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Arunachal Pradesh: A Crux of Sino-Indian Rivalry

by Jeffrey Reeves

Few bilateral relationships have the potential to transform geopolitics like that between China and India. The two states' policies directly affect a collective 2.5 billion individuals, or one-fifth of the world's population, and influence Asia's overall stability and development. China and India are projected to be the world's first and third largest economies by 2025, respectively. Cooperation and/or competition between the states will, therefore, shape the regional and global systems for the medium to long terms.¹

The sheer size of the two states' populations and economies (both singularly and collectively) suggest that regional, indeed global, stability depends on their avoidance of conflict. Sino-Indian relations are, however, uneasy and contain myriad challenges. Both states are jockeying for regional influence in geostrategic Asian countries such as Burma and Sri Lanka and for access to the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. While India is expanding its political and economic influence east and west, China is intent on broadening its strategic presence southward. These overlapping development aims have the potential to undermine security relations between the two states by bringing them into direct strategic competition.²

Nowhere are the existing security challenges facing China and India more evident than in Arunachal Pradesh, the largest of two states' three contested border regions. Part of the British Raj since the 1914 Simla Convention, New Delhi enacted official administrative control over the region in 1951. Beijing contests India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh, claiming demarcations resulting from the Simla Convention are illegitimate.

Arunachal Pradesh is a focal point of Sino-Indian competition in that geography, resources, culture, nationalism, and military variables contribute singularly and collectively to a complicated, highly charged security environment.³ Both countries believe the area is an important base for projecting political and economic influence into Southern Asia and an important source for natural resources ranging from timber to coal. Both Beijing and New Delhi see the region as culturally and historically part of their territory, a state-originating perception that has gained force in popular nationalist sentiment. Both states have built sizable military presences on their respective borders to protect what they argue are core national interests.

¹ Dominic Wilson and Roppa Purushothaman, "Dreaming with the BRICS: The Path to 2050," *Global Economics* 99 (2003): accessed May 11, 2011, <http://www2.goldmansachs.com/ideas/brics/book/99-dreaming.pdf>

² Robert Kaplan, "Center States for the Twenty-first Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2009).

³ Dong Yujie "What areas are under disputed between China and India? (zhongyin bianjie you naxie zhangyi diqu?)," 1 *Party & Government Forum (dangzhi luntan)* (2010).

This article will look at both China and India's positions on security in Arunachal Pradesh in order to identify potential sources of conflict between the two states. To accomplish this analysis, the author will draw on both Chinese and English language material to understand the two states' respective threat perceptions. This approach will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the security situation in Arunachal Pradesh from both a Chinese and Indian perspective.

Background

The current Sino-Indian border dispute over Arunachal Pradesh has its base in an agreement between the British and Tibetan governments over a formal demarcation between British-controlled India and Tibet. The accord, reached at the 1914 Simla Convention, established the McMahon Line, which roughly follows the Himalayas for 550 miles from Bhutan to Burma. The agreement gave the British Raj control over the North East Frontier Tract (NEFT), an area that would later become Indian-controlled Arunachal Pradesh.

Controversy surrounding the McMahon Line stems from two points. First, representatives from the Republic of China (ROC), while present at the conference, were not consulted regarding the final demarcation. At the time, China claimed suzerainty over Tibet and argued that the Tibetan government required Chinese consent to enter into agreement with a foreign power. While the Britain had previously acknowledged the Chinese Qing Dynasty's claim over Tibet, and had limited its dealing with Tibetan officials as a result, it did not extend the same recognition to the ROC and ignored Chinese demands. Chinese plenipotentiaries withdrew from the Convention in response and refused to sign the accord.⁴

Second, while the McMahon Line did establish a theoretical line of control (LOC) between India and Tibet, it did not specify the line's exact location. Drawn with a 'fat nib', the border's margin for error averages five miles.⁵ This uncertainty adds to bilateral tension as Chinese and Indian troops and businesses routinely operate in these pockets of questionable sovereignty.

While first the ROC and then the Communist Party of China (CPC) both rejected the 1914 McMahon Line, neither government was able to divert resources away from the Sino-Japan War or then the Chinese Civil War to assert claim to the area. Following the CPC's victory against the ROC, however, Beijing instituted a more assertive policy. This policy shift resulted in two key events in the 1950s that contributed to tension over the Sino-Indian LOC in NEFT.

