Chapter 4
Cooperation and Conflict in India-China Relations: A Crisis of Confidence Building

1 Introduction

Even if people have been talking of peace, the global environment in the past one hundred years has been full with conflicts and crises. The two world wars were followed by the Cold War and bloody wars in East Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia including the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and unfolding of the new Cold War between the USA and China. Therefore, even if one talks about peace, the environment around us is full of fear and lingering security threats, which has created problems for genuine cooperation between the countries. As regards cooperation and conflict, there is a continuing debate between the realist and liberalist schools. Realists believe that cooperation is hard to achieve, for power is essentially expansionist; therefore, conflict is unavoidable.

Neo realists are also concerned about the distribution of power and the international system. They believe that since there is no sovereign authority in the international system, “the states are given an opportunity to do what they like, which makes it difficult for states to trust each other and cooperate” (Jervis 1978). This leads to the so-called security dilemma, which is the outcome of fear between the states. According to Collins (1996), “perceived external threats (real or imagined) generate feelings of insecurity in those states that believe themselves to be the targets of such threats, thereby leading those states to adopt measures to increase their power and capability to counteract those threats (alliance creation, arms build-ups, and so on).” Therefore, even if there are agreements and crisis management mechanisms (CMMs) or confidence building measures (CBMs) in place between the two, these are likely to be violated by one or the other as has been witnessed during various border stand-offs between India and China between 2014 and 2020. Realists have been criticized for their “survival of the fittest approach” and have also been criticized for ignoring other factors such as cultural identities, civil societies and soft power of a state. Jervis (1999), believe that realists would not be able to explain conflict or cooperation in the coming years.
Contrary to the realists’ theory, the constructivists and the idealists agree with the Mencius view of human nature being good 人性善. Mencius upholds that this nature is corrupted by the surrounding and environment, but constructivists believe that good nature could prevent the conflict and a way could be paved for cooperation. Cooperation could be given a full play provided that more and better international institutions are created and perfected. Interdependence and complementarities would lead to cooperation, and a better peaceful international order could be created. They also believe that identical social systems make the cooperation more viable, as has been the example of West Europe. However, their belief in institutionalism has been belied by the fact that states have accepted or entered these in their national interest or when they tend to benefit from them and have come out of these whenever uncomfortable with them. The Brexit, the USA pulling out of Paris Climate Deal, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) could be some examples. Not only this, many states have flouted the norms quite often.

This is owing to these approaches that the world has moved from unipolarity to bipolarity, then to uni-multi-polarity for some time and now heading towards bipolarity once again, albeit people are still talking about multi-polarity. The heterogeneous nature of multi-polarity has called for a structural change. Various scholars have tried to find out answers to these structural changes. Samuel Huntington (1999, 35) coined the notion of uni-multi-polar structure with the USA in the core and various other countries extending diplomatic, economic and military support for its initiatives. Some of its representations have been obvious in the invasion of Iraq, Afghanistan and the NATO led regime change in Libya and an abortive attempt in Syria. Such a structural arrangement is unsustainable in long term, the Libyan, Syrian and more recent Iranian crises are pointer to this, where the USA including its allies remained non-committal on not only sending the ground forces, but also not backing the use of force. Haass (2008, 44) has argued that “non-polarity” is the answer, where a dozen of countries could have the capability of “exercising different powers.” Giovanni (2009, 9) on the other hand argues that the world is becoming increasingly “inter-polar” which is “multi-polarity in the age of interdependence.” However, this approach has also been challenged by the forces of deglobalization, protectionism and populism. The spread of Covid-19 pandemic has shattered this myth when nations discovered that they were highly dependent on China for many supplies including the raw materials for pharmaceutical industry. People started to talk about relocating such supply chains and decoupling of their economies from China.

Multilateralism or multi-multilateralism is not necessarily an ultimate solution to bilateral or multilateral problems, however, is extremely important for crisis and conflict management as well as resolutions and enhancing understanding and cooperation among nations. Therefore, even if the cooperation and conflict have existed side by side, presently, undoubtedly, the balance has tipped in favour of cooperation.
rather than large-scale conflict. In the light of these debates, the signing of a range of crisis management agreements between India and China has also indicated that the cooperation has been favoured irrespective of deep rooted political mistrust between the two, however, the incidents such as Galwan bloodshed on the night of 15 June 2020 have belied such a thinking.

2 CBMs Between India and China

With the belief that India and China will resolve their differences and pending issues such as border amicably and peacefully, they signed various CBMs and pledged cooperation in other fields like people-to-people exchange and trade and investment. Let us examine some of the measures India and China have negotiated over the years.

2.1 The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence or the Panchsheel

The first CBM between India and China could be said was the “Agreement Between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse Between Tibet Region of China and India,” also known as the Panchsheel Agreement signed on 29 April 1954. During the 60th anniversary of the agreement, India and China declared the year 2014 as the year of friendly exchanges and various activities were planned. There is a general belief that Nehru propounded these principles by taking inspiration from Buddha’s Dhumma Panchsheel, Nehru may have suggested the name; nevertheless, these were the clear creation of Zhou Enlai which could be demonstrated from his speech to the 11 members “Sino-Indian Negotiation Committee” on 7 January 1954. Zhou had said (Deepak 2005, 150), “China’s India policy should be to win India for peaceful-coexistence with us on the basis of five principles, to make her fight against the American invasion and war.” China says that these were propounded by Zhou Enlai and suggested to the Indian delegation when he met the latter on 31 December 1953.

