

Security council

The question of the Sino-Indian border disputes



Forum	Security Council
Issue:	The question of the Sino-Indian border disputes
Student Officer:	Julia Collier
Position:	Deputy president

Introduction

East Asia underwent a multitude of significant transitions in the span of the first half of the 20th century. The Qing dynasty fell in 1911 at the hands of the Xinhai Revolution and subsequently, the Republic of China was established for just a few decades before the Chinese Civil War led to the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The introduction of this communist state was predated only two years by the independence of India from Britain in 1947. The aftermath of such a rapid evolution in a concentrated area manifested itself in the longest-lasting territorial dispute in history.

Sino-Indian relations have faced extreme lows with very few, but still notable, highs. After the establishment of the PRC, the two parties were close international partners. They saw prospects of, vaguely, a collaborative future. This friendship was short-lived. After China's annexation of a semi autonomous Tibet, India and China signed an agreement to respect one another's territorial claims. However, the geography of the shared region proved this to be a difficult promise to maintain. Patrolling troops began to confront one another at the border, being pushed close to one another by natural landmarks. Additionally, the vague and indefinite demarcations of the borders paired with the rapid evolution of East-Asia made for a blurred line between the two countries that shows no sign of being clearly defined in the near future.

Definition of Key Terms

Line of Actual Control (LAC)

The Line of Actual Control is the line which defines the border between India and China. It is divided in three sectors; Western, Middle, and Eastern.





Figure 1: Map of LAC & disputed regions along it

Western Sector

The Western sector is approximately 2150 km and separates disputed area Ladakh from China's Xinjiang Province. The Western sector is home to one of the greatest areas of contention along the border; Aksai Chin. There have been two proposals for this sector of the border; the Johnson Line and the Macartney-MacDonald Line.

Middle sector

The Middle Sector is approximately 625 km and is marked by a watershed. It instigates little contention between India and China.

Eastern sector

The Eastern Sector is approximately 1,140 km and is marked by the proposed McMahon Line. Arunachal Pradesh is the area of greatest contention in this sector.

The Johnson Line

The Johnson Line was drawn in 1865 as a proposed division of land between India and China in the Western Sector. It was not well-received by China because it allocated Aksai Chin to India. During the 1950s, China neglected the line by placing a road through the desired region of Aksai Chin. India defends this line.



The Ardagh-Johnson Line

The Ardagh-Johnson Line is a modification of the Johnson Line as a more manageable border in the case of an attack. It was proposed in 1897.

Macartney-MacDonald Line

The Macartney-MacDonald Line is an alternative division of land in the Western Sector of the Sino-Indian border. The main difference between this line and the Johnson Line is the placement of Aksai Chin; the Macartney-MacDonald Line allocates sovereignty of Aksai Chin to China. China defends this line.

