



---

MAPPING  
CHINA  
JOURNAL

2020

---

# I V A N L I D A R E V

## Insecurity in the Himalayas: The Impact of the Territorial Dispute Between China and India on their Security Dilemma

No 4

### ABSTRACT

The article examines how the China-India territorial dispute affects the security dilemma between Beijing and New Delhi. The conventional view holds that the militarisation of the defacto border between the two sides is the key contribution of the territorial dispute to the China-India security dilemma. The article partly accepts this view but argues that there are three other aspects of the dispute which drive the security dilemma between China and India. These three drivers are: 1) the close connection between the dispute and the so-called “Tibet issue”; 2) the nexus between the dispute and the security of India’s unstable Northeast region; 3) the involvement of the United States in the dispute. On all these aspects of the dispute Chinese and Indian security interests and policies are opposed to each other and thus security gain for one side results in a security loss for the other, feeding the security dilemma between them.

### AUTHOR

Ivan Lidarev is a doctoral candidate at the Defence Studies Department, King’s College London. He previously served as advisor at Bulgaria’s National Assembly, Associate Editor of E-International Relations, GLOBSEC Young Leader and MERICS Young European China Talent. He studied at George Washington University, Fudan University and Bard College. Ivan has a rich think tank experience, having worked at New Delhi’s Observer Research Foundation, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Council on Foreign Relations and the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. His work focuses on Asian security, especially Sino-Indian relations.



# Insecurity in the Himalayas: The Impact of the Territorial Dispute Between China and India on Their Security Dilemma

By

Ivan Lidarev

## I. Introduction

The China-India territorial dispute has long troubled relations between Beijing and New Delhi. The dispute has regularly affected the security of both Asian powers in spite of continued attempts to resolve it or marginalize its impact on bilateral relations. It has not only produced a brief war between China and India in 1962, but has also continued to generate regular tensions, armed standoffs and even military crises on the border, most notably in 1986, 2017 and 2020. It has also led to a competitive buildup of troops, arms and infrastructure on the border. Against this background, it is fair to conclude that the dispute clearly generates insecurity and military competition around the border and thus contributes to the security dilemma between China and India. However, it is not clear *how exactly* it does so.

This article seeks to answer the crucial question: *How does the China-India territorial dispute affect the security dilemma between Beijing and New Delhi*. Most writings on the subject automatically assume that the militarization of the Sino-Indian border, with the threat of military conflict that it breeds and the uncertainty about the intentions of the other side, generates a security dilemma between the two sides (Garver 2002; Holslag 2009; Sui 2014; Lu 2016). The following article does not refute this assumption but rather aims to modify it. It argues that it is not just the buildup of troops and arms on the border, but also the dispute's larger security implications that drive the Sino-Indian security dilemma.

In particular, this work holds that three aspects of the dispute contribute to the security dilemma between the two sides: 1) the close connection between the dispute and the so-called "Tibet issue"; 2) the nexus between the dispute and the security of India's unstable Northeast region; 3) the involvement of the United States in the dispute. Each of these pits the irreconcilable security interests of one side against the other, generating a spiral of insecurity in which the security gains for one side inevitably produce security losses for the other. Thus, these three aspects of the dispute drive the security dilemma between China and India.

Three points should be made about the article. First, it is important to examine the article's main research question, how the China-India territorial dispute affects the security dilemma between the two. This question enables us to gain better understanding of both the security dilemma and how it is influenced by the territorial dispute. As this influence is often inaccurately assumed in literature as primarily military, the question also serves to challenge a widespread misperception.

Second, the article aims neither to explain the complex China-India territorial dispute and its dynamics, nor to examine the China-India security dilemma in its entirety. Third, the article is broadly based on the author's doctoral research, including substantial field research in both China and India. It draws on published primary sources, such as articles and books written by Chinese and Indian diplomats and former officials, on secondary literature such as academic publications, articles, opinion pieces, and books by Chinese and Indian scholars, as well as on the author's interviews with scholars, retired diplomats, and retired military officers in China and India.<sup>1</sup>

Before proceeding, it is necessary to briefly present the territorial dispute. The China-India territorial dispute has plagued Sino-Indian relations since the 1950s and was the main cause of the 1962 war between the two sides, which China decisively won, without substantially altering the territorial status quo on the ground. The dispute concerns both the whole 3488 km long China-India border (Ministry of Home Affairs, India n.d.)<sup>2</sup> and large pieces of territory divided into three sectors, Western Sector, Middle Sector and Eastern Sector (please see the map below).

---

<sup>1</sup> On the Chinese side, the author undertook interviews in Fudan University, Peking University, China Foreign Affairs University and Tsinghua University, as well as in four thinktanks, The China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Pangoal Institution and the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS). On the Indian side, this article is based on interviews in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi College, and several thinktanks, including the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA), Observer Research Foundation(ORF), Centre for Policy Research (CPR), Delhi Policy Group (DPG), Institute for Chinese Studies (ICS), Carnegie India, Vivekananda International Foundation(VIF), and the Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA).

<sup>2</sup> Please note that there are fierce disagreements between the two sides about the length of the de facto border between China and India based on the differing claims of the two sides. However, most independent sources accept the figure 3488km.



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),

Source: The author, based on a map by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

The largest disputed territories are Arunachal Pradesh in the Eastern Sector, held by India and claimed by China as South Tibet (*Zangnan* 藏南), and Aksai Chin in the Western Sector, held by Beijing and claimed by New Delhi. In spite of decades of negotiations and several pushes to resolve it, the dispute has remained unsettled and has been further militarized in recent years with the deployment of troops and the building of infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border which separates the territories controlled by the two sides.<sup>3</sup>

The rest of this article is divided into seven sections. The first three sections examine the concept of security dilemma, the China-India security dilemma, and the connection between the territorial dispute and the China-India security dilemma. The remaining sections analyze three aspects of the territorial dispute that influence the security dilemma: the “Tibet issue,” its connection to India’s Northeast, and US involvement, followed by a brief conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> Where LAC actually lies is also disputed, with the two sides having different perceptions of its location.

## II. The Concept of the Security Dilemma

To examine the impact of the China-India territorial dispute on the security dilemma between the two Asian giants, it is necessary to briefly present the concept of security dilemma and some of its most important theoretical aspects.

The security dilemma is a model of competition and conflict in international relations in which ‘an increase in one state’s security can make others less secure’ in Robert Jervis’ famous formulation (Jervis 1976:62). According to the model, one state’s efforts to enhance its security make another state less secure and prompt it to respond with countermeasures to increase its own security, countermeasures which infringe on the security of the first state and push it to take further steps to increase its security, with the same result as earlier. This process generates a spiral of insecurity in which each state seeks security but ends less secure (Glaser 1997: 171-174).

As the security dilemma is a realist model, most closely associated with the traditions of defense realism and neoclassical realism, it is based on realism’s key assumptions, namely the existence of an anarchic, self-help world of states with no higher authority to regulate relations between them. This anarchic world generates uncertainty in a state about other states’ intentions as well as fear of them, both the direct origin of the security dilemma according to most scholars (Herz 1951; Jervis 1976; Jervis 1978). The major exception of this understanding is Herbert Butterfield, one of the creators of the concept of the security dilemma, who instead holds that the security dilemma originates from fear and human nature (Butterfield 1951).

The security dilemma is regulated by both material and psychological factors called modifiers which increase or decrease its severity. While many such modifiers have been identified in literature, several have been widely accepted among theorists. The material, or structural, modifiers most frequently identified by scholars include geographic proximity, alliances, the balance between offense and defense determined by military technology<sup>4</sup> and the differentiability of offensive and defensive weapons (or postures) (Jervis 1978:186-211; Taliaferro 2000:137; Snyder 1996:167–192; Tang 2009:620-621).

The psychological modifiers most often described in literature include fear, worst-case scenario mentality, history of loss, and misperception (Jervis 1976:67-76; Tang 2009:622-623; Glaser 1997:182-183). There have been debates about the impact of different modifiers on the severity

---

<sup>4</sup> The defense-offense balance determines whether the offense or the defense in a military conflict has an advantage.

of the dilemma. In particular, scholars have debated the balance between offensive and defensive capabilities and their differentiability (Lynn-Jones 1995:660-661; Glaser and Kaufmann 1998:44-83). Similarly, there have been debates whether the security dilemma inevitably produces a spiral of escalation that automatically ends in armed conflict. (Tang 2009:616-620).

