



## INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS: COMPETITION & COOPERATION OVER THE YEARS

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**ABSTRACT** More than half a century ago, Sino-Indian relations moved from friendship to war within only five years. In June 1954, the two countries agreed on “panchsheel”, the five principles of coexistence. Sixty-two months later, they shot at each other across their unsettled border in the Himalayas. The downfall of Sino-Indian friendship was related to events in Tibet. The land between China and India was the source of most misunderstandings, and its unsettled borders the root for the wars in 1959 and 1962. But how did this development come about? This paper tracks Indo-China relations from the pre-Independence period. Furthermore, it analyses the 1962 War, its causes, impact and end. Lastly, it talks about future prospects for the two countries.

**KEYWORDS** : Sino-Indian relations; coexistence; wars; borders; misunderstandings

### I. OVERVIEW

India achieved independence in trying times. Born in the backdrop of World War II, India faced global as well as internal challenges that had to be tackled to maintain her newfound sovereignty. As poverty pervaded the Indian nation, it grappled with issues of reconstruction and the pressures of partition. At the same time, the country also had to focus on peace and development, and build significant international relations with influential countries. It was during this period that India's foreign policy was formulated, largely influenced by the personality of Nehru, who served as both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of the country. Keeping in mind the devastating years of colonisation as well as the ruins of the war, he decided to conduct India's foreign relations with an agenda to preserve her hard earned sovereignty, protect her territorial integrity and promote rapid economic development.

The basis of the Indian foreign policy, however, was set in the pre-independence era. Put forward by the Indian National Congress, the policy was largely based on the noble ideas that inspired the country's struggle for freedom. The Indian freedom struggle, and the encouragement and support expressed by the INC, inspired various other colonised Asian and African nations to fight for independence. This in turn created a natural bond between India and these countries and helped India develop strong external ties with them, and play a significant role in conducting international relations.

India's attainment of independence coincided with the beginning of the Cold War era; this coincidence had a large influence on the country's foreign policy decisions. India decided to maintain distance from the two power blocs while maintaining friendly relations with every country, and respecting the sovereignty of each nation. The country also gave supreme priority to her relations with her neighbours to ensure peace, security and growth of the South Asian region. Jawaharlal Nehru envisaged a major role for India in world affairs given the country's size, location and power potential, and strongly advocated for Asian unity. It was during this time that India began to strengthen ties with her neighbours, such as China, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh etc.

As India rises as a great nuclear power with important geopolitical interests, so does its relevance as an influential country in the modern world. The country has now become the focus of global attention and developed significant external relations with various countries, irrespective of the political systems followed by them. India's foreign policy emphasises on the true importance of cooperative relations in contemporary world politics, recognises world issues such as the depletion of resources and climate change and is guided by various factors including coexistence and security, nuclear capability and economic growth and development. While India's external relations have been improving and widening, the fundamentals of the Indian foreign policy continue to be those adopted in the Nehruvian era. The policy of non-alignment and principles of peaceful coexistence and harmony remain relevant to the essential character of India.

### II. INTRODUCTION

Responsibility and guilt for misunderstandings between India and China have been shunted across the Himalayas in both directions. The

problems that plagued the Sino-Indian relationship accumulated over the period from 1954 to early 1959. The Tibetan Uprising in the late winter and early spring of 1959 exacerbated the situation.

The story of the collapse of Sino-Indian friendship unfolded in concentric circles. At its centre stood developments in Tibet which remain the source of political and scholarly disputes to this day. In the second circle ranks the relationship between India and China, which had its roots both in the development of their interactions over time as well as in the domestic sources of each country's foreign policy. Finally, there is the wider world, not only the Asian-African movement (or the emerging Third World) of which India and China were prominent members, but also the international system dominated by the Cold War, in which the Sino-Indian relationship was embedded.

### III. HISTORY

#### 3.1 BEFORE COLONISATION

Cultural and economic relations between China and India date back to ancient times. Throughout the first millennium, they were the centres of spiritual and religious activities. The two countries suffered from western colonialism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, political contacts between them were few. A point of contact between the two countries were trade routes. The Silk Road served as a major trade route between India and China, and is also credited for facilitating the spread of Buddhism from India to East Asia.