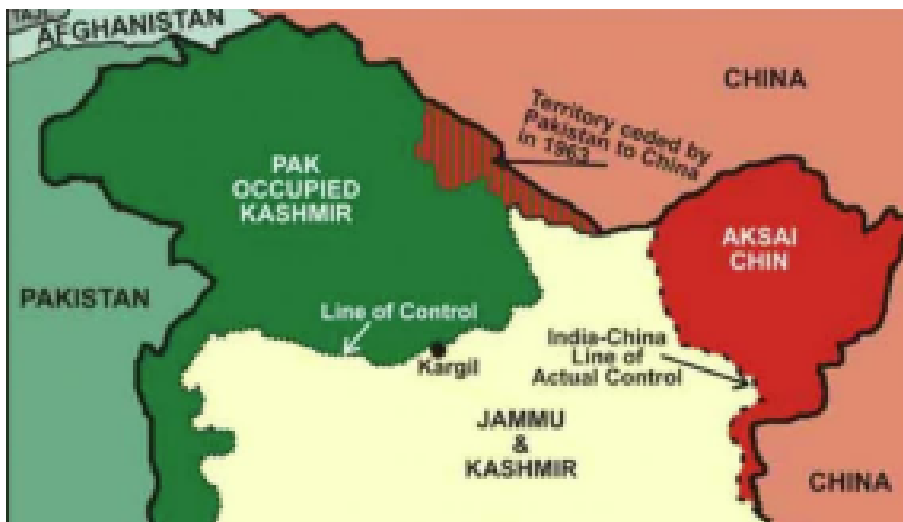


Figure 1: Disputed area between Johnson and Macartney-MacDonald lines

The McMahon Line

The McMahon Line marks the division of land in the Eastern Sector of the Sino-Indian border. The main region of contention along this line is Arunachal Pradesh, which currently resides as a state in India. The signatories of the convention which enabled the line were India and Tibet, though Tibet had de facto independence under the suzerainty of China that it lost decades later, thus invalidating the legality of the line in China's opinion.





Figure 3: Map of McMahon Line

Indo-Pacific

The term *Indo-Pacific* refers to the region of land between the Indian and Pacific oceans.

The Qing Dynasty

The government which predated the Republic of China prior to the Xinhai Revolution of 1911.

Chinese People's Liberation Army (CPLA)

The primary military body of the People's Republic of China.

De facto Independence

De facto independence refers to a state whose sovereignty is not recognised meaningfully by much of the world but falls under the suzerainty of a parent sovereign.

Suzerain State

The parent state of a semi-autonomous or de facto state.

Confidence-building measures (CBMs)

Measures taken on either side of a conflict to prevent the likelihood of military involvement or otherwise conflict exacerbation.



Skirmish

An unprecedented or sudden outburst of conflict between troops.

Status quo

The natural state of a region without having been tampered with.

General Overview

The heart of the conflict lies in the lack of specificity of the original border. Once India gained independence and the Republic of China— and later the People’s Republic of China— was established, it was not explicitly confirmed how the division of land would translate to these new definitions of East Asia.



Figure 4: Map of disputed regions on Sino-Indian border

Much of the area along the border is sparsely populated. The confrontations are enabled by the geography of the region separating the two powers; mountains, rivers, and other natural landmarks force patrolling troops to encounter one another at various positions along the border.



The main areas of contention in the Western Sector

Along the Western Sector, the most problematic region is Aksai Chin, which is also the main point of differentiation between the two proposed lines for the sector; the Johnson Line, which allocates sovereignty of Aksai Chin to India, and the Macartney-MacDonald Line, which allocates sovereignty of Aksai Chin to China. Predictably, India considers the Johnson Line correct and China considers the Macartney-MacDonald Line correct.

The Macartney-MacDonald Line was initially proposed to the Qing government in 1899 by British India because of the natural boundary that the Karakoram Mountains created, which offered British India a convenient defence against Russia in the case of an invasion. The Qing government did not respond. British India used both lines back and forth up until India's independence.

The Johnson Line was employed again after the first world war, but switched out in 1927 for the convenience of the aforementioned natural boundary on the Macartney-Macdonald line. Though Britain was opting for the Johnson Line again toward the end of its sovereignty over India, this was not formally discussed or demarcated. The switching between the two lines left a confused border with various cartographic interpretations by the time of India's independence.

Independent India utilised the Johnson Line, as confirmed by the Prime Minister's motion to reinforce this in maps. However, the Johnson Line had not originally been presented to China, since the (fallen) Qing dynasty had been the one to accept it.



Figure 5: Map of conflict region, Arunachal Pradesh



The newly-established People's Republic of China neglected the Johnson Line with construction on a road through Aksai Chin in the mid-to-late 50s. India learned about the road toward the end of the decade and saw it in Chinese maps. The two parties disagreed on China's right to the area; India argued that Aksai Chin had always been housed by the Indian Ladakh region, China argued that its government had only ever proposed the Macartney-MacDonald Line, which placed the disputed region under its jurisdiction. This particular tension reached its climax in 1959 with a skirmish along the Kongka La mountains in India's Ladakh. Nine Indian policemen were killed.

The next significant clash, and the gravest thus far, was the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The China People's Liberation Army (CPLA) invaded Ladakh in November. The war was short-lived and resulted in a harsh defeat of India when the PRC ceased fire in October of the same year. The conflict killed approximately 1,400 Indian soldiers and half as many Chinese.