For the purposes of this study, it is crucial to point out that the security dilemma is not purely a military phenomenon but also a political one. Not only is security a political-military phenomenon in the realist tradition, but the uncertainty which lies at the heart of the security dilemma is fundamentally an issue about the political intentions of the other side. Just as important, political factors shape the modifiers that regulate the security dilemma. While there are many such factors in literature, two alliances and the presence of potentially restive ethnic groups (Snyder 1984; Posen 1993), are particularly relevant for understanding the relationship between the territorial dispute and the security dilemma between China and India.

On the basis of this brief theoretical overview, this article defines the security dilemma as a self-reinforcing military and political spiral generated by uncertainty and fear in which security gains for one state produce security losses for another. This broad formulation does not aim to be theoretically rigorous or exhaustive but rather to serve as a working definition that allows us to examine all the aspects by which the China-India territorial dispute affects the security of two sides.

### **III. The China-India Security Dilemma**

Is there a security dilemma between China and India? This section briefly presents the debate on this question and then argues that there is indeed a security dilemma between the two Asian neighbours.

Most of the large literature on Sino-Indian relations holds that there is a security dilemma between China and India (Garver 2002; Holslag 2009; Dittmer 2001; Wei 2004; Lu 2016). While most authors recognize that there are several factors which drive this security dilemma, they often tend to focus on a single one, such as naval competition in the Indian Ocean (Raja Mohan 2012), the nuclear arms race (Yang 2016; Kampani 2014), competition in South Asia (Malik 2011; Hu 2017), tensions over water resources (Christopher 2013) and, of course, the unresolved territorial dispute (Sui 2014).

However, there are also dissenting voices. Some authors disagree that there is a security dilemma between China and India. For instance, Srinath Raghavan argues that most scholars mistake the Sino-Indian competition for a security dilemma and, after examining the history of China-Indian relations, concludes that China-India security relations are driven not by a security dilemma but by the domestic politics of the two sides and by regional geopolitics (Raghavan 2019).

Others believe that Sino-Indian relations cannot be understood through the allegedly simple prism of a security dilemma. Chinese scholar Li Li holds that China-India security relations have changed markedly since the end of the Cold War due to changes in the two sides' understanding of security and thus their security relationship has evolved away from a security dilemma toward a more positive state of affairs (Li 2009).<sup>5</sup>

There are also scholars who question whether the China-India security dynamics operate as a traditional security dilemma. For instance, Fang Tien-Sze argues that contrary to the assumptions of a traditional security dilemma the two sides have highly asymmetric threat perceptions. As a result, India as the less secure power is more assertive than China, while China as the more secure actor strives to preserve the security status quo (Fang 2014).

While recognizing that such criticism makes important points, this article argues that there is a China-India security dilemma. This conclusion is based on the existence of several areas in which China and India are indeed locked in dynamics in which the security gains for one side automatically result in a security loss for the other. What distinguishes these areas from mere conflicts of interest that breed competition is their relevance for the hard security of either side, its territorial integrity and its military security. There are five such areas which generate a security dilemma between the two sides.

First, the nuclear arms race between Beijing and New Delhi engenders a security dilemma. The two sides both possess substantial nuclear arsenals and the capability to deliver massive nuclear strikes against each other. These capabilities are fast expanding in quantity and improving in accuracy and survivability. Both sides have, explicitly or implicitly, recognized each other as a nuclear threat. In 1998, in a secret letter to US president Bill Clinton India justified the very weaponization of its nuclear program with Beijing (Deepak 2005:371).

---

<sup>5</sup> Li Li 's views on China-India relations have somewhat darkened since then but she continues to see them primarily as complex and not locked in a persistent, severe security dilemma (Li 2017; Li 2019).



Similarly, China has consistently seen India's nuclear weapons program as a threat, as indicated by its support for Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons aimed at offsetting India's, support which went as far as giving Islamabad highly enriched uranium sufficient for two atom bombs in 1982 (Small 2015:34). Crucially, the two sides have directed their nuclear and missile forces against each other. India's Agni-III missiles are stationed in Assam to target China's west coast, including Beijing and Shanghai (O'Donnell & Bollfrass 2020:6), and New Delhi is fast developing the Agni V ICBM which, with its greater range and greater reliability, would enable India to threaten all of China (Financial Express 2018). The ranges and location of both missile types indicate clearly that they are directed against China and not against Pakistan, India's other nuclear adversary. For its part China has long stationed nuclear-capable medium range ballistic missiles and, likely, nuclear weapons in Tibet and Yunnan, locations which leave no doubt that these capabilities are directed against India (Scott 2008:253; Cunningham & Metcalf 2011:7; O'Donnell & Bollfrass 2020:4).

Second, both China and India have developed alliances and partnerships with the other side's principal adversaries in a direct challenge to its military security. China has been allied with Pakistan for decades and has supplied its ally with weapons and nuclear support directly targeted at India. New Delhi has undermined Beijing's security by developing a growing partnership with the US and its allies, embodied in India's increasingly close defense cooperation with the US (Hu 2018) and its participation in the Quad, a naval grouping which also includes the US, Japan and Australia and is obviously directed against Beijing (Madan 2017). Beijing fears that the US-Indian partnership might eventually evolve into anti-China military alliance (Jaipragas & Sukumaran 2020).

Third, the Sino-Indian competition for influence in the two sides' shared strategic periphery, particularly in Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar, has direct military consequences for the security of each country. In case of armed conflict along their disputed border Beijing and New Delhi can turn this influence into military deployments, intelligence, and important tactical advantages. Similarly, each power can use these countries as a base to stir trouble in the other, either in China's Tibet or in India's restive Northeast. There are also prospects that Sri Lanka, the Maldives and even Bangladesh might also become security sensitive for both sides in the future, especially if their naval and security ties with China to expand.

Finally, the highly militarized LAC between the two sides and the closely related "Tibet issue" drive the security dilemma between the two sides. Both sides concentrate large forces around the LAC which would, very likely, play a key role in case of armed conflict. The "Tibet issue" is closely

related in many ways to the border, not least because it is the Chinese possession of Tibet which brings the Chinese and Indian armed forces in contact, generating a security dilemma along their militarized border. Both issues are discussed in greater detail below.

To these five drivers of the China-India security dilemma, it is also crucial to add the deep sense of mistrust between the two sides, a key psychological component of the security dilemma which breeds uncertainty about the other side's intentions, fear and worse-case scenario mentality. On the Indian side, this mistrust is rooted in the traumatic memory of the 1962 war and the fear that Beijing might once again strike India (Garver 2001:225,376). On the Chinese side, mistrust is centered on India's historical support for Tibetan separatism and the Chinese conviction that India has not truly accepted Tibet as part of China and seeks to undermine Beijing's rule there (Qiu 2016; Kang 2013). India's relations with the US and Japan also stir up the traditional Chinese fear of encirclement.

Admittedly, the China-India security dilemma is asymmetric, as New Delhi views Beijing as a greater threat than the other way round, due to the large asymmetry in capabilities in China's favor and the memory of the Chinese victory in 1962. However, it would be misleading to assume that China does not see India as a potential security threat. Rigorous analyses of Chinese publications not only reveal a persistent Chinese preoccupation with India's military development (Saalman 2011), but also an increased security concern caused by India's military modernization and closer defense ties with the US (Pardesi 2010).

#### **IV. The Militarized Border**

The territorial dispute plays a major role in the security dilemma between China and India. As most literature on the dispute and on China-India relations points out, the presence of a large unresolved territorial dispute, an undemarcated border and a large concentration of troops inevitably feeds the security dilemma between the two sides (Holslag 2009; Garver 2002; Scott 2008). Very predictably most analyses of the nexus between the dispute and the security dilemma focus on the military aspect of the security dilemma (Holslag 2009; Sui 2014; Joshi & Mukherjee 2019). This section briefly presents the military aspect of the dispute and its impact on the security dilemma between Beijing and New Delhi. Then it argues that the dispute has three other aspects which contribute substantially to the security dilemma between China and India.