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1These are: 1. mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; 2. mutual non-aggression; 3. non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; 4. equality and mutual benefit and 5. peaceful co-existence.

2These are 1. No Killing (Respect for life); 2. No Stealing (Respect for other’s property; 3. No Sexual Misconduct (Respect for our pure nature); 4. No Lying (Respect for honesty) and 5. No intoxicants (Respect for a clear mind).
The controversy apart, it was a credible CBM even though it immensely favoured China, but India too believed it was a little short than a no war pact. Speaking in the Lok Sabha [lower house of the Indian parliament], Nehru remarked (Deepak 2005, 154) “By this agreement we ensure peace to a very large extent in a certain area of Asia” and that by subscribing to these principles, “one could create an environment wherein it becomes a little more dangerous to the other party to break away from the pledges given.” We will how see how wrong Nehru was when these were grossly violated by China.

Nonetheless, the five principles of peaceful coexistence were sold aggressively by both India and China at various forums such as during the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung and Colombo Conference in May 1954. During his India visit in 1954 and 1956, Zhou Enlai time and again emphasized the need to adhere to these principles. In a press conference on 27 June, Zhou further elaborated the principles of Panchsheel and allayed fears of neighbouring countries about Chinese brand of communism. He said,

“It is possible for various countries of the world to have a peaceful coexistence irrespective of their size and social systems. The people of each country should have the right to choose its way of life and system of governance, and should not be interfered by other countries. The revolution cannot be exported. At the same time, the common will of a nation in any country should not be interfered with. If all the countries of the world handle their relations in accordance with these principles, then the question of threat and invasion of one country by another does not arise, and the possibility of peaceful coexistence between the countries could be realised (Wang 1998, 97).”

According to Wang, Zhou also proposed to Nehru that by adhering to the Panchsheel, India and China should set an example to the world, proving that countries can coexist peacefully. Nehru in fact had been doing exactly the same. This is evident from his speeches during the Colombo Conference. In a broadcast from Colombo, Nehru had emphasized the significance of Panchsheel and had remarked that although the political and economic structure of India and China were different, India was nevertheless being able to sign an agreement with China on the basis of these principles. Since the Panchsheel in his view would guarantee peace in Asia, he recommended the concept to other members of Colombo Conference (Deepak 2005, 157–8).

Going by the arguments given by Nehru and Zhou Enlai, the CBM was aimed at creating trust and confidence in each other, and it did create the environment of peace and friendship, the atmosphere of Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai (Sino-Indian Brotherhood) could be rightly attributed to these CBMs, albeit was hyped beyond reality by both the sides. Also, as professor Swaran Singh (1998a, 1998b, 505) puts it, “Indian response has to be understood in view of Nehru’s personality and beliefs, he had been India’s sole spokesperson on foreign relations and following the death of Gandhiji (1948) and Sardar Patel (1950) Jawahararl Nehru had clearly emerged as the single most important leader of the monolith Indian National Congress...a man who sought security in peace.”
Gradually, these principles have become the basic norms in developing bilateral relations transcending social systems and ideologies. Many academics and strategists are bewildered as to why did not India open border question with China while signing such a CBM? And that why did not India think of a quid pro quo for accepting Tibet as a part of China? The academics have looked these issues from differing perspectives. While some argues that the Dalai Lama’s escape and India granting asylum derailed the CBM (Swaran 1998), Swaran Singh also maintains that Bhai-Bhai atmospheric and Nehru’s single handily China policy could be another reason; I believe more than anything, it was India’s failure to understand China’s stake in Tibet, hence the ambivalent Tibet policy, as well as the maximalist position on the border, which ultimately resulted in hostilities. After the brief conflict of 1962, bilateral relations remained in deep freeze for almost three decades.

### 2.2 CBMs of 1993, 1996, 2003 and 2005

The Joint Working Group (JWG) on border in the wake of Rajiv Gandhi’s December 1988 China visit could be regarded as the second CBM after the Panchsheel. The JWG also institutionalized flag meetings between military commanders from both sides at the Bumla and Dichu in the Eastern sector, Lipulekh in Uttrakhand in the middle sector and Spangggur near Chushul in the Western sector; this also sets a stage for the CBMs of 1993, 1996 and 2005 as well as some recent new initiatives. Fifteen rounds of talks on border issue were concluded under the aegis of the JWG.

