

India-China Border Stand-Off

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On the 5th and 6th May 2020, Chinese incursions were reported at a very large frontage along the Line of Actual Control (LAC); starting from Naku La in north Sikkim, in Finger area of Pangong Tso, in Galwan Valley, Hot springs and Gogra heights located north-east of Galwan Valley.



Map-1: Showing Aggressive postures by the PRC in Area from South China Sea to Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO)

Source: Lt Gen PR Shankar, "Face-Off: The Matrix Ahead", pub in The Daily Guardian dated 30 May 2020.

These incursions were a little different from all previous border standoffs. This time the Chinese incursion has been at multiple places and also, they had come prepared with weapons, vehicles and tents. They had come in large numbers with an intent to dig in.

The issue came to light when scuffles were reported by the media on 10 May that some Chinese had intruded into the Muguthang Valley at Naku La and asked Indians to vacate the area as they claimed that it was their land. A scuffle ensued¹. According to PTI, the incident involved 150 soldiers. During the incident, the two sides threw stones at each other.² Subsequently

¹ Vedika Sud; Ben Westcott , "[Chinese and Indian soldiers engage in 'aggressive' cross-border skirmish](#)", reported by CNN dated 11 May 2020.

² France-Press, Agence, "[Indian and Chinese soldiers injured in cross-border fistfight, says Delhi](#)" dated 11 May 2020.

Indian Army spokesman said that the matter had been "resolved after 'dialogue and interaction' at the local commanders' level". The Chinese claim was surprising because as per protocol on border trade signed during 2003 visit of the then prime minister of India Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee, China had agreed to recognise Sikkim as Indian state in lieu of India accepting TAR (which does not include Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, Aksai Chin and Karakoram Pass as part of the Tibet region). It was decided that the Chinese would redraw their maps to reflect the new ground realities.³



Map-2: Activation of LAC by China Ref: Rekindling Tensions over Boundary...vajiramias.com

Concept of Line of Actual Control

The concept of Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been confusing to say the least. In order to understand the LAC one should look at the complete border between the two countries. India-China border is 4,057-km long and traverses through three areas of northern Indian states: western (Ladakh and J&K), middle (Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh) and eastern (Sikkim, Arunachal) .⁴ The then Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai used the phrase for the first time in a letter addressed to Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru dated October 24, 1959. Zhou told

³ Prabhu Chawla, "Historic visit to China by Prime Minister Vajpayee brings Beijing and Delhi closer" published in India Today dated 07 Jul 2003

⁴ "Another Chinese intrusion in Sikkim", OneIndia, Thursday, June 19 2008.
Link: <http://news.oneindia.in/2008/06/19/another-chinese-intrusion-in-sikkim.html>

Nehru that the LAC consisted of "McMahon Line in the east and the line up to which each side exercises actual control in the west". This demarcation existed as the informal cease-fire line between India and China after the 1962 India-China war. In 1993 it was accepted officially in a bilateral agreement⁵, but China did not agree to add the word existing before the word LAC⁶, which would have given the line a formal geographical entity. It is now clear that this was deliberate as China wanted to keep the option of altering it in future. Thus, it needs to be noted that the LAC remains undefined and it is a matter of perception. There is "no publicly available map depicting the Indian version of the LAC," and the Survey of India maps are the only evidence of the official border for India⁷. No wonder China has not only grabbed and absorbed Aksai Chin into its fold but also contested the areas in Arunachal and Central Sector amounting to over 38000 Sq Km to keep its claims alive. Accordingly over the years it has nibbled another 640 Sq Km in almost 200 to 300 incursions yearly. In 2019, India reported over 660 LAC violations and 108 aerial violations by the PLA, which were significantly higher than the number of incidents in 2018.⁸ No wonder that the claim of China on the disputed boundary has reduced from 4056 sq km in 1962 to just over 2000 sq km.⁹ There are 20 locations along the LAC which are disputed. Since the 1980s, there have been over 20 rounds of talks between the two countries related to these border issues.¹⁰ But there has been no progress at all towards resolution.

Intrusion in Pangong Tso Area

On 5th May 2020, the first standoff incident was a clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers on the Northern Bank of Pangong Tso. The 135 km long Pangong Tso is a long narrow lake, covering an area of 604 sq km. It is 6 km wide at its widest and is situated at an altitude of

⁵ ["Agreement On The Maintenance Of Peace Along The Line Of Actual Control In The India-China Border"](http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/agreement-on-the-maintenance-of-peace-along-the-line-of-actual-control-in-the-india-china-border/). Published by Stimson Center dated 07 Sep 1993 and uploaded on <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/agreement-on-the-maintenance-of-peace-along-the-line-of-actual-control-in-the-india-china-border/>

⁶ An interview of Lt Gen Shekatkar on Times Now on 18 Jun 2020.

