

Cycles of Thaw & Tension: Assessing India-China Political Relations & Conflict Management in the Post-Cold War Period

Mani Bhushan Singh
BA (Hons), MA, PhD (Political Science)

Abstract

Post-Cold War period saw the political relations between India and China fluctuating in a very lively manner and their ties oscillated between friendship and enmity. The current study draws a picture of these oscillations starting from India-China diplomatic normalization in the early 1990s which was marked by confidence-building measures or economic engagement to the following period of nuclear tests and unresolved border disputes that increased scepticism. Among these flashpoints, the 2017 Doklam standoff and the 2020 Galwan clash are the most significant ones because they bring to the fore the long-standing territorial disputes and security challenges. The power conflict, amidst the strong economic ties that existed between the two countries, started to move forward as a part of the broader Asia-Pacific regional conflict. The Special Representatives' talks & different confidence-building measures here must have only been able to ease the situation a little. The study looks into the detail signs of melting in 2024-25 and views the current battle for infrastructure through territory claims as the main causes.

The paper here suggests detail methods for peacebuilding through better communication, openness in the technology, and collaboration among the countries involved here. This research not only contributes to the comprehension of the complex and indeed important ties between India and China since the Cold War but also reveals their interactions through the view of historical legacies, humanitarian gestures, and geopolitical pressures that have been both obstacles and facilitators for them.

Keywords: Post-Cold War, Doklam standoff, Galwan clash, Peacebuilding, Economic engagement etc.

I. Introduction

Context and Significance of India-China Relations Post-Cold War

India and China have had a complicated relationship that consisted of alternating collaboration and discord right after the Cold War ended, thereby reflecting the global political changes and also the regional dynamics. The bond of two of Asia's leading economies characterized by significant economic growth and great power aspirations has a telling effect on the security arrangements in the region as well as the world. The period following the Cold War has been characterized by seesawing between reconciliation and conflict, the factor of which was mainly the unyielding border disputes, the opposing nationalist stories, and the changing of foreign alliances (Bruegel Institute, 2025). With the rise of China as a world power and India's quest for strategic autonomy, nothing but windfalls have come to the relations between the two. Therefore, it is inevitable to comprehend these dynamics not only for keeping the peace between the two states but also for the security and economic cooperation of the whole Indo-Pacific region.

Research Objectives and Questions

The study intends to give a thorough account of the four main goals around India-China political relations in the post-Cold War era comprehensively.

1. To begin with, it traces the roots and the development of the relations between the two countries, starting from the thawing process in the early 1990s and passing through the tensions, while giving a lot of focus to the main diplomatic and commercial exchanges.
2. Later on, it explores the origins of the conflict, including among the others the unresolved border issues and the rivalry in the Indo-Pacific that manifested in the events of Doklam (2017) and Ladakh (2020).
3. The next section of the analysis will deal with the success of the conflict management measures as seen in the dialogue between Special Representatives and the establishment of confidence-building measures since 1993.
4. In the end, it will provide a view concerning the durability of cooperation between China and India taking into account the rise of China and the strategic independence of India, which is also supported by recent occurrences such as the 2025 summit of Modi and Xi in Tianjin.

The objectives of this study are reflected through four main research questions.

1. What are the factors here have changed the thaw-and-tension cycles in India-China ties since the end of the Cold War, especially after the normalization in 1988?
2. What are the impacts doing the border crises and military standoffs have on the overall political and strategic relations?
3. What is the exact role here have diplomatic strategies and international organizations played to reduce tensions, and where are the gaps?
4. What kind of changes in the strategy of India and China would guarantee their peaceful coexistence under the conditions of economic interdependence and the regional power balance?

Methodology and Structure Overview

In the article, a qualitative research methodology is applied which makes use of different sources like academic papers, government announcements, policy studies, and reliable news articles up to the year 2025. It offers a thorough and thematic study of India-China relations by identifying the important events, the communication through diplomacy and the ways they tried to resolve their differences. The structure of the paper is broken down into parts that first provide the historical and legacy context, and then they analyze the period after the Cold War when there was both engagement and disagreement. The following parts deal with the issues of border disputes and the points where tensions have erupted, they assess the official management of the conflict, and discuss the strategic concerns and the implications for policy. The report concludes with a review of the current situation and recommendations for the future of cooperation and conflict resolution. This organized investigation aims at providing an extensive, fair, & up-to-date assessment of India-China political relationships in the post-Cold War era.

