



A Brief on

INDIA-CHINA

The Civilizational Struggle





INDIA-CHINA



भारत-चीन 印度-中国

*Panchsheel Principles of
Mutual Co-Existence*





INTRODUCTION

*I*ndia and China are two ancient civilizations turned modern states. The two have been interacting with each other in political, economic, diplomatic and people-to-people exchange domains since centuries. Until the advent of European colonialism in the 17th century, the two controlled around 25% of the Global GDP while coexisting peacefully.

There are historical instances to prove that the two societies were sensitive towards each other. The spread of Buddhism from India to China initiated religious exchanges wherein many Buddhist scholars and monks visited India and recorded the nuances of Indian empires of those times.

Even during the colonial periods, the story of Gadhadhar Singh, an Indian soldier serving in the British military posted in China during the Boxer Rebellion, recorded his experiences, which gives us a view into the societal aspects of China controlled by the Qing Empire. The fact that Indian troops stationed in Taiping turned over their loyalty from the British to the Chinese people during the Taiping Rebellion shows that the people on both sides understood the need to join hands in their struggle against colonial influences.





THE BOXER DAY REBELLION

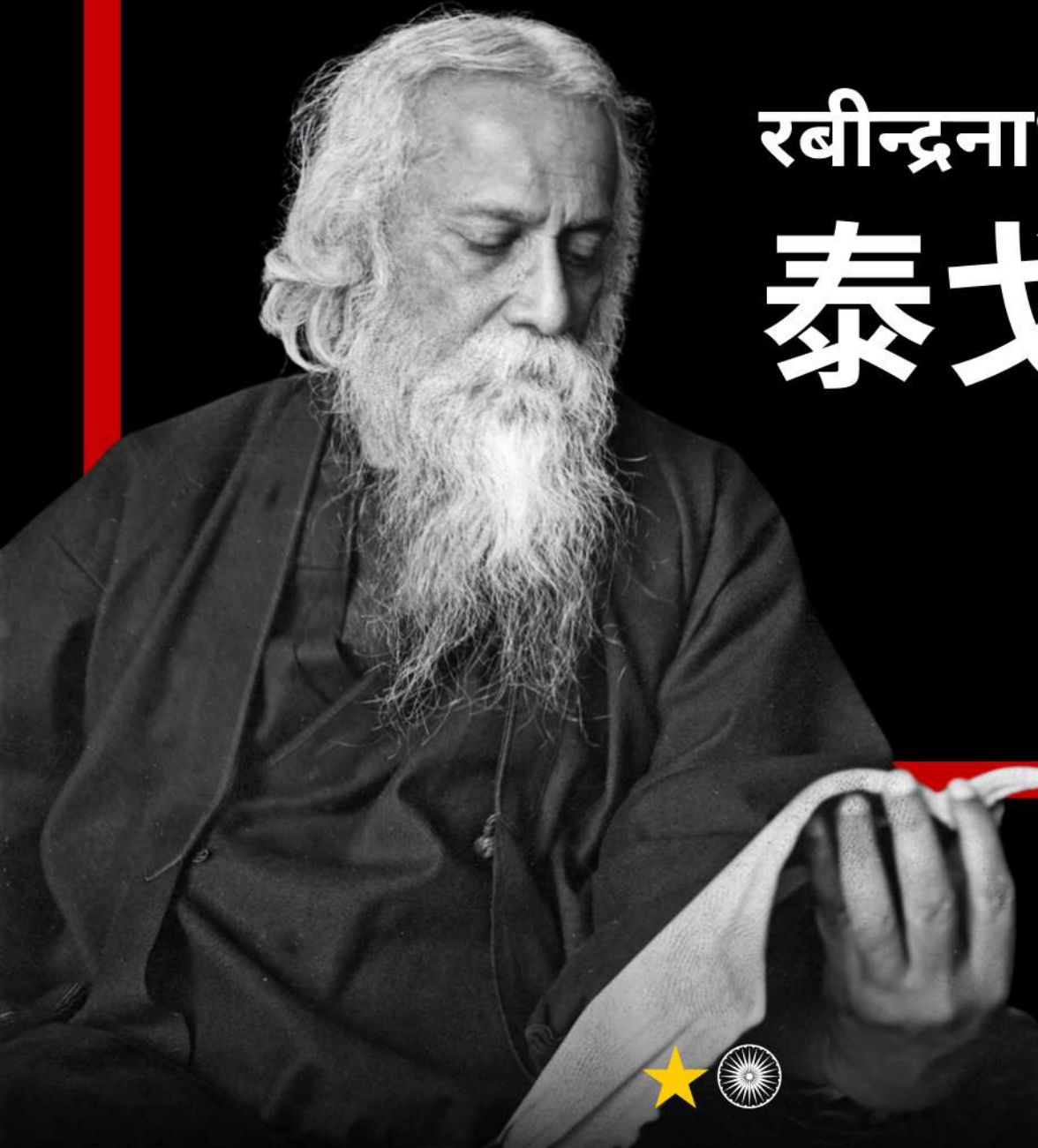


GLOBAL EYE
INTELLIGENCE

One of India's revolutionary parties that operated from overseas, the Ghadar Party got support from the Chinese out of Shanghai, Nanjing and Hong Kong to carry out anti-British activities in their pursuit to gain independence. Even the Kuomintang Party that controlled the Republic of China before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 saw Gandhi's peaceful struggle against the colonialists as revolutionary.