The “Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (AMPT),” in the India-China border area signed on 7 September, 1993; the Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control (ACBMMF) in the India-China border areas signed on 29 November, 1996; and the Protocol on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles (PPPGP) for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question signed on 11 April 2005 are unique in a way that these are not the by-products of bipolar and unipolar world, neither the Cold War, and nor the asymmetrical force structure between India and China; rather the evolution of these CBMs could be seen as lessons learnt by India and China from the hostilities and Cold War, and the result of the rapprochement and engagement after the establishment of diplomatic ties between India and China. According to Wang (1998, 339) both sides adopted a “realistic and flexible” approach to the knotty border problem and were emerging into an era of mutual comprehension and understanding. The commitment to not to use force by both sides and not to undertake “specified levels of military exercises in the mutually identified zones” further hinted to the fact that both sides were willing to accept the ground realities, albeit article 6 of the agreement clearly pointed out that references to the LAC do not prejudice the respective positions of India and China on the boundary question. Nevertheless, it may be pointed out that the reference to the LAC was being used for the first time in a formal document signed by both the sides. These exchanges and
CBMs reiterated the faith in 1954 *Panchsheel* agreement, even if the document was never renewed after its expiry in 1962, as well as the equality of the relationship.

These CBMs emphasize time and again that “India-China boundary question shall be resolved through peaceful and friendly consultations. Neither side shall use or threaten to use force against the other by any means.” Both undertake to “strictly respect and observe the line of actual control” and will maintain peace and tranquillity along the border, to this end, the two sides will keep their border military presence “to a minimum level compatible with the friendly and good neighbourly relations.” The 1993 and 1996 CBMs also recommend provisions in the case of border transgression and intrusions. Articles IV and V of the 1993 CBM stipulate that the “two sides shall deal with them through meetings and friendly consultations between border personnel of the two countries.”

The 1996 CBM built on the foundations of the 1993 CBM is more elaborate and specific as regards military and security relations between India and China. The very first article “Neither side shall use its military capability against the other side” was pronounced as “a virtual no war pact” at the time it went public (Deepak 2005, 352). Article III and IV spell CBMs in military fields, for example “two sides shall reduce or limit the number of field army, border defence forces, paramilitary forces and any other mutually agreed category of armed forces deployed in mutually agreed geographical zones along the line of actual control to ceilings to be mutually agreed upon.” Article IV stipulates the withdrawal of some offensive weapons such as combat tanks, infantry combat vehicles, guns (including howitzers) with 75 mm or bigger calibre, mortars with 120 mm or bigger calibre, surface-to-surface missiles, surface-to-air missiles and to start with the two sides, etc., as well as avoiding the holding of “large scale military exercises involving more than one division (15,000 troops) in close proximity to the LAC.” Article VI prohibits opening fire within two kilometres of the LAC and that in case of a faceoff, they should exercise restraint and avoid escalation. This article created lot of controversy, when 20 Indian soldiers were brutally attacked by the Chinese at Patrolling point 14 in the Galwan Valley in June 2020. Article VII provides that the two sides shall (a) increase “meetings between their border representatives at designated places, (b) expand “telecommunication links” between these border points and (c) establish “step-by-step medium and high-level contacts between the border authorities” of the two sides. Article IX stipulates “the right to seek clarification” regarding the “manner in which the other side is observing the agreement” or on any “doubtful situation” in the border region. Article X says that both sides “agree to exchange maps indicating their respective perceptions of the entire alignment of the line of actual control as soon as possible.” For avoiding intrusions, as well as to “strengthen exchanges and cooperation between their military personnel and establishments.”
The 2003 Special Representative (SR) Mechanism according to China’s SR, Dai (2016: 269), who negotiated border issue with four Indian SRs between 2003 and 2013, both sides lost an opportunity to resolve the border during early rounds of the SR talks. Dai reveals that it was Vajpayee who during his 1979 China visit had proposed to establish a mechanism of the SRs for border negotiations. “Vajpayee reiterated it again on 23 June 2003, and immediately appointed his Principle Secretary Brijesh Mishra as India’s SR, Wen Jiabao in turn appointed me as China’s SR.”

Dai has vividly and candidly penned down his reminiscences about these talks in Chapter 7 titled Dragon and Elephant Tango running into 29 pages and six sections—Taking on the thorny issue; An excellent beginning; Origin of the first political parameters and guiding principles; Arduous exploration for a framework for border resolution; Worth an effort; and Friendly neighbours facing each other. In section two—An excellent beginning, Dai Bingguo says that the mechanism of SR was proposed by the Indian side to China. “Through diplomatic channels India explained to us that through this we would explore the guiding principles for resolving the issue, it will not involve specific negotiations for border demarcation and work on the maps. Second, the goal would be to accomplish the task of the SRs within 4–5 rounds through frequent contacts and talks. Third, India would adopt a constructive approach when negotiating with China.” He says China basically agreed to India’s proposition and proposed that SR consultations must be dealt with political and strategic height, and also from the overall situation of the bilateral relations, must not confine merely to facts as they are. The proposed Indian mechanism also pointed out that the mechanism must transcend the conventional bureaucratic system and seek a new thinking for settling the issue. Mishra’s appointment demonstrated Vajpayee’s desire and determination to resolve the issue. During the first SR talks, Vajpayee told us (Dai 2016, 273), “SRs responsibility is big, I think you must go all out and do it.”