First, in 1957 the Chinese government built an all-weather road through the Indian-controlled Aksai-Chin Plain to connect Tibet with Xinjiang. When New Delhi protested against what it viewed as a blatant territorial incursion, Beijing responded by announcing sovereignty over the region. In response, the Indian Army approved incursions by Indian patrols into unoccupied Chinese territory.⁶

⁴ Srinath Raghavan, 'India in Transition: Resolving the Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute' *Center for the Advanced Study of India* (2009), accessed May 11, 2011, <https://casi.sas.upenn.edu/iit/raghavan>.

⁵ 'India and China: A Himalayan Rivalry' *Economist*, August 19, 2011.

⁶ Steven Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

Second, Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to increase its presence along the Sino-Indian border in response to India's decision to allow the Dalai Lama to reside in India following the 1959 failed Tibet Rebellion. Then-Indian Prime Minister Jawaharla Nehru responded by ordering the Indian military to implement a forward policy aimed at establishing military presences within Chinese territory to disrupt the flow of supplies to Chinese troops.⁷

These respective policies caused an increase in the frequency and intensity of cross-border skirmishes that ultimately led to the 1962 Sino-Indian War. In 1962, Chinese forces invaded the NEFT. The Chinese general offensive's main target in the NEFT was the Tawang area, which the Chinese had long argued was the cultural and historic center of 'South Tibet'.⁸ While China's motivation included concerns related to Cold War geopolitics, the principle driving force behind the invasion was Beijing's desire to assert Chinese dominance over the region to ensure domestic stability in Tibet and the rest of China.⁹ Chinese troops routed the ill-prepared Indian military only to unilaterally withdrawal one month after the initial Chinese invasion. The Indian government and military responded by furthering sovereign and military control over the NEFT.

Following the Sino-Indian War, Beijing and New Delhi entered a period of détente surrounding the territorial dispute in the NEFT. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Deng Xiaoping both endorsed tacit Indian control over the region while never relinquishing Chinese claim to the area.¹⁰ One notable exception to this détente was the 1986 Sumdorong Chu incident, which followed the Indian government's formal granting of statehood to the NEFT and changing its name to Arunachal Pradesh. Beijing protested New Delhi's move as provocative and India responded by dispatching over 200,000 troops to Tawang. While foreign observers worried war between the two states was inevitable, China and India were able to achieve rapprochement and avoid military conflict.

Relations between the two states took a decided turn for the worse in 2006. Just several days before Chinese President Hu Jintao arrived in India for a state visit, the Chinese ambassador to India, Sun Yuxi, announced during a 2006 interview with New Delhi television that China unequivocally viewed Arunachal Pradesh as part of its territory. Immediately after Ambassador Sun's statement, China began construction of a road across Northwest Sikkim and increased the number of Chinese troop incursions into disputed areas.¹¹ China reaffirmed its official claim to the Indian-controlled region in a meeting between Foreign Ministers Yang Jiechi and Pranab Mukherjee in Hamburg in 2007, when Yang renounced Beijing's earlier assurance to protect the rights of populations in the border region. Beijing also made clear Chinese consideration of Arunachal Pradesh as part of China by declining a visa to an Indian Administrative Service officer from Arunachal Pradesh on the grounds that he was a Chinese citizen and, therefore, did not require a visa.¹²

⁷ David M. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance? Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸ Steven Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁹ Lu Zijian, *China's Policy Towards Territorial Disputes: the case of the South China Sea Islands*, (London: Psychology Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Sujit Dutta, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China: India's Evolving Posture', 34:2 *The Washington Quarterly* (2011).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Namrata Goswami, 'China's Territorial Claim on Arunachal Pradesh: Crafting an Indian Response', *Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis* (2010), accessed May 11, 2011, http://www.idsa.in/system/files/IB_Chinasterritorialclaim.pdf

India responded to what it viewed as provocative policy changes by refusing to reaffirm its previous support for China's One China Policy, by which Beijing claims sovereignty over Taiwan, and increasing its military relations with the United States and Japan.¹³

Relations between the two states over Arunachal Pradesh have steadily deteriorated since 2007, with both sides adding to their military capabilities along the border. Nationalism over the territorial dispute has increased with Chinese and Indian societies framing the territorial dispute an area of core national importance and patriotic pride.