In this context, the visit undertaken by Rabindranath Tagore in 1924 was also instrumental because the Chinese had a soft corner for Indian intellectuals who were fighting British imperialism. The story of Dr. Kotnis, who served the Chinese people during the Japanese invasion in the 1940s, is still respected by the Chinese.

रबीन्द्रनाथ टैगोर 泰戈尔





A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.



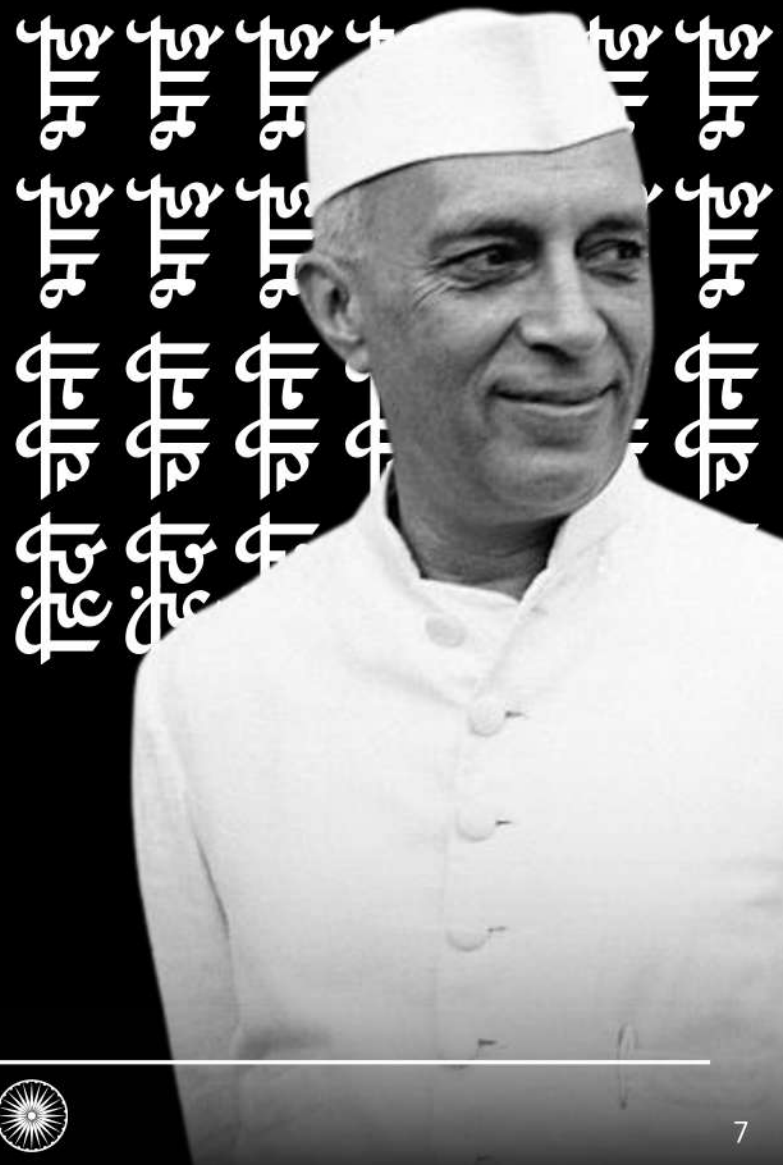


POST WWII

The bond between the two peoples started to decline post the Chinese Revolution of 1949. The Republic of China saw India's freedom struggle as a revolution led by Gandhi's ideology of non-violence. The People's Republic of China saw the Indian polity as a stooge of British imperialism, made out of the western threads of statecraft. This led them to think of India negatively in Tibet because India said India will inherit all the treaties of the British Empire, which included the question of Tibet.


Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's efforts to integrate the Communist China into the Asian mainstream led many in Beijing to believe that India was showing imperialistic tendencies. PM Nehru's idea was to build an Asia led India wherein China was also accorded a respectful status. China viewed India's diplomatic effort to bring a solution to the Korean crisis, in which the Chinese themselves were fighting the Americans, as an attempt by the West to subdue China by using India.

China's international isolation and domestic chaos unleashed by the Great Leap Forward created tense border issues, which were aggravated because the Tibet question was still not brought to a conclusion. This led India to take a tough posture on the border to deter China, but ended up provoking China into attacking Indian territories in the Himalayas.





