

# India and China Border issues discussed on the sidelines of SCO summit

June 20, 2019

## Manifest pedagogy:

SCO summit happened recently. Many issues of regional interest were discussed at the forum. The entire topic needs to be studied from the following dimensions

1. SCO summit and important decisions
2. Importance of SCO for India
3. Bilateral issues like border problems between India and China(dealt with in the present article)

## **In news**

Recently honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi had meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) SCO Summit in Bishkek and discussed the full spectrum of bilateral relations.

## **Placing it in syllabus**

India and it's neighbourhood relations

## **Static dimensions**

History of border problems

## **Current dimensions**

- Attempts by both Governments to solve them
- Impact of the border issues
- Decisions at the SCO summit,2019 at Bishkek
- Sino Indian bilateral trade

## Content

History of Sino-Indian border issues:

India, following Independence, believed it had inherited firm boundaries from the British, but this was contrary to China's view. China felt the British had left behind a disputed legacy on the boundary between the two newly formed republics. The 3,488-km length border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout and there is no mutually agreed Line of Actual Control.(LAC)



The India-China border is divided into three sectors, viz. Western, Middle and Eastern.

**Western Sector** – dispute pertains to the **Johnson Line** proposed by the British in the 1860s that extended up to the Kunlun Mountains and put Aksai Chin in the then princely state of Jammu and Kashmir(or the Chinese province of Xinjiang). Independent India used the Johnson Line and claimed Aksai Chin as its own. However China stated that it had never acceded to the Johnson Line.

**Middle Sector** – the dispute is a minor one and is the only one where India and China have exchanged maps on which they broadly agree.

**Eastern Sector** – dispute is over the **MacMahon Line**, (formerly referred to as the North East Frontier Agency, and now called Arunachal Pradesh) which was part of the 1914 Simla Convention between British India and Tibet, an agreement rejected by China. Till the 1960s, China controlled Aksai Chin in the West while India controlled the boundary up to the McMahon Line in the East.

In 1960, based on an agreement between Nehru and Zhou Enlai, Chinese minister, discussions held by Indian and Chinese

officials in order to settle the boundary dispute failed.

The 1962 Sino-Indian War was fought in both of these areas. An agreement to resolve the dispute was concluded in 1996, including "confidence-building measures" (CBM) and the informal cease-fire line between India and China was officially accepted as the 'Line of Actual Control' in a bilateral agreement. In 2006, the Chinese ambassador to India claimed that all of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory. In 2014, China granted stapled visas to Indians from Arunachal Pradesh.

In April 2013, as Chinese troops established a camp in the Daulat Beg Oldi sector, 10 km on their side of the Line of Actual Control, India retaliated by setting up camps on its side. Both sides pulled back soldiers in May and the tension got diffused.

In September 2014, India and China had a standoff at the LAC, when Indian workers began constructing a canal in the border village of Demchok, and Chinese civilians protested with the army's support. It ended after about three weeks, when both sides agreed to withdraw troops. In September 2015, Chinese and Indian troops faced-off in the Burtse region of northern Ladakh after Indian troops dismantled a disputed watchtower the Chinese were building close to the mutually-agreed patrolling line.

#### Recent Doklam Military Standoff, 2017

In June, 2017 a military standoff occurred between India and China in the disputed territory of Doklam (near the Doka La pass), which is claimed by both China and India's ally Bhutan. Chinese with heavy road building equipment began constructing a road in the disputed area. This resulted in Indian intervention of China's road construction, based on India's **Friendship Treaty** which makes it mandatory for Bhutan to take India's guidance on foreign policy. China's claim on

Doklam is based on the 1890 Convention of Calcutta between China and Britain for which Bhutan was not a party.



India's Foreign Ministry had claimed that China's road construction had security implications for India. The face-off at Doklam had also underscored the **vulnerability of Siliguri Corridor**, a 22 km-long narrow stretch linking the Northeast with the rest of India. Thus, in confronting China in Doklam, the Indian Army was protecting vital Indian interests more than enforcing the India-Bhutan security pact. In August, 2017, both side troops pulled out of Doklam and China halted road construction in Doklam,

Attempts by both Governments to solve them:

- CBMs on the border with bilateral agreements were signed in 1993, 1996, 2005, 2012 and 2013.
- The Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question was signed in 2005.
- During Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003, the two sides agreed on the appointment of special representatives for boundary settlement consultations.
- Both the 1993 Agreement on Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC and the 1996 Agreement on CBMs on the India-China Border Areas talk about measures to prevent air intrusions along the LAC.
- Agreement on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs was signed in 2012, which provided for a mechanism to strengthen exchanges and cooperation between military personnel and administrative bodies in respective areas.
- The Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) signed by the two countries in 2013 was aimed at streamlining

channels of communication in case of a faceoff.

