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Master thesis

The recurrent conflict between China and India in the Himalayas:

A study of regional policies and power dynamics

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Abstract

This thesis' main research purpose is to understand why the border conflict between India and China in the Himalayas has not been solved, as of May 2021. A secondary focus is put on the understanding of dynamics that escalate or deescalate the standoff over time. The objective is to contribute to the academic discussion surrounding the understanding of recurrent and frozen conflicts. This has been done through the holistic analysis of economic, political and military policies both sides engage in, as well as through the look at the historical background of the conflict, ties to its people's social identities and the role geography can play in dispute (de)escalation. The research is guided by the theoretical base of the securitization and desecuritization theories, complemented by defensive neorealism. The key argument for China and India not being able to reach a feasible conclusion is the finding that the Himalayan conflict is not about the territory anymore. It rather represents a struggle for the influence of two rising powers that have inevitably clashed in their perceived backyard, which is represented by the mutual unwillingness of both countries to compromise. As well as by the sheer complexity of the border conflict, which is not only about borders anymore, being instead closely intertwined with a whole host of political, social, military and economic issues. Many of them went over the time so far that they became practically unsolvable. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that any meaningful, long-lasting and internationally accepted resolution of the Himalayan border conflict will occur in the coming years.

Keywords: China, India, Himalayas, border, dispute, policies, recurrent, power

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1. Introduction

China borders 14 countries alongside its 20 000km long border, plus shares its living space with multiple more island countries. With many of them, China has disputes over land or maritime economic zones, and in some cases even went to war over them, such as in the case of the 1962 Sino-Indian war, the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict or the 1979 Sino-Vietnam war. A lot of these territorial disputes remain decisively unsolved to this very day – as in the case of the South China Sea, Diaoyu Islands or parts of the Sino-Indian border. They remained frozen for a long time, but with the rise of China's economic might, they start to get since 2008 heated again. Why is that so and why they have mostly remained unsolved to this very day I would like to research the case of the world's two most populous countries and regional hegemons – China and India. Drawing up on their endeavours and territorial disputes in the Himalayas and surrounding regions. The relationship between the People's Republic of China and India has not started overly rough. India was the first non-socialist country to recognize the PRC in 1949 and both countries experienced a so-called "honeymoon" period, enjoying the best mutual relations just after the World War 2. In 1954, India even joined China in the promotion of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence[1]. The warming up of mutual relations however did not go past the Five Principles that moreover failed to be applied in the long run. The honeymoon however turned first into hostility when India started to support the Tibetan separatist movement and later in 1962 into a Sino-Indian war over border territories (Wei, 2019).

The point of research for this thesis will be the frozen conflict between China and India in the area of the Himalayas. How the conflict came to be, why hasn't it been resolved as of yet and what prevents its resolution. Meanwhile, at the same time, addressing factors that might contribute to the conflict's "up and down" dynamics. And concurrently trying to contribute to the broader academic discussion about frozen conflicts on the case of the two giants.

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[1] 1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. 2. Mutual non-aggression. 3. Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs. 4. Equality and mutual benefit. 5. Peaceful co-existence (Eekelen, 1967).

1.1 Problem formulation

The main idea of this thesis is to analyze and find answers on why has the border dispute between China and India (+ Bhutan) been going on for so long, without any final resolution. Most of the areas in question are desolate lands thousands of meters above sea level with little economic value. There are some exceptions though, such as the disputed territory of Arunachal Pradesh. Covering over 80 thousand square kilometers, an annual growth rate of around 8% and huge hydropower generating potential that could account for 22% of India's energy demand, if properly utilized (IBEF, 2021). Some territories, for instance the area around the Doklam plateau that has seen a standoff with China in 2017 hold immense strategic value. As Chinese control of Doklam could seriously threaten the Siliguri corridor or "chicken's neck", a narrow passage connecting the East and the West of India, while the Aksai Chin is important for China due to a national highway connecting provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang through its territory. Almost each of the disputed territories between the two (three, including Bhutan) therefore holds some value, either economic or strategic. What is however unique about this long-lasting standoff is the unwillingness of both sides to back down from their claims and acknowledge the claims of the other side, while trying to reach some final resolution. Instead, China and India are pursuing the policy of keeping the status quo after the 1962 Sino-Indian war which seems comfortable for both sides, which does not seem rational. As both sides are deployed on the so-called Line of Actual Control and are effectively controlling and administering territories, they are currently present at. At the same time technically acknowledging the fact that the other side is administering the territories presented to that side after the establishment of the status quo. So, from the first glance, it might seem the most reasonable thing to do to simply sign the status quo into an official border demarcation, which could reduce tensions on both sides. As well as lower the amount of money each side has to spend on keeping its military on alert in the Himalayas. However, this has not happened so far and it seems there is no mutual willingness for such resolution soon, even though the land swaps were proposed in the past (Swami, 2013).