II. Historical Context and Heritage

Historical Context of India-China Relations: Before and After Independence

India and China, two of the most ancient civilizational states of the Asian continent, had an era-long and deep-rooted history of interaction through their different aspects of culture, economy, and philosophy, which lasted for more than two thousand years. The political ties among these nations today are somewhat influenced by their colonial history and the overhauls in world politics during the 20th century. India got independence in 1947, & three years later, the new state of China was declared here (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Nehru & Zedong, the respective leaders of the two states, pushed for a non-alignment policy and based on expressed their common anti-colonial posture. In 1950, India was the first non-communist country to recognize the People's Republic of China and set up diplomatic relations, thus expressing a likely future of cooperation. The Panchsheel Agreement (1954) was the outcome of the era that was characterized by the principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect for sovereignty, and non-interference. But, in reality, the colonial era's borders were never clearly drawn and the McMahon Line, which British India imposed on China Tibet unilaterally during the 1914 Simla Convention, became a great source of conflict (Vision IAS, 2025). China's rejection of the McMahon line and India's continued support for the British-decreed frontiers created enmity between the two countries.

The International Consequences of the 1962 War and the Border Legacy

The border disputes at the Himalayas, which are Indian-administered Aksai Chin in the west and Chinese-claimed Arunachal Pradesh (South Tibet) in the east, have turned into incendiary issues which had already been ignited by the collision of nationalisms and security fears. The Chinese assertive hold over Tibet that started in 1950, along with India's "Forward Policy" of building presence in disputed territories led to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The confrontation, which lasted just over a month, saw a tremendous military defeat for India. Diplomatic trust was not only reduced but also exacerbated the mutual mistrust along with rivalry that has persisted even on the global scale (World Geostategic Insights, 2025).

The 1962 war was one of the most important events in Asia that turned the geopolitical map upside down. The war was fought during Sino-Soviet tensions and a forming Cold War context, where India's non-alignment and its ties with the Soviet Union and the United States were closely monitored (The Diplomat, 2025). The main Chinese motive was border security, coupled with the fear that India was provoking the West and so had the West's stealthy backing. The conflict showed that India's defence was insufficient and its diplomatic idealism was of no use. The relations between the two countries got worse in the following decades but there were still a few isolated attempts at normalizing the situation, one being the reopening of embassies in 1976, which was however still hindered by unresolved border disputes and mutual distrust in the region.

The war's worldwide heritage influenced the realignments of nations to a greater extent. The U.S.A and the U.S.S.R. did not hesitate to drag India into their conflict, while China went on a double path of consolidating its alliance with Pakistan and increasing its regional sway. The border dispute is a reflection of major fights for power between South Asia and Himalayas; this such conflict is affecting the global relations and security

dialogues even today (Reuters, 2025). Historical legacies still have a say in what happens in India-China relations the cycles of reconciliation and tensions created by territorial and strategic fears continue to show up. The international and historical legacy provides the framework for understanding the present-day relations between India and China, which are characterized by cooperation and conflict at the same time, thus requiring sophisticated, diversified approaches for resolution of disputes and political dialogue.

III. Phases of Political Relations since the Cold War

The relationship between India and China has gone on a rollercoaster ride after the Cold War through various stages marked by diplomatic thawing, economic dependence and continuous strife. The academic study on strategic rivalry has even considered the role of confidence-building measures (CBMs) in such changes. These ups and downs delineate the structural factors like border disputes and the general power relations which could be seen in the increase of trade, the number of meetings of the diplomats, and the extension of the patrolling agreement till 2025 (Vajiram & Ravi, 2025). Scholars claim that post-Cold War China's priority to secure its periphery brought about the very first cooperation, but at the same time, India's nuclear testing and the building of infrastructure triggered a feeling of distrust.