During the first round on 23–24 October 2003, Dai told Mishra that we must not leave this historical baggage forever to our younger generations. Mishra appreciated what Dai said and in turn proposed six guiding principles. On 12–13 January, 2004, I invited Mishra for the second round in Beijing. During this round, though India’s stride could not be considered as big, however, it was a pragmatic and flexible approach. As regards guiding principles, Mishra for the first time proposed “give and take” principle and expressed that India was open and willing to keep them aside and would welcome a better proposal from China, writes Dai.

During the first and second round when Dai proposed a time frame of 3–5 years for the settlement, Mishra at once chipped in and clarified, if it takes so many years as you have said, perhaps I would not be around to see it. “At the close of the second round, Mishra took me aside and told me to convey a message to the Chinese leadership. He told me, Vajpayee is already 79 years; he is concerned about India-China border issue. Mishra told me he himself was 75 years, and wished to resolve the problem as soon as possible. I was hopeful that with Mishra’s negotiating style, the SRs talks would lead to an early outcome. However, in May 2004 India went to elections and the BJP suffered an unexpected defeat. Afterwards when I met Mishra, he told me, I would have never wished to pass the baton to the others, what is a pity!” (Dai 2016, 275–76).
The 2005 protocol on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question took the bilateral relations to higher level and attempted to view the relation in a larger and global context. There was an indication that the constructive and cooperative partnership between India and China transcends bilateral and regional configurations but has global implications, and that “both sides are seeking a political settlement of the boundary question in the context of their overall and long-term interests,” therefore, “differences on the boundary question should not be allowed to affect the overall development of bilateral relations.” It also talks about “a package settlement to the boundary question” which still remains one of the most viable frameworks for resolving the issue. Pending an ultimate settlement of the boundary question, the two sides should strictly respect and observe the Line of Actual Control and work together to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas. The importance of the mechanism of SR on the boundary question was underscored and stated that the SRs “shall continue their consultations in an earnest manner with the objective of arriving at an agreed framework for a boundary settlement, which will provide the basis for the delineation and demarcation of the India-China boundary.” The protocol while invoking *Panchsheel*, reiterated that both sides would abide by and implement the 1993 and 1996 CBMs.

In section three, Origin of the first political parameters and guiding principles, Dai says that in comparison with the BJP, the historical baggage the Congress Party carries is heavier. Moreover, it was a weak coalition government, which was restrained by many factors and had limited decision-making ability. It strived for political stability, and its foreign policy priority was India’s relations with South Asian countries and had no urgency for resolving the Sino-Indian boundary question. The SR talks that should be pushed forward, on the contrary faced new challenges, posits Dai (2016, 277).

In June 2004, the Indian government appointed Dixit as a new National Security Advisor (NSA) and SR. “When I apprised Dixit that former SR had a timeframe of 4–6 months for reaching an agreement on guiding principles, Dixit hoped the agreement could be reached during the fourth round.” Both side aspired that these should be worked out prior to Wen Jiabao’s April 2005 India visit. In the process of negotiations, the Indian side was apprehensive whether the guiding principles should be discussed first or the framework for resolution of the border. During the fourth round on 18–19 November 2004, Dai proposed the “three-step formula” (First establish the political parameters and guiding principles for resolving the border issue, then establish an agreed framework for a boundary settlement of these guiding principles, and finally demarcate the border on the ground) for the resolution of the border, which was appreciated by Dixit and finally agreed upon by both sides. After Dixit’s sudden demise, India appointed K.R Narayanan as the next NSA and SR. I met him 9 times for 5th to 13th round of SR talks. During the fifth round in Delhi on 10–11 April 2005, both the SR were successful in reaching an agreement on the political parameters and guiding principles, and the agreement was signed during 2005 Wen Jiabao’s India visit.
In the fourth section, Arduous exploration as regards framework for border resolution, Dai says he conducted next eight rounds with Narayanan. The sixth round which was held between 24 and 28 September 2005 in Beijing was the first meeting for exploring the framework for resolving the issue. During the 7 round between 11 and 14 March 2006 in New Delhi, Dai proposed that there exists a dispute on the Eastern, Middle and Western sectors of China-India border. Both sides need to make a very significant adjustment, which is acceptable to both the sides through a package deal. The eighth round was held in Xi’an and Beijing between 24 and 28 June 2006. “During the 9th round in Delhi on 17–18 January 2007, I told Narayanan frankly that this is our 9th round, I do not wish to discuss it to the 99th round, and I do not wish to keep it for our future generations. China is fully prepared for a political resolution of the Sino-Indian border issue. I sincerely hope we endeavour for finding a framework for resolving the issue at the earliest. Having said this, I expounded China’s views on political resolution. I pointed out, the disputed area is large, and it involves historical background, actual situation, people’s sentiments on both sides, the actual difficulties etc. factors…given these factors if we hold on to just one and ignore others, we would be negotiating endlessly and I am afraid we would not be able to find a solution in 100 years or even 1000 years. The framework should be more specific than the guiding principles and simpler and clearer than the border demarcation plan.” (Dai 2016, 282).