⁷ Singh, Sushant, ["Line of Actual Control: Where it is located, and where India and China differ"](#), published in [The Indian Express](#) dated 02 Jun 2020

⁸ Smith, Jeff M., ["The Simmering Boundary: A "new normal" at the India–China border? | Part 1"](#). Published by ORF dated 13 Jun 2020.

⁹ Agencies, "Chinese Intrude Frequently, Occupied 640 Sq. Km Indian Territory: Report, published in Kashmir Observer dated 28 May 2020.

¹⁰ Ladwig, Walter (21 May 2020). ["Not the 'Spirit of Wuhan': Skirmishes Between India and China"](#) published by [Royal United Services Institute](#) dated 21 May 2020.

more than 14,000 ft. The first 45 km from the western side is with India and balance is in China's control. The western end of the lake lies 54 km southeast of Leh. The LAC in this area passes through the lake.¹¹ On the northern side of the lake high barren mountains, called Chang Chenmo, slopes down in the form of spurs, which are referred to as "fingers". India claims that the LAC is coterminous with the Finger 8, but it physically controls area only up to Finger 4. Chinese border posts are at Finger 8 and claim that the LAC passes through Finger 2. All these years both countries patrolled up to their respective claim lines. The fracas between Indian and Chinese soldiers earlier this month happened in the general area at Finger 5, which led to a "disengagement" between the two sides. The Chinese have now stopped Indian soldiers moving beyond Finger 2.¹² It needs to be appreciated that the lake lies in the path of the Chushul approach, which is one of the main approaches for an offensive into Indian-held territory. In fact this is the approach PLA took in 1962. A recent video showed soldiers from both nations engaging in fistfights and stone-pelting along the LAC in this region. On 10/11 May clashes took place¹³ resulting in a number of soldiers on both sides sustaining injuries. Indian media reported that around 72 Indian soldiers were injured in the confrontation at Pangong Tso. It has been reported by The Daily Telegraph that China had captured 60 sq km of Indian-patrolled territory between May and June 2020¹⁴. Reports on the conflict by some Indian news outlets indicated that the situation escalated into a fight when a group of Chinese soldiers approached the group of Indian soldiers with clubs and sticks, some wrapped with barbed wire.¹⁵

¹¹ Singh, Sushant, "[India-China conflict in Ladakh: The importance of Pangong Tso lake](#)" published in [The Indian Express](#), dated 22 May 2020.

¹² IBID-11.

¹³ Bhaumik, Subir, "[Sikkim & Ladakh face-offs: China ups ante along India-Tibet border](#)" published in [The Quint](#) dated 11 May 2020.

¹⁴ Wallen, Joe; Yan, Sophia; Farmer, Ben, "[China annexes 60 square km of India in Ladakh as simmering tensions erupt between two superpowers](#)", published in The Daily Telegraph dated 12 Jun 2020.

¹⁵ "['Unprofessional' Chinese Army used sticks, clubs with barbed wires and stones in face-off near Pangong Tso](#)", published by [The Times of India](#) dated 26 May 2020.