The persistent nature of discord between China and India over Arunachal Pradesh precipitates the need for further study of the conflict drivers behind the border dispute. The remaining sections of the article will organize these drivers under the generic categories of geography, resources, culture, nationalism, and military buildup. While this classification is limited in its ability to examine what are almost always multifaceted, overlapping issues, the approach nonetheless facilitates analysis by organizing the root causes of the Sino-Indian border conflict.

Geography

Lord George Curzon, the influential Viceroy of British India from 1899 to 1905, called the frontier between India and Qing Dynasty-controlled Tibet, in what is today Arunachal Pradesh, a 'razor's edge' tripwire separating war and peace and life and death. While East and South Asia's geopolitical landscapes have changed dramatically since the early twentieth century, Lord Curzon's appraisal of what later became the McMahon Line remains prescient. Despite pledges by both Beijing and New Delhi to reach a compromise on the contested border in Arunachal Pradesh, both China and India continue to maneuver to expand their control over the Himalayan heights and the LOC.

Geography occupies a central place in the Sino-Indian border conflict, despite the tendency of both China and India to frame the dispute in cultural and historical terms. While there are cultural and demographic drivers to the conflict—which the article addresses in more detail in the following sections—they are in many ways secondary to the two countries' strategic aims in relation to geography. Geography's centrality to the ongoing dispute would suggest that the conflict in Arunachal Pradesh is more zero-sum in nature than either the Chinese or Indian government openly admits.

For India, the strategic value in maintaining sovereign control over Arunachal Pradesh stems from its need to create a physical and cultural inner defense line against Chinese-controlled Tibet.¹⁴ Arunachal Pradesh is rimmed to its north by the Himalayas, which serve as a physical defensive barrier against invasion from northern forces. Indian control over the Himalayan watershed means that any invasion launched from China would first have to pass over some of the world's highest and most rugged terrain. While the Chinese government has developed the military means to theoretically accomplish such maneuvers, sovereign control over Arunachal Pradesh remains a strategic imperative for Indian defense.

¹³ John W. Garver and Wang Fei-Ling 'China's Anti-encirclement Struggle', 6:3 *Asian Security* (2010).

¹⁴ Maitreyee Choudhury, *Himalayan Studies in India* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications: 2008).

India also relies on the region's geography to stymie China's expansion into South Asia and the Bay of Bengal. The Indian military is greatly concerned about China's growing influence in South Asia, due both to Beijing's political and economic relations with India's arch-rival Pakistan, and to the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) increased presence in the Arabian Sea.¹⁵ India is engaged in intense political and military competition with China over Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Bhutan, both areas Beijing and New Delhi see as central to their domestic stability and security.¹⁶ That Arunachal Pradesh borders these two states provides New Delhi with the potential to expand Indian political and economic influence while limiting China's ability to spread its own influence. Control over the Tawang salient, which abuts Bhutan's eastern border, also allows the Indian military to limit Chinese attempts to penetrate further into Bangladesh and establish a direct link to the Bay of Bengal.¹⁷

For China, the strategic value of Arunachal Pradesh, or 'Southern Tibet', is more that of maintaining internal stability than projecting Chinese military power into India. China already occupies the Tibetan plateau, which gives it operational and logistical capability over India in the event of a military contingency, and has little to gain militarily by extending its sovereignty over the region. The PLA would be hard-pressed to billet forces in Arunachal Pradesh as they would be separated from the rest of geographic China by the wall of the Himalayas and would have to maintain logistics lines of support over and through challenging operational terrain.

The strategic intentions behind China's claim to the disputed region are, therefore, better understood in relation to Beijing's ongoing concern about stability in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). As Beijing is extremely anxious over the security situation in the TAR, it is stridently committed to bringing all elements of Tibetan culture under Chinese control.¹⁸ Sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh would allow Beijing to incorporate a large swath of ethnic Tibetans and Tibetan culture currently outside its domain into Greater China. The geographic inclusion of Arunachal Pradesh would also allow the Chinese government to shift military deployments away from the contested border and toward Taiwan.¹⁹

Resources

Relevant to any discussion of the security environment in Arunachal Pradesh are the region's abundant resources. The area is home to sizable forests, which cover 82 percent of the state's total area, and deposits of coal, dolomite, marble, lead, zinc, graphite, gold, and copper.²⁰ The Sang Po/Brahmaputra River, a major source of hydroelectricity and irrigation for both China and India, flows from Tibet through Arunachal Pradesh and into India.

¹⁵ Derek Mitchell and Chietigj Bajpae "China and India in the China Balance Sheet" in *The China Balance Sheet in 2007 and Beyond*, eds. C. Fred Bergsten and Eve Cary (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007).