The main areas of contention in the Eastern Sector

Along the Eastern Sector, the most problematic region is Arunachal Pradesh. The line utilised in this region is the McMahon Line, drawn and agreed upon at the Simla Conference between 1913 and 1914.

China did not agree to this line, but Tibet did. Tibet was autonomous at the time, but China disagreed with the validity of the convention because of its suzerainty over Tibet. The convention saw substantial Tibetan territory resigned to India, such as the Tawang Tract, but China, to date, does not recognise this. Even decades later once China annexed Tibet in 1951, its arguments against India's justification of the McMahon Line as well as the questions of India's jurisdiction over regions that were historically Tibetan, remained.

Half a decade after the Sino-Indian War of 1962 over in the Western Sector, India began construction on a fence along its proclaimed border at Nathu La, which instigated a series of skirmishes between August and October of 1967, not all of which excluded artillery.

Roughly a decade passed without a death along on the border caused by the dispute since 1975 until a conflict arose at Sumdorong Chu. In 1986, Indian patrollers noticed Chinese structures and members of the PLA on their territory in the Tawang region, which had been claimed by India since 1951. The conflict festered as China deployed more soldiers and began construction on permanent structures and helipads. China's persistence in the region even after India's proposal of a



truce led India to initiate Operation Falcon, which consisted of the airlifting of 50,000 soldiers into Sumdorong Chu. The operation was followed by India's Chequerboard Exercise, which was an



exhibition of Indian power and efficiency in order to demonstrate the military progress that it had made since its defeat in 1962. It consisted of ten divisions of men, all maintained and supplied by the various Indian aircrafts involved in the exercise. The purpose was to demonstrate to China that they could not repeat their past successes. The exercise, though elaborate, was not meant to be a physical manifestation of Indian power, but a

visual and cognitive understanding of it.

Arunachal Pradesh, the area of most contention in the Eastern Sector, was declared a state in 1987, which exacerbated the conflict at Sumdorong Chu. However, China, taken aback by the capability of India's army, agrees to elapse the conflict over one of the many border talks which were taking place simultaneously with the Sumdorong conflict.

Recent developments

Between 1993 and 2013, India and China continued to conduct border discussions and decided to share mutual control over the LAC in the areas of most contention.

Besides a skirmish in 2017, Sino-Indian relations strengthened significantly in the second half of the 2010s. China invested in India and became its largest trading partner. However, a recent Indian distrust in China has sprung from the COVID-19 pandemic. The manner in which the PRC handled the crisis alongside the lack of transparency exhibited by various Chinese establishments has alarmed India of its over-dependence on the state with which it has shared a historically tumultuous relationship. In 2020, the growing partnership faced yet another conflict.



Since 1987, the most notable skirmish was in 2020. In May of 2020, China sent soldiers to Ladakh to confront Indian construction efforts. Weeks of skirmishes followed and although artillery was not deployed during the confrontations, 20 Indian soldiers and 4 Chinese were killed.

Major Parties Involved

The People's Republic of China (PRC)

Since its establishment in 1949 subsequent to the Chinese Civil War, the People's Republic of China has been both a formidable opponent and partner to India. China has demonstrated its steadfast vision of prosperity and has been questioned time and time again for its transparency in the question of the Sino-Indian border. China has expressed its strong desire for the Aksai Chin region and Arunachal Pradesh among other areas of lower contention. China's defence of its chase after land often bases itself in geography. An argument that it has withheld since the early 20th century relies on the division of East Asia marked by the Himalayas. China has been suspected to be moving toward a sinocentric Asia, which India, among others, has argued is the reason for China's stubbornness on its ideal Sino-Indian border. A sporadic pattern of sudden military outbursts has been established within the dispute as a whole and China's formidable military and vast global connections takes some accountability for it. However, China, like its counterpart in the matter, have expressed a reluctance toward the outbreak of war or the resorting to non-diplomatic means of settling the dispute. China's global influence is one of its most daunting characteristics for an opponent like India. The initiation of the BRI in 2013 is evidence of China's burgeoning savviness for even more global influence than that which it has acquired thus far.