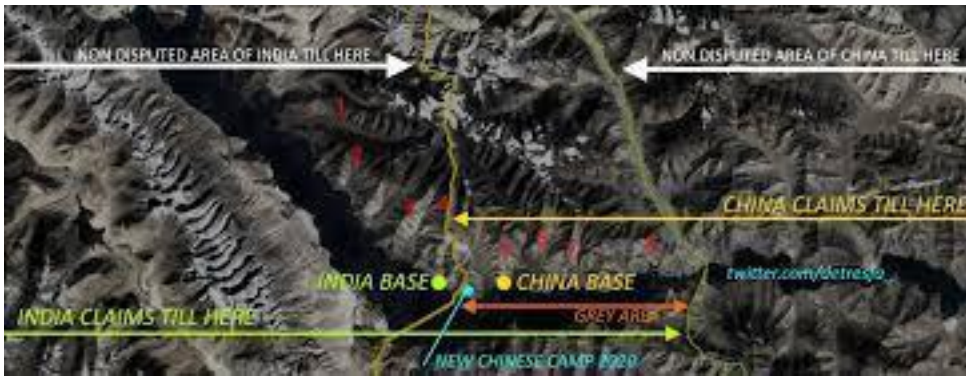
Map 3: Indian and Chinese Claim lines

Source: Foreign Policy watch: India- China, civildaily.com



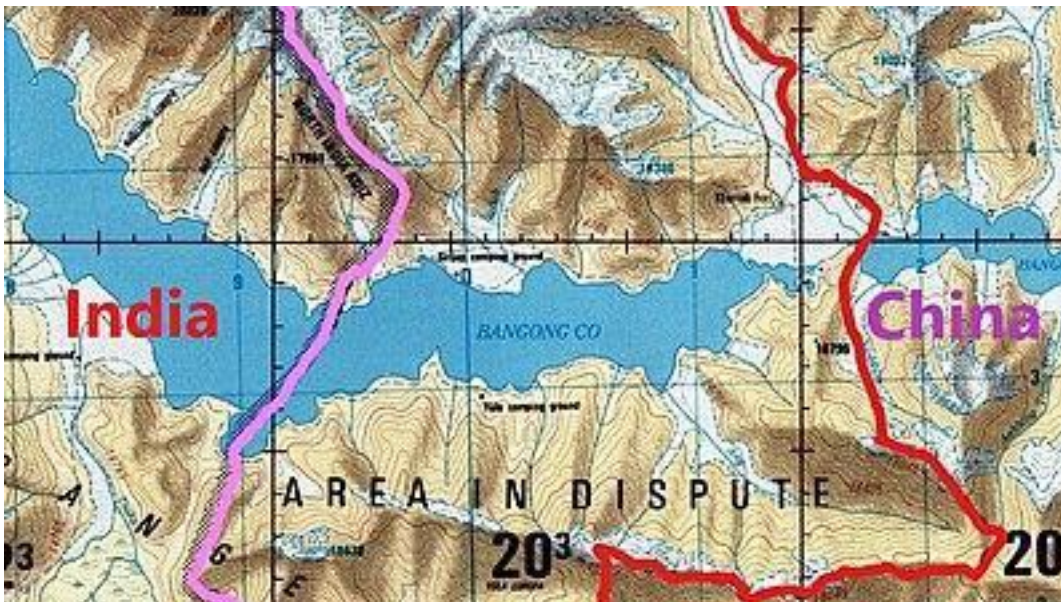
Map 4: Finger Area leading to Pangong Tso

Ref: indiatoday.in



Map 5: Claim Lines of India and China in Finger Area

Source: India-Pacific News on Twitter: #India...twitter.com



Map 6: Part of Pangong Tso with Indian and Chinese Claim Lines

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_China-India_skirmishes#cite_note-AFP-44

Developments in Galwan Valley

In early May Chinese intrusion was noticed in Gogra Heights, Hot spring and Patrol Point (PP)14. As in other places these troops appear to have come prepared for the long haul with a well-established logistic supply chain. By some reports, tanks were also part of the force. This intruding force began to obstruct the patrolling pattern of Indian troops. In usual times, the resulting face-offs get resolved in the Commanders Meet that inevitably follow. In mid-May PLA

attempted to cross the LAC in the Sector to which Indian troops responded appropriately. The Face Off was followed by Talks at the appropriate level. A meeting was held at Chushul Moldo Region, between Lt Gen Harender Singh, General Officer Commanding of the 14 Corps and Maj Gen Liu Lin, Commander South Xinjiang District of the PLA on 06 Jun 2020. De-escalation and disengagement are agreed to on reciprocal basis. On 15 June 2020, both sides had Brigade level talks near patrolling point 14, which is right near the mouth of Galwan Valley and patrolling point 17 at Hot Spring Area. However Chinese Forces refused to withdraw and resorted to violent action (without using fire arms) to alter the status quo ante at PP-14. The ensuing altercation and clashes led to the death of 20 Personnel of the Indian Army including the commanding officer. China also suffered casualties but has not released any figures but admitted significant casualties. Leaderships in both countries moved in quickly to diffuse the situation and bring peace. While military commander level talks did not yield any breakthrough, talks at the foreign ministers' level began to pay off. The two sides have agreed to move back to create a buffer zone. Despite moving back from points of face-to-face contact the Chinese have increased their force levels in the region.¹⁶

¹⁶ Zee Media Bureau, "India-China face-off in Galwan Valley in Ladakh: Here's a brief timeline" dated 20 Jun 2020, uploaded on <https://zeenews.india.com/india/india-china-face-off-in-galwan-valley-in-ladakh-here-s-a-brief-timeline-2291065.html>



Map 7: Eastern Ladakh- Galwan Valley Area

Source: ajashuklablogspot.com

Relevance of Galwan Valley in India's Security Matrix: It is important to examine the relevance of Galwan Valley in India's security aspects.