¹⁶ Robert Kaplan. 'Center State for the Twenty-first Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean' *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2009).

¹⁷ Lou Chunhao, 'Sino-Indian Border Conflict: Indian Strengthening of its Position is Unreasonable (zhongyin bianjing zhengyi qu: yindu qianghua zhanling buzai li)' 7 *World Affairs* (shijie zhishi) (2010).

¹⁸ Robert Kaplan, 'The Geography of Chinese Power' *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2010).

¹⁹ John W. Garver and Wang Fei-Ling 'China's Anti-encirclement Struggle', 6:3 *Asian Security* (2010).

²⁰ Nursadh Ali, *Natural Resource Management And Sustainable Development In North-East India* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications: 2007).

Both China and India are engaged in competition to secure access to these natural resources for continued economic growth. Beijing sees Arunachal Pradesh as the logical territorial extension of resource rich Tibet, from which China already receives a large portion of its domestic copper and iron ore. Control over Arunachal Pradesh would allow Chinese companies to develop resources in China's near abroad that would lessen its dependency on resources imports from the Middle East and/or Africa.

For New Delhi, Arunachal Pradesh has become a valuable source of soil, hydroelectricity, timber, and mineral resources necessary for overall national economic development. The area's resources are also an integral part of India's plans to develop its northeast states through a common property regime.²¹

Security surrounding natural resource use in Arunachal Pradesh is complicated by the fact that the McMahon Line does not clearly delineate the border between the two states. The border's margin for error is more than five miles wide, creating pockets of questionable sovereignty along the existing LOC.²² The potential for conflict to erupt over border adjacent resources is, therefore, substantial.

So, too, is the issue of water use an inherent source of conflict between the two states. Both China and India rely on the Sang Po/Brahmaputra River for hydroelectricity and irrigation and both states have plans to further develop the river's potential. China wants to construct the world's largest hydroelectric plant on the Great Bend of the Sang Po River in Tibet, which has a planned capacity of 40,000MW—twice that of the Three Gorge Dam.²³ For India, the river has a hydropower potential of 34,920MW at 60 percent load factor; enough to supply 41.5 percent of all hydroelectricity generated in India.²⁴ Both states also have plans to expand the number of irrigation channels along the river

Beijing controls the river's source waters and does not cooperate with India on its management. The Chinese government has shown itself unwilling to compromise on its national energy priorities for India's sake, pushing forward with dam projects and plans to reroute the Sang Po/Brahmaputra River. Indian officials have repeatedly warned China over its plans to dam the Sang Po River, arguing that doing so could reduce water flow in the Brahmaputra River by 60 percent. New Delhi has also cautioned China against diverting the Sang Po's waters towards China's increasingly dry north. The Indian government has stating it would interpret any 'mega-rerouting' of the Sang Po River/Brahmaputra River by the Chinese as a declaration of 'water war'.

Culture

The concept of culture, used in the anthropological sense of shared values and practices that distinguish one group from another, is closely related to geography in that it often defies formal attempts at politicization and transcends state's boundaries. In some instances, culture's

²¹ Ibid.

²² 'India and China: A Himalayan Rivalry' *Economist*, August 19, 2011.

²³ Claude Arpi, *Born in Sin: The Panshell Agreement: the sacrific of Tibet*, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004).

²⁴ Sharad K. Jain, Pushpendra K. Agarwal, and Vijay P. Singh, *Hydrology and water resources of India*, (London: Springer, 2007).

transnational nature directly challenges state sovereignty in that it casts doubt on the relevance of political identity.

Much is the case of culture in Arunachal Pradesh, which is extremely diverse, transnational in nature, and not easily classifiable. There are 26 major tribes and about 110 minor tribes in Arunachal Pradesh that can be roughly divided into three distinct cultures: the Buddhists from Tawang (including ethnic Tibetans in exile), the tribal groups from the central areas, and the Hindus from the east.²⁵ The majority of the state's 1.4 million residents speak languages in the Tibetan-Burmese group, which facilitates interstate contact between closely related ethnic groups.