The Sino-India border areas are heavily militarized. Counting the deployments close to the LAC itself and the strength of the military regions responsible for it, there are almost half a million soldiers in case of armed conflict on the border. China can rely on 200,00-230,00 troops under the Western theater command and the Tibet and Xinjiang military district (O'Donnell & Bollfrass 2020:8). In this theater the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) can field about 157 fighters, of which about 101 are 4<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft, all deployed at four air bases at Hotan, Lhasa/Gonggar, Ngari-Gunsa, and Xigaze, as well as a force of UAVs (O'Donnell & Bollfrass 2020:8-9).

For its part, India has deployed about 225,000 troops in its Northern, Eastern and Central commands facing China and can muster an estimated 270 fighters, including 122 4<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft and 68 ground attack aircraft in these military commands (O'Donnell & Bollfrass 2020:7, 9). While these figures suggest an Indian advantage, it is important to bear in mind that China's military is much larger and better equipped than India's, particularly with missiles that would prove very important in a conflict, and that Beijing can fast deploy troops to the border on its impressive transportation infrastructure. Naturally, the presence of Pakistan, a Chinese ally and Indian enemy, significantly affects the overall military situation.

To offset these weaknesses India has embarked on a campaign to improve its position on the border by raising a mountain strike corps, improving airfields, making moves to boost aircraft and helicopter capabilities, and increasing firepower, all as part of a new offensive Indian posture toward China (Joshi & Mukherjee 2019:33-34). Beijing has responded with a new emphasis on high-altitude warfare (Gan 2019), the induction of new howitzers (Liu & Ji 2019), massive military exercises in Tibet (Rajagopalan 2020a) and the introduction of a special tank for high-altitude operations (Episkopos 2020).

Beside the purely military competition, the two sides have also been engaged in an infrastructure building competition along the border (Ramachandran 2016). Whereas this infrastructure serves to consolidate each side's hold on the border region and symbolizes its sovereignty, its main task is military; to deploy and supply troops around LAC, particularly in case of conflict. While India has made substantial progress in building roads, bridges, and tunnels in the borderlands in recent years, China still enjoys a substantial infrastructure lead over its rival (Jakhar 2020).

This massive buildup of troops, arms, and defense infrastructure feeds the China-India dilemma in three ways. First, it creates a great military threat for both sides in case of armed conflict. The troop buildup on the border not only enables a surprise attack, but also permits either side to exploit the internal vulnerabilities of the other in case of war by invading such restive border territories as Tibet, Kashmir and Northeast India where it can join forces with local separatists. Inevitably, such military scenarios shape the security perceptions of each country's political and military leadership toward the other, instilling a fear and worst-case scenario thinking.

Second, the concentration of forces on the border regularly produces "border incidents" that create political and military tensions between the two sides. Such incidents, in the majority of cases initiated by China, involve either troops moving into disputed territory to patrol or tensions over military infrastructure such as roads, bunkers or surveillance equipment. Some of these incidents are likely the result of the divergent perceptions of where the LAC lies. Others constitute deliberate acts of pressure, usually Chinese acts, in what an Indian general referred to the author as "pinpricks" aimed at pressuring India (anonymous 2017, personal communication, 15 November). In either case, incidents not only create regular low-level military tensions but also have larger political impact on bilateral relations. This point is well illustrated by the Chinese incursion on Indian territory in September 2014 during President Xi's first visit to India after the inauguration of the Modi government which overshadowed the visit and seriously complicated relations between President Xi and PM Modi (The Times of India 2014).

Third, the militarization of the disputed China-India border affects the China-India-Pakistan military triangle. The presence of massive Chinese forces on the border threatens India with the nightmarish possibility of a two-front war in the case of conflict with Pakistan or China. This Indian vulnerability is particularly palpable in the westernmost section of the border, where Chinese, Indian and Pakistani forces occupy positions close to the de facto trijunction of their borders around the troubled Kashmir region, disputed between Pakistan and India<sup>6</sup> and long destabilized by a Pakistani-backed insurgency.

The military situation along the LAC obviously feeds into the China-India security dilemma. However, its importance as a source of insecurity between the two sides should not be exaggerated. After all, the chance of military conflict between China and India under present circumstances is

---

<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking China is also a participant in the Kashmir dispute, as India claims Aksai Chin as part of Kashmir and lays claims to a tract of territory around the Shaksgam valley which Pakistan transferred to China in 1963 (Smith 2013:24-25).

not great, even after the 2020 Ladakh crisis between the two sides. Such a conflict would be very costly and very high-risk for both sides. A victory or even a stalemate against the massive military machine of the other side would require enormous efforts, losses, and expenses, while the potential gain in terms of recovered disputed territory would be small, as most of the disputed territory is of limited strategic and economic value. Moreover, a war on the border can easily escalate into a larger conflict on land and sea between the two sides, produce nuclear tensions and involve Pakistan and even the US. Regardless how such a war ends, its long-term effect would be to turn the other side into an enemy, force it in the embrace of hostile powers and likely prompt it to support separatism in restive regions such as Kashmir, Northeast India, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

Does this mean that the dispute has only limited impact on the China-India security dilemma? The answer is a decisive ‘no.’ The impact of the territorial dispute on the China-India security dilemma is much broader than the military build-up along the LAC on which most experts focus. As the territorial dispute is closely connected with other important security issues, its significance for both sides extends far beyond a militarized dispute over territory. It is these, sometimes underappreciated, aspects of the territorial dispute which drive much of the security dilemma between China and India.

In particular, three aspects of the territorial dispute beyond the military situation feed into the Sino-Indian security dilemma. First, the territorial dispute’s close connection with Tibet and the “Tibet issue” affects the security dilemma between the two sides. As Tibet is a vital question of national sovereignty for China and an important strategic issue for India, the two sides’ security interests clash over it. Second, the dispute’s importance for the security of the Indian Northeast also feeds into the security dilemma between the two Asian giants. For India the restive Northeast concerns India’s territorial integrity and internal security, while for China it represents an Indian vulnerability that gives Beijing substantial strategic advantages and a region important to the security of Tibet and Beijing’s southern flank in Yunnan and Myanmar. Third, the involvement of the US in the territorial dispute also exacerbates the China-India security dilemma. On the background of growing US-India rapprochement and escalating US-China competition, Washington’s involvement not only strengthens India’s position politically and militarily but also signals support in case of conflict between the two sides.

To understand how these three aspects of the China-India territorial dispute affect the security dilemma between the two sides, the next three sections examine each of them in detail.

#### IV. The “Tibet issue”

The close connection between the territorial dispute and the so-called “Tibet issue” is one aspect of the dispute which severely affects the security dilemma between China and India. To examine its impact on the security dilemma this section first clarifies the connection between the dispute and the “Tibet issue,” then explains what crucial security interests China and India have at stake in the “Tibet issue,” and finally argues how the dispute affects the China-India security dilemma via the “Tibet issue.” Before proceeding, it is necessary to point out that the term “Tibet issue” is used here as a broad, umbrella term which encompasses various Tibet-related questions, such as the issue of China’s sovereignty over Tibet, the campaign of the Dalai Lama and his government in exile to challenge it and the controversy over Beijing’s policies in Tibet.

There is a close connection between the China-India territorial dispute and the “Tibet issue” for five reasons. First, China and India’s claims in the territorial dispute are based on Tibetan precedent. The two sides’ positions on the dispute are founded either on the historical sovereignty exercised by Tibet, invoked by Beijing, or on border treaties signed by Tibet, such as the 1914 Simla Accords (Noorani 2011:169-209) and the 1840 Dogra-Tibetan agreement (Noorani 2011:Genesis), which New Delhi uses to support its position.

Second, the territorial dispute raises the critical question of the status of Tibet as part of China, as the Simla Accords were signed by a Tibet which functioned as a sovereign state. Thus, India’s invocation of this treaty challenges China’s present-day and historical sovereignty over Tibet. Third, the “Tibet issue” played a key role in China’s decision to launch the 1962 border war, on the suspicion that India tries to undermine Chinese rule in Tibet (Garver 2006), a suspicion that persists to this day.

Fourth, many experts and policymakers on both sides believe that the territorial dispute will not be resolved until the “Tibet issue” is settled to Beijing’s advantage, i.e. there is no more challenge to China’s sovereignty over Tibet. A very high-ranking former Indian security official told this author that ‘the Chinese are not interested in settling the dispute because of Tibet’ and want to wait for the “Tibet issue” to be resolved after the passing of the current Dalai Lama (anonymous 2017, personal communication, 28 November). One leading Chinese expert concurred, adding that if India changes its Tibet policy and evicts the Dalai Lama and his government in exile, China would ‘make some very important deal’ on the territorial dispute (anonymous 2018, personal communication, 13 December).