Some of the important aspects are as follows: -

- a. Completion of Darbuk- Shyok- DBO Road (D-S-DBO Road): This is an all-weather road in eastern Ladakh in India,¹⁷ close to the LAC . It connects Leh with Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) near Karakoram Pass by going over Changla, via the villages of Darbuk and Shyok at southern Shyok Valley near the China border. The 220-km long section between Shyok and DBO was constructed between 2000 and 2019 by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).¹⁸ The most difficult part of this road was construction of a 430 metre long Bridge across Shyok near Sultan Chhushku, which got completed in Oct 2019. Its strategic importance lies in the fact that it connects Leh to DBO, which is virtually at the base of the Karakoram Pass, the gateway to Aksai Chin. DBO is also located in the area better known in Army parlance as Sub-Sector North (SSN), which is plain and tank-able. Presence in this area by India will threaten Karakoram Pass and also the CPEC. Thus this all weather, strategic road, which will reduce the build-up time of

¹⁷ Nirupama Subramanian, "Explained: The strategic road to DBO", published in Indian Express dated 16 Jun 2020

¹⁸ Ajay Banerjee, [India completes vital Ladakh road](#), The Tribune (Chandigarh) 22 April 2019

security forces in the SSN, has made China uncomfortable. Strong presence in SSN will also provide depth to the defence of Siachen Glacier from East. In 2013 PLA intruded in the Depsang Plains and remained there for three weeks, an act that signalled their increasing concern about this strategic road. Although another alternative route exists from Leh to Daulat Beg Oldie through the 17,500-ft-high Sasser La which connects Sasoma close to the Nubra Valley in the Upper Shyok Valley to Karakoram Pass,¹⁹ but an all-weather road on this alignment is still many years away and that makes the D-S-BBO Road an extremely important link in the road connectivity of the SSN. That is why the PLA wants to come to Galwan Valley so that they retain the option of interdicting this road.

- b. Importance of Galwan Valley for the Security of G219- It is for the first time since 1962 that the Galwan Valley is witnessing an intrusion by the Chinese. All these years it was thought that LAC was well defined in this part, but China, as has been their wont all these years, have attempted to change the alignment of the LAC for the first time in this region. A sense of vulnerability of their Highway G219 between Xinjiang and Tibet due to improving infrastructure on the Indian side is probably one of the triggers for the intrusion. Around 179 km of this highway passes through Aksai Chin; a territory presently occupied by the Chinese and claimed by India. Chinese want to control any movement by the Indian Army from West to East. That is why they want to push the LAC towards the West from the generally accepted alignment all these years. Their objective appears to deny India control of dominating heights and create more depth between LAC and the Chinese G219 Highway. The Galwan river is the highest ridgeline and it allows the Chinese to dominate the Shyok route passes, which is close to the river. The Chinese are keen on controlling this area as they fear that the Indian side could end up threatening their position on the Aksai Chin plateau by using the river valley. India is trying to construct a feeder road emanating from DSDBO Road. This road runs along the Shyok River and is the most critical line of communications close to LAC. It comes up to Patrol Point 14 (PP14). Based on satellite imagery, the Chinese built a road by 2016 till the middle point of the Galwan valley. Since then, they have managed to extend this to some point closer to the current

¹⁹ IBID-17

alignment of the LAC in the sector.²⁰ In a new development post June 15th clash, China claimed on 18 Jun 2020 that the entire Galwan Valley is their territory. India has rejected China's claim as exaggerated and the allegation that India was trying to change the status quo ante by constructing infrastructure on China's side of the LAC. India maintains that the infrastructure being developed is on their side of the infrastructure.²¹