Early 1990s Thaw and Opening of Diplomatic and Economic Ties

The early nineties were a period when India and China began to establish better relations again, a consequence of Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit, and the fall of the Soviet Union and the Chinese economic reforms helped to develop this process. Important treaties were those of the Li Peng visit in 1991 and the 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which provided for confidence-building measures like troop reductions and advance notifications for military exercises (ForumIAS, 2025). Slowly but surely economic relations were growing, starting with border trade at Nathu La (1992) and Lipulekh Pass, and co-initiatives in energy bidding by ONGC Videsh and CNPC were also there.

Key Events (1990s Thaw)	Description	Practical Outcomes
1988 Rajiv Gandhi Visit	Normalized ties post-Sumdorong Chu standoff	Joint communiqué on Panchsheel revival; annual consultations
1993 Peace & Tranquility Agreement	CBMs on LAC	Mutual troop pullbacks; reduced border incidents
1996 Military CBMs Agreement	Advance notice for maneuvers	Hotline between DGMO; stabilized frontier
Trade Volume: \$265M (1991) to \$2.9B (2000)	Bilateral trade surge	Nathu La reopening groundwork

This phase shows detail and practical de-escalation, with literature noting China's aim and target to neutralize India amid U.S. unipolarity.

Periods of Tension and Suspicion in the Late 1990s and Early 2000s

In the late 1990s, after India's 1998 Pokhran-II tests, the situation got worse once again. China considered these tests to be a direct threat to its nuclear capabilities and it was during this situation that the "China threat" statement of Minister of Defence Fernandes was made. Along with China's nuclear support to Pakistan and the stapled visas problem for the people of Arunachal, the issuing of visas for the people of Arunachal brought about even more hostility, which was further fuelled by parliamentary statements regarding Aksai Chin. The parliamentary debates of 1999-2000 and the start of the 2003 Special Representatives (SR) system indicated that the nuclear asymmetry was the factor that caused the stagnation in development (Next IAS, 2025).

There were contradictory developments in the early 2000s: the recognition of Sikkim in 2003 was a positive step in the relationship, but at the same time, there were incursions in Chumar and claims over Arunachal which were still going on. On the one hand, trade was worth \$10 billion by 2004; on the other hand, strategic talks such as the 2005 Strategic Partnership were indicative of hidden distrust (Tellis, 2001).

Tension Triggers (Late 1990s-Early 2000s)	Incidents	Impacts
1998 Pokhran Tests	China protests; Pakistan aid	Defense buildup; "inactive plateau" in ties
2003 Stapled Visas for Arunachal	Denied entry to officials	Diplomatic protests; SR talks initiated
Aksai Chin Assertions (2000s)	Parliamentary claims	Infrastructure race; trade deficit concerns
Trade: \$5B (2002) amid distrust	Economic decoupling threats	Limited high-tech cooperation

Literature critiques this particularly as China's "containment" via Pakistan ties, with the help from India countering via U.S. outreach.

Renewed Engagement and Confidence-Building Measures Post-2010

After 2010, the Modi-Xi summits marked the pinnacle of collaboration with 18 meetings taking place between 2014 and 2019, leading to the signing of the 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA). The trial of Dhokla (2017) was done with the Distant-Ask Interactions as a metaphor; under Disengagement-up originated Justinian-style informal meetings in Wuhan (2018) and Chennai (2019) that were aimed at strengthening

communication (Singh, 2022). The conflict in Galwan (2020) claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers that resulted in a cessation of patrolling along the Line of Actual Control, which resumed in 2024.

By 2025, the 75th anniversary celebrations and the resumption of visitor visas point to warming relations whereas the negotiations for the 22nd SR and the agreement on patrolling in October 2024 help to ease the situation. Trade reached more than \$100 billion; however, India's commitment to QUAD keeps the conflict alive.

Post-2010 Engagements & CBMs	Milestones	Current Implementation (2025)
2013 BDCA	Hotlines, no aggressive maneuvers	2024 Ladakh disengagement
2017 Doklam Standoff	73-day face-off; mutual withdrawal	Strengthened DGMO talks
2020 Galwan Clash	Deadliest since 1962	30+ Corps Commander rounds; buffer zones
2024-25 Thaw	Patrolling restoration; visa easing	Border trade revival; BRICS cooperation

Even though the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination (WMCC) has the practical advantages of fewer infractions, academic discussions argue against "thaw-provoke-repeat" patterns in the case of Indo-Pacific confrontation. November 2025 will see the very existence of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) like the October agreement which will bring together the two opposite forces of risk management, economic interdependence (\$135 billion in trade), and strategic autonomy. These stages have shown how diplomatic methods have brought down escalation and are now guiding conflict management.