Finally, the “Tibet issue” clearly influences the policies of the two sides on the territorial dispute (Lidarev 2019:120-136). The only case in which China and India have made any substantive progress on their territorial dispute came after India made concessions on the “Tibet issue” by recognizing the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) as part of the PRC (Deepak 2005:430-32). Similarly, after the 2008 unrest in Tibet, which Beijing believed the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGIE) in India had organised, China seriously hardened its position on the border with increased border incidents and attempted blockage of a development loan for the disputed Arunachal Pradesh (Lidarev 2019:130).

The “Tibet issue” is central to Sino-Indian relations and the security dilemma between the two sides because it affects the security interests of both China and India. For China, Tibet is a huge, restive region with a large ethnic minority population and great natural resources whose stability and security are regularly threatened by the separatist TGIE led by the Dalai Lama. As the Dalai Lama and the TGIE have been based in India for decades and conduct their activities, including their international campaign for Tibetan autonomy or independence with the acquiescence of New Delhi, the “Tibet issue” is a ‘great concern of China in its relations with India’ (Li 2009).

Against this background, Tibet and the “Tibet issue” affect China’s security interests in three ways. First, for Beijing the “Tibet issue” is a question of sovereignty and thus a “core security interest” on which no compromise can be made. Second, for China Tibet is a question of internal security. TAR and the Tibetan inhabited parts of China have for years been rocked by protests, Tibetan self-immolations, and large scale unrest, such as in the 1987-89 period and in 2008. Third, the “Tibet issue” is also a question of external national security for Beijing.

Traditionally seen as a ‘backdoor to China’ through which invaders can enter China (Norbu 2008:687-688), Tibet constitutes a Chinese vulnerability that adversaries such as the US and India can exploit, as they have done in the past. Against this backdrop, China’s basic security interest has been to solidify its rule over Tibet, eliminate any international or domestic challenge to its sovereignty over Tibet, and deny the “Tibet issue” to hostile external forces.

For India, the “Tibet issue” presents a special security challenge. With Tibet’s incorporation into the PRC in 1950 India lost the strategic buffer which separated it from China and ensured the security of its northern borders. Hence, the “Tibet issue” affects India’s security interests in four ways. First, China’s hold on Tibet inherently militarizes India’s northern border and poses a military

challenge to India's security. Second, the consolidation of Chinese rule in Tibet allows Beijing to project power in the whole Himalayan belt, by using its financial muscle and Buddhism to spread its influence in Nepal, Bhutan and in some parts of India, such as Sikkim, Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. Third, China's claimed historical sovereignty over Tibet legally challenges most of India's northern border and serves as the basis of Chinese claims to Indian territory, particularly to Arunachal Pradesh. Finally, the "Tibet issue" presents India with a rare Chinese vulnerability it can exploit in spite of the massive imbalance in power between the two sides. On the basis of all this, New Delhi's basic interest is to prevent China from fully consolidating its hold over Tibet in order to prevent Beijing from threatening India and keep the advantage the "Tibet issue" gives it.

Against this background, security dilemma dynamics emerge between China and India on the "Tibet issue" and the related territorial dispute. Put very simply, China strives to gain security by completely settling the "Tibet issue," while India tries to improve its security by keeping it alive. In practice, this has meant that Beijing tries to offset India's advantage and force New Delhi to restrict Tibetan activities, deny any form of recognition to the Dalai Lama and the TGIE and eventually expel them or force them to capitulate to China's demands. India for its part has aimed at exactly the opposite, to allow the "Tibet issue" to remain relevant and maintain China's strategic vulnerability in Tibet to keep Beijing in check and use it if necessary. Each of these two strategies on the "Tibet issue" aims to give one side more security at the expense of the other and thus would translate into a military and political advantage on the territorial dispute.

Each side has adopted policies to advance its goals above, which predictably have undermined the security of the other side. India has hosted the Dalai Lama and the TGIE on its territory and has acquiesced to their massive international activities aimed at advancing the cause of Tibetan autonomy or independence. New Delhi has also kept two paramilitary forces which have enlisted many Tibetans in their ranks, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Special Frontier Force (SFF), which tellingly falls under the command of India's external intelligence service (Garver 2002:3).

These policies have given India the so-called "Tibet card" (*xizang pai* 西藏牌) against China (Hu 2017; Qiu 2016). If seriously provoked by China or seeking leverage on an issue, New Delhi can play this card by increasing its support for the TGIE. Importantly, New Delhi can also use the card to pressure China on the territorial dispute to moderate its policy and territorial claims to India (Lidarev 2019; 131). Hence, the "Tibet card" is both an insurance policy for India against China



and a lever over China on issues such as the territorial dispute or Pakistan (anonymous 2018, personal communication, 13 December). As Chinese scholar Zhang Guihong notes ‘Tibet is virtually the only effective mechanism of leverage India has against Beijing’ (Zhang 2005:64).

Predictably, China has felt deeply insecure by India’s Tibet policy. It has seen this policy as an attempt to turn Tibet into a ‘buffer zone’ (*huanchong chu* 缓冲区) (Qiu 2016) and use the “Tibet issue” as a pressure point. As a former Chinese diplomat explained to the author ‘when China-India relations become tense they will use this card again’ (anonymous 2018, personal communication, December 2). To reduce this vulnerability and increase its security and pressure on India, Beijing has adopted various policies. These include isolating the Dalai Lama internationally, preparing the ground for his reincarnation, continuing some minimal support for Northeast separatists (Routray 2017), and using the territorial dispute to pressure India on the “Tibet issue” through coercive diplomacy (Lidarev 2019:128-131).

Naturally, the opposition between the mutually exclusive security interests of the two sides on the “Tibet issue” and the mistrust it breeds have large implications for the territorial dispute. These implications generate a security dilemma on the dispute. A Tibet which is fully integrated into China would strengthen Beijing’s claims to Indian territory and might even expand them, massively improve China’s military position along the border and deny India a lever with which it can pressure China on the territorial dispute. Conversely, an unresolved “Tibet issue” would undermine Chinese claims to Indian territory, legitimize the historical agreement on which India has founded its position on the dispute, strengthen India’s military position in the border areas and sustain New Delhi’s “Tibet card” that might threaten Chinese rule in Tibet in the future. This, in brief, is how the connection between the territorial dispute and the “Tibet issue” generates a security dilemma in Sino-Indian relations.

## **VI. India’s Northeast**

The nexus between the dispute and the security of India’s troubled Northeast also feeds into the security dilemma between China and India. The following section first examines why India’s Northeast is a great vulnerability for New Delhi and then explains how it is connected to the territorial dispute and how it contributes to the security dilemma between the two sides.

The Northeast, a large region comprising eight states, is one of India's great internal security vulnerabilities.<sup>7</sup> Its vulnerability is predetermined by the region's geography, its ethnic composition, its relative economic underdevelopment and its long history of separatism and instability. In terms of geography, the landlocked Northeast is barely connected with the rest of India through the extremely narrow Siliguri corridor which at its thinnest is merely 22km wide and, hence, stands geographically separate from the rest of India (Hu 2017). This makes New Delhi's ability to hold the region or reinforce it in case of war difficult. To make matters worse from Indian perspective, the Northeast is surrounded on three sides by foreign countries, including by China and Chinese dominated north Myanmar. Just as important, the region is very ethnically diverse, with about 220 different ethnic groups which speak a variety of languages (Jain 2016:275). This combination of ethnic diversity, severe economic underdevelopment, and the local populations' many grievances against New Delhi has fostered separatism and insurgency in the Northeast for decades. There have been a number of insurgent groups in the region, as many as 120 at one point (Hussain 2013:175), some of which had been backed by China in the past (Egreteau 2008:46-47) and, allegedly, continue to receive some Chinese support to this day (Routray 2017). While the insurgencies in the Northeast have declined in recent years due to police action, internal splits and agreements with the Indian government, they remain a factor of instability for the region and a threat to India's control over it. For all these reasons the Northeast is poorly integrated into India and hence presents a strategic vulnerability for New Delhi. Inevitably, such an Indian vulnerability offers China an opportunity to weaken and pressure its rival.