While religious and cultural interactions existed between China and India during the first few centuries, they were extremely limited. The Islamic invasion of India resulted in the two countries living as strangers until the nineteenth century, when the Europeans colonised both. Before European colonisation, China under the Song (960- 1279) and Qing (1644- 1912) dynasties was the superpower. Under the Guptas (c. 320- c.550 ce) and Mughals (1526- 1857), India's economic, military, and cultural prowess was an object of envy too. Then European powers overshadowed the Asian civilisations which declined, disintegrated and were eventually conquered.

#### 3.2 DURING COLONISATION

During the British colonisation, China had limited trade relations with India. In the early twentieth century, a great resurgence in Asia deeply influenced India and China who began looking at each other with sympathy and admiration.

During the 19th century, China's growing opium trade with the East India Company in British India triggered the First and Second Opium Wars. The British used their Indian sepoy and the British Indian Army in the Opium Wars and Boxer Rebellion against China. They also used Indian soldiers to guard the Foreign concessions in areas like Shanghai. During World War II, India and China both played a crucial role in halting the progress of Imperial Japan.

#### 3.3 POST INDEPENDENCE: THE EARLY YEARS

In the late 1940s, newly independent India and emerging Communist China were by far the two largest Third World countries. Apart from sharing a long common border, they both could look back on a long history and rich civilisation, and they both envisioned leading roles for themselves in the developing world.

Free India began her relationship with China on a very friendly note. India established diplomatic relations with the nationalist Kuomintang Chinese Government in 1948 itself. On 30th December 1949, India became the second non communist nation to recognise the Peoples' Republic of China after its proclamation on the 1st of October of the same year.

India and China held radically different positions in international affairs. While Nehru continued to emphasise on cooperation, democracy, equality and non violence even after formal independence, Mao, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, came to claim that the role of leading the Third World naturally would fall to China. The Communist philosophy of China had no time for regimes which continued to maintain friendly relations with imperialist and capitalist countries. Nehru's India failed to realise that China's contempt for all non-communist regimes was a fundamental principle of Communist ideology. India believed that China's behaviour was a natural reaction to the slights it had suffered from Western countries, and that it would settle down as a normal, peace-loving country after its revolutionary exuberance had run its course.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru believed that cooperation between the two countries was essential for the development of the Third World and considered China as a friend. He helped the new Chinese government in the international fora and felt strongly for this neighbour coming out of the shadow of Western domination. Nehru also believed that it was exceedingly unlikely that India would face an attack from China and trusted the country so much that for a very long time the Chinese borders were guarded by para-military forces, and not the army. During this period, Indian and Chinese leaders visited each other's countries and were greeted with friendly crowds.

#### IV. PANCHSHEEL AGREEMENT & THE TIBET ISSUE

Apart from radically different positions in international affairs, the two countries also faced a difficult territorial issue - Tibet.

##### 4.1 EVENTS LEADING TO THE SIGNING OF THE PANCHSHEEL AGREEMENT

Tibet, situated on a high plateau between China and India, had long political ties to the former and cultural ties to the latter. On April 29, 1954, Beijing and Delhi signed the "Agreement between India and China on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet Region of China and India." It sanctified Chinese control of Tibet, the withdrawal of Indian troops from it, and the handing over of Indian postal and governmental infrastructure there. The two sides, however, failed to agree on the precise demarcation of the Tibetan-Indian border. In the wake of the agreement on Tibet, during a visit by Chinese Premier Zhou to Delhi in late June 1954, the two sides also signed the joint statement on the five principles of peaceful coexistence (panchsheel), which included respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs and equality and mutual benefit. While this accord on Tibet in 1954 had caused the friendship between India and China to bloom, differences over Tibet in 1959 brought the friendship to an end.

##### 4.2 THE TIBET ISSUE

From time to time in history, China had claimed control over Tibet, and from time to time Tibet had been an independent country too. Today, China has created the Tibet autonomous region which is now an integral part of China. Tibetans oppose the claim that Tibet is a part of Chinese territory and dispute China's claim that autonomy is granted to the region. They think that China wants to undermine the culture and traditions of Tibet.

Here is the chain of events that led to the escalation of the Tibet issue between India and China:

1950: China took control over Tibet. A large portion of the Tibetan population was against this and India tried to persuade China to let Tibet be independent.

1954: It was in this year that the signing of the Panchsheel Agreement took place, in which one of the clauses was about respecting each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Through this clause, India conceded China's claim over Tibet. China assured India that Tibet will be given greater autonomy than enjoyed by any other region in China.

1956: The Tibetan spiritual leader, Dalai Lama, accompanied the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai during an official Chinese visit to India in

1956. He informed Nehru about the worsening situation in Tibet. When there was news of the suppression of Tibetan culture, India grew uneasy.