India

British India has informed much of Independent India's claims on its land. Since its independence in 1947, India has continued to defend the regions over which Britain used to hold sovereignty. Besides this historical influence on India's motivations, geography also comes into play. Its claims on Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh are largely based on agricultural convenience and military advantage in the case of an outbreak of war. Because of China's daunting power over the world beyond just Asia, India's insistence on the sparsely populated regions under dispute refers to the fear of China's expansion and acquisition of power. India has found common ground with the United States of America in its reluctance to Chinese prosperity.



Though China has often claimed a reactionary stance and has accused India of instigating many of the skirmishes seen along the border, India has arguably taken a less aggressive stance in the matter. This could be a consequence of China's tendency to hold its cards close to its chest, India's inferior military, or a genuine desire for more diplomatic means on India's side. However, the reason is unclear because of the conflicting accusations passed between the parties.

Tibet

Tibet has met the brunt of this border dispute for decades. It has fallen under Chinese sovereignty since the 12th century, but received de facto independence in 1912 that lasted until 1951, when China reclaimed total sovereignty.. Tibetan separatism has formed a large part of the nation and collaborated with anti-Chinese sentiment in the late 1950s to result in the Tibetan uprising as a response to the potential arrest of the Dalai Lama. This example evidences Tibetan agency even under Chinese sovereignty. It lies at the edge of China and thus meets many of the ramifications of the tumultuous Sino-Indian relationship.

Bhutan

Being surrounded by China and India has made Bhutan a breeding ground for Sino-Indian skirmishes. Bhutan is a close ally to India; the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1948, which is still viable as evidenced recent adjustments in 2007. India has provided extensive economic and military support to Bhutan. The alliance is long-lasting and very strong. In 1962, Bhutan allowed Indian soldiers into its territory to confront Chinese efforts to re-establish the LAC between India and China. The relationship between Bhutan and China is troubled because of the close relation the former shares with India and the disagreement over the China-Bhutan border.

The Russian Federation

Russia has demonstrated a recent interest in defusing the tension between India and China. After the 2020 skirmishes, Moscow offered to mediate discussions between the two parties and since 1998 has expressed a potential desire for a coalition between the India, China, and Russia. Russia has been a significant supplier of weaponry to India and demonstrated no reason for distrust in recent years. The federation demonstrates no interest in straying from neutrality in the issue, but because of the scale and longevity of the dispute as well as the power of either nation, it is highly unlikely that Russia will play a notable role in the elapsing of the issue.



The United States of America (USA)

The USA has not played a large role on the grounds of the conflict, but it has demonstrated a strengthening relationship with India in recent years. Much of their promising partnership is due to a mutual resistance toward Chinese power. They also relate to the prospects of global prosperity, especially pertaining to economic sectors. The relationship between the two powers currently only shows signs of strengthening as the United States considers its trade relationship with India.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)

Recent efforts by UNODA have consisted in advocating for the minimal amount of violence possible along the border. In 2020 after the most violent confrontation since 1975, this department of the UN has been vocal about its support for the de-escalation tactics on either side of the matter and it continually encourages diplomatic means of settling the dispute. UNODA's position will likely not change through the course of the dispute unless one party exhibits more violence than the other, which has not often been the case in the history of the disagreement.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
1865	The Johnson Line is drawn.
1897	The Ardagh-Johnson Line is drawn.
1899	The Macartney-Mac-Donald Line is presented to the Qing government.
1912	The Republic of China is established.
1912	Tibet gains de facto independence.
1913-1914	The Simla Conference takes place; the McMahon Line is drawn.
1947, August	India gains independence.
1949, August	India and Bhutan sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.
1949, October	The People's Republic of China is established.
1951, February	India takes Tibet's Tawang Tract.
1951, May	The PRC annexes Tibet.
1954	A Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence Agreement is established between India and China.