To accomplish greater cultural integration with the largest Indian subcontinent, New Delhi has adopted a four-part approach focused on economic development in Arunachal Pradesh. First, the Indian government is investing heavily in building new schools and hospitals and improving old institutions to provide better social services to the Arunachal Pradesh population. Second, New Delhi is developing the region's utilities infrastructure such as water, power, and electricity. New Delhi hopes to connect all the region's villages to a state power grid and establish communications between them in the near future. Third, the Indian government has launched an aggressive road and rail construction program in Arunachal Pradesh. India has specifically focused on increasing migration to alongside the McMahon Line by building an extensive road network along the border.²⁶ Fourth, New Delhi is encouraging local government officials and entrepreneurs to develop the region's tourism and agriculture industries.²⁷

India's focus on using economic development to facilitate cultural assimilation in Arunachal Pradesh has fundamentally augmented the region's indigenous culture. While in 1971, 64 percent of Arunachal Pradesh's population was either Sikhs or Jains, by 1991 the number had fallen to 38 percent, which is much closer to the overall Indian national average. Over the same time period, the number of residents who are Hindus grew from 21 percent to 37 percent.²⁸ In 2008, an Indian public opinion poll showed residents in Arunachal Pradesh overwhelmingly identifying with India over China and expressing strong resistance to the idea of Chinese claims over the region.²⁹ Arunachal Pradesh's government enjoys stability and widespread popularity among the population for its continued commitment to regional development.³⁰ For the Indian government, Indian public, and the majority of the Arunachal Pradesh population, Arunachal Pradesh is culturally an integral part of the larger Indian state.

Whereas Indian has a strong cultural claim to Arunachal Pradesh, the region has more cultural value for Beijing. China's cultural claim to Arunachal Pradesh comes from its sovereign control over the TAR. China argues that the Arunachal Pradesh, particularly Tawang, is part of Tibet and, as such, is part of Greater China's 'lost territories'. Beijing points to the large number

²⁵ Jayanta Kumar Ray and Aripita Basu Roy, *Political Roles of Religious Communities in India*, (Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2008).

²⁶ Yu dong 'India Maneuvers to Control China's 'South Tibet (yindu 'si zhao' kongzhi zhongguo zangnan)' 10 *Party & Government Forum* (dangzhi luntan) (2009).

²⁷ Lou Chunhao, 'Sino-Indian Border Conflict: Indian Strengthening of its Position is Unreasonable (zhongyin bianjing zhengyi qu: yindu qianghua zhanling buzai li)' 7 *World Affairs* (shijie zhishi) (2010).

²⁸ J. B. Ganguly, 'Ethnic Issues, secularism, and conflict resolution in North-east India' in *Ethnic Issues, secularism, and conflict resolution in North-east Asia* ed. Bimal J. Deb (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2006).

²⁹ Sujit Dutta, 'Revisiting China's territorial claims on Arunachal', 32:4 *Strategic Analysis* (2008).

³⁰ S.C. Bhatt and Gopal K. Bhargava, *Land and people of Indian state and union territories*, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006).

of ethnic Tibetans who live in the region as demographic proof that its sovereignty extends over the region. Chinese officials also argue that the Indian government is engaged in economic neo-colonialism in the region and must do so because the region's culture is naturally antithetical to Indian culture.³¹

A great deal of China's cultural claim to the region stems from its determination to secure the TAR. Beijing believes that bringing the Tawang monastery and the Tawang tract with the Drepung monastery—both important religious and cultural symbols for ethnic Tibetans—under Chinese control could contribute to stability in Tibet by proving the Chinese government can act to protect Tibetan cultural claims.³² Beijing is also concerned about the more than 100,000 Tibetans who live in India and worries Arunachal Pradesh could become a potential staging point for subversive action incursions into the TAR. While the Indian government has pledged to deny Tibetans the ability to use Indian territory as a base to engage in subversive action against China, Beijing does not entirely trust India's guarantee and would prefer to ensure its own security.

Indeed, Chinese cultural assertion over these sensitive areas increased following the 2008 Lhasa riots and will likely further increase following the 14th Dalai Lama's demise. The Dalai Lama has publically announced that he might reincarnate outside of Tibet and many observers believe he might choose the Tawang tract, where the 6th Dalai Lama was born.³³ The Chinese government is determined to control the Dalai Lama's reincarnation and the effect it will have Tibetan culture in China. The Chinese government has, therefore, a growing strategic interest in culturally bringing Arunachal Pradesh into its sphere of influence.