*INDIAN SOLDIERS PATROLLING AT SPANGGUR TSO AT THE
SINO-INDIAN BORDER IN JANUARY 1962*



Relationship nosedived for almost two-and-a-half decades until the Indian Prime Minister led a delegation to Beijing to restore normal ties. PM Rajiv Gandhi's visit was monumental because the two sides realized the mutual damage caused to the trust between the two Asian giants in the aftermath of the 1962 border conflict.

What followed was a series of Confidence-Building-Measures (CBMs) starting from the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement of 1993. It was followed up by the Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the military field along the LAC in 1996. The 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India changed the status of the relationship in a manner which neither China nor India could find themselves comfortable in.

PM Vajpayee's visit to China eased the nerves a bit. Under the Vajpayee-Wen Declaration, India conceded that India accepts Tibet as a part of China. The two leaders also agreed on establishing the Special Representatives (SR) Mechanism, which would eventually lead to the further CBMs.

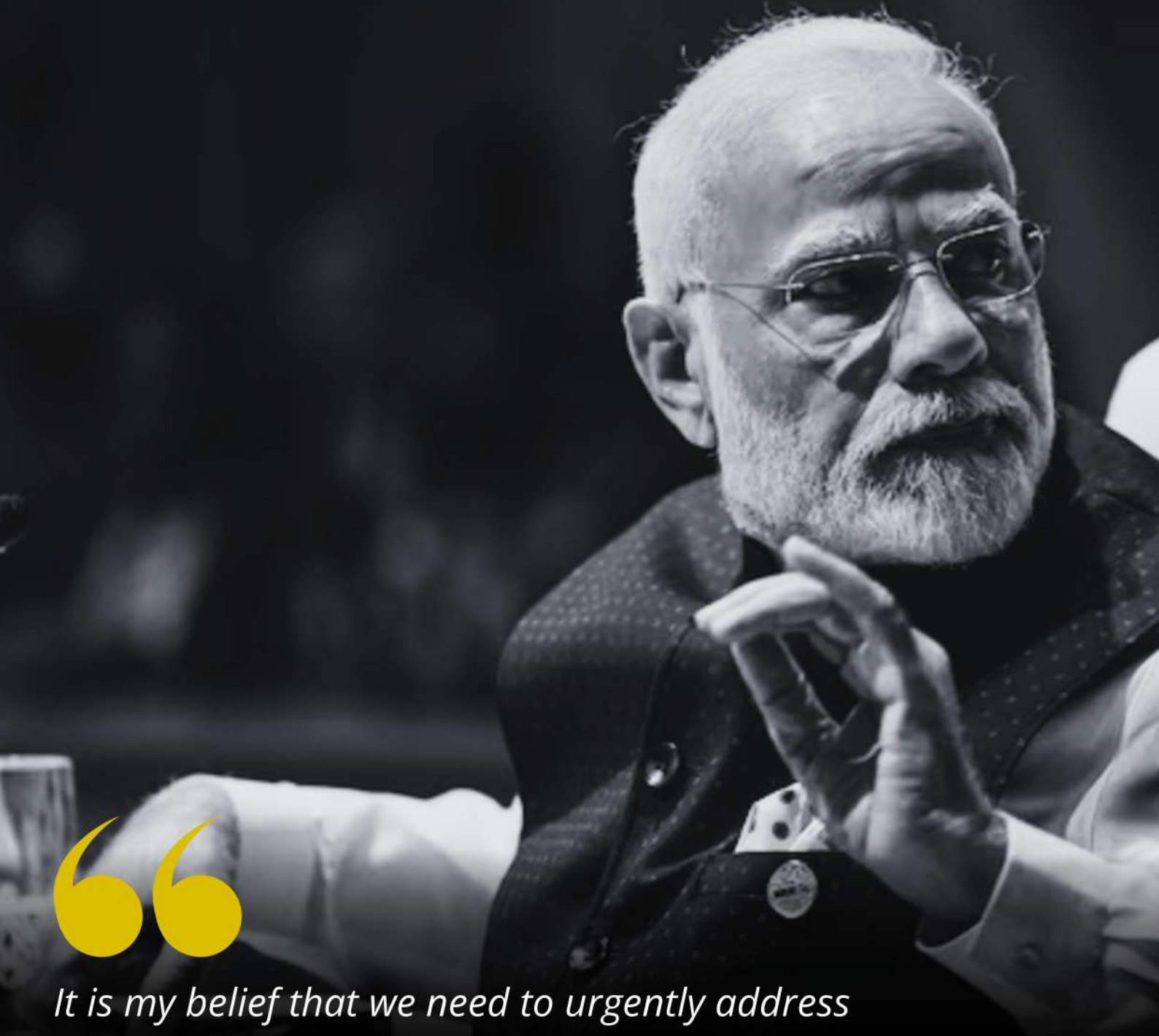
The SR mechanism was also instrumental in discussing critical issues directly. The 2005 CBM that followed PM Vajpayee's visit, i.e. PPPGP = Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question is hailed as a step forward in resolving the border issue. Another major breakthrough on the border question came with the establishment of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs in 2012 followed by the 2013 Pact between India and China, i.e. Border Defence Cooperation Agreement.