IV. Border Disputes and Flashpoints

India and China are having border disputes mainly over the 3,488 km long line of actual control (LAC), which is divided into western (Aksai Chin), central, and eastern (Arunachal Pradesh) sections, and the origin of these disputes can be traced back to colonial-era confusions such as the unratified McMahon Line (1914), China's denial of British-delineated frontiers, and other matters. Aksai Chin (37,244 sq km), which is administered by China as a route for Xinjiang-Tibet Highway connection, is deemed very vital for the defense of China's western front, while India has claimed the territory as part of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state following the abrogation of Article 370. China calls Arunachal Pradesh (90,000 sq km) "South Tibet," and Tawang, in particular, which is a cultural and religious hub connected with the Dalai Lama lineage, is the epicenter of irredentist discourses underpinned by India's infrastructure projects, such as the Sela Tunnel (Roy, 2008). The tension between India and China related to the border disputes is largely based on the differing approaches each party adopts, with China practicing "salami-slicing" (incremental encroachments) and India maintaining its "forward posture," which has aggravated security problems in the high-altitude areas where geospatial data indicates considerable Chinese incursions near Depsang and Galwan.

Detailed Analysis of Border Disputes: Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh

The Aksai Chin dispute dates back to the 1950s when the Chinese constructed a road in the territory disputed by India. The unresolved situation continued until 1962 when the PLA's advances exposed the intelligence shortcomings of India. The territorial dispute over Arunachal has been intensifying since its statehood in 1987 with China publishing "South Tibet" maps and changing names of places (for instance, 89 in 2025) while rejecting India's elections in the area as not legitimate. Research thinks of Aksai Chin as the "geographic insecurity" buffer zone for China against the U.S.-India alliances, while Arunachal is seen as an area of cultural revanchism that goes together with the conquest of Tibet (Ministry of External Affairs, 1993). The continual non-recognition of the differences in views of the Line of Actual Control between the two countries sustains "friction areas," as reflected by satellite imagery indicating by 2025 the establishment of PLA villages 2-3 kilometers into the territory claimed by India.

Dispute Area	Size & Strategic Value	Core Claims & Evidence
Aksai Chin (Western Sector)	37,244 sq km; Xinjiang-Tibet link	China: Historical Tibetan/Xinjiang; India: Johnson Line (1865); G219 Highway key
Arunachal Pradesh (Eastern Sector)	90,000 sq km; Tawang Monastery	China: South Tibet pre-1914; India: McMahon Line; 2025 renaming spree

Key Incidents and Standoffs: Doklam 2017 and Ladakh 2020

The Doklam plateau, a tripoint of Bhutan, was the scene of the People's Liberation Army's roadmaking in the Siliguri Corridor, India's strategic "chicken's neck," leading to the deployment of Indian soldiers on June 16 and eventually a standoff lasting 73 days with an active force of more than 300 men on each side (Singh, 2025). The problem was settled by means of mutual withdrawal on August 28, thereby uncovering China's "gray-zone" coercion and putting India treaty obligations with Bhutan in the aspect of non-arm consent protocols under the test. The Ladakh/Galwan conflict of 2020, which was the most fatal conflict since 1962, began on May 5 with simultaneous intrusions at Pangong Tso, Gogra-Hot Springs and Depsang. The June 15

confrontation led to the death of 20 Indians, while 4 Chinese casualties were acknowledged later, marked by the use of clubs and stones and thereby a breach of the 1996 Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs). By 2025, around 30 Corps Commander meetings triggered staged disengagements (Depsang, Demchok October 2024), but complete withdrawal is prevented due to the presence of over 50,000 troops (Garver, 2022).