Therefore, I would like to examine the reasoning behind the border disputes in general and why they have not been resolved, while also explore what contributes to their constant re/de-

heating over time. Especially in connection to the latest Galwan valley skirmish in June 2020. My research question for the thesis thus being:

Why hasn't the border dispute between China and India been resolved yet and what contributes to its constant re/de-heating?

This will be done by analysing the process and reasons behind the growing consolidation of power of the two countries in the Himalayas. Including the implications for their regional policy and hard/soft power dynamics in the region. The main question for the thesis is the research of why has the dispute between China and India not been solved yet, while the second question of what contributes to the conflicts' constant re-heating and de-heating will be taken as a sub-question. Resolution of which will contribute to the overall answer to the main question.

1.1.1 Objective

The objective of this work is to analyse the dynamics of the relationship between China and India (+ Bhutan) in the scope of the Himalayan theatre, while contributing to the academic and expert discussion on the topic of frozen conflicts.

1.2 Delineation
1.2.1 Researched actors

To research why has the Sino-Indian border conflict not been resolved to this very day, I will put an equal focus on both India and China and their policies toward the Himalayan region and its relevant surroundings. A minor focus will be also given to Pakistan, but it will be mainly covered in some relation to one of the two superpowers and their policies. Special treatment will be given to Bhutan due to its 'protected state' status with India. Since 1949 when Bhutan and India signed a treaty of friendship, Bhutan was under the Indian 'guidance' in its foreign policy in exchange for military protection and financial aid. This treaty was renegotiated in 2007, so Bhutan's policy no longer needs to be 'guided' by India. However, it still does receive

the largest portion of the Indian foreign financial aid and has an Indian military stationed within its territory. So, for the purpose of this thesis, Bhutan will be understood as being within the framework of Indian foreign and military policy, especially since Bhutan and China have no official diplomatic relations. Bhutan is therefore being represented by India in its territorial disputes with China. As we could have seen in 2017 when India intervened on Bhutan's behalf in its dispute with China over the Doklam plateau by China's Chumbi valley (Chawla, 2019).

1.2.2   Researched area

The main focus of this thesis will be put on the area of the Himalayas. A mountain range that extends almost 2500 kilometres from Nanga Parbat in the west to Namcha Barwa in the east. Spanning across the territories of Pakistan, India, China, Nepal and Bhutan. The Himalayas are bordered by the Tibetan plateau to the north, mountain ranges of Hindu Kush and Karakoram to the northwest, Indian plains to the south and South-East Asian rainforests to the southeast. With over 110 peaks rising well above 7300 meters the Himalayas is one of the highest regions in the world, including the world's highest mountain – Mount Everest. The width of the mountain range varies between 200 and 400 kilometres and spans around 595 000 square kilometres. With India currently administering around 96 000 kilometres and China around 36 000 kilometres[2]. The Himalayas are specific by their steep and high peaks, alpine glaciers, various valleys, complex flora and fauna, huge reservoirs of fresh water, while at the same time being volcanically active. The whole Himalayan region consists of various sub-ranges - the Lower Himalayas, the Great Himalayas, the Tibetan Himalayas, the Trans-Tibetan Himalayas and the Siwalik Range. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will be referring to the whole Himalayan region in this work as "the Himalayas" (Chatterjee and Bishop, 2017).

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[2] Referred to the currently administered