There is a close connection between the territorial dispute and the security and stability of India's Northeast, a connection that generates insecurity in New Delhi. There are three ways in which the dispute and the security of the Northeast are connected. First, China claims Arunachal Pradesh, one of the eight states of the Northeast. While it is very unlikely that Beijing will use force to enforce its claims, their very existence challenges India's sovereignty in the unstable Northeast and creates military and political tensions. This effect is further enhanced by the ambiguity of China's claims which breed uncertainty about Beijing's intentions on the Indian side and consequently insecurity. For instance, it is unclear if China claims all of Arunachal Pradesh, as its ambassador in India once stated, or only most of its territory, as its official maps suggest (Smith 2013:28). Equally, it is unclear if China claims more territory than just Arunachal Pradesh in the east, as Beijing claims 90 000 square km in the eastern sector, a territory larger than Arunachal Pradesh's 84 000 square

---

<sup>7</sup> The eight states are Arunachal Pradesh (which China claims), Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Originally, the Northeast included seven states until Sikkim was added in 2003.

km (Smith 2013:28). Inevitably such deliberate Chinese ambiguities raise fears in New Delhi that Beijing's claims might expand in the future.

Second, China's territorial claims to India, particularly in the strategic Chumbi valley, threaten to cut off the Siliguri corridor, often euphemistically referred to as India's vulnerable "chicken neck" (Hu 2017; Scott 2008: 247). As the strategic Chumbi valley is about 50km from the narrow Siliguri corridor which connects the Northeast to the rest of India, China's claims in the area have great strategic consequences and deeply worry New Delhi (Bajpai 2017). As the prominent Chinese scholar Hu Shisheng writes, the Siliguri corridor is a "sword of Damocles" (*Damokelisi zhijian* 达摩克里斯之剑) hanging over Indian strategic thinking (Hu 2017), making China's claims in the Chumbi Valley a great source of insecurity for India. In addition, through military deployments and infrastructure building Beijing has gradually strengthened its tactical position in the valley, greatly improving Beijing's chances of severing the "chicken neck" in case of war. Moreover, a stronger Chinese position in the Chumbi valley allows Beijing to pressure India whenever it chooses by building up its position in the area, as happened in 2007 (Scott 2008:247) and in 2017, the latter sparking the huge Doklam standoff that shook China-India relations (Panda 2017).

Third, China uses its territorial claims to put pressure on Sikkim, one of the eight states of the Northeast. Sikkim is a former Himalayan kingdom in which Beijing and New Delhi vied for influence until Sikkim acceded to India in 1975, an accession that China refused to officially recognize until 2005 (Lidarev 2015). Sikkim has emerged as an Indian vulnerability due to its controversial merger with India, its proximity to the Siliguri corridor and the fact that it borders Nepal and Bhutan in which China and India compete for influence. Whereas China has officially accepted Sikkim as part of India, it has sought to exploit India's Sikkim vulnerability. Beijing has claimed a part of Sikkim, the "Finger area," and has not accepted the 204 km border between China and Sikkim as undisputed, thus blocking the complete resolution of the Sikkim question (Lidarev 2015). Moreover, Beijing has used Sikkim to pressure India through construction activities and military patrols in the disputed "Finger area" in 2007 and 2014 (Garver & Wang 2010:247; Chellaney 2008; Lidarev 2015). Just as important, there has been some ambiguity about China's acceptance of Sikkim as part of India as Beijing has not publicly declared that Sikkim is part of India, implying that at some point China might raise the Sikkim issue again, as *Global Times* suggested at the height of the 2017 Doklam crisis (Zhou et al. 2017).

The dispute's connection with the security of India's troubled Northeast feeds into the security dilemma between China and India. India's security vulnerability offers an advantage to China which Beijing has partially tried to exploit, while for India it challenges New Delhi's sovereignty over the region, particularly in case of military conflict with China. The nexus between the dispute and the Northeast's security enables China to keep India off balance, pressure it whenever it needs, and improve its military position in case of conflict. Beyond taking advantage of New Delhi's vulnerability, China has an important stake in not allowing India to consolidate its position in the Northeast. Such a consolidation would enable India to project influence and "cause trouble" for China in Tibet, the China-dominated north Myanmar and even Yunnan, unstable areas with often restive ethnic groups living across the borders of China, India and Myanmar. A consolidation of Indian rule in the Northeast, and particularly in Arunachal Pradesh, would also have bearing on the "Tibet issue." Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as part of Tibet, hosts a large group of Tibetans and includes the monastery town of Tawang, where one Dalai Lama was born and the current one might be reincarnated outside Chinese control, to Beijing's great concern (Smith 2013:71-79).

For all these reasons China and India's security interests over the Northeast and the dispute with which it is connected, are in opposition to each other. More security for India in its Northeast would reduce China's security by depriving it of an advantage against a powerful rival and allowing India to threaten Chinese vulnerabilities. An improvement in China's position around the Northeast, in Sikkim and the Chumbi valley, would enhance China's security but undermine India's by increasing Beijing's ability to exploit New Delhi's vulnerabilities, especially in case of war. Hence, it is fair to conclude that the nexus between the territorial dispute and India's Northeast indeed generates a security dilemma.

## **VII. US Involvement**

US involvement in the China-India territorial dispute, although relatively small, also reinforces the security dilemma that the territorial dispute generates between India and China. This section first introduces the background to this US involvement, then presents the involvement itself and, lastly, examines how it influences the security dilemma between the two sides.

To understand the role of US involvement in the territorial dispute and how it impacts the China-India security dilemma, it is crucial to examine its background. The US involvement in the dispute has taken place against the backdrop of two developments which have made it very security

sensitive to China. First, there has been a great acceleration of US-China competition in recent years. While China has consistently seen itself as surrounded and threatened by the US in what one very popular Chinese book described as C-shaped encirclement<sup>8</sup> (*C-xing baowei* C形包围), the last decade has witnessed a massively acceleration of the US-China competition.

From Beijing's perspective, the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia and US President Trump's hawkish trade and security policies have sought to contain China. China has been particularly worried by Washington's consistent involvement in China's territorial disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. As a result, Beijing has become highly sensitive to US's partnerships with its neighbours and to its involvement in China's territorial disputes with them.

Second, there has been a growing rapprochement between India and the US in the last two decades, a rapprochement aimed at balancing China. This rapprochement made a decisive step forward in 2005 when Washington and New Delhi signed a defense treaty and agreed on a landmark nuclear deal which transformed relations (Ma 2005:14-15). Beijing believed that the point of the agreements had been to turn India into a 'strategic counterweight to China,' according to an editorial in *People's Daily* (quoted in Garver & Wang 2010:245), and as a result 2005 became a "turning point" in the deterioration of Sino-Indian relations according to a leading scholar interviewed by the author (anonymous 2018, personal communication, 13 December). Since then, India has become a Major Defense Partner of the US, has signed various military agreements with Washington and has joined the Quad, a naval grouping led by the US which de facto aims to offset China's maritime rise (CFR 2020). Predictably, with accelerating US-China competition, the burgeoning partnership between the US and India has deeply worried China, that sees it as a first step toward an alliance aimed at encircling and containing China. Combined, these two developments ensure that any US involvement in the China-India territorial dispute would negatively affect Beijing's security and provoke its suspicion.

Against this backdrop, the United States has been involved in the China-India territorial dispute in four ways. Diplomatically, the US has supported India's position on the territorial dispute in the eastern sector. Washington not only officially recognized the territory of Arunachal Pradesh as part of India in 1962 (Smith 2012) but has also offered verbal and political support to New Delhi in

---

<sup>8</sup> The book in question is *C形包围 - 内忧外患下的中国突围* (C-shaped Encirclement: China's Breakout of Encirclement under Internal and External Threats), written by the retired army colonel and popular commentator Dai Xu, likely with some official support from the PLA (Dai 2010).

times of tensions with Beijing on the border. For instance, in 2012 the US ambassador to India reemphasized American recognition of Arunachal Pradesh as part of India, on the background of a Beijing-initiated breakdown of Indo-Chinese talks on the dispute (Sunil 2012). Similarly, in 2016, amid tensions between China and India, the US publicly lent support to India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh by dispatching its ambassador to the border state and to Tawang, provoking a strong Chinese reaction (Mitra 2016).