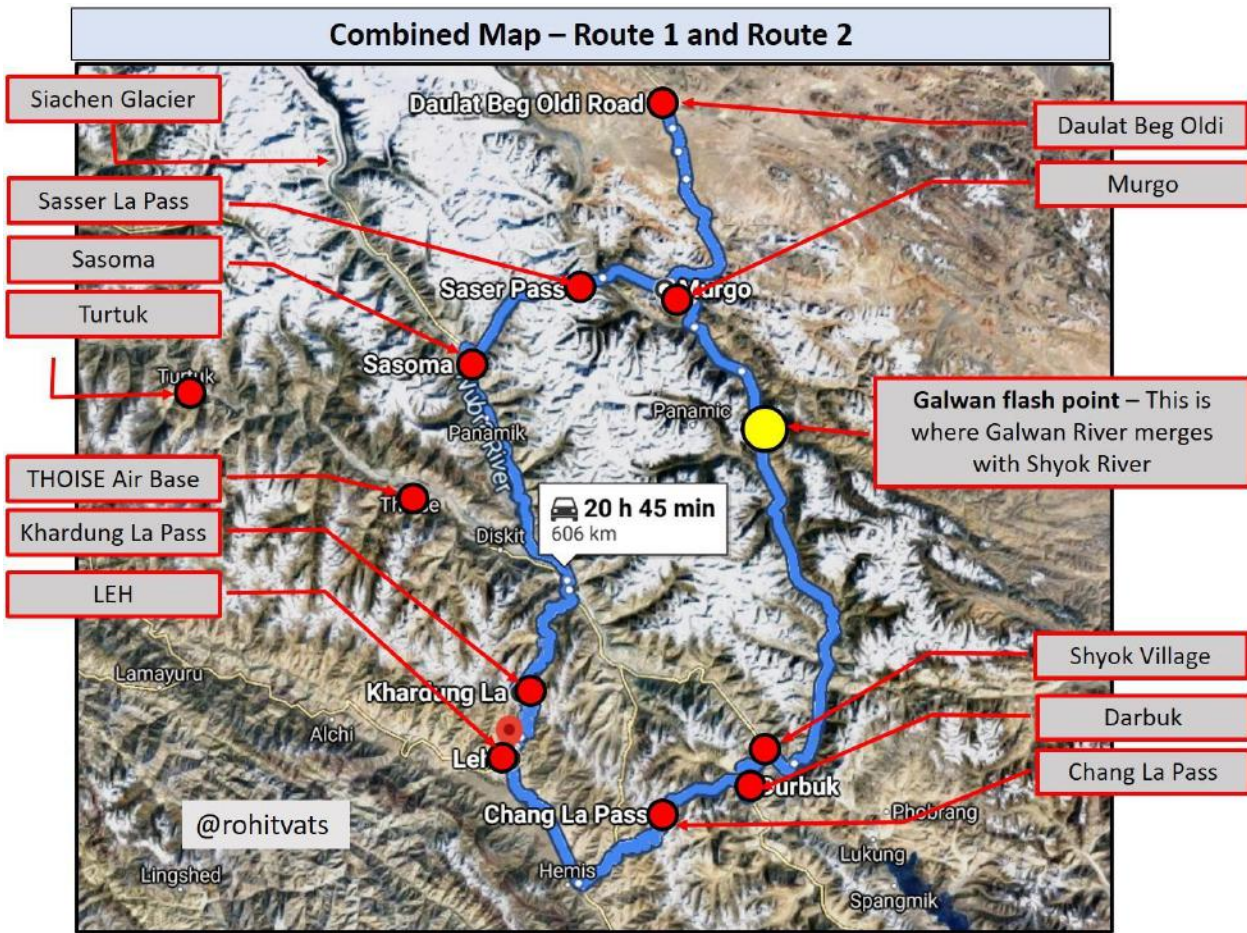


Map- 5: A Broad View of Eastern Ladakh- Showing Galwan valley, Hot Spring, Gogra Heights and Finger Area

Ref: indiadefencetimes.com

²⁰ Huma Siddiqui, "Galwan Valley: Why is the site of the India-China Ladakh standoff important? Know more about it, published in Financial Express dated 20 Jun 2020

²¹ Sachin Parashar, "India: China's Galwan claim unacceptable ", published by The Times of India dated 21 Jun 2020. Also up loaded on <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-chinas-galwan-claim-unacceptable/articleshow/76488382.cms>



Map- 6: Alignment of Roads to DBO from Leh

Ref: Vatsrohit@kesaridwaj.jun10

Map- 6:
Road
Shyok- DBO
Ref:
driштиias.com



Alignment
Darbuk-

On 27 May
Chinese
Ambassador

2020, the
to India as

well as a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that the overall situation was

stable.²² However, news reports continued stating that thousands of Chinese soldiers were moving into the disputed regions in Ladakh. This move prompted India to deploy several units from Leh, as well as from Kashmir.²³



Map-8: Location of Galwan River in Eastern Ladakh

Ref: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_China-India_skirmishes

Since 5 May 2020, Chinese and Indian troops have remained engaged in aggressive actions, face-offs and skirmishes at locations along the Sino Indian LAC in Pangong Tso area and area of the Galwan Valley.

According to Indian sources, fighting on 15/16 June 2020 resulted in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers (including an officer)²⁴ and at least 43 Chinese soldiers becoming casualties (including the death of an officer)²⁵. 10 Indian soldiers who probably were taken captive by the Chinese

²² ["'Differences Should Not Overshadow Relations': China Downplays Border Standoff, Says Situation Controllable"](#). News18 dated 27 May 2020.

²³ [China and India move troops as border tensions escalate Archived 28 May 2020 at the Wayback Machine](#), The Guardian, 27 May 2020.

²⁴ ["India soldiers killed in clash with Chinese forces"](#). BBC News. 16 June 2020.

²⁵ Paul D. Shinkman, ["India, China Face Off in First Deadly Clash in Decades"](#). *U.S. News & World Report* dated 16 Jun 2020.

were released on 18 June.²⁶ Claims and counter claims were made by both India and China. India accused China of reneging on June 6th agreement to restore status-quo and withdraw from the Galwan Valley as well as attacking an Indian patrol party. China on the other hand acknowledged the skirmish but accused Indian troops of crossing the LAC.²⁷

An Appraisal of Reasons for Chinese Action

Many in the international community are wondering about the timing of Chinese action. Some of the reasons which could have prompted China to show India its place could be as follows. The recent stand-off needs to be seen in continuation with the events in South China Sea, Trade War with US and unrest in Hong Kong.