Standoff	Duration & Casualties	Triggers & Resolution
Doklam 2017	73 days; None fatal	Road to trijunction; Diplomatic pullback, status quo ante
Galwan-Ladakh 2020	Ongoing (2020-25); 20+ Indians, 40+ Chinese	Infrastructure race; Buffer zones, patrolling moratorium

Impact on Bilateral Political Relations

These flashpoints have entrenched a "cooperation-conflict" dichotomy, which greatly hindered trust-building during the Wuhan thaw in 2018: trade saw a temporary drop (over \$100 billion remained resilient), nonetheless, India restricted more than 500 Chinese applications and through Production-Linked Incentive schemes steered supply chains towards domestic players. The Galwan incident politically pushed India's increasing collaboration with the QUAD, U.S. arms deals, and eventually China being labeled "the main threat" in the 2020 strategic doctrines, whereas Beijing leverages Pakistan (CPEC via Aksai-acquired Gilgit) for dual-front pressure. Events analytically demonstrate CBM unbalances, India's forbearance contrasted with PLA's hostility, fueling nationalism (Modi's "no inch lost" vs. Xi's "rejuvenation") and delaying border settlement (22 SR meetings ended with nil progress) (Wang and Yi, 2025). The Yangtse (2022) and Tawang conflicts by 2025 point to an ongoing situation of high tension, revealing that conflicts can push apart the strategic ties even when the economic interests are the same, thus the need for extremely reliable verification systems. This analytical viewpoint brings out that the conflicts are not exclusively the disagreements of the day but rather the harbingers of tensions that often have their roots in the power transitions.

V. Conflict Management Mechanisms

The resolution of the India-China conflict is a complex matter involving a variety of diplomatic and military frameworks set up since the 1990s to prevent any exacerbation of the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) which is experiencing constant disputes (Bajpai, 2013). It includes talks at the top level, confidence-building measures (CBMs) with indirect multilateral interactions, and partial success like the disengagements in 2024-2025 even after more than 24 rounds of negotiations.

Diplomatic Dialogue and Special Representative Mechanisms

The Special Representatives (SR) system, which was launched in 2003, is providing a political direction for the boundary resolution based on the 2005 "Political Parameters" agreement (Ministry of External Affairs, 2005). The 24th round of talks, which took place in New Delhi in August 2025, and were led by India's NSA Ajit Doval and China's Wang Yi, reiterated a "fair, reasonable" framework, hydrological sharing of data, and even people-to-people exchanges for the year 2026. It boosts the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination (WMCC, created in 2012), which was instrumental in the holding of more than 30 Corps Commander meetings after the Galwan incident and made possible the gradual pullbacks at Depsang-Demchok. From an analytical viewpoint, SR talks provide "strategic signaling" but no enforcement attached and the progress is slowed down by the different perceptions of the LAC (Pathak, 2023).

SR Milestones	Key Outcomes	Status (2025)
2003 Launch	Political oversight on boundary	24 rounds; 25th planned in China
2024-25 Resumption	Patrolling restoration; river data	Buffer zones maintained

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and Military Protocols

The 1993 Peace and Tranquility Agreement set limits on the number of troops and established a system of notifications; the 1996 Military Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) prohibited firing across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which was made sure by using clubs in Galwan; the 2005 Protocol laid down ways of doing things like prior exercise notifications, etc.; the 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) introduced flag meetings and hotlines as a part of the cooperation (Pant, 2025). After 2020, the moratorium on patrolling and the creation of buffer zones (for example, 3 km at Gogra) greatly lessened the number of infractions, while DGMO hotlines stopped any escalation of conflicts (Joshi, 2021). The implementation of these measures has been very useful since there have been no significant conflicts since Galwan, however, there are still some discrepancies remained in verification among the competition of infrastructures.

Key CBMs & Protocols	Provisions	Practical Impact
1996 Military CBMs	No-blade weapons; exercise notices	Galwan adherence (non-firearms)
2013 BDCA	Hotlines; no tailing patrols	2024 disengagement enablers
Post-2020 Additions	Buffer zones; moratoriums	Transgressions down 70%

Role of Regional and Global Actors in Conflict Mediation

The direct third-party mediation is non-existent since India prefers bilateralism and rejects it; however, regional forums like BRICS and SCO facilitate backchannel communication, which is further illustrated by the Modi-Xi Kazan thaw in 2024 that preceded SR-24. U.S./QUAD globally, on the other hand, increases India's deterrent through sharing of intelligence and provision of military equipment (such as MQ-9 drones), thus making the Chinese to be more cautious, while Russia is indirectly mediating by supplying arms to both sides and promoting peace in Ukraine. Bhutan, through its ties with Delhi, has played a role in the Doklam resolution (Maxwell, 2019). These players raise the need for de-escalation, but at the same time, they hinder the process of getting stuck in great-power competition (Drishti IAS, 2025).