Since 2010, India and China created a Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED) mechanism, which by the year 2019 had six working groups looking into infrastructure, energy, environment, hi-tech, pharma and policy coordination. The SED Mechanism along with the High Level Mechanism on Culture and People to People Exchanges could not get desired results because of the geopolitical compulsions propounded by tough domestic rhetoric.





It is my belief that we need to urgently address the prolonged situation on our borders so that the abnormality in our bilateral interactions can be put behind us. Stable and peaceful relations between India and China are important for not just our two countries but the entire region and world.

THE BORDER

The mysticity of the Great Game between the British & the Russians haunts the majority of the world till date. Here's a great example of a story that not only turned tragic as it aged but also pitted two big giants against each other, even when neither of them had any role to play when it began.

The India-China Border Line Demarcation in the Western Sector (Ladakh - Aksai Chin) is a story of a lot of confusion, complications, ups and downs & an unsettled inheritance. After winning the Anglo-Sikh Wars, the British wanted to demarcate a line in the Himalayas that could earn them the goodwill of the Chinese against the Russians.

Russia was expanding southwards into Central Asia and posed a great danger to British interests in the sub-continent. The Chinese empire was weak and plagued with corruption & misgovernance after losing to the British in the Opium Wars.

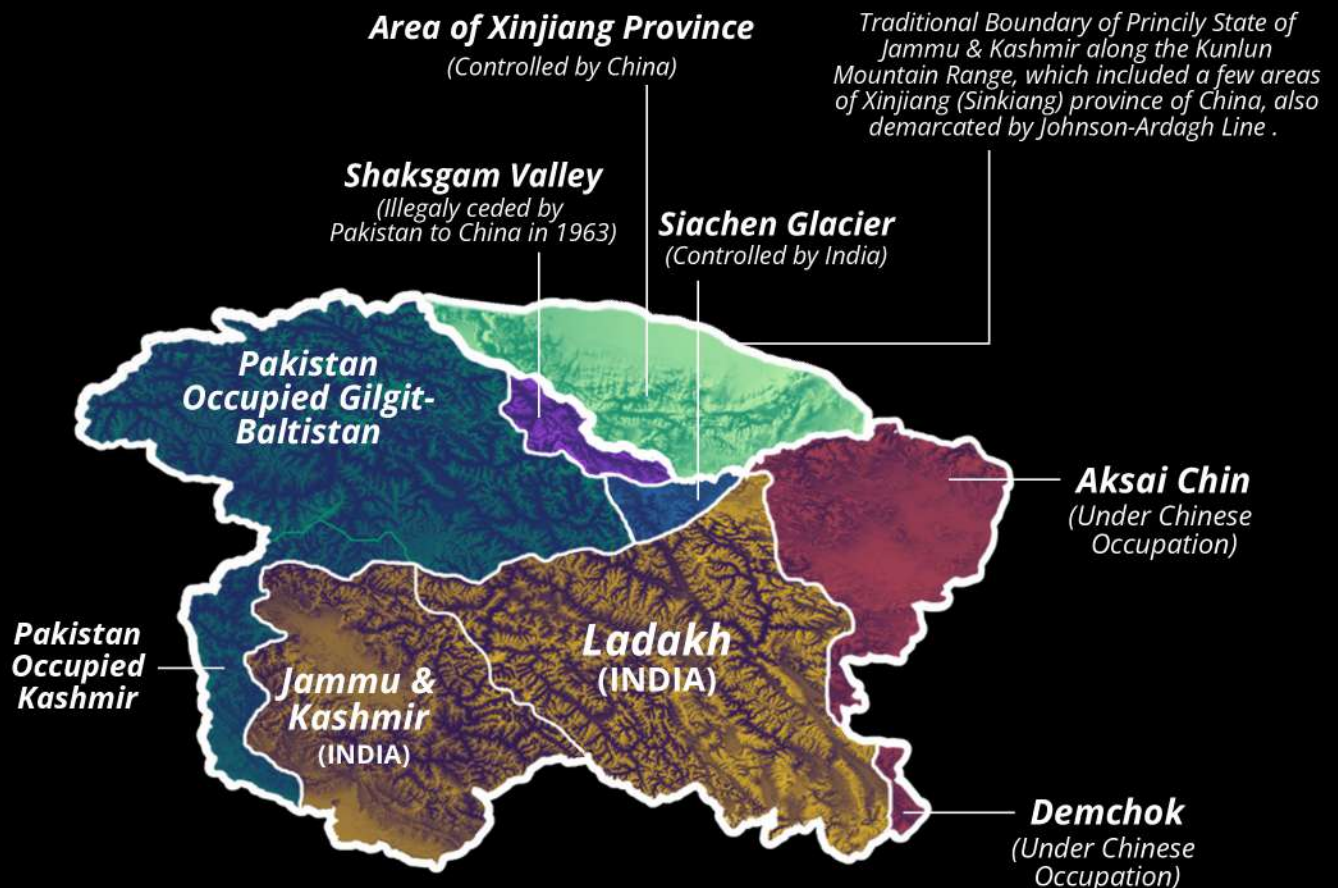
What started as an exercise to demarcate the line turned into an ideological struggle within the policymakers in London with strategists from the Forward School wanting to expand the line as deep as possible to prevent the Russians from carrying out any adventure while the moderates who saw no benefit in building deployments in an inaccessible area of the Himalayas.





