

# UNDERSTANDING SINO-INDIA DISPUTE

Abdul Waheed Parry



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 Analysis

One of the bloodiest encounters in decades between the Chinese and Indian armies along the disputed border in the Himalayas took the lives of 20 Indian soldiers without any exchange of gunfire. The soldiers from the two side fashioned weapons from what they could find in the desolate landscape, some 14,000 feet above sea level. Soldiers from India and China high above the Galwan valley engaged in hand-to-hand fighting for many hours. Some Indian soldiers died after falling into the river in the valley below. Others were beaten to death. The scuffle left 20 Indian troops dead while it remains unclear if there were Chinese casualties. The clash on 15 June 2020 was a result of months of mounting tension and years of dispute between the two nuclear-armed rivals in the region. The animosity between the two states is still happening even after one century.

## Brief Account of India-China Rivalry

The conflict stretches back to 1914 the least, when representatives from Britain, the People's Republic of China, and Tibet met to negotiate a treaty that would determine the status of Tibet and effectively settle the borders between China and British India. China refused to sign any deal. But Britain and Tibet signed a treaty establishing what would be called the McMahon Line, named after a British colonial official, Henry McMahon, who proposed the border. China has never accepted this border.

In 1947, India became an independent state. Two years later, the Chinese revolutionary Mao Zedong founded the People's Republic of China. Tensions rose throughout the 1950's regarding the border dispute between the two countries.



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There were several failed attempts of peaceful negotiation. By 1962, a war broke out. It lasted for one month but resulted in more than 1,000 Indian deaths and over 3,000 Indians taken as prisoners. By November 1962, China declared a cease-fire, redrawing the border with the name Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Tensions rose again in 1967 along two mountain-passes, Nathu La and Cho La. The clashes in September and October 1967 in those passes would later be considered the second all-out war between China and India.

In 1987, a large number of Indian troops and their equipment arrived next to China's outposts at the disputed border, shocking Chinese commanders. China responded by advancing towards the Line of Actual Control. Later, both India and China de-escalated, and the crisis was averted. In 2013, a Chinese platoon erected a camp near Daulat Beg Oldi at LAC. India soon followed, setting up their own base less than 1,000 feet away. Both camps were later equipped with troops and heavy artilleries.

Though both sides agreed to dismantle encampments, disputes about the location of the Line of Actual Control persisted.

In June 2017, China set to work building a road in the Doklam Plateau, an area of the Himalayas controlled not by India, but by its ally Bhutan. This led to another faceoff between the two nuclear-armed states.

In May 2020, clashes broke out several times. China bolstered its forces with dump trucks, excavators, troop carriers, artillery, and armored vehicles. This time it was clear that this could be the most serious series of clashes between the two states since 2017. It actually proved an indication of a deadly confrontation between the two rivals. It was the worst clash in decades on the disputed India-China border killing at least 20 Indian troops with no report of casualty on the Chinese side.

## The Other Side of the Story

Analysts view that the recent Sino-India clash stemmed from India's decision last year to alter the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir. Many say that Beijing has been compelled to be involved in the Kashmir dispute. Deputy Director of the Institute of South Asian studies at the Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) Wang Shida argues, "India has, since last August, taken constant actions to unilaterally change the status quo of Kashmir and continued to exacerbate regional tensions." He further explains that "This forced China into the Kashmir dispute, stimulated China and Pakistan to take counter-actions on the Kashmir issue, and dramatically increased the difficulty in resolving the border issue between China and India".

The other side of the story may help us understand the real reasons behind the fresh faceoff. China is seen as the second pole in the new bipolar world. Chinese leadership wants to convey the message that they are no longer the "rising China" but a global superpower; and it is a ripe time for China to claim its position in the global distribution of power. By confronting India, the only 'to be used' ally of the United States in the region, China is stating its position clearly. Thus the current border standoff must be understood more as global geopolitics than as a border dispute. The crisis must be seen as part of superpower gameplay in the much-talked "New Cold War". The blinded support of the United States to its ally India is the main reason for India's aggression within and outside its borders. Whether it is the case of unilateral constitutional amendments changing the status of Kashmir or the use of brutal force against minorities and stripping of citizenship of Muslims in India, India is aggressively dealing with all its neighbors, bullying them and taking advantage of their weaknesses. By confronting India, China wants to convey a message to the United States.

India has received an undue support from the United States during both the 2017 Doklam standoff and the current crisis. There is a cry in the United States that the U.S. must develop a deep strategic alliance with India. Many Western scholars think that an economic and defense-oriented alliance with India will safeguard U.S.' hidden interests in the region and will block China's influence in Asia.

A superficial look over the situation and on the emerging U.S.-India cooperation may seem as an improvement to India's position in the region but will put India in a difficult situation. Times have changed completely now. The 'New Cold War' would be completely different from the Cold War of the previous century. The United States has lost all its fame and reputation, and no longer enjoys the status of a hegemon. Its position as the leader of the international order has long been challenged. Most of its partners no longer see it as a reliable ally. This cooperation with a 'falling world power' will only prove fatal

to any 'unlucky' ally such as India. It would be wise for India to handle its bilateral issues with its neighbors with much care without falling prey to the costly U.S. friendship.

## **Tail Piece**

It is high time for India to review its domestic and foreign policies. The Hindu nationalist agendas could only further weaken the country. India's economy has been worse hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Any military adventure will prove deadly to the already ailing Indian economy and dying Indian Democracy. Handling the current standoff wisely would be strategically beneficial for India. By playing in the hands of the United States, India would offend China and its strategic space in the region. India will simply fall prey in the present crisis as a loser in the 'New Cold War' between the United States and China. It would be better for India to seriously try to settle the Kashmir dispute and wisely attempt to handle all its regional disputes bilaterally.