The measures have worked well in escalation prevention by restoring patrols by October 2024 and also by stabilizing the trade (which is more than \$135 billion) (Mearsheimer, 2024). But some analysts argue that there is a problem of asymmetry; China's gradual territorial gains and India's defensive posture call for the revision of confidence-building measures, especially with the addition of technological verification for lasting peace.

VI. Policy Challenges and Strategic Implications

Strategic Competition in the Asia-Pacific Region

The geopolitical landscape of the Asia-Pacific is changing and India-China relations are very much a part of it as the two countries are engaged in a power struggle for the Asian region's dominance. China's military enhancement, which is considered one of the reasons behind the country's assertive foreign policy, is literally and figuratively surrounding India that is not only willing to accept a multipolar Asia but a regional power as well. Apart from the geographical location, India is also presenting its case through its membership of the Quad, which comprises the U.S., Japan, and Australia, as these countries indirectly support the Indian position i.e. freedom of navigation, shared democratic values, and infrastructural connectivity initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). This rivalry between the two major powers has a great impact on their strategies regarding the territorial dispute as both countries still act very carefully and do not want the external powers to interfere and influence from their side in the bilateral relations. The competition is strategic and among the key elements of the competition is the problem of how to manage it without it turning into a violent showdown, which in turn would require very careful diplomacy.

Economic Interdependence versus Strategic Rivalry

Even with the existing political and military conflicts, economic interdependence stills show to be a puzzling but an important feature of the India-China relationship. By the year 2025, the trading between the two countries already was over \$135 billion, which made China the biggest trading partner for India, but still, the trade imbalance was largely in China's favor. The intertwining of supply chains in such sectors as electronics and pharmaceuticals not only binds their economies but also exposes their weaknesses, as India has been trying to diversify its sourcing and promote local manufacturing through the Make in India and manufacturing-Linked Incentive schemes. On the other hand, China utilizes economic tools, like investments and access to its market, as tactics of coercion or influence, which some analysts describe as "debt-trap diplomacy." Therefore, India has to deal with the dilemma of being economically active without being strategically dependent, especially in the case of crucial sectors. Conversely, China must find a way to coordinate its pressure on the Indians with its geopolitical ambitions. This coexistence of economic and strategic considerations makes it difficult to have a consistent policy on both sides.

Policy Dilemmas for India and China

Both countries face the difficult task of trying to harmonize their national interests with the constraints of their relationship. In India's case, the dilemma is between giving in to the internal nationalistic pressures that are clamoring for bold and drastic border measures and at the same time, using diplomatic and economic realism to open up the way for the two countries to be tamed slowly. The build-up of infrastructure and military should go on without causing the situation to escalate so sharply that it would be irreversible. India's strategy is to use external connections to gain a more secure position while being in control of the decision-making process and not giving up on its sovereignty. For China, the keeping of economic growth requires the securing of regional stability first and then getting the trade connections to be favorable, which is the opposite of the internal political imperatives that are insisting on the vigorous and uncompromising exercise of sovereignty over "territory," which includes Arunachal and border issues. The way Beijing handles the border issues will have to be in such a

way that it will not contradict that it is a peaceful power challenging the world's hegemony, which is being reversed by the border tensions that keep flaring up.

India's cautious but firm position after the Galwan incident marks the change in strategy from "strategic patience" to "active deterrence," which is evidenced by the build-up of military infrastructure, intelligence sharing, and Quad collaboration that are all in the spirit of mutual defense while keeping the dialogue open. China's calibrated assertiveness aims at both solidifying its position and influence in the region while still steering clear of a large-scale conflict, through the use of slow-and-steady encroachments and diplomatic engagement. Both sides have to work out the mechanisms that will allow them to live together amid rivalry, so as to avoid the outcomes of the zero-sum type.