The Johnson Line & the MacDonal Line, as the two corresponding boundary commissions produced their reports, were not only arbitrary but also challenging to define on the ground. Hence, the interpretation and the political positioning kept changing as the geopolitical landscape changed.

After India got its independence from the British and the Communists in China formed the People's Republic of China, the two new neighbors were confused as to how to define the boundaries. The Communists were clear that they wanted to amalgamate Tibet into their new state. They laid out military infrastructure in the unoccupied territory and claimed it after their aggression on India in 1962. Hence began a merry go round around the two boundary lines, that has remained unresolved till date.



REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL CONTROL OVER VARIOUS PARTS OF KASHMIR.



MACARTENY-MACDONALD LINE - 1899

(Informally accepted by China as border till 1959)

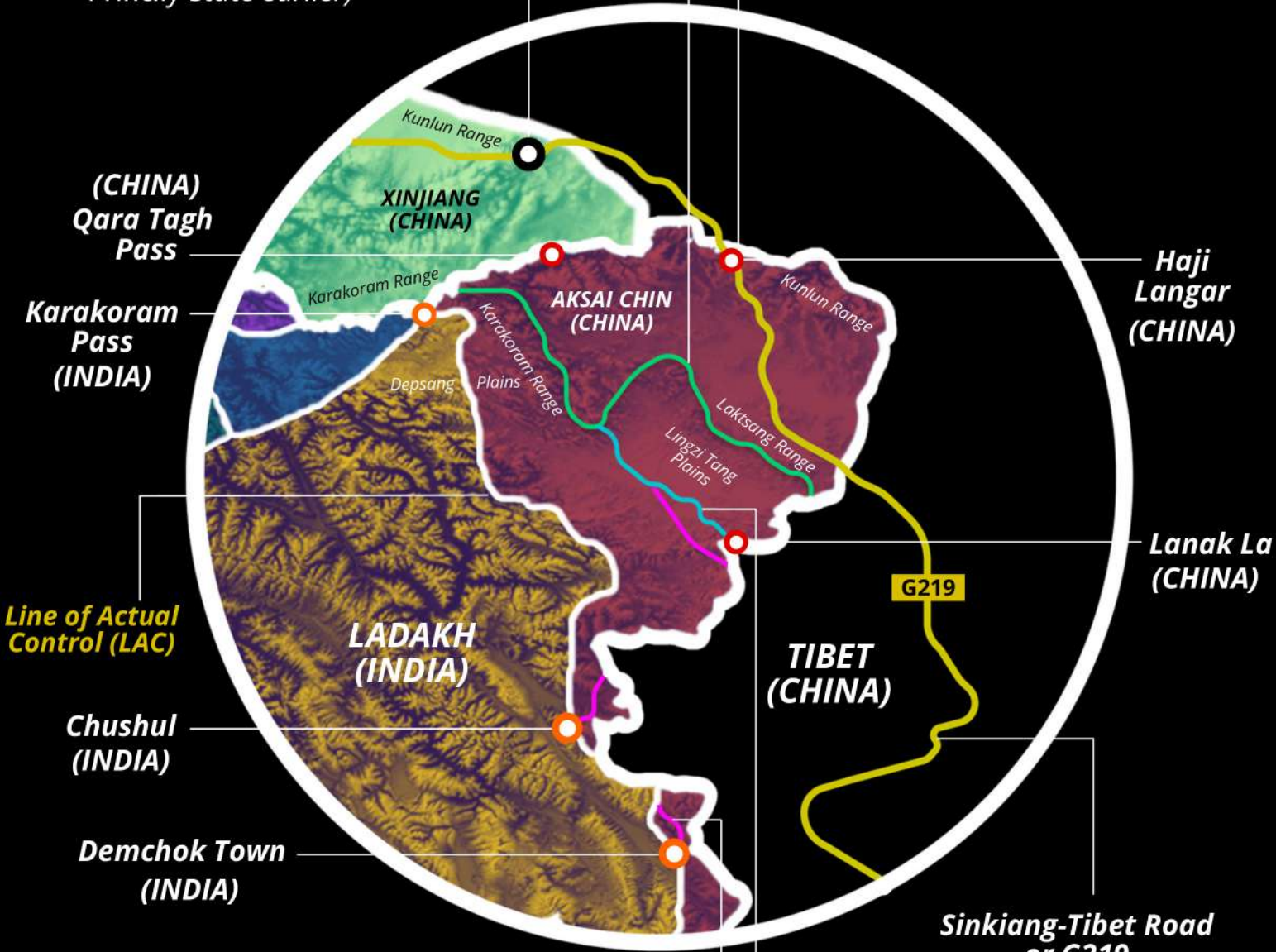
(CHINA)