1958: During this year, there was an armed uprising in Tibet against Chinese occupation, which was brutally suppressed by Chinese forces.

1959: Because of the tensions in Tibet, at the end of March 1959 the Dalai Lama was compelled to flee to India, where he was courteously received and granted political asylum. Several thousand refugees, who followed later, were similarly given shelter.

The manifestations of sympathy in India for the Dalai Lama and his country enraged the Chinese, who alleged that India was keeping the Dalai Lama under duress and the Dalai Lama's statements criticising China had been drafted by Indians. China claimed that India was allowing anti-Chinese activities to take place on her soil.

Over the last 50 years, a large number of Tibetans have sought refuge in India and many other countries. In Delhi, there are large settlements of Tibetan refugees. Dharmashala in Himachal Pradesh is the largest refugee settlement of Tibetans in India and also the home of the Dalai Lama.

#### V. SINO-INDIAN BORDER DISPUTES

The border between India and China is not clearly demarcated throughout. Along certain stretches of its 3,488-km length, there is no mutually agreed Line of Actual Control (LAC).<sup>(1)</sup> 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 India-China border is divided into three sectors, viz. Western, Middle and Eastern.

##### 5.1 WESTERN SECTOR:

The boundary dispute in the Western Sector 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. Independent India used the Johnson Line and claimed Aksai Chin as its own. China initially did not demur when India said so in the early 1950s; however, in the years that followed it reversed its position and stated that it had never acceded to the Johnson Line and therefore did not see why it should cede Aksai Chin to India.

##### 5.2 CENTRAL SECTOR:

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

##### 5.3 EASTERN SECTOR:

The disputed boundary in the Eastern Sector of the India-China border is over the MacMahon Line. Representatives of China, India and Tibet in 1913-14 met in Shimla, where an agreement was proposed to settle the boundary between Tibet and India, and Tibet and China. Though the Chinese representatives at the meeting initialled the agreement, they subsequently refused to accept it.

Till the 1960s, China controlled Aksai Chin in the West while India controlled the boundary up to the McMahon Line in the East.

The main border dispute between India and China manifests itself into two distinct and separate areas of contention: One is Aksai Chin, a virtually uninhabited high-altitude desert expanse of about 37,000 square kilometres. The other is what is now the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, a diversely populated hill region with a population of around 1.4 million people spread out over 84,000 square kilometres, much of which China claims as Lower Tibet.

##### 5.4 AKSAI CHIN:

Aksai Chin lies between the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, and China's Xinjiang province, both regions that are also riven by separatist conflicts as well as India's long-running dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir. In the late 1950s, soon after occupying Tibet, China occupied a large tract (approximately 38,000 square km) of Aksai Chin and built a highway (National Highway 219) through it to connect with its eastern province of Xinjiang. India considers this an illegal occupation.

### 5.5 ARUNACHAL PRADESH:

While China officially stakes claim to all of Arunachal Pradesh (earlier called the North Eastern Frontier Agency), it is a small district called Tawang, which borders Tibet and Bhutan, which it is most interested in. The town is famous for its monastery, built in 1681 by the by the Tibetan Lama Lodre Gyatso in accordance to the wishes of the 5th Dalai Lama, Nagwang Lobsang Gyatso. China cites the monastery as evidence that the district once belonged to Tibet and wants New Delhi to return it in order to help settle the row.

### VI. 1962 WAR

Despite discussions and correspondence among top leaders of both countries, these issues between China and India could not be resolved. It was on October 20th, 1962 that China launched a massive attack and the Sino-Indian War broke out. It lasted for one month before China unilaterally declared ceasefire and ended the war.

On October 20, 1962, the People's Liberation Army of China invaded Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh (then known as NEFA) in a synchronised move.

### 6.1 BACKGROUND:

The same year the Dalai Lama fled to India (1959), Indian and Chinese forces clashed at several posts. Major armed engagements were reported from Longju in the eastern sector in August and at the Kongka Pass in the western sector in October, 1959. While the relation between India and China was on the downside over the questions of boundaries and the Dalai Lama, Zhou Enlai proposed a peace-deal asking India to forfeit its claim over Aksai Chin while China would give up its claim over Arunachal Pradesh in return. Nehru rejected the proposal saying that China lacked legitimate claim over these territories. China responded with an allegation that India had "grand plans in Tibet".