The tenth round from 20–22 April 2007 did not conform to the convention of alternatively holding talks in respective countries. At the request of the Indian side, I came to Delhi and pointed out that while discussing border, we cannot sever history, cannot ignore history, we must factually understand history, justly and reasonably consider the historical factors, we must fully consider Chinese people’s historical and national sentiments towards the Eastern sector. During these five rounds, I fully expounded the Chinese stands from different angles, however, the talks made no progress whatsoever in these two years. Next two rounds (September 2007 and September 2008) were held in Beijing. Our main focus was to keep the channels of talks open, and safeguard the atmospherics, says Dai. He pinned his hope on the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) II as the Congress had emerged stronger in May 2009 general elections. “Narayanan told me that the Indian side hopes to resolve one and all issues between India and China within 3–5 years.” 13th round of SR talks was held in New Delhi on 7–8 August 2009. During this round, I met Narayanan 9 times and we engaged in talks for 12 h. He told me that the sheer number of time I have met you is more than Hillary Clinton had met you, India-China SR talks can be termed as strategic dialogue. I told Narayanan that China has no intention whatsoever to scramble for any ‘sphere of influence’ in South Asia. Though we did not achieve any real progress on border issue, but it was indeed a bit of strategic dialogue as we talked about bilateral, international and regional hotspot issues.” (Dai 2016, 285).

In the last two sections, Dai says that he was dealing with the fourth SR from India as Narayanan had been given some other appointment and was replaced by an old China hand Shiv Shankar Menon. The 14th and 15th round were separately held on 29–30 November 2010 and 16–17 January 2012 in Beijing and New Delhi, respectively. Dai posits that Menon’s outlook on Sino-Indian boundary was no different
from India’s previous interlocutors. Looking back at the SR talks on border, he says it was a worthwhile effort. We were able to formulate a “three-step” blueprint for the resolution of border issue, the first step of which was completed in just two years. After 2005, we entered the second step, after nine rounds of talks we did achieve some progress, but it is a pity that we have not been able to reach a consensus on resolution framework all along. Nonetheless, in the last 30 years, we have been able to put the most sensitive and complex issue of Sino-Indian border on the track of peaceful negotiations, which has promoted strategic trust between the two, and have created conducive conditions for the restoration, improvement and development of bilateral relations. He suggests that mechanism of the SRs should be continued and strengthened. In order to complete the three steps, both must grab opportunities thrown by history and make bold strategic decisions. Dai considers India as an important partner for China’s open door policy. He is of the view that there can never be a colossal turmoil in India; 15% of its people can speak English and is capable of becoming a major power in the twenty-first century. China must treat India not only as a major country in Asia but also as a major world power. China-India relations must be accorded priority and transcend the significance of general neighbourhood diplomacy. According to him, pragmatic cooperation between China and India is very low, which is asymmetrical given the potentialities of both the countries. Moreover, the mechanism of SR has become a platform for strategic engagement and should be optimally used. As far as border issue is concerned, he says that owing to differing stands, the issue is relatively difficult to resolve in a short time, but both have to manage it well and avoid conflict.

Since Dai’s departure, 22 rounds of SR talks have been held, the last being on 21 December 2019 in New Delhi between Ajit Doval and Wang Yi “as per the guidance provided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping at the second informal summit between them in Chennai.” Even though both sides have been reiterating that the special representatives are resolved to intensify their efforts to achieve a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the India-China boundary question at an early date, however, it seems that Article VII of the agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question has become a big hurdle for China as the article stipulates that “in reaching a boundary settlement, the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas” which essentially jeopardizes the principle of give and take.

2.3 New Initiatives and the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA)

Besides the above-mentioned CBMs, in January 2012, India and China signed Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border
Affairs (WMCC) at Joint Secretary Level of ministries of foreign affairs of the two countries especially for timely communication of information on the border situation and for appropriately handling border incidents. In March 2012, both sides also agreed to undertake joint operations against pirates and sharing technological knowhow on seabed research.

Another CBM in the line of earlier initiatives is the BDCA signed on the basis of “mutual and equal security” on 23 October 2013 during Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s China visit. Contrary to the perception that it was signed in response to Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) stand-off (Panda 2013), the BDCA was being negotiated for almost a year by the two sides. It could not be signed during Premier Li Keqiang’s India visit in May 2013 owing to the DBO “face-off” and ongoing negotiations on the agreement. The agreement reinforces many points enshrined in the earlier mechanisms except for a few new ones stipulated in the article II and VI. Article II stipulates modalities for implementing the BDCA such as—exchange of information about military exercises, aircrafts, demolition operations and unmarked mines; cooperation in combating smuggling of arms, wildlife, wildlife articles and other contrabands; assist the other side in locating personnel, livestock, means of transport and aerial vehicles that may have crossed or are possibly in the process of crossing the LAC; cooperation in combating natural disasters or infectious diseases that may affect or spread to the other side. Article VI entails that the two sides should not follow or tail patrols of the other side in areas where there is no common understanding of the LAC.