Shahidulla (Xaidulla)

(Had a post of Kashmir's Princely State earlier)

JOHNSON-ARDAGH LINE

(The forward line was drawn along the Kunlun Mountain range tracing the traditional boundary of the Princely State of Jammu & Kashmir. The line showed Aksai Chin and a few areas of Xinjiang province (Shahidulla & part of Hotan region) of China as part of India. After independence, India accepted this line as its official border with China in Aksai Chin region, but no claim was made on the areas of the Xinjiang region, till the Kunlun mountains. Instead border was moved to Karakoram mountain range, like the other claim lines.)



VANS AGNEW BOUNDARY COMMISSION LINE

(An estimation of Vans Agnew line drawn in 1846, joining Demchok-Chushul-Lanak La and ending at

FOREIGN OFFICE LINE 1873

REPRESENTATION OF VARIOUS BORDERLINES DRAWN ALONG THE INDIA-CHINA BORDER.





In the last decade, there have been five critical border crisis between the two in the order:

- 1. 2013 Depsang Plains*
- 2. 2014 Chumar Sector*
- 3. 2017 Doklam Standoff*
- 4. 2020 Galwan Conflict*
- 5. 2022 Tawang Crisis*

Despite there being over 20 rounds of talks between India and China at the Corps Commander levels, the issue is stuck at the position where India takes the border issue seriously and hence wants to solve it at a political level to explore further opportunities of cooperation whereas the Chinese side is of the view that the border issue is an issue that needs to be negotiated between the militaries and hence, it should not reflect the entire crux of the relationship.



China is constructing a road in a disputed region of Kashmir, close to the Siachen Glacier, which is considered the world's highest battlefield. The road is being built in the Shaksgam Valley, which is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and was ceded to China in 1963. It branches out from Highway G219 in China's Xinjiang region and disappears into the mountains about 50 kilometers north of India's northernmost point in the Siachen Glacier.

The road lies in the Trans-Karakoram Tract, historically part of Kashmir and claimed by India. Despite the abrogation of Article 370, India still considers this region as its territory. This tract, spanning about 5,300 square kilometers, was captured by Pakistan in the 1947 war and later handed over to China in 1963, a move not recognized by India. Moreover, reports suggest increased military cooperation in the region, with Pakistan planning a new road from Muzaffarabad to Mustagh Pass, which could potentially link to China's national highway G219 through the Shaksgam Valley. This raises further concerns for India's security. India has raised its concerns with regards to the infringement by the Sino-Pakistan nexus on India's territorial integrity and sovereignty. This latest development has the potential to jeopardize the Corps Commander level talks that the two Asian Giants are holding since June 2020.



REPRESENTATION OF NEW ROAD BEING BUILT BY CHINA





Newly Constructed Chinese Road in Shaksgam Valley



Newly laid road

(Running parallelly with the Shaksgam River in illegally occupied Shaksgam Valley, the road abruptly ends 50 km before the Indian Border point of Indira Col in the Siachen Glacier)





STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

India and China share a 3,488 km disputed border along the LAC, with multiple flashpoints emerging since the 2020 Galwan Valley incident. The period from 2022 to 2024 saw an intensification of both military and diplomatic activities, as both sides aimed to secure their respective territorial claims while avoiding full-scale conflict. The standoff underscored broader strategic rivalries as India deepened its involvement with Western allies, while China sought to expand its influence across South Asia.

From July 2022 to October 2024, India-China relations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) continued to face heightened tensions due to unresolved boundary disputes, strategic infrastructure development, and frequent military face-offs. Diplomatic engagements provided some respite but failed to produce a lasting solution to the LAC issue. Military posturing and geopolitical alignments, particularly India's engagement with the Quad and China's positioning through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), played key roles in shaping the trajectory of the dispute.





JULY 2022 - OCT 2024

The period was marked by a mix of disengagement efforts in certain areas and escalating tensions in others, notably the Depsang Plains and Arunachal Pradesh. Military infrastructure build-up, border clashes, and evolving regional alliances indicate that the situation is likely to remain volatile in the near future.





- **July 2022:** The 16th round of Corps Commander-level talks resulted in limited progress on disengagement at Gogra-Hot Springs but left unresolved issues in the Depsang Plains and Demchok.
- **September 2022:** Completion of disengagement at Gogra-Hot Springs (Patrolling Point 15). However, the Tawang clash in December revived tensions in Arunachal Pradesh.
- **October – December 2022:** China accelerated infrastructure build-up, including logistics and troop accommodations, along the LAC. The Tawang clash in December marked a significant point of conflict.