Chinese perception of having become a Superpower: It is felt that China thinks that the time has come for them to declare their arrival as a Superpower. China's 2019 Defence White Paper flags growing strategic rivalry between China and the United States. Many analysts perceive that in early next decade China will become stronger than Russia in virtually every respect other than its nuclear arsenal.²⁸ On August 19, 2019, the United States Studies Centre handed out a report, suggesting that Washington no longer enjoys primacy in the Indo-Pacific and China has grown stronger and more capable since 9/11, to the point that China could now actively challenge the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.²⁹ However there are analysts like Minxin Pei, who have been arguing since 2010 that China was neither a superpower and nor will it be for some more time because of its daunting political and economic challenges.³⁰ Further in 2012 he added that despite using its economic power to influence some nations, China has very few

²⁶ Haidar, Suhasini; Peri, Dinakar, "[Ladakh face-off | Days after clash, China frees 10 Indian soldiers](#)". *The Hindu*, Dated 18 Jun 2020.

²⁷ Philip, Snehes Alex, "[Chinese troops challenge India at multiple locations in eastern Ladakh, standoff continues](#)", published in *The Print* dated 24 May 2020.

²⁸ Anthony H Cordesman, "China's New 2019 Defence White Paper", published by CSIS dated 24 Jul. 2019.

²⁹ Ashley Townshend, Brendan Thomas-Noone, Matilda Steward, ". Averting Crisis: American strategy, military spending and collective defence in the Indo-Pacific", published by United States Studies Centre dated 19 Aug 20

³⁰ Minxin Pei (20 January 2010). "China's Not a Superpower". *The Diplomat*. Retrieved 10 February 2012.

real friends or allies and is surrounded by potentially hostile nations. This situation could improve only if regional territorial disputes were resolved and China participated in an effective regional defence system that would reduce the fears of its neighbours. Alternatively, a democratization of China would dramatically improve foreign relations with many nations.³¹ While both options appear to be near impossible, China has a belief that its time has come and notwithstanding many of the indicators not being favourable they feel that they can pull it through by using their military power and/or economic power.

China's Strategic underpinnings in Middle Kingdom Concept: Middle Kingdom or Middle Country, (in Mandarin *Zhongguo*), is the Chinese name for China. It dates from 1000 BC, when it designated the Chou empire situated on the North China Plain. The Chou people, unaware of other equally evolved civilizations, believed that their empire had occupied the middle of the earth, surrounded by barbarians. Since 1949, when the Communists took power, the official name for China has been *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo* [middle glorious people's republican country] or, in English, the People's Republic of China.³² Unfortunately even today China treats all other countries with equal disdain and feels that they are inheritors of divine Ordain to rule the world and all other countries including India should recognise their position akin to a vassal state and China's superiority.

This explains their aggressive approach to territorial and maritime issues in its neighbourhood. The disputes in the South China Sea involves all countries in the region, with China virtually trying to bulldoze their way through. They have already reduced Pakistan to the status of a client state, they are changing rules for Hong Kong and they have begun to target Taiwan towards submission. The border dispute with India is nowhere near resolution despite three decades of talks. Some of India's actions have been viewed seriously by China. Some of these are as follows: -

- a. The Xi Jinping led Communist Chinese government was forced to agree to an independent inquiry into the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus during the ongoing World Health Assembly (WHA). It was in response to a resolution drafted by the European Union with

³¹ Minxin Pei (20 March 2012). "The Loneliest Superpower". Foreign Policy. Retrieved 28 June 2014.

³² <https://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/history/asia-africa/china-mongolia/middle-kingdom>

signatories from 120 countries including India, seeking an investigation into the SARS-CoV-2 virus's source and the process of its introduction into humans. China was not pleased.³³ In this connection it further added to China's concern when India was elected as the Chairman of the WHO Executive Board³⁴.