Nationalism

Chinese and Indian cultural claims in Arunachal Pradesh have led to a growth of border-related nationalism in both countries. The nationalism dimension has the potential to complicate the border issue by limiting how much ground either government can cede in a potential compromise without looking weak.³⁴ Indeed, nationalism with Arunachal Pradesh as the symbolic focus has elevated the Sino-Indian border dispute to a societal issue in which Beijing and New Delhi are increasingly cast as support rather than the principle actors.

Predictably, Indian residents both in Arunachal Pradesh and in wider India resent Chinese claims to an area they believe has long been incorporated into India both culturally and economically. While the most vocal nationalism comes from Indian student unions and academics, the local populations in Arunachal Pradesh also support New Delhi's claims to sovereignty over the region.³⁵ National and regional-level opinion polls in India indicate that distaste of perceived Chinese aggression, concern over Chinese minority policies, and resentment over China's historical claim to Arunachal Pradesh all contribute to calls for a greater

³¹ Lou Chunhao, 'Sino-Indian Border Conflict: Indian Strengthening of its Position is Unreasonable (zhongyin bianjing zhengyi qu: yindu qianhua zhanling buzai li)' 7 *World Affairs* (shijie zhishi) (2010).

³² Sujit Dutta, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China: India's Evolving Posture', 34:2 *The Washington Quarterly* (2011).

³³ George Yeo, 'Between China and India: Is Tibet the Wedge or Link?', *YaleGlobal*, September 8, 2009, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/between-china-and-india-tibet-wedge-or-link>

³⁴ Nationalism is used here in line with Smith's definition, which includes the formation of nations, the consciousness or sentiment belonging to a nation, the language and symbolism of a nation, and the political movement on behalf of the nation, Anthony Smith, *Nationalism* (London: Polity, 2010).

³⁵ Namrata Goswami, 'China's Territorial Claim on Arunachal Pradesh: Crafting an Indian Response', *Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis* (2010), accessed May 11, 2011, http://www.idsa.in/system/files/IB_Chinasterritorialclaim.pdf

Indian presence in the region and more overt claims of total sovereignty by New Delhi.³⁶ A 2010 Pew Global Attitudes poll indicated 52 percent of Indians held unfavorable views of China, exceeded only by South Korea and Japan in Asia.³⁷

A clear example of Indian nationalism occurred in February 2011, when the Chinese government issued stapled visas to two student athletes from Arunachal Pradesh (a symbolic sign that Beijing does not recognize Indian sovereignty over the region). In response to the event, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) met with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and called on him to close the borders with China in protest and enact a more assertive foreign policy. Leaders from the AAPSU also urged greater Indian military and economic presences in Arunachal Pradesh, particularly in remote and isolated areas so as to protect Indian residents against Chinese regional influence.³⁸ PM Singh promised to amend India's foreign policy towards China to strengthen New Delhi's claim over the region, thereby demonstrating how nationalism surrounding the issue can influence domestic and foreign policy.

Chinese nationalism regarding Beijing's claim over Arunachal Pradesh has grown exponentially since 2006, in line with China's toughening policy towards India.³⁹ Since 2008 in particular, Chinese institutes, popular bloggers, and military officials have called for increasingly aggressive policies towards India and Arunachal Pradesh, including calls for war. These arguments for war, written almost always anonymously or under pseudonyms, contain expert-like war plans for reclaiming 'South Tibet' and vows to 'crush' India once and for all.⁴⁰

In 2009, China's government-run *Global Times* published an in-depth discussion of China's claims to Arunachal Pradesh, stressing their legitimacy.⁴¹ In the same year, the CPC's mouthpiece, the *China Times*, published a poll claiming 96 percent of over 6,000 Chinese residents polled felt Arunachal Pradesh was part of greater China and that the Indian government should defer to Beijing on matters related to the Dalai Lama in the region.⁴² These two publications, both officially sanctioned by the CPC and, thereby, representative of Beijing's official policy line, suggest either that the Chinese government approves of and supports nationalism related to the topic of Sino-Indian border security or that the CPC's foreign policy is increasingly influenced by nationalism..⁴³

Military Buildup

The Indian and Chinese governments have responded to the conflict drivers stemming from geography, resources, culture, and nationalism by building up their military capacity along the contested border. The buildup of conventional force contributes to a security dilemma between the two states that has the potential to catalyze intrastate military conflict.

³⁶ Sujit Dutta, 'Revisiting China's territorial claims on Arunachal', 32:4 *Strategic Analysis* (2008).

³⁷ Sujit Dutta, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China: India's Evolving Posture', 34:2 *The Washington Quarterly* (2011).