- **February 2023:** India initiated high-tech military upgrades along the LAC, deploying advanced surveillance and missile systems in response to Chinese troop fortifications.
- **March 2023:** Diplomatic negotiations continued with the 17th round of Corps Commander-level talks, yielding no breakthrough on the Depsang and Demchok sectors.
- **June 2023:** The 18th round of talks saw further diplomatic engagement but limited progress, as military tensions remained high along critical sectors of the LAC.

- **July 2023:** China and India's foreign ministers met, reflecting a mutual desire to avoid further escalation. However, no significant breakthroughs on the LAC dispute were achieved.
- **August 2023:** Tensions spiked as China expressed concerns over India's military exercises with Quad members, while India fortified its defense mechanisms along the LAC.
- **September 2023:** Satellite imagery showed continued Chinese infrastructure buildup, prompting India to ramp up its own military presence along the LAC.
- **October 2023:** The 19th round of Corps Commander-level talks ended without a concrete agreement. India and China maintained high alert status along the Depsang Plains, where minor skirmishes were reported.



- **January 2024:** Diplomatic efforts intensified as both nations sought to contain military confrontations. India proposed a new round of dialogue focused on disengagement in the Demchok sector, but China remained non-committal.
- **March 2024:** A strategic defense agreement between India and France, involving joint production of military hardware, drew criticism from Beijing, which saw it as a challenge to its dominance in South Asia.
- **April 2024:** Skirmishes near the Tawang region flared again, raising concerns about the stability of the LAC in the eastern sector. India deployed additional forces to the region to prevent escalation.

- **June 2024:** India expanded its cooperation with the Quad, holding naval exercises in the Indian Ocean. This coincided with China conducting military drills in Tibet, signaling a potential strategic standoff between the two regional powers.
- **July 2024:** Amid rising tensions, the 20th round of Corps Commander-level talks took place. Both sides agreed to establish more confidence-building measures (CBMs) in an attempt to prevent future clashes, though ground realities remained unchanged.
- **August 2024:** Intelligence reports suggested increased Chinese military activity near the Aksai Chin region, raising alarms within India's strategic community. India responded by further strengthening its forward bases in Ladakh.
- **September 2024:** India-China relations took a downturn following renewed confrontations near the Depsang Plains. Diplomatic attempts to defuse the situation saw little success, and both sides issued public statements reinforcing their territorial claims.
- **October 2024:** As the situation along the LAC deteriorated, India sought greater collaboration with the Quad for strategic support. The 21st round of talks between India and China began, but tensions remained high with no significant progress in disengagement.





IMPLICATIONS

Escalation Risk at the LAC: The sustained military buildup and lack of resolution in critical areas such as the Depsang Plains and Arunachal Pradesh pose a continued risk of confrontation. Both sides appear prepared for prolonged deployments, signaling that the border dispute is far from resolution.

China's Expansionist Strategy: China's infrastructure projects in Tibet and Aksai Chin, combined with its military exercises, indicate that Beijing views its control over the LAC as integral to its broader strategic interests in South Asia. This has led to China reinforcing its military capabilities in the region, complicating any potential peace initiatives.

India's Strategic Alignment with the Quad: India's deepening ties with the Quad, particularly its military exercises and strategic partnerships, are likely to shift the balance of power in the region. While this provides India with a deterrent against Chinese aggression, it also risks further escalating the situation along the LAC as China views these developments with suspicion.

Diplomatic Fatigue: Despite over 20 rounds of military talks, both sides have failed to achieve any meaningful disengagement in key sectors. Diplomatic efforts have been overshadowed by tactical posturing and strategic distrust, which suggests that the stalemate will continue unless there is a significant geopolitical shift or breakthrough in negotiations.





THE KAZAN SUMMIT

Regional Power Dynamics: *India's engagements with France, the US, and the broader Quad are part of its strategy to counterbalance China's growing influence. China's response has been to accelerate its military readiness along the LAC, indicating that both nations view the LAC dispute as part of a broader strategic rivalry that extends beyond the border.*

India and China have reached a landmark agreement to resolve the ongoing border tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) just ahead of the BRICS summit in Kazan. This deal signifies a pivotal step toward disengagement between the two countries, reducing the chances of further military confrontation in the region. The agreement includes the withdrawal of troops and the restoration of patrol routes along the LAC to pre-2020 conditions. This resolution is a testament to sustained diplomatic efforts by both nations and holds profound geopolitical consequences, particularly impacting the influence of external powers like the U.S. in the region.



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Resolution of Border Dispute: After four years of escalating tensions, with a significant military buildup from both sides in areas such as the Pangong Tso Lake, Galwan Valley, and Gogra-Hot Springs, India and China have agreed to resume pre-2020 patrolling norms along the LAC. As per Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, the disengagement will follow a phased process, focusing on reducing military presence and addressing legacy issues in regions like Depsang Plains and Demchok.

BRICS Context and Diplomatic Success: The timing of the agreement—just before the BRICS summit—is crucial. It highlights the importance of diplomatic and military negotiations, which have been in play since 2020, leading to this breakthrough. This agreement is seen as a strategic victory for both nations, with Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar hailing it as a “positive step” in restoring border peace.