- b. On 20 May in an unprecedented move, two parliamentarians of the BJP, Meenakshi Lekhi and Rahul Kaswan, 'virtually attended' the swearing-in ceremony of Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen. Although these two MPs attended the ceremony virtually as BJP representatives and not as the representatives of the Indian Govt, the message was loud and clear. This act miffed China so much that its Foreign Ministry without naming anyone objected to the event and hoped everyone would "support the just cause of Chinese people."³⁵

Internal and External problems of China³⁶

- a. The CCP considers Western values and democracy as weakening the ideological commitment to China's socialist system. General Secretary Xi Jin- ping has attempted to consolidate control over nearly all of China's government, economy, and society. His personal ascendancy within the CCP is in contrast to the previous consensus-based model established by his predecessors. His anti-Corruption campaign has not endeared him to the rank and file of the party.
- b. China's current economic challenges particularly in the post COVID world include; slowing down of economic growth; rising debt levels; fear of MNCs pulling out of China and a rapidly-aging population. Instead of market reforms, the policy emphasis has shifted towards state

³³ Swarajya Staff, "Cornered China Agrees To Inquiry Into Coronavirus Origin After Intense Pressure By 120 Nations Including India", Published in SWARAJYA, dated 18 May and uploaded on <https://swarajyamag.com/insta/cornered-china-agrees-to-inquiry-into-coronavirus-origin-after-intense-pressure-by-120-nations-including-india>

³⁴ Prashasti Awasthi, "Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan assumes Chair of the WHO's Executive Board", published in The Hindu Business Line dated 23 May 2020 uploaded on <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/union-health-minister-harsh-varadhan-assumes-chair-of-the-whos-executive-board/article31656338.ece>

³⁵ An IANS Report, "Outraged China asks India to refrain from supporting Taiwan", Published by Live Mint dated 24 May 2020

³⁶ Internet upload: <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/Chapter%20%20-%20Beijing's%20Internal%20and%20External%20Challenges.pdf>

control. As per IMF estimates the real GDP growth (percentage change). is likely to be 1.2 as against 6.1 in 2019

- c. Beijing views its dependence on foreign intellectual property as undermining its ambition to become a global power and a threat to its technological independence. China has accelerated its efforts to develop advanced technologies to move up the economic value chain and reduce its dependence on foreign technology, which it views as both a critical economic and security vulnerability.
- d. China's senior leaders are concerned over perceived shortfalls in the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) warfighting experience and capabilities and its failure to produce an officer corps that can plan and lead. These concerns undermine Chinese leaders' confidence in the PLA's ability to prevail against a highly-capable adversary. The CCP has also long harboured concerns over the loyalty and responsiveness of the PLA and internal security forces to Beijing and the potential for provincial officials to co-opt these forces to promote their own political ambitions.
- e. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) faces growing scepticism due to concerns regarding corruption, opaque lending practices, and security threats. Lowering of prioritisation of the BRI will affect the personal standing of Xi Jinping in the internal power struggle within CCP.
- f. Beijing's military modernization efforts, coercion of its neighbours, and interference in other countries' internal affairs have generated resistance to its geopolitical ambitions. Countries in the Indo-Pacific and outside the region are accelerating their military modernization programs, deepening cooperation, and increasing their military presence in the region in an attempt to deter Beijing from continuing its assertive behaviour.
- g. Xi Jinping seemed indomitable when lawmakers abolished a term limit on his power in early 2018. But in recent times, China has been struck by economic headwinds, a virus scandal and trade battles with Washington, emboldening critics in Beijing who are questioning Mr. Xi's sweeping control.³⁷ It would be recalled that post failure of 'Great Leap Forward' (1958-62) of

³⁷ Chris Buckley, "As China's Woes Mount, Xi Jinping Faces Rare Rebuke at Home", published in the New York Times Dated 31 July 2018

Chairman Mao Zedong³⁸, China embarked on the 1962 Campaign to divert the attention of her citizens and an almost similar situation exists today.

India being an Enigma and an Irritant: China has viewed many of India's recent actions as inimical to its rise as the Asian hegemon. India's increasing strategic closeness to USA and Japan, and its opposition to China's flagship project, Belt and Road Initiative, have irked China significantly as given below: -

- a. China has set out, particularly in the current covid-19 pandemic environment, to prove that its system of state and governance is the best model. India's vibrant democracy, despite all its chaos and some failings, is seen as a model that can always be attractive to its citizens and therefore, a threat to CCP's control over the nation.
- b. India's deepening strategic ties with the USA, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam and South Korea.
- c. India's economic growth and gradual rise in manufacturing could pose a threat to China's dominance as the global manufacturing centre. US-China trade war and the world's accusation of China as being responsible for the pandemic has heightened the threat of global companies shifting their production from China to countries like India and Vietnam..
- d. India's accelerated push for infrastructural development in the border regions has the potential of changing the operational and tactical scenario along the LAC. The increased tempo of China's incursions are attempts at disrupting India's infrastructure development.
- e. India's resistance to China's CPEC and BRI projects has not gone down well with China

Strengths of India to Face the Challenges posed by China

It is true that as on date China is much stronger militarily and economically but India has its own strengths to stand up against China. Some of the important areas are as follows: -

³⁸ Perkins, Dwight, "China's Economic Policy and Performance" published as part of Chapter-6 in The Cambridge History of China, Volume 15, ed. by Roderick MacFarquhar, et al John K. Cambridge University Press in 1991.