### 6.2 HOW THE 1962 WAR BEGAN:

Alarmed at Chinese assertiveness, India launched its Forward Policy in 1961. Its objective was to create outposts behind advancing Chinese troops to cut supplies forcing them to retreat to north of the demarcated lines. Deployments were made at several posts.

Skirmishes continued throughout the first half of 1962. But, the Indian think tank was not fully convinced that China would go to war with India. They believed that China would engage in small skirmishes as it was not in a position to wage a full-fledged war.

Finally, on October 20, 1962 China launched simultaneous attacks on Indian posts in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh. Its objective was to capture Chip Chap valley in the western sector and territories beyond Namka Chu river in the eastern sector.

### 6.3 THE WAR:

The Chinese forces made rapid advancement into Indian territories as the Indian Army was ill-prepared, poorly equipped and short in supplies. On October 20, 1962, the People's Liberation Army of China invaded Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh (then known as NEFA) in a synchronised move. By October 24, Chinese troops were 15 km inside the Indian territories when Zhou Enlai shot off a letter to Nehru.

On the first day, the Chinese infantry also launched an attack from the rear. The continued losses forced the Indian troops to escape to Bhutan. On October 22, the Chinese lighted a bush which caused a lot of confusion among the Indians. Some 400 Chinese troops attacked the Indian position. The initial Chinese assault was stopped by accurate Indian mortar fire.

The first attack on India lasted one week and Chinese forces captured some key areas in Arunachal Pradesh. The second wave of attacks came next month. While the Indian forces could block the Chinese advances on the western front in Ladakh, in the east the Chinese managed to advance nearly to the entry point of the Assam plains.

### 6.4 CEASEFIRE AND END OF WAR:

Zhou Enlai proposed ceasefire and offered a negotiated settlement. Enlai suggested that both India and China should disengage and withdraw their troops 20 km behind the present lines of actual control. Enlai proposed Chinese withdrawal in Arunachal Pradesh (NEFA) while suggesting that India and China should maintain status quo in Aksai Chin.

Zhou Enlai wrote another letter to Nehru making the same proposal.

But, Nehru rejected the proposals saying that Chinese claim on Aksai Chin was illegal. Meanwhile, Soviet Union changed its stance from pro-India to say that the McMahon line was the notorious result of British imperialism. This is exactly China stated.

Parliament passed a resolution to "drive out the aggressors from the sacred soil of India." Finally, on Nehru's birthday - November 14, Sino-India war resumed. A week later, China declared unilateral ceasefire ending the war having occupied the Aksai Chin and withdrawn from the northeastern territories, where its forces had come down till Tezpur in Assam.

### VII. CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

The 1962 war was jolt to India and Nehru. It dented India's image abroad and at home. India had to approach the British and Americans for military assistance to tide over the crisis. The Soviet Union remained neutral over the conflict.

While the war induced a sense of national humiliation, it also strengthened a spirit of nationalism.

1. Some of the top army commanders either resigned or were retired. Nehru's close associate and the then Defence Minister V Krishna Menon was forced to resign and leave the cabinet.
2. The war led to reversal of defence policy of the country putting the Indian Army on the path of modernisation. The greater emphasis on nuclear power and use of nuclear weapons became part of India's defence policy.
3. Nehru's own stature suffered as he was severely criticised for the war and not foreseeing that it would take place. He was blamed for his naive assessment of Chinese intentions and the lack of military preparedness. For the first time, a no confidence motion against his government was moved and debated in the Lok Sabha.
4. The political mood of the country began to change severely. Post the War, the Congress lost some key by-elections to Lok Sabha.
5. The Sino-Indian War affected not only the Congress but the opposition as well. This, accompanied by the rift between China and the Soviet Union created differences between the Communist Party of India (CPI). This eventually led to a split in the party. The pro-USSR faction remained with the CPI and moves towards closer ties with the Congress. The other faction was for sometime closer to China and was against any ties with the Congress. The party split in 1964 and the leaders of the latter faction formed the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M).
6. The war with China also alerted the Indian leadership to the volatile situation in the northeast region. Apart from being extremely underdeveloped, this region also presented India with the challenge of national integration and unity. The process of its reorganisation began soon after the war.

### VIII. INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS TODAY

After several conflicts and the war between India and China, the once popular slogan of "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" was modified to "Hindi-Chini Bye Bye." Diplomatic relations between the two countries were downgraded until 1976. Thereafter, relations between India and China began to improve slowly.