³⁸ Ani 'Arunachal Students meet PM over China issuing stapled visa' *India Times* February 2, 2011, accessed May 11, 2011, <http://oneclick.indiatimes.com/article/0giAbnl8KQ36A?q=Manmohan+Singh>

³⁹ John W. Garver, 'China's Anti-encirclement struggle' 6:3 *Asian Security* (2010).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² '96% Chinese Against Indian visits to Arunachal', Rediff, October 14, 2009, accessed May 11, 2011, <http://news.rediff.com/report/2009/oct/14/pc-chinese-against-indian-visits-to-arunachal.htm>

⁴³ Sujit Dutta, 'Revisiting China's territorial claims on Arunachal', 32:4 *Strategic Analysis* (2008).

The military buildup is largest on the Chinese side, as the PLA view security in the TAR and the border issue as intricately entwined. While the PLA has warned India against increasing its military presence in Arunachal Pradesh, it has been involved in upgrading its own military infrastructure, its reconnaissance and surveillance capability, and its quick response ability in the border area.⁴⁴

The PLA has constructed a long distance rail link between Beijing and Lhasa that it can leverage to enhance its logistics supply chain to support rapid troop deployment in Tibet or into South Asia. Beijing has plans to extend this rail line to Linzhi Prefecture, just north of Arunachal Pradesh, which would enable the PLA to bring military supplies and troops directly to the contested Sino-Indian border.⁴⁵ The PLA has also established five airfields capable of supporting fighter aircraft in the TAR at Gongar, Pangta, Linchi, Heping and Gar Gunsa in addition to 9 other airfields capable of handling smaller aircraft.⁴⁶

The PLA maintains 13 Border Defense Regiments, including the 149th Division of the 13th Group Army near Arunachal Pradesh, across the TAR.⁴⁷ Moreover, the PLA has modernized the Chengdu and Lanzhou military Regions, home to a collective 400,000 troops, providing them with long-range fighter-bombers capable of military action inside India. On the border between Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh, the PLA has established signals intelligence installations aimed at India.⁴⁸

This buildup of troops and infrastructure in Tibet allows China to maintain a robust offensive capability that could challenge the Indian military in Arunachal Pradesh. In response to the Chinese buildup of conventional forces and troops in Tibet, the Indian military has undertaken its own military buildup and modernization program.⁴⁹

In 2007, the Indian Ministry of Defense dispatched two army divisions of 25,000 to 30,000 specially trained mountain troops to the Sino-Indian border in Arunachal Pradesh to reinforce the 90,000 troops already stationed in the mountainous region. The Indian Army also announced plans to deploy 105mm field guns and howitzers and 155mm Bofors howitzers, both with the capacity to penetrate up to 30 kilometers into China, along the border region.⁵⁰ The Ministry of Defense added 20 new battalions to the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (which patrols India's side of the McMahon Line) to reinforce its work along the border.

In 2009, the Indian Air force announced plans to forward-deploy two 18-aircraft squadrons of SU-30 MKI (Flanker-H) fighter jets. The Air Force will deploy these jets at its airbase in Tezpur in Arunachal Pradesh, less than 150 kilometers from the Chinese border.⁵¹ The Indian Air Force also announced plans to develop 4 to 5 new airfields as well as an Advanced

⁴⁴ 'Li Zhaoxing: To solve the Sino-Indian border dispute, we must first ensure peace along the border (Li Zhaoxing: bianjie wenti jie jue qian zhongyin ying wei hu bianjingdiqu heping)', *Sina*, March 4, 2011, accessed May 11, 2011, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2011-03-04/1148636021.html>

⁴⁵ Vijay Sakhuja, 'Military Buildup Across the Himalayas: A Shaky Balance', 9:18 *The Jamestown Foundation* (2009).

⁴⁶ Jonathan Holslag, 'The Persistent Military Security Dilemma', 32:6 *Journal of Strategic Studies*, (2009).

⁴⁷ Vijay Sakhuja, 'Military Buildup Across the Himalayas: A Shaky Balance', 9:18 *The Jamestown Foundation* (2009).

⁴⁸ Jonathan Holslag, 'The Persistent Military Security Dilemma', 32:6 *Journal of Strategic Studies*, (2009).

⁴⁹ Shen Kaiyan, 'We must use logic to solve the Sino-Indian border dispute (zhongyin bianjie wenti xu lixing jie jue)', 8 *Social Outlook (Shehui guan cha)* (2009).