The same year also saw US diplomats issuing public statements reaffirming Washington's position on the status of the Land of the Dawn-Lit Mountains<sup>9</sup> (The Economic Times 2016) and even arguing that Google should change its online maps of Arunachal Pradesh to reflect Indian sovereignty (Qiu 2016). More recently, during the Doklam crisis, the US made another gesture reinforcing Indian sovereignty over Arunachal by introducing a smart villages project in the state (Singh & Philip 2019). China has resisted the diplomatic involvement of the American superpower in the dispute. Such involvement undermines Chinese claims to the state of Arunachal Pradesh and enables New Delhi 'to seek recognition of its occupation and control of the disputed border areas by the international community' (*qiu guojishehui dui qi zhanling yu guanrong zhengyi bianjie diqu de chengren* 求国际社会对其占领与管控争议边界地区的承认) according to Chinese scholar Qiu Meirong (Qiu 2016).

Militarily, the US has quietly helped to strengthen India's position on the disputed border through joint exercises and arms sales. The US has conducted the last three Indian editions of the *Yudh Abhyas* joint exercises with India in Uttarakhand, not far from the disputed China-India border (Press Information Bureau 2014; 2016; 2018). The US has also strengthened India's military position on the border through important arms sales. For instance, in recent years India has acquired from the US and deployed close to the border M777 ultra-light howitzers made for mountain warfare, as well as heavy-lift Chinook helicopters crucial for fast deployment along the Himalayan border in case of crisis (The Economic Times 2019).

India has also acquired from the US C-130J Super Hercules aircraft, perfect for deploying troops and supplies to its distant airstrips along the border, an important capability in view of the relatively poor Indian infrastructure in the border areas (India Today 2013). Whereas these arms sales are part of a larger defense trade relationship between the US and India which is often driven by

---

<sup>9</sup> In Sanskrit Arunachal Pradesh means the Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains, a name sometimes used to refer poetically to the state.

economic considerations, there is a clear realization on both the American and the Indian sides that many of these arms have impact on the tactical military balance on the border and serve the larger strategic purpose of balancing China. Arms sales and military exercises also serve to signal US strategic support for India in the dispute, support which puts pressure on Beijing and gives leverage to India in negotiations. In brief, US military involvement in the dispute improves Indian security on the border at China's expense.

Thirdly, potential US involvement in a China-India military conflict on the border constrains Beijing's policy. As US-China relations have massively deteriorated in recent years and the US-Indian partnership has progressed, such US military involvement is likely to be on India's side and to tip the military balance in New Delhi's favor. There are precedents for such American involvement. During the 1962 war Washington delivered massive amounts of arms and ammunition to India and might even have intervened militarily upon New Delhi's request, had not the war ended unexpectedly while Washington moved an aircraft carrier to India (Reidel 2015:120-146). Another, dramatically more limited US involvement in the dispute took place during the 2017 Doklam standoff, when Washington reportedly provided intelligence to India on Chinese troop deployments (Samanta 2018). Inevitably, the possibility of such US involvement, in the form of arms, intelligence or even direct military intervention, constrains China. It limits how Beijing can employ its military during a crisis on the border, practically erecting a ceiling of military escalation above which China cannot go without risking an American involvement. Of course, India's awareness of this "ceiling" emboldens New Delhi to adopt a harder stance on the border. Just as important, the prospect of US involvement also enables New Delhi to pressure China to deescalate under the threat of India inviting Washington in the conflict, as India implicitly did during the 2020 Ladakh crisis through highly publicized phone conversations between Indian and US leaders (Rajagopalan 2020b). Lastly, a US involvement in a military crisis on the border constrains Chinese policy because such involvement might give the final push for the formation of the very US-India alliance that China has so long feared.

Finally, US support for the TGIE and the Dalai Lama puts further pressure on Beijing along the disputed border by exploiting China's Tibet vulnerability. The US, together with India, has been the main backer of the Dalai Lama and the TGIE. Its support is well documented and involves frequent visits by US politicians to the Dalai Lama, political support, and congressionally mandated financial aid to the TGIE. Bearing in mind the connection between the "Tibet issue" and the territorial dispute examined above, greater US involvement in the "Tibet issue" reinforces New

Delhi's "Tibet Card" and its position on the dispute and, hence, weakens China's.<sup>10</sup> These dynamics have been underscored by the first ever visits of a sitting US ambassador to Tawang in 2016 and 2019 (Roche 2019). The visits not only indicated that Tawang belongs to India but also quietly signalled potential American support for the Dalai Lama's reincarnation there, in a blow to Beijing's hopes for legitimizing a reincarnation in Chinese Tibet. Not coincidentally, the 2019 ambassadorial visit took place at about the same time as a high-ranking US diplomat met with the Dalai Lama (Singh & Philip 2019). For China, US involvement also has a harder security aspect. As India and the US had jointly supported armed Tibetan struggle against Beijing in the 1960s, China fears that renewed US-India cooperation aims to destabilize Tibet (Qiu 2016). As a prominent Chinese scholar observed to the author, US-India cooperation on Tibet is a factor that China 'needs to think about' in its relations with India, including on the border (anonymous 2018, personal communication, 13 December).

US involvement in the territorial dispute on New Delhi's side clearly generates a security dilemma between China and India. Washington's involvement not only strengthens India's military position on the border and its legal case for sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh but also suggests that the US might be willing to support India in case of conflict with China. The involvement of the most powerful country in world on India's side in the territorial dispute is clearly a net security gain for India which otherwise has been at a disadvantage in the dispute against the wealthier, politically more powerful and militarily mightier China. Crucially, it also gives India leverage over its northern neighbour that it can exploit in the diplomacy on the territorial dispute by implicitly or explicitly threatening to invite greater US involvement. On the contrary, for China US involvement is clearly a net security loss on the dispute. Apart from strengthening India's military and political position, Washington's involvement also reduces Beijing's power advantage over New Delhi by raising the possibility, however distant, that the US might intervene in an armed conflict on India's side, as it almost did in 1962. Moreover, the spiraling security dilemma between Washington and Beijing also contributes to China's insecurity caused by American involvement in the dispute, as it means that the US might be much more willing to back India in peacetime or even wartime than before. The

specter of US-India cooperation to exploit Beijing's Tibet vulnerability also produces Chinese insecurities about US involvement in the territorial dispute and shapes its policy on the border.

---

<sup>10</sup> At least as long as the Dalai Lama and the TGIE remain on Indian soil where New Delhi can be certain to have strong influence on them, regardless of any US involvement.



This relatively recent spike in US involvement in the dispute would likely prompt China to take counter measures to improve its own security on the border.

In sum, US involvement in the territorial dispute, while relatively small, generates a security dilemma between China and India as it presents a security gain for one side and a security loss for the other.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

This article has sought to answer the question how the China-India territorial dispute affects the security dilemma between Beijing and New Delhi. It has acknowledged that part of the answer lies with the military situation around the disputed border where Chinese and Indian forces face each other amid a competitive buildup of forces, arms, and infrastructure. However, this article has argued that there are also three other underappreciated aspects of the dispute that influence the China-India security dilemma.

First, the close connection between the dispute and the “Tibet issue” guarantees that the conflicting security interests and policies of the two sides on this issue generate a security dilemma. China’s push to reduce its vulnerability in Tibet and India’s attempt to hold a “Tibet card” against China are fundamentally irreconcilable as each enhances the security of one side at the expense of the other.

Second, the nexus between the dispute and the security of India’s restive Northeast also feeds into the Sino-Indian security dilemma. Beijing is trying to exploit India’s Northeast vulnerability to improve its security position in the east and pressure India, while New Delhi seeks to reduce this weakness and with it its insecurity. The two security goals are clearly in conflict with one another.

Third, the involvement of the United States in the dispute also exacerbates the China-India security dilemma. The US not only supports India militarily and diplomatically, but also with its tilt toward India on the dispute shapes the two sides’ planning in case of a border conflict and their policies on the “Tibet issue.” From a security perspective, the involvement of a Chinese adversary such as the US is a net security loss for China that offsets its power advantage over India and a net security gain for India, the weaker side in the territorial dispute.