As for Article II, India could have said impressed upon China about the need to combat insurgency and smuggling along its north-eastern border region. India’s north-eastern states bordering Bangladesh, China and Myanmar have been infested with insurgencies and smuggling of arms and drugs and poached animal products. Illegal organizations engaged in such activities have been found all over the Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (BCIM) economic corridor. If the agreement is carried out in letter and spirit undoubtedly, not only the borders would be tranquil and peaceful but the chances of regional peace and development would be greatly enhanced. Similarly, if article VI is carried in its spirit and letter, the face-offs like DOB would be prevented. Even though the mechanism of BDCA in no way is a solution to the border issue, but it certainly is symptomatic of declaring India-China relations of global strategic importance. Nonetheless, none of these CBMs have been successful in preventing stand-offs along the LAC as demonstrated by the following confrontations.

3 Depsang (2013) and Chumar (2014) Stand-Offs

In mid-April 2013, there were reports of at least 40 People’s Liberation Army (PLA) troops transgressing and camping at Depsang Bulge, 30 km south of Daulat Beg Oldi and almost 10 kilometres inside the “Indian territory” according to media reports.
The Indian forces also pitched tents almost 200 m away from the PLA and the face-off continued for three weeks. A similar face-off took place in September 2014 in Chumar sector when the Indian soldier stopped the road construction of the PLA they perceived was being built inside the Indian territory. The stand-off was resolved when India agreed to demolish a recently built observation shelter at Tible and Chinese agreed to restore the pre-September 10 status quo. These face-offs vitiated the atmosphere in India and perhaps in China too just before the maiden visits of the newly elected Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang to India in May 2013 and President Xi Jinping in September 2014.

Even though both Indian and Chinese government downplayed the incidents, but starting from 1 May, some articles by academics started to surface in the Chinese print media and hint to the Chinese apprehensions about “aggressive” patrolling in the region as well as upgradation of border infrastructure by India, despite of the fact that India was a latecomer as regards development of border infrastructure. An article by Hu Zhiyong, a professor with the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences while calling for a better management of the border issue, maintained that presently India has deployed 45 battalions of police force along the border areas, besides four battalions are in the midst of organization. India plans to add nine more battalions by 2015 (Deepak 2013). Reports about China’s infrastructural development are of major concern for the Indian government, for example, former Indian Defence Minister A. K. Antony gave the following statement to the Parliament in March 2011 (Anthony 2011):

“The total road network in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is assessed at 58,000 km in 2010. Extension of Qinghai Tibet Railway to Xigaze is in progress. Another railway line from Kashgar to Hotan in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region is under construction,” besides there are five operational TAR airfields namely Gongar, Pangta, Linchi, Hoping and Gar Gunsa. Antony further said that “necessary steps” were being taken in consonance with India’s national security concerns.”

A decade later, according to a Xinhua report (2018), “99% of the villages in the TAR are connected to highways, as the network in the region has increased from 65,000 kilometers to 90,000 kilometers; around 85% of the villages have broadband access.”

4 Doklam (2017) and Galwan (2020)

On 18 June 2017 when the PLA started to extend the road southward in Doklam, the Indian troops crossed the International border over to the Bhutanese side to stop the construction. As could be discerned from the Indian and Bhutanese statements issued on 29 and 30 June, when Chinese army started to alter the status quo in the region by constructing “a motor able road from Dokola in the Doklam area towards the Bhutan Army camp at Zompelri, they were stopped by the Indian army from doing so. Indian statement demonstrated the Indian fears of China determining the tri-junction points unilaterally in violation of the understanding reached between the
Special Representatives of India and China in 2012 on one hand, and with Bhutan in 1998 on the other” (MOFA, Bhutan 2017; MEA, India 2017). This invited such a fury from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence that both reminded India of its Himalayan blunder. Chinese print, electronic and social media was even more bellicose, and the war mongering was raised to such a pitch that use of force appeared imminent. The entire body of Chinese intelligentsia wore the hats of army generals, crossed all limits, as they shouted on top of their voices that India should be taught another lesson, China must liberate Bhutan and Sikkim, should enter Kashmir at the request of a third country, and the list continues. People’s Daily in its official blog warned India that the “border line is the bottom line.” On 11 July, the same paper posted an image from September 1962 front page editorial titled, “If this can be tolerated, what cannot?” People’s Daily’s sister newspaper Global Times provided lot of ammunition to provoke India by spitting venom in its dozens of articles and commentaries, unprecedented in the modern history of India-China relations. Even though serious Chinese scholarship on the Indian side brushed these aside, nonetheless, there is a view in India which holds that perhaps for the first time Chinese diplomacy was hijacked by the very paper and the social media.

4.1 The Convention of 1890

In order to understand the stand-off at Doklam, it is necessary to revisit the great game between colonial India and imperial China as regards their spheres of influence in the Himalayan states. The much-referred 17 March 1890 “Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim” was a spinoff of the 1886 Tibetan invasion of Lingtu, a place eighteen miles within the Sikkim frontier (Bell1924, 60). However, the Tibetans and Chinese maintained that the post was within Tibetan territory, and even if it was not, since Sikkim was Tibet’s vassal state, it had all the right to do so (Yang1992, 73–74). The British demanded the withdrawal of Tibet from Lingtu but Tibet refused to budge; on the contrary, Tibet demanded British withdrawal from Sikkim and Bhutan. Wen Shuo, the Chinese Amban or imperial resident in Lhasa, supported the Tibetans but was admonished by the Qing court and dismissed in 1888 for fomenting the trouble. A new Amban, Sheng Tai was appointed in his place (Li 2000, 481). The British resorted to force and ejected the Tibetan army from Lingtu; Sheng Tai memorialized the throne on 18 June 1888, apprising that the Lingtu affair was settled for good. The British have recalled their forces, and the status quo that existed two years back has been restored.

Contrary to Sheng Tai’s assurances to the Qing court, the affair was not settled as yet, for the Tibetans were preparing for another battle. It was under such circumstances that the Manchus sent Sheng to Calcutta (now Kolkata) to conduct further negotiations and sign a treaty with the British to settle the Sikkim–Tibet boundary, which he signed on 17 March 1890. According to Alistair Lamb (1966, 127), even after ten years of long discussions from 1894 to 1903, the British and Chinese failed to persuade the Tibetans to accept the 1890 boundary, which had been arranged
on their behalf. Chinese consulate in Manchester also adheres to this view when a post in its website says that “They (Tibetans) even managed to destroy the border stones erected by Britain in an open protest against the border division and the unfair treaties.” Chinese scholarship on the other hand is of the view that ever since the signing of this convention, China lost its sovereignty over Sikkim (Wang 1998, 56 emphasis added).

Notwithstanding the Tibetan disagreement, the convention did decide Sikkim–Tibet boundary. Article 1 of the convention reads:

“The boundary of the Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluent from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gipmochi and follows the above-mentioned water parting to the point where it meets Nipal territory.”

China has made use of this convention for claiming the tri-junction of India-China-Bhutan at Gipmochi or Gymochen or Jimu Mazhen in Chinese. However, according to the geographical features the “watershed” and “the crest of the mountain range do not stretch beyond Batang La, 6 kilometres north of Doka La. It is this interpretation which Bhutan and India are holding on to and have infuriated China the most. China since early 2000s has built a motor able road to Shinche La or Shenjiula, however, presently when China wanted to extend it to the Jampheri Ridge near Doka La, roughly over 2 km north of Gipmochi, Indian forces entered the third country to stop the construction. The area of stand-off is a disputed territory between Bhutan and China and both have concluded 24 rounds of talks to resolve the dispute. China has expressed its interest to swap the area with disputed area in North and Eastern Bhutan, but owing to special relationship with India, Bhutan is unable to strike a deal with China. Moreover, according to Bhutan, there is a written agreement of 1998 between Bhutan and China, which says that both will safeguard peace in the area and maintain the status quo. India’s former National Security Advisor, Shiv Shankar Menon has also maintained that this is China’s attempt to change the status quo at the tri-junction. On 28 August, both sides announced that they are disengaging and restoring the status quo. Thanks to the BRICS summit that was being hosted by China in Xiamen, thus ended the 73 days’ stand-off.

4.2 June 15 Galwan Incident

Galwan, where India had a forward post in 1962, witnessed one of the bloodiest stand-offs on the evening of 15 June 2020 at patrolling point 14 when the Indian soldiers who had gone there to verify the Chinese withdrawal agreed upon by the corps commanders of both sides in a meeting held on 6 June and were ambushed and attacked with iron rods with metal nails on them. Both sides suffered causalities, India reported 20 fatalities including an officer, but China kept its losses secret.

The death of Indian soldiers in Galwan, the first after 1962, dealt a heavy blow to the CBMs India and China had signed between 1988 and 2013, as well as the
“Wuhan Spirit” and “Chennai Connect” that talked about the “consensus” between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping that both sides “will not allow their differences to turn into disputes.” In Galwan, it appears that China, rather has thrown down the gauntlet to India, telling her that all the disputed territory between India and China belongs to it, and that it will continue to change the status quo and pass it as fait accompli to India with brute force. “If the satellite images are to be believed, China has crossed its own perception about the LAC in Galwan and moved a few kilometres westward in finger areas of Pangong Tso. The coordinates provided by China to India as regards the boundary in Western sector during the 1960 border negotiations, and later reinforced on ground after the 1962, including on its maps of the official history of the 1962 conflict titled *History of China’s Counter Attack in Self-defence Along the Sino-Indian Borders* (Chinese edition) published by the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences in 1994, has been violated, implying that China seeks boundary beyond these coordinates” (Deepak 2020a).

Irrespective of activating the WMCC, having eight rounds of talks at corps commander level on 6, 22, 30 June, 14 July, 2 August, 22 September, 12 October, and 6 November 2020; phone calls between the SRs and foreign ministers, and then meetings between the defense and foreign ministers of both sides in Moscow, but disengagement and de-escalation have not made much progress. Disengagement has happened at patrolling point 14 and 15 by creating “buffer zones” of 4 km separating both forces, but on other points such as Depsang, Gogra and Pangong Tso, China has refused to pull back. Both have deployed forces along the LAC and may be there for a long haul. The issue has been discussed in greater details in Chapter 10 titled “India-China relations post Covid-19 and Galwan.”

The stand-off of 2013, 2014, 2017 and 2020 in the Western sector along the LAC demonstrates that any attempts to enhance military capability along the borders by both India and China may create further tension and vitiate the security environment. It is also a pointer to the fact that India-China relations remains “fragile” and the border issue is the root cause of most of the trust deficit and mutual suspicion, if not handled properly could rekindle animosities in no time; it also indicates that the existing mechanisms fall short of finding a solution to the border issue, especially when both India and China are making fait accompli of the areas under their jurisdictions in the Eastern and Western sectors. Therefore, it becomes imperative for both India and China to show political will and resolve and reach an agreeable resolution to the border as soon as possible. Dai (2016, 283) posits that since 2007 round of the Special Representatives, “our main focus was to keep the channels of negotiations open, and safeguard the atmospherics…” demonstrating that the mechanism of the SR was dead within three years of its inception. Not only the SR, these stand-offs show that the CBMs have been repeatedly violated and made redundant (Deepak 2020b).
5 CBMs Could Lead to Better Regional and Multilateral Cooperation?

Even though the stalemate on the border issue persists, and the gap between India and China is widening in terms of economic development and overall living standards of their population, both have witnessed increased level of engagement at world arena. Both have found some real convergence of interests on issues such as climate change, democratization of international financial institutions through multilateral forums such as Russia-India-China Strategic Triangle; Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS); Brazil, South Africa, India China (BASIC); the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); East Asian Summits (EAS); G 20 and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). India and China have also initiated dialogue on terrorism, Afghanistan, and high-level mechanism on cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

The multilateral cooperation has been used to strengthen bilateral relations by both the countries, and both are working towards raising the level of bilateral relationship with the hope of creating larger stakes in each other’s economic systems through complementarities and interdependence. It may, however, be reminded that diversification of bilateral and multilateral exchange, as well as cooperation on international issues of common concern has been based on the premise that India and China will maintain peace and tranquillity along the border, will ensure the sanctity of the LAC and the CBMs. But, given the nature of transgressions and changing of the status quo as has been witnessed in Galwan, it suggest that India-China relationship is fragile and remains exposed to vulnerabilities by domestic, regional and global posturing of both India and China.

6 Conclusion

It could be discerned that as long as India and China have adhered to the provisions of the CBMs, they have managed the border well and diversified their relationship in other areas. However, recent Chinese transgression and stand-offs in Doklam, Nakula in Sikkim, Galwan and Pangong Tso, especially Galwan, where 20 Indian soldiers were martyred, have demonstrated that the violation of the CBMs has brought the relationship to nadir, and that it may require a long time to normalize the relations. Why is there a change in Chinese behaviour?

At the outset, it is clear that border is not the biggest agenda for China. China believes that it has not reached the stage where resolution is must. Therefore, “maintenance of peace and tranquillity,” “managing” rather than solving the problem will be China’s top priority, despite of the fact that the cost of maintaining “peace and tranquillity” is becoming higher. China knows that the CBMs will not be enough to resolve the problem, hence no stone should be left unturned as far as infrastructure development in Tibet and Xinjiang is concerned, so as the LAC is made accessible for patrolling and quick deployment in the rear. This was demonstrated during most of the stand-offs in the Western sector, especially in the year 2020. It is out of this
thinking that China does not support identification of the LAC. China believes that clarification of the LAC will lead to opening more points of friction; moreover, an unidentified LAC will provide China an opportunity to change the goalposts further westward, as was seen in the Galwan Valley. This is also owing to such a proposition that China has pitched for a sort of “demilitarized zone” along the border, which India may be reluctant to accept at this point in time. Nonetheless, the same is mirrored in the so-called buffer zones China created in the place of restoring status quo ante in the Galwan, thus denying India patrolling access to certain points in the areas.

As India tries to revamp its own border infrastructure and enable greater accessibility to the LAC, it is bound to create more points of friction and an aggressive response from China, as has been witnessed by the building of Durbak-Shyok-DBO road recently. The choices before India in the short term would be to maintain peace and tranquillity along the border strengthen the existing mechanisms and introduce new ones, especially relating to drones and AI technologies; chalk out a time-bound border infrastructure development plan in terms of rail, road and air connectivity; nodes of internal connectivity initiative such as Bharatmala need to be extended to our neighbourhood, modernization of our defence forces with integrated theatre command, etc. These are some of the measures through which India should be able to uphold the principle of “equal and mutual security” envisaged in the 2012 CBMs, else the gap on the ground will be widened further and India’s position on border weakened.

Finally, the “rise of India” and its international image were based on India’s robust economic growth, demographic dividend and capacity to handle domestic and global challenges realistically. As the growth and capacity to handle internal challenges have entered the zone of unpredictability, asymmetries in India-China relations are bound to widen. Therefore, India seeking some equilibrium and understanding with China on various issues may not work to India’s favour. Not only does it put China in an advantageous position, but also provides her with opportunities to rake up new issues. Nonetheless, both India and China need to take a holistic view of the changing regional and global political architecture and rebalance their relations by positioning themselves in the middle of this change by negotiating what is workable and what is not by exploring pragmatic constructivism.

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