1959	9 Indian policemen die in a skirmish at Kongka La.
1962, October 20	The CPLA invades India's Ladakh. The Sino-Indian war of 1962 begins.
1962, November 21	China announces a ceasefire.
1967, August 20	India begins to fence the border at Nathu La.
1967, August 23	A Chinese troop protests India's building efforts.
1967, September 7	A hand-to-hand conflict escalates to stone-throwing.
1967, September 11	Skirmish at Nathu La. Artillery is employed on either side.
1967, October 1	Skirmish at Cho La.
1975	4 Indian soldiers are shot by a Chinese troop in India's Arunachal.
1981	Discussion: India and China agree to maintain the status quo of the border.
1982	Discussion: India and China agree that the border discussions should concern only one sector at a time.
1985	Discussion: China reclaims that the natural boundaries of the LAC are the rightful ones.
1986, June	Indian patrol notices Chinese structures near the Tawang region.
1986, July	Discussion: India proposes a truce. China does not accept.
1986, August	China establishes more soldiers and buildings.
1986, October	India initiates Operation Falcon.
1987, January	The Chequerboard Exercise is initiated.
1987, February	Arunachal Pradesh is declared an Indian state.
1987, May	The Indian foreign Minister visits Beijing to claim India's desire for peace.
1987, August	Discussion: The ongoing border talks result in an agreement to end the confrontation on the Sumdotong Chu.
1988	Discussion: India and China mutually recognize the necessity for minimal military contact along the LAC.
1993 - 2013	A series of agreements allocates rights over the LAC to both India and China.
2013, April - May	A standoff in the Depsang Plains ensues (no reported deaths).
2013, October	China establishes its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
2015	Another confrontation at the Depsang Plain ensues (no reported deaths).
2017	China begins constructing a road that would enable access to busiest commercial and military route between regions of India.
2017	Bhutan allows the Indian military into its territory to stop construction. India and China stand off for months with no reported deaths.



2020, March	COVID-19 spreads globally.
2020, May	Many skirmishes ensue in Ladakh.
2021, January	A skirmish ensues on the border between Bhutan and Nepal.
2021	China establishes a village near the Tibetan border.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Please do use either British or American spelling (and be consistent) throughout your Research Report. When listing past UN Resolutions, it is suggested that you make use of bullet points and the specified format below:

- Simla Convention, 3 July 1913
- Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, 9 August 1949
- Seventeen Point Agreement, 23 May 1951
- Agreement on Trade and Intercourse, 29 April 1954
- Since the 2020 skirmishes, UNODA has encouraged diplomatic means of settlement and advocated for peace.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Various lines have been proposed, but both India and China are persistent in maintaining their visions of the border. Peace treaties have been signed to facilitate other interactions between or involving the nations and diplomatic means of settlement have been advocated for by either side, but the conflict has festered for centuries with no sign of ending soon. Since the conflict has lasted for so long, attempts to solve it have mainly been individual steps that have not had the momentum needed to move to the next step. Some of these steps include the aforementioned prior attempts to



incite peace, the alternate line proposals, and smoothing over Sino-Indian relations outside of the border dispute. Though some attempted solutions have seen short-lived improvements in the situation, none have proven to be effective enough to elapse the centuries-long disagreement.

Possible Solutions

Enforcing more line divisions upon either side will definitely cause conflict. Aligning with any of the existing lines (Johnson, Macartney-MacDonald, McMahon) is not neutral. For such a longlasting conflict, the best way to go about a permanent solution is to stray away from what has been tried over and over. Keeping the peace between the two powers is foundational to the effectiveness of any solution.

In alignment with UNODA's efforts, promises of peace create the most space for conflict resolution. Mediation and peace treaties that propose CBMs are effective ways of creating this space. The strongest episodes in the Sino-Indian relationship between have been in times of minimal conflict at the border and significant economic collaboration. The strengthening of the relationship between China and India off of the border may assist in the willingness to comply on the border. Similarly, confidence in the trust between the nations will facilitate the acceptance contributions from either side.

Regulating the means of patrolling or reinforcing the definition of a status quo are possible ways of preventing conflict but both run the risk of causing more harm than good without explicitness and neutrality.

The fallacies of past solutions have often lied in vagueness. Explicit demarcation of the border is a non-negotiable necessity to relief from the conflict.



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