Geopolitical Ramifications: Impact on India-China Relations: The agreement marks a significant thaw in bilateral relations, which had reached their lowest point since the 1962 border war. The resolution indicates a commitment to de-escalation and stabilizing the relationship, reducing the risk of further clashes. Military and diplomatic channels remain open, as both sides aim to navigate complex unresolved issues such as the militarization of the border.



U.S. Efforts Undermined: *The successful negotiation serves as a setback for the U.S. strategy of exploiting the India-China rift to limit Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region. With the two Asian giants now demonstrating improved cooperation, Washington's efforts to divide them and strengthen the Quad as a counterbalance to China's regional ambitions are facing new challenges.*

Russia's Influence: *Russia's role in facilitating India-China dialogue, particularly through multilateral forums like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), has been instrumental in maintaining regional stability. The renewed India-China détente aligns with Russia's broader geopolitical objective of preserving the BRICS framework as a counterbalance to Western hegemony.*

On-Ground Impact and Military Reconfigurations: *Indian and Chinese forces stationed along the LAC have begun initial steps toward disengagement, particularly at Pangong Tso and Galwan Valley, though the areas of Depsang Plains and Demchok remain contested. The immediate thinning of troops will occur as winter approaches, following traditional patterns of withdrawal in high-altitude regions. Both sides remain alert, ensuring local commanders continue dialogue to prevent any flare-ups.*



China's Positioning: China has emphasized the importance of reducing military friction points, and recent meetings between Indian Ambassador to China Pradeep Kumar Rawat and Li Jinsong, Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs, highlight the diplomatic groundwork. The engagement reflects China's broader objective of stabilizing its border regions while maintaining focus on its strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific.

Domestic and Strategic Implications for India: Domestically, the agreement provides political relief for the Indian government, which has faced scrutiny for its handling of the 2020 standoff. Restoring patrol routes to pre-April 2020 conditions marks a political victory, demonstrating the government's resolve in protecting territorial sovereignty while avoiding prolonged military confrontation.

Regional Security: The agreement de-escalates one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the region, contributing to stability along the LAC. However, lingering issues, such as the heavily militarized border and unresolved territorial claims in Arunachal Pradesh, suggest that future tensions may arise if diplomatic progress stalls.

Impact on Global Alliances: The rapprochement between India and China could shift regional dynamics, particularly in the context of multilateral institutions like BRICS and SCO. This development complicates U.S. and Quad strategies in the Indo-Pacific, as India's alignment with China, however temporary, weakens the narrative of the Indo-Pacific as a battleground between democratic and autocratic powers.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Defense Infrastructure: India must continue fortifying its defense capabilities along the LAC, particularly in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, to counter China's infrastructure build-up.

Engaging in Multilateral Diplomacy: India should use its platform within the Quad to build diplomatic pressure on China while maintaining open communication lines to prevent inadvertent escalation.

Expanding Confidence-Building Measures: Both sides should seek to implement more robust CBMs to avoid accidental clashes, particularly in high-risk areas like the Depsang Plains and Tawang.

Strategic Deterrence through Alliances: India's growing alliances with Quad members should focus on enhancing its maritime capabilities, particularly in the Indian Ocean, where China's presence is expanding.



CONCLUSION

India-China relations along the LAC remain highly volatile, with no clear resolution in sight. While diplomatic channels remain open, both nations have reinforced their military positions, and the continued lack of trust suggests that tensions will persist through the medium term. The intersection of global geopolitics, particularly India's role in the Quad and China's Belt and Road Initiative, adds complexity to the LAC dispute.

The India-China agreement to resolve the LAC crisis represents a significant diplomatic achievement that will likely foster a period of reduced tensions between the two powers. While several thorny issues remain unresolved, the current disengagement sets the stage for a new phase in bilateral relations, with broader implications for the global geopolitical landscape, particularly for the U.S., Russia, and regional alliances.

Although patrol routes and positions are being restored, both countries continue to build infrastructure along the LAC, maintaining strategic advantages. The likelihood of military skirmishes will decrease, but the overall militarization of the border persists, warranting continued vigilance.

IND-PRC



THE WAY AHEAD

Multilateralism is something that will shape the destiny of India-China relationship. The baggage of history compiled with the opportunities of the future make this relationship very complex to deal with.

Coordinated efforts at various multilateral institutions in various domains can prove decisive or detrimental, depending on the diplomacy the two countries undertake. Cooperation at multilateral levels of governance will also shape other facets of the relationship, like the Tibet question, the border conundrum, the trade imbalance etc.

At the heart of the India-China relationship lies the question of peaceful coexistence, something that was agreed upon during the signing of the Panchsheel agreement.

Diplomacy is the only answer to the relationship that is destined to define the global strategic balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and beyond throughout the 21st century.





GLOBAL EYE
INTELLIGENCE

FOLLOW US

for more reports!