These three aspects of the China-India territorial dispute give us a broader, more multifaceted perspective on how it affects the China-Indian security dilemma. They also suggest different ways the security dilemma on the border can escalate. For instance, if in the aftermath of the coming reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, the two sides might find themselves with two Dalai Lamas, one in Chinese Tibet and one in India. If in such a scenario New Delhi recognizes the Dalai Lama on its soil in a challenge to the Beijing-backed candidate, who would present an opportunity for China to settle the “Tibet issue,” this would significantly escalate the security dilemma between the two sides.

In another scenario Bhutan might decide to establish diplomatic relations with China and resolve its territorial dispute with it along lines proposed by Beijing in exchange for investment and a greater share of the disputed territory. As a result, Beijing would strengthen its position in the Chumbi valley, close to Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. This would ratchet up India’s sense of insecurity, exacerbating the security dilemma between the two sides.

Yet another possibility is that the US would involve itself more decisively in the dispute, for instance by supporting India’s claims to Chinese territory in the western sector. Such a development would not only undermine Chinese sovereignty and security around the border but would also tie even further the dispute to the increasingly tense relationship between Washington and Beijing, escalating the Sino-Indian security dilemma. While none of these scenarios are inevitable and some are unlikely, they suggest how the complex, multilayered character of the territorial dispute with its non-military aspects can exacerbate the security dilemma between China and India.

In conclusion, the complex, multifaceted China-India territorial dispute with its military and nonmilitary security aspects is a key driver of the security dilemma between Beijing and New Delhi. Inevitably, the dispute’s complexity with its various security aspects also affects the security dilemma, making it more severe.

## References

- Bajpai, Arun (2017) China's Chumbi Valley Shenanigans India Must Act Tough, *India Defence Review*. Available at: <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/chinas-chumbi-valley-shenanigans-india-must-act-tough/> [Accessed 10th December 2020].
- Butterfield, Herbert (1951) *History and Human Relations*, London, Collins.

- Chellaney, Brahma (2008) Defending against martial arts, *Hindustan Times*. Available from: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/defending-against-martial-arts/story-MrqtR0Jdm764cYPZSVxK8O.html> [Accessed 20th April 2020].
- Christopher, Mark (2013) Water Wars: The Brahmaputra River and Sino-Indian Relations, CIWAG Case Studies. 7. Available from: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/ciwag-case-studies/7> [Accessed 21st April 2020].
- Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) (2020) Timeline: U.S.-India Relations 1947 – 2020. Available from: <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-india-relations> [Accessed 17th April 2020].
- Cunningham, Fiona and Rory Medcalf (2011) The dangers of denial: nuclear weapons in China-India relations. Lowy Institute Analysis. Available from: [https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/pubfiles/Cunningham\\_and\\_Medcalf%2C\\_The\\_dangers\\_of\\_denial\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/pubfiles/Cunningham_and_Medcalf%2C_The_dangers_of_denial_web_1.pdf) [Accessed 15th April 2020].
- Dai Xu (2010) C形包围--内忧外患下的中国突围 (C-shaped Encirclement: China's Breakout of Encirclement under Internal and External Threats) Shanghai, Wenhui Press.
- Deepak, B.R. (2005) *India and China 1904-2004: a century of peace and conflict* New Delhi, Manak Publications.
- Dittmer, Lowell (2001) South Asia's Security Dilemma, *Asian Survey* 41, (6), 897-906.
- Egreteau, Renaud (2008) India and China Vying for Influence in Burma – A New Assessment, *India Review*, 7, (1), 38-72.
- Episkopos, Mark. Type 15: Meet the Tank China Could Use to Fight India—Or Launch an Amphibious Invasion, *The National Interest*. Available from: [http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-07/23/content\\_4846315.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-07/23/content_4846315.htm) [Accessed 21st April 2020].
- Fang Tien-sze (2014) *Asymmetrical Threat Perceptions in India-China Relations*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Financial Express (2018) India's Agni-V to Balance Out China's Military Muscle, January 19, 2018. Available from: <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/indias-agni-v-to-balance-out-chinas-militarymuscle-chinese-media-cant-keep-calm-heres-what-it-says/1021541/> [Accessed 25th April 2020].
- Gan Zuoyu (2019) 西部战区陆军作战旅常态化砺兵高寒山地 (The normalization and training of a Western Theater Command army unit into a high and cold mountain area) *PLA Daily*. Available from: [http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-07/23/content\\_4846315.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/power/2019-07/23/content_4846315.htm) [Accessed 10th April 2020].
- Garver, John (2006) China's Decision for War with India in 1962 in: Robert S. Ross and Alastair Iain Johnston (eds.) (2006) *New Approaches to the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 86-130.
- Garver, John (2002) The security dilemma in Sino-Indian relations, *India Review* 1(4), 1-38.
- Garver, John (2001) *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* Seattle and London, University of Washington Press.
- Garver, John and Fei-Ling Wang (2010), China's Anti-encirclement Struggle, *Asian Security*, 6 (3), 238-261.
- Glaser, Charles L. (1997) The Security Dilemma Revisited, *World Politics* 50 (1), 171–201.
- Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann (1998) What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?, *International Security*, 22 (4), 44–82.
- Herz, John (1951) *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A Study in Theories and Realities* Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Holslag, Jonathan (2009) The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32 (6), 811-840.
- Hu Shisheng (2018) 印度在美国地缘战略中的地位达到了历史最高点 (India's position in U.S. geostrategy has reached the highest point in history), *World Affairs* 24, 21-22.

- Hu Shisheng (2017) 洞朗对峙危机与中印关系的未来 (The Dong Lang standoff crisis and the future of Sino-Indian relations) *Contemporary International Relations* 11, 9-22.
- Hussain, Wasbir (2013) Peace Processes: Poor success in Northeast India in: D. Suba Chandran and P.R. Chari (eds.) (2013) *Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2012: Uneasy Stasis and Fragile Peace*, New Delhi, Routledge, 175-178.
- India Today (2013) India dares China, lands Super Hercules at world's highest airstrip in Ladakh. Available from: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/india-dares-china-iaf-super-hercules-aircraft-daulat-beg-oldie-ladakh-174387-2013-08-20> [Accessed 21th April 2020].
- Jain, Neha (2016) Northeast India's Multi-Ethnicities: Dominant Issues and Problems, *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies* 3 (2), 275-285. Available from: <http://oaji.net/articles/2016/1115-1476782788.pdf> [Accessed 11th December 2020].
- Jaipragas, Bhavan and Tashny Sukumaran (2020) 'Indo-Pacific Nato': China's Wang Yi slams US-led 'Quad' as underlying security risk at Malaysia meeting, *South China Morning Post*. Available from <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3105299/indo-pacific-nato-chinas-wang-yi-slams-us-led-quad-underlying> [Accessed 9th December 2020].
- Jakhar, Pratik (2020) India and China race to build along a disputed frontier. BBC Monitoring. Available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53171124> [Accessed 28th September 2020].
- Jervis, Robert (1978) Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma, *World Politics* 30 (2), 167-214.
- Jervis, Robert (1976) *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton.
- Joshi, Yogesh and Anit Mukherjee (2019) From Denial to Punishment: The Security Dilemma and Changes in India's Military Strategy towards China, *Asian Security* 15 (1), 25-43.
- Kampani, Gaurav (2014) China-India Nuclear Rivalry in the "Second Nuclear Age," IFS Insights, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, nr. 3. Available from: [https://fhs.brage.unit.no/fhs-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/226454/Insight2014\\_3.pdf](https://fhs.brage.unit.no/fhs-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/226454/Insight2014_3.pdf) [Accessed 22nd April 2020].
- Kang Sheng (2013) 印度的“西藏情结”及其对中印关系的影响 (India's "Tibet complex" and its influence on China India Relations) *South Asian Research* 2, 80-92.
- Lidarev, Ivan (2019) The Tibet Factor in the China-India Territorial Dispute: Issue-Linkage, Leverage and Coercion, in: Jagannath P. Panda (ed.) (2019) *India and China in Asia: Between Equilibrium and Equations*, New York, Routledge, 120-136.
- Lidarev, Ivan (2015) The Sikkim Anniversary, *The Diplomat*, December 31, 2015). Available from: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/12/the-sikkim-anniversary/> [Accessed 18th April 2020].
- Li Li (2009) *Security Perception and China-India Relations*, New Delhi, Knowledge World.
- Li Li (2017) 印度偏离不结盟及其动因分析 (Analysis of India's deviation from non-alignment and its causes), *Quarterly Journal of International Politics*, 2 (1), 1-35.
- Li Li (2019) China-India Relations in Modi's Second Term The Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute (LKI). Available from: <https://lki.lk/blog/china-india-relations-in-modis-second-term/> [Accessed 10th December 2020].
- Liu Caiyu and Ji Yuqiao (2019) Mobile howitzers help Tibet border defense, *Global Times*. Available from: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1134945.shtml> [Accessed 10th April 2020]
- Lynn-Jones, Sean M. (1995) Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics, *Security Studies*, 4 (1), 660-691.
- Lu Yang (2016) *China-India Relations in the Contemporary World: Dynamics of National Interest and Identity* London and New York, Routledge.
- Ma Jiali (2005) 印美关系走向 (The tendency in Indo-US relation) *Contemporary International Relations* 8, 14-19.
- Madan, Tanvi (2017) The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the 'Quad,' *War on the Rocks*, November 16, 2017. Available from <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/rise-fall-rebirth-quad/> [Accessed 25th April 2020].
- Malik, Mohan (2011) *China and India: Great Power Rivals* Boulder, CO, First Forum Press.

- Ministry of Home Affairs, India (n.d.) Management of Indo-China border. Available from [https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/INDO%20CHINA\\_05052017.pdf](https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/INDO%20CHINA_05052017.pdf) [Accessed 15th April 2020].
- Mitra, Devirupa (2016) India, China Clash Over US Ambassador's Visit to Tawang, *The Wire*. Available from <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-china-clash-over-us-ambassadors-visit-to-tawang> [Accessed 25th April 2020].
- Noorani, A.G. (2011) *India-China Boundary Problem, 1846-1947*, London, Oxford University Press.
- Norbu, Dawa (2008) Chinese Strategic Thinking on Tibet and the Himalayan Region, *Strategic Analysis*, 32 (4), 685-702.
- O'Donnell, Frank and Alex Bollfrass (2020) *The Strategic Postures of China and India A Visual Guide* Harvard Belfer Center, Available from: <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/india-china-postures/China%20India%20Postures%20-%20Tables.pdf> [Accessed 17 April 2020].
- Panda, Ankit (2017) The Political Geography of the India-China Crisis at Doklam, *The Diplomat*, July 13. Available from: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/the-political-geography-of-the-india-china-crisis-at-doklam/> [Accessed 17th April 2020].
- Pardesi, Manjeet S. (2010) Understanding (Changing) Chinese Strategic Perceptions of India, *Strategic Analysis*, 34 (4), 562-578.
- Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence (2014). India US Combined Military Training Exercise (Ex Yudh Abhyas) in Progress. Available from <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=110122> [Accessed 10th April 2020].
- Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence (2016). Opening Ceremony: Indo-US Joint Military Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2016. Available from [https://pib.gov.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=\(Release%20ID%20:149799\)](https://pib.gov.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=(Release%20ID%20:149799)) [Accessed 10th April 2020].
- Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Defence (2018). Opening Ceremony: Indo-US Joint Military Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018. Available from <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=183496> [Accessed 10th April 2020].
- Posen, Barry (1993) The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict, *Survival*, 35 (1), 27-47.
- Qiu Meirong (2016) 印度在中印边界争端中的新动向 (India's new tendencies in the China-India border dispute), *Contemporary International Relations*, 06, 15-20.
- Raghavan, Srinath (2019). The Security Dilemma and India-China Relations, *Asian Security*, 15 (1), 60-72.
- Raja Mohan, C. (2011) *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*, Washington, D.C. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Rajagopalan, Rajeswari Pillai (2020a) Why China's Growing Military Might in Tibet Should Worry India, *The Diplomat*. Available from: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/why-chinas-growing-military-might-in-tibet-should-worry-india/> [Accessed 10th April 2020].
- Rajagopalan, Rajeswari Pillai (2020b) This Time the US Is Taking India's Side Against China. *The Diplomat*. Available from: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/this-time-the-us-is-taking-indias-side-against-china/> [Accessed 29th September 2020].
- Ramachandran, Sudha (2016) China and India's border infrastructure race, *China Brief*, 16 (14), 17-21.
- Reidel, Bruce (2015) *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and the Sino-Indian War*, Washington DC Brookings.
- Roche, Elizabeth (2019) US ambassador Kenneth Juster's visit to Tawang can rile China, *Live Mint*. Available from: <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/us-ambassador-kenneth-juster-s-visit-to-tawang-can-rile-china-11572271661374.html> [Accessed 13th April 2020].
- Routray, Bibhu Prasad (2017) China's New Game In India's Northeast – Analysis, *Eurasia Review*. Available from <https://www.eurasiareview.com/09082017-chinas-new-game-in-indias-northeast-analysis/> [Accessed 14th April 2020].
- Tang Shiping (2009) The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis, *Security Studies*, 18 (3), 587-623.

- Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. (2000) Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited, *International Security* 25 (3).
- The Economic Times (2016). Arunachal Pradesh integral part of India, says US consul general Craig Hall, Economic Times, April 29. Available from: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/arunachal-pradesh-integral-part-of-india-says-us-consul-general-craig-hall/articleshow/52033358.cms?from=mdr> [Accessed 24th April 2020].
- The Economic Times (2019) India to deploy latest American weapon systems for Ex-HimVijay along China border. Available from: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-to-deploy-latest-american-weapon-systems-for-ex-himvijay-along-china-border/articleshow/71108992.cms> [Accessed 24th April 2020].
- The Times of India (2014) Chinese incursion in Ladakh: A little toothache can paralyze the entire body, September 20. Available from [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/42940337.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/42940337.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst) [Accessed 14th April 2020].
- Saalman, Lora (2011) Divergence, Similarity and Symmetry in Sino-Indian Threat Perceptions, *Journal of International Affairs*, 64 (2), 169-194.
- Samanta, Pranab Dhal (2018) “US’ Comcasa assurance: Won’t share India data without consent,” *The Economic Times*, September 05, 2018. Available from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/us-comcasa-assurance-wont-share-india-data-without-consent/articleshow/65678934.cms> [Accessed 7th October 2020].
- Scott, David (2008) Sino-Indian Security Predicaments for the Twenty-First Century, *Asian Security*, 4 (3), 244-270.
- Singh, D.K. and Sneesh Alex Philip (2019) “It was US ambassador Juster who wanted to take part in Tawang festival, Arunachal CM says” *The Print*. Available from <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/it-was-us-ambassador-juster-who-wanted-to-take-part-in-tawang-festival-arunachal-cm-says/313877/> [Accessed 15th April 2020].
- Small, Andrew (2015) *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Jeff M. (2013) *Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Smith, Jeff (2012) A Forgotten War in the Himalayas, *Yale Global*. Available from: <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/forgotten-war-himalayas> [Accessed 24th April 2020].
- Snyder, Glenn (1984) The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics, *World Politics* 36 (4), 461-495.
- Snyder, Glenn D. (1996) Process Variables in Neorealist Theory, *Security Studies*, 5(3), 167-192.
- Sui Xinmin (2014) 中印边境互动：一种博弈视角的分析 (Interstate Dynamics and Security Management on the Sino-India Border: A Game Theoretic Analysis), *South Asian Research*, 36 (4), 1-15.
- Sunil, Oinam (2012) India-China border row: US sticks to McMahon, *Times of India*, December 14, Available from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/India-China-border-row-US-sticks-to-McMahon-Line/articleshow/17620832.cms> [Accessed 25th April 2020].
- Wei Ming (2004) 安全两难与中印关系 (The security dilemma and Sino-Indian Relations), *Studies of International Politics* 3, 132-136.
- Yang Xiaoping (2016) China’s Perceptions of India as a Nuclear Weapons Power. In Regional Voices on the Challenges of Nuclear Deterrence Stability in Southern Asia. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available from: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/30/china-s-perceptions-of-india-as-nuclear-weapons-power-pub-63970> [Accessed 12th April 2020].
- Zhang Guihong (2005) Sino-Indian Security Relations: Bilateral issues, external factors and regional implications, *South Asia Survey*, 12 (1), 61-74.

Zhou Liangchen, Bai Yunyi, Ni Hao and Wang Huicong (2017) 被吞并42年后，锡金对印度有多忠诚? (How loyal is Sikkim to India 42 years after its annexation?), *Global Times*. Available from: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK3Y1O> [Accessed 17th April 2020].