When China's political leadership changed in the 1970's, its approach to foreign relations became more pragmatic and less ideological. The country was prepared to put off the settlement of contentious issues while improving relations with India. In 1981, a series of talks to resolve the border issues were initiated.

### 8.1 RELATIONS IN THE POST COLD WAR ERA

After the end of the Cold War, there have been significant changes in India-China relations. Their relations now have a strategic as well as an economic dimension. Today, both the countries view themselves as rising powers in the modern world and contemporary politics, and would like to play a major role in the Asian economy and politics.

In 1988, Rajiv Gandhi made a path breaking trip to China that really helped in re strengthening relations between the two countries. He thereby convinced China's leaders that India was seriously prepared to negotiate the border, despite the vagueness of China's various public but nonofficial offers made in 1960, 1979 and 1983 to settle. As a result of Rajiv Gandhi's visit, a joint working group headed by the Indian foreign secretary and the Chinese vice foreign minister was created, and was to meet every 6 months in alternate capitals.

Since this visit, both the governments have taken measures to contain conflict and maintain peace and tranquility on the border. They have also signed agreements on cultural exchanges and cooperation in science, technology and opened four border posts for trade.

## 8.2 TRADE

India-China trade has grown at 30% per year since 1999, and a more positive perspective on relations with China has emerged. Bilateral trade between India and China has increased from \$338 million in 1992 to more than \$18 billion in 2006.

At the global level, India and China have adopted similar policies in international economic institutions like the World Trade Organisation. The countries have agreed to cooperate in areas that could cause conflicts.

## 8.3 TODAY

Even though China is often seen as a major threat to India, the two countries have managed to maintain stable relations. China was seen contributing to Pakistan's nuclear programme and China's military relations with Bangladesh and Myanmar were viewed as hostile to Indian interests in South Asia. However, none of these issues is likely to lead to conflict between the two countries.

Indian and Chinese leaders and officials visit Beijing and New Delhi with greater frequency, and both sides are now becoming more familiar with each other. Narendra Modi has visited China several times in his term as Prime Minister to maintain good relations. A little over a year ago, Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a carefully manicured bilateral show of reconciliation after a difficult year in 2017. During a summit in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, which several analysts described as a "reset" moment, Modi and Xi sought to convey that the competitive-cooperative dynamic in India-China relations had regained its equilibrium after the summer 2017 stand-off between their armed forces over a once-obscure piece of disputed territory along India's border with Bhutan.

## IX. MODI 2.0 - And what it means for India-China

As India forms a new government and Modi begins a second five-year term, one of the fundamental foreign policy challenges that will remain high on the agenda in New Delhi is the nature of the bilateral relationship with China.

Modi's second term begins in a turbulent global context, with no sign that either the United States or China will unilaterally capitulate in the bilateral competition that exists between them.

But beyond the great power rivalry context, Modi will carry forward a complex bilateral agenda with China into his second term.

The border dispute between the two countries remains as intractable as ever and concerns in Delhi about China's big strategic and economic bet on Pakistan are growing.

In the days after India's election results were announced, Chinese vice-president Wang Qishan conducted a rare visit to Pakistan, offering security assurances to ensure the integrity of Beijing's multibillion-dollar investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the crown jewel of the Belt and Road Initiative.

As difficult as the relationship with China remains, we can expect Modi's second term to mostly yield continuity in New Delhi's approach toward Beijing, which has in the past decade maintained a balance between cooperation – including economic cooperation – and strategic competition.

Even as India has long had concerns and misgivings about China's rise – especially as Beijing's presence becomes an undeniably reality around New Delhi's strategic neighbourhood –, it has little to gain from taking a confrontational posture towards China

## X. CONCLUSION

To summarise and conclude, India and China started off as two neighbours with very limited relations - countries that were very close territorially but strangers when it came to bilateral relations. Gradually, the friendship between India and China grew even in the face of various conflicts. In his terms as Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru trusted China immensely, a mistake that led to the war between our country and China in 1962. This war was extremely devastating and had grave consequences on the country's economy and politics, but

eventually led to the strengthening of our military.

There was period after 1962 when all diplomatic relations between India and China were cut off. Eventually, however, with peace talks, agreements and settlements and important visits, the relations between the two countries started getting restored. Even today, we have important leaders from both countries meeting at various events and summits, and conscious efforts have been made to improve our trade relations. Even as India and China still face disputes and conflicts, none of them will lead to the cutting off of relations. We only hope to see the relations between these two countries improve here onwards.

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