- a. Although China is militarily much stronger as compared to India, Defence budget of China is \$179 billion and the corresponding figure of India was \$66.9 billion³⁹, but application of force at a point is quite different from absolute combat power. It also entails the relative prowess of two adversaries in fighting in high altitude areas. Finally the Indian Armed Forces being a voluntary army as against PLA being a conscription based army which has implications on the motivational level. Use of Airforce by India will be a force multiplier as the IAF has clear advantages of operating from much lower altitudes. Thus an integrated response from India will not be very easy for China to take on. Additionally, India can expand its ability to apply strategic pressure in the maritime sphere. China's economy is substantially export based (\$1.99 trillion⁴⁰) and a substantial part of it is dependent on its shipping that passes through the Strait of Malacca. India with its presence in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands has the capability to dominate the crucial sea lanes in the six degree channel and the Malacca Straits.
- b. China is the second largest economy (\$14.14 trillion in nominal GDP terms and \$27.31 trillion in PPP terms)⁴¹ with a foreign exchange reserve of \$3.1 trillion.⁴² Although Indian economy is also growing, as on date it is almost one-sixth of China's economy. In fact India suffers from a trade deficit of \$48.7 billion with China.⁴³
- c. International tie up with the US and with other friendly foreign powers in the region and beyond can be a huge strength provided India discards its tentativeness and firmly endorses alliances like the Quad. However, India needs to be prepared to fight her battle on its own terms.

³⁹ A PTI Report, "China hikes defence budget to \$179 billion, nearly three times that of India" published in The Times of India dated 22 May 2020.

⁴⁰ G Parthasarathy, "Securing the Indian Ocean sea-lanes", published in The Hindu Business Line dated 26 Jun 2019.

⁴¹ Caleb silver, "The Top 20 Economies in the World", published by Investpedia dated 12 Mar 2020 and uploaded on <http://www.investpedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>

⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_foreign-exchange_reserves#cite_note-92

⁴³ Times of India News Network, "India's Trade Deficit with China at 5-yr Low", published in The Times of India dated 23 Jun 2020.

India's further actions should be based on firm and forceful Strategy

India will have to take a number of measures in short, medium and long terms. Some of the recommendations are as follows: -

- a. For long China has used its economic, military and diplomatic enticements to influence India's neighbours. While China has Pakistan as its strongest ally for more than half a century, its influence in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Myanmar has seen a steep increase. India will need to take steps to reverse this huge strategic threat.
- b. For long India's military strategy has been reactive and defensive. This has been clearly a failure. India will need to recalibrate its China strategy to be based on active defence and a strong proactive foreign policy with China.
- c. India also needs to work with littoral countries of South China Seas like Vietnam and Philippines who are as much affected by the high handedness of China. India will also be required to work closely with Russia, Japan, South Korea and Australia to influence China geopolitically where it hurts her most. In this connection, India needs to work in conjunction with Russia to operationalise the Sea link: Vladivostok-Chennai for the movement of energy from the Russian Far East. Such an action will enhance Indo Russian Cooperation and will also give a strong message to China as well as reassure other littoral countries of the region.
- d. Economic dependence on China will need to be required to be addressed on priority; may be in phases because nothing would hurt China more than the economic dis-engagement.
- e. Indian efforts to exploit the post COVID scenario, to attract many of those MNCs who are planning to move out of China should be a high priority. Necessary policy reforms to attract MNCs will have to be introduced post haste.
- f. The faceoff has flagged certain weaknesses in the intelligence acquisition and processing. The agencies concerned need to be held accountable and immediate action will be required to be initiated to ensure that the real time intelligence acquisition is ensured.
- g. Mis-information campaign of the PLA will have to be contested. The decision that local commanders can take decisions and Indian Army is no longer bound by 1996 Treaty for non-use of fire arms is a step in the right direction.

- j. Finally, while talks at the Army level and diplomatic level to ensure de-escalation as well as disengagement should continue, India will need to be prepared for the long haul in terms of tense border situation and a possible military action across the LAC. India's bottom line for de-escalation/ normalisation is recommended to be based on two points; firstly; China needs to pull back all its troops to positions which were as existing at the time of 1993 agreement, and secondly; the LAC needs to be defined for all future references. Settlement of boundary disputes should be separate and talks for them may resume under the frame work of 1993 Accord once de-escalation and disengagement gets completed.



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The author, Major General A K Chaturvedi AVSM VSM (Retd), is an Indian Army Veteran, with 38 years of active service. He is from Corps of Engineers (Bengal Sappers), has held a variety of operational and staff appointments. Post retirement he is very active in academic research and focuses on water security and regional geography. He is a prolific writer and his books have been published. He is a Senior Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation.



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