the Galwan Valley issue is not resolved before taking in the bilateral ties ahead. It is very much important to fix the ongoing border disputes.
- b. India has faced an unsustainable trade imbalance with China, which has gone unaddressed. Although China was one of the largest trading partners with India, now the United States has taken over that position in becoming the preferred trading partner and the value of imports and exports for FY 22 has raised to \$119.42 bn, whereas China has aggregated at \$115.42 bn (PTI 2022). If the issue is not resolved, China will lose its market in India.
- c. The two sides should show interest in settling the border disputes ranging from Galwan Valley, Line of Actual Control to the Doklam region. Until the issues are not settled down the territorial insecurity among both countries will remain the same. A High-level bilateral talk or Track Two diplomacy can bring a possible outcome in avoiding a future war.
- d. India's visions of the Indo-Pacific and the role of the Quad are a developmental necessity for India as the Belt and Road Initiative was for China (Gokhale 2021). In order to deal with China, India has to be politically and economically capable to deter its actions alongside both land and maritime borders. It is only possible if India extends its support to external powers who can support them in every possible means.
- e. India should initiate a plan of action in modernizing the defence system, which helps them to assess the threat perception from its immediate neighbours ranging from land to maritime boundaries. As India is progressing in maintaining good relations with external powers except for China and Pakistan, it is necessary for India to avoid territorial border disputes with its neighbours. However, a new normal has already started where both India and China can't be allies until the border disputes are settled. The possible solution is to hold bilateral talks and negotiate for a peaceful settlement, furthermore, this can also result in a surge in imports and exports, people-to-people exchanges, and military diplomacy.

Conclusion

The enduring border stand-off between India and China, particularly exemplified by the clashes in the Galwan Valley and Yangtse, has significantly impacted the bilateral relationship and regional security dynamics. Despite the failure of diplomacy to resolve the border issues, it is essential to acknowledge that diplomacy can only be effective

when all parties involved are willing to negotiate and respect agreements. The absence of a foreseeable resolution has intensified the security competition between the two nations, leading to a fundamental transformation in their relationship.

The loss of soldiers along the Line of Actual Control was a tragic event that marked a turning point in India-China relations. Expert opinions have highlighted the gravity of the situation, emphasising its long-term impact and characterising it as a significant development and the lowest point since the 1962 border war.

The implications of the continued border standoff on regional security are far-reaching. The tensions between India and China have raised concerns not only for the immediate region but also for the broader international community. The ongoing conflicts have necessitated a closer examination of the evolving security landscape and the potential paths that India and China may take to navigate this challenging terrain.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject, a theoretical approach of Realism and Constructivism was incorporated to highlight the crucial historical, geopolitical, and strategic factors. By drawing upon reliable sources and expert opinions, this paper aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on regional security and bilateral relations in South Asia.

If India focuses on improving military modernisation and deploying the required number of military personnel along the border, it reduces the security threat by making use of digital technology benefits India in assessing the threat perception. Following the Galwan Valley clash, bilateral relations gradually deteriorated and it resulted in the reduction of imports and exports from China, and subsequently, it affected the trade between the two countries. Until 2020, China was the largest trading partner with India worth \$77 bn but post the violent clash during FY 2020-21 it was \$86.4 bn and in FY 2021-22 it aggregated at \$115.42 bn. But the United States has surpassed China in becoming India's preferred trading partner and its bilateral trade has increased to \$119.42 bn. Trade experts have confirmed that increasing bilateral ties between India and the United States will continue in the coming years and engage themselves in furthering the economic ties. The recent border clash, cybersecurity issues, the blame game between India and China in international forums, etc. have resulted in a rivalry with China than maintaining friendly relations with them in recent times.

The future of Sino-Indian relations primarily depends upon the settling of ongoing border disputes by holding high-ministerial negotiation talks and by agreeing to promote peace and tranquillity in the region. In order to engage in peaceful bilateral relations between the two countries, it boils down to settling the post-Galwan Valley clash incident amicably and creating a roadmap for enforcing and enhancing future bilateral relations between the two Asian behemoths. More importantly, the post-Tawang attack leaves a big question in front of Indian defence forces about how resilient Indian security infrastructure and technology are used in the border area, that somehow failed to inform the troop build-up across the border because of the clouds.

Resilience in defence infrastructure is the need of the hour keeping in mind the uncertain nature of Chinese policy on border disputes along with timely reporting of the incident which was delayed both the times.

In light of the abstract and introduction, it becomes evident that the India-China border standoff has had significant ramifications. The lack of resolution and the escalation of tensions underscore the need for comprehensive analysis and a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics. It is imperative for policymakers and scholars to closely examine the implications of the border dispute and explore potential future trajectories for India and China. By doing so, they can contribute to efforts aimed at promoting stability, cooperation, and dialogue in the region.

DISCLAIMER

The paper is author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

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