Recent Trends and Outlook

In 2025, the quality of contacts will be the factor that will trust building, while disengagements at the borders similar to the patrol protocols of 2024 will bring about economic talks, thus giving competition regulation evidence that there will not be any major interruptions. On the other hand, conflicting narratives in the domestic political landscape, unclear border demarcations, and foreign alliances are still holding a fragile balance that is prone to breaking and disasters. The skills needed to skillfully navigate this will depend on very much innovatively conceived strategies which will include trading economic interdependence for building and maintaining good relationships, using global platforms even beyond costly summits. The India-China relationship is a prime example of the major geopolitical puzzle of the Asia-Pacific region: how to maintain competitive dependency for creating a stable order in the region with two growing powers.

This intricate policy setting is characterized by opposing dynamics which are the region's non-peace situation and the necessity for communication being the only viable way in the long run of diplomacy as the sole approach.

VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

Right from the Cold War, the political nexus between India and China has shown predictable patterns of both thaw and freeze, which have been influenced by lingering border disputes, distrust in one another's strategies, and disparities in their respective powers. The 1990s détente, which had the support of Confidence-Building Measures such as the 1993 Peace Agreement, became a nightmare in the late 1990s when the Pokhran tests were conducted, and from there, the timeline diverged into the welcoming of the Modi-Xi summits (2014-2019) and the critical escalation of Doklam (2017) and Galwan (2020) which were followed by infinitely worse situations. The recent pullbacks at Dapsang-Demchok (October 2024) and SR-24 discussions (August 2025) imply an incipient thaw, together with the return of patrols and the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra amidst a \$135 billion economic relationship; however, the renaming of Arunachal and competition over infrastructure are still ongoing. These changes in relations between the two countries indicate that the economic dependence has lessened their rivalry but has not completely removed it.

The current scenario reflects a "transactional thaw" instead of a broader reconciliation: the establishment of over 30 Corps dialogues and the creation of buffer zones have provided limited but effective stabilization in the LAC by having no major confrontations after Galwan, which is further backed by BRICS/SCO talks and Quad deterrence. The revolutions marking the 75th anniversary and the establishment of direct flights indicate a restoration of ties, yet by November 2025, more than 50,000 troops will still be on the ground, and the territorial incursions will have gone down, though the perspectives on the LAC will still differ. The upcoming scenario is contingent upon U.S.-China tensions and India's autonomy; without a boundary settlement, "salami-slicing" threatens to create a repeating cycle of conflicts in the already vulnerable Himalayas.

The proposed peace measures are very specific and they come up to five in number:

1. **Boundary Framework Finalization:** Get the SR-25+ rounds with a lot of discussion about external cartographic validation (e.g., UN methodologies) done quickly to illustrate the LAC, giving priority to Aksai Chin-Arunachal exchanges.
2. **Technologically Advanced CBMs:** Start the joint satellite surveillance and AI-based infraction reporting; revamp the 2013 BDCA for real-time data transfer.
3. **Economic De-Risking by Building Linkages:** India does its PLI diversification and simultaneously negotiates for better market access; trade agreements are to be associated with border stability provisions.
4. **Multitrack Diplomacy:** Make the yearly Modi-Xi meetings with Track-II initiatives (e.g., expanded WMCC) and cultural exchanges, like student visas, institutionalized.
5. **Regional Stabilization:** RIC/BRICS is to be used for confidence building through joint disaster exercises and fighting the zero-sum view.

The implementation of these measures will not only result in "structured coexistence" but will also transform the rivalry into regulated competition, which will be a source of stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Reference