A **five-layer mechanism for communication** between the two sides agreed upon is:

1. flag meetings between border personnel on the LAC
2. meetings between senior officers of China's Military Regions and India's Army Commands
3. periodic meetings at the ministry level
4. meetings of the Working Mechanism
5. apex India-China Annual Defence Dialogue.

Impact of border issues:

Chinese and Indian competition on their shared Himalayan border is creating a slow-moving environmental catastrophe. During the past 20 years, first China and then India have increased Himalayan degradation by building large-scale mines and hydroelectric dams in this sensitive region. These projects have not been profitable or environmentally sound, but they have solidified state control by entrenching populations, upgrading transport networks paving way to competitive infrastructure development.

Despite growing economic and strategic ties, there are several hurdles for India and the PRC to overcome. India faces trade imbalance heavily in some favour of China. As the two countries have failed to resolve their border dispute there are reported Chinese military incursions into Indian territory. Both countries have steadily established military infrastructure along border areas.

The growing alignment of interest among three democracies – India, the U.S. and Japan has become a source for Chinese insecurity. China has expressed concerns about Indian military and economic activities in the disputed South China Sea. China-Pakistan strategic cooperation and China's Belt and Road initiative has made India uneasy.

## Belt and Road initiative:

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global development strategy adopted by the Chinese government involving infrastructure development and investments in 152 countries and international organisations in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. "Belt" refers to the overland routes for road and rail transportation, called "the Silk Road Economic Belt" and "road" refers to the sea routes or the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. India has refused to endorse BRI since beginning as it has raised concerns about the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which comprises major part of the project, passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). New Delhi has always maintained that CPEC will have serious security implications for India as it includes highways that could facilitate the rapid movement of Pakistani troops.

## Decisions at the SCO summit, 2019 at Bishkek:

The meeting between the two leaders at Bishkek on the sidelines of SCO summit has been described as **"extremely fruitful"**. The meeting came a month after , **the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee** of the powerful UN Security Council designated JeM chief Azhar as a global terrorist.

The informal Wuhan summit of 2018 had been largely credited to have turned around the bilateral ties between two countries by the Doklam standoff. In Bishkek President Xi confirmed his readiness to visit India in 2019 for the next informal summit. The two sides have agreed to celebrate the 70th anniversary of their diplomatic ties in a "fitting manner" by holding 70 events, 35 each in both countries.

Both countries have agreed to deepen cooperation by properly handling differences and have called for strengthening CBMs to maintain stability at the border. Regarding boundary issue China has said that meeting of the

Special Representatives on the boundary issue should be made good use of. Xi called India and China to uphold free trade, multilateralism and the right of developing countries to legitimate development thus deepening mutual trust.

Xi gave a call to India to expand cooperation channels, by carrying out cooperation in investment, expansion of common interests, and jointly promoting regional connectivity, including the development of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) so as to promote mutual cooperation and common development. He emphasised that by working together, China and India will contribute to peace, stability and prosperity of Asia and the world at large.

India- China bilateral trade relations:

China and India are the two most populous countries and fastest growing major economies in the world having cultural, economic and religious ties since ancient times. Inspire of military conflicts, since the late 1980s, both countries have successfully rebuilt diplomatic and economic ties. The bilateral trade crossed USD 95 billion in 2018 and is set to cross USD 100 billion in 2019. According to Commerce ministry data, China saw its trade surplus with India go down from \$59.3 billion to \$57.4 billion in 2018. Data shows India's exports to China for 2018 showed a rise of 30.4 per cent over the previous year. India has lot of opportunities in boosting its exports to China by leveraging the USA protectionist policies against China. India and China are members of the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement and are negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade pact with 14 others. Both are members of International forums like SCO, BRICS, AIIB.

**Territorial integrity and national sovereignty** are two subject matters that any country finds difficult to compromise on, including an authoritarian China. Finding a 'political' solution within the ambit of the "**Panchsheel**" – the Five

Principles of Peaceful Coexistence is very much needed. Given China's push for BRI and given that its CPEC project has already affected India's sovereignty claims in certain parts of Kashmir, it is incumbent upon India to bring the settlement of the India-China border issue to the forefront of its relationship with China. Twenty-first century Asia is multi-polar and multi-aligned and mutual trust and cooperation between the two major players is the key to maintain regional peace and stability.