⁵⁰ Jonathan Holslag, 'The Persistent Military Security Dilemma', 32:6 *Journal of Strategic Studies*, (2009).

⁵¹ Vijay Sakhuja, 'Military Buildup Across the Himalayas: A Shaky Balance', 9:18 *The Jamestown Foundation* (2009).

Landing Grounds (ALG) in Arunachal Pradesh. The Ministry of Defense continues to invest heavily in roads and railways in the region as part of an infrastructure development program to allow for rapid deployment of troops.

The increase in number and proximity of Chinese and Indian armed forces has led to a spurt of aggressive cross-border, small-scale provocations between China and India. Each month, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police report several dozen incursions by Chinese troops into Indian territory. Conversely, Chinese officials regularly report that Indian soldiers have crossed over the LOC into Tibet.

The tendency of both governments is to downplay the significance of these events even when they constitute more severe territorial violations such as the destruction of forward-deployed facilities such as bunkers.⁵² Nevertheless, media in both China and India contain stories of illegal incursions that have the potential to rile nationalist sentiment against each respective side and drive further military buildups.

Conclusion

In April 2011 at the BRICS summit in Hainan China, Chinese President Hu Jintao and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pledged to ‘reset’ relations between their two states and launched the ‘Year of China-India Exchange’. While welcome in that the announcement indicated a desire by both sides to improve relations, underlying conflict drivers remain that, if left unaddressed, could derail any chance of genuine détente. As Arunachal Pradesh is the most prominent source of potential large-scale conflict between the two states, any attempt to improve Sino-Indian relations must focus first and foremost on solving the border issue.

To settle outstanding claims to the region, Beijing and New Delhi must address issues ranging from geography to culture, from resources to nationalism. More importantly, both states must do so while avoiding direct military conflict. These significant hurdles suggest that while a solution may be elusive, any successful outcome will contain the foundation for closer overall Sino-Indian relations.

Take, for instance, the case of geography, which is central to the border dispute in Arunachal Pradesh. Geography is also a larger component of Sino-Indian tension both in terms of contested areas and regions where the two states are competing for political and economic influence, such as Myanmar and Bangladesh. If the two states reach an agreement on the issue of geography in Arunachal Pradesh, they will have a premise for future negotiations over geography-based issues.

So, too, is competition over natural resources in Arunachal Pradesh one component of a larger trend of Sino-Indian rivalry. Chinese and Indian demands for natural resources are increasing in tandem with the two countries’ economic growth, forcing them to compete for access to resources in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.⁵³ Agreement over resource use in Arunachal Pradesh would provide a framework for cooperation that could lessen tension resulting from resource-based competition.

⁵² John W. Garver, ‘China’s Anti-encirclement struggle’ 6:3 *Asian Security* (2010).

⁵³ Miria Pigato, *Strengthening China’s and India’s Trade and Investment Ties to the Middle East and North Africa*, (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2009).

Cooperation over cultural preservation in Arunachal Pradesh could also lead to a bettering of relations between China and India. De-securitization of cultural issues by Beijing and India would significantly decrease cross-border tensions and diffuse the basis for nationalism over Arunachal Pradesh.

Lastly, military buildups by both China and India are not confined to the border region in Arunachal Pradesh, but occur throughout Asia. Successful demobilization of contiguous troops in Arunachal would, therefore, have regional significance for Sino-Indian affairs.

If President Hu and Prime Minister Singh are serious about ‘resetting’ Sino-Indian relations, they could find no better place to start than in Arunachal Pradesh. The region’s dominate position in Sino-Indian affairs, together with its myriad conflict drivers, suggests the border conflict has the potential to make or break the two states’ relations. While clashes over the LOC in Arunachal Pradesh have the prospect to accelerate into large-scale conflict, cooperation in the region could promote closer Sino-Indian relations. In this regard, as goes Arunachal Pradesh, so go Sino-Indian relations.

Dr. Jeffrey Reeves is currently Director of the Chinese Studies Center and Director for Culture and Conflict Studies at the Center for Advanced Defense Studies in Washington, DC. Before assuming this position, Dr. Reeves worked as Director of Conflict Studies at Veratect Corporation and was a researcher with the London School of Economics’ Asia Research Center. Dr. Reeves has extensive experience working with political and social development in Asia with the United Nations and as a Peace Corps volunteer. Dr. Reeves received his PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2010.

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