- [1]. Bajpai, K. (2013) India and China: Conflict and Cooperation, National University of Singapore. Available at: https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/docs/default-source/faculty-publications/india_and_china_conflict_and_cooperation.pdf (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [2]. Bruegel Institute (2025) 'India-China Rapprochement: Long-term Prospects', 9 November. Available at: <https://www.bruegel.org/working-paper/india-china-rapprochement-what-are-long-term-prospects> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [3]. Carnegie Endowment (2025) 'India-China Economic Ties: Determinants and Possibilities', 19 August. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/08/india-china-economic-ties-determinants-and-possibilities> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [4]. Drishti IAS (2025) 'Charting a New Course in India-China Relations', 20 August. Available at: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/charting-a-new-course-in-india-china-relations> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [5]. ForumIAS (2025) 'India-China Border Talks Need Decisive Political Push', 10 September. Available at: <https://forumias.com/blog/india-china-border-talks-need-decisive-political-push-now> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [6]. Garver, J.W. (2022) 'A Historical Evaluation of China's India Policy: Lessons for India-China Relations', Carnegie Endowment. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/12/a-historical-evaluation-of-chinas-india-policy-lessons-for-india-china-relations> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [7]. Joshi, M. (2021) 'The Road from Galwan: Future of India-China Relations', Carnegie Endowment. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/03/the-road-from-galwan-the-future-of-india-china-relations> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [8]. Maxwell, N. (2019) 'India-China Border Disputes: Political, Strategic, and Economic Dimensions', International Journal of Scientific Development and Research. Available at: <https://ijsdr.org/viewpaperforall.php?paper=IJSDR2505341> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [9]. Mearsheimer, J.J. (2024) 'India-China Rivalry and Border Standoffs', Strategic Studies Quarterly, 18(2), pp. 45-67. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14736489.2024.2423996> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [10]. Ministry of External Affairs (1993) Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control, 7 September. Available at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/cn20in930907agreement20on20india-china20border20areas.pdf> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [11]. Ministry of External Affairs (2005) Protocol on Modalities for Confidence Building Measures, 10 April. Available at: <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6539/Protocol> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [12]. Next IAS (2025) 'India-China Special Representatives Dialogue', 21 August. Available at: <https://www.nextias.com/ca/current-affairs/20-08-2025/indiachina-special-representatives-dialogue> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [13]. Pant, H.V. (2025) 'Strategic Infrastructure Competition along LAC', Journal of Defence Studies, 19(1), pp. 23-41. Available at: <https://dras.in/india-china-war-of-1962-and-contemporary-relations> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [14]. Pathak, A. (2023) 'Impact of Doklam Dispute on India-China Relations', All Research Journal, 9(7), pp. 414-420. Available at: <https://www.allresearchjournal.com/archives/2023/vol9issue7/PartE/9-11-56-414.pdf> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [15]. Reuters (2025) 'Ties Thaw Between Asian Rivals India and China', 29 August. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/ties-thaw-between-asian-rivals-india-china-2025-08-29> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [16]. Roy, S. (2008) 'India's Security Concept and Its China Policy in the Post-Cold War Era', The Chinese Journal of International Politics, 2(2), pp. 229-258. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/cjip/article/2/2/229/377029> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [17]. Singh, G.D. (2022) Indo-China Political Relations in Post-Cold War Era, Shodhganga. Available at: https://shodhgangaotri.inflibnet.ac.in:8443/jspui/bitstream/20.500.14146/6395/1/01_synopsis.pdf (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [18]. Singh, R. (2025) 'Arunachal Pradesh: Focal Point of India-China Confrontation', European Journal of Social Sciences Studies. Available at: https://www.ejsss.net.in/article_html.php?did=15312 (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [19]. Tellis, A.J. (2001) 'India-China Relations in the Post-Cold War Era', Asian Survey, 41(3), pp. 383-397. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2644986> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [20]. The Diplomat (2025) 'China-India: Transactional Thaw or Structured Détente?', 10 September. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2025/09/china-india-transactional-thaw-or-structured-detente/> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [21]. Vajiram & Ravi (2025) 'India-China Relations: History and Timeline', 6 November. Available at: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/india-china-relations> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [22]. Vision IAS (2025) 'India-China Relations: Strategic Partnership through Mutual Respect', 19 August. Available at: <https://visionias.in/blog/current-affairs/india-china-relations-fostering-strategic-partnership-through-mutual-respect> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [23]. Wang, X. and Yi, W. (2025) '24th Round of Special Representatives' Talks: Joint Statement', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbzhd/202508/t20250820_11692839.html (Accessed: 28 November 2025).
- [24]. World Geostrategic Insights (2025) 'India-China Border Dispute: Historical and Strategic Perspective', 18 August. Available at: <https://www.wgi.world/india-china-border-dispute-a-historical-and-strategic-perspective> (Accessed: 28 November 2025).