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India, China and the Contested Border

IG indrastra.com/2022/10/india-china-and-contested-border.html

By Dr. Amrita Jash



Image Attribute: The file photo of an Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) soldier in Ladakh

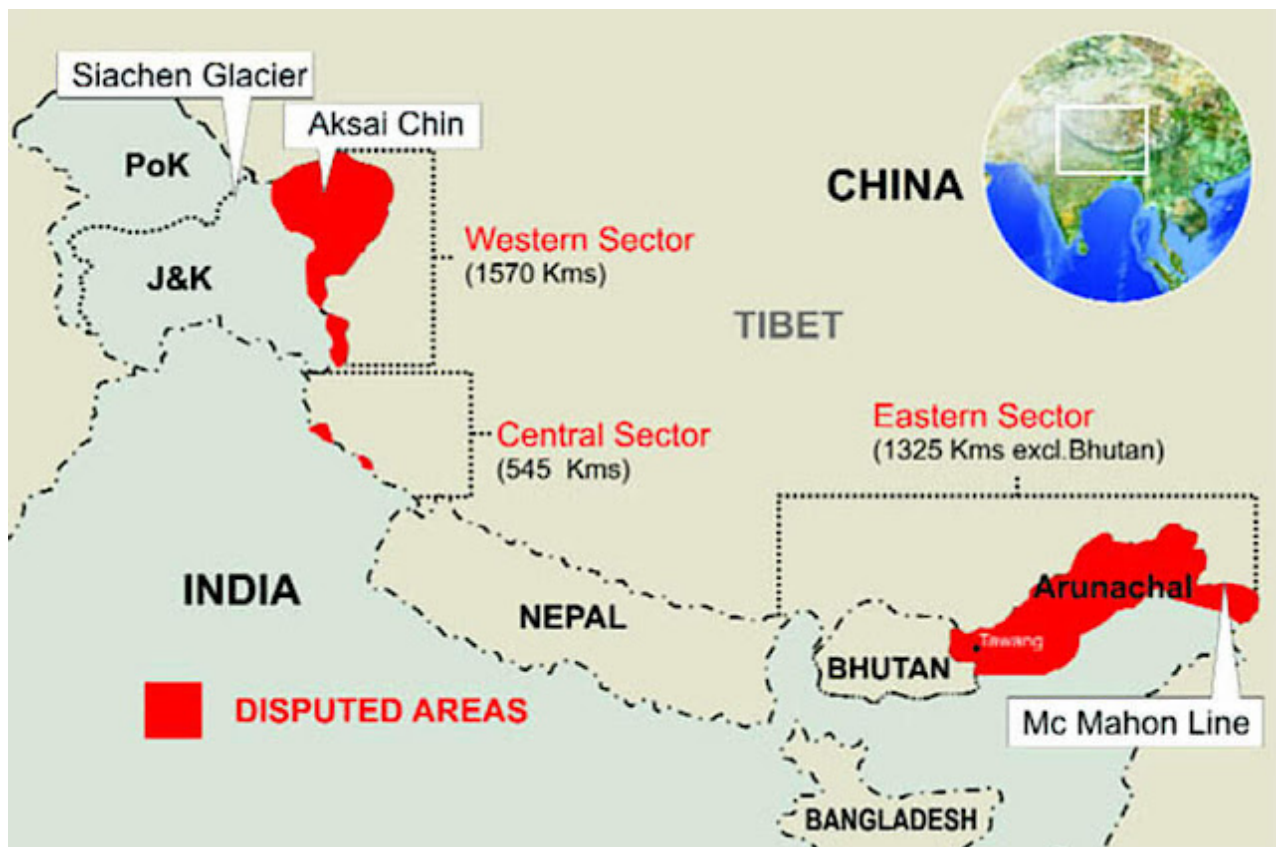
In October, at the **25th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC)**, both parties examined the Line of Actual Control (LAC) situation and appreciated the latest disengagement at Patrolling Point 15 in Gogra-Hot Springs as well as agreed to hold the 17th round of Commander-level talks to resolve the remaining issues at the LAC.

Since April 2020, the military standoff along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh has disrupted India-China relations. While disengagement has been completed but to construe that the disengagement will lead to de-escalation is misleading. The fact remains that the border dispute has only become complicated. Thus, the border and the India-China ties have a 'new normal'- that is, 'not normal'.

The two Asian neighbors are experiencing new realities of a 'volatile' border, with 'peaceful co-existence' replaced by 'confrontational co-existence'. '**Wuhan Spirit**' and '**Chennai Connect**' are phrases of the past, and the present agreements stand 'null and void' against the 2020 Galwan valley collision. To ask: Can India-China relations become 'normal'?

Not that the ties 'cannot' be normal, but 'normalcy' is now tied to 'conditions' of a 'stable' border. At the Munich Security Conference 2022, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that relations are in a "very tough period" and that the "state of the border will decide the state of the relationship". Why the 'condition'?

With the security situation at its worst, the LAC is disputed in three sectors (the western sector in Aksai China, the central sector in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and the eastern sector in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh), is showing signals of military action between India and China. Beijing's incremental and tactical actions to press its sovereignty claims on the Himalayan border are constantly challenged by India.



Map Attribute: India-China Disputed Areas, Sector-wise / Source: ClearIAS

In securing their territorial claims, India and China fought a war in 1962 and since then have witnessed face-offs, such as Nathu La and Cho La skirmishes in 1967 (eastern sector); Tulung La incident in 1975 (eastern sector); Sumdorong Chu standoff in 1986-87

(eastern sector); Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) and Chumar stand-offs in 2013 (western sector); Demchok stand-off in 2014 (western sector); Burtse incident in 2015 (western sector); Doklam stand-off in 2017 (eastern sector) and in 2020 Naku La incident (eastern sector) and eastern Ladakh standoff in 2020-2022 (western sector). Furthermore, the Galwan Valley incident casts doubt on China's compliance with the 1993-1996 boundary agreements. While China speaks peace, it acts otherwise- making a 'stable' border crucial for normal relations.

Risks are impending since the border is neither delineated nor demarcated, and only short-term remedies to manage the border tensions. To this, the growing troop deployments and infrastructure build-up by India and China at the LAC imply that the border is only adjusting to future threats. Given the current situation, seeking 'normalcy' in the ties is only getting difficult with time.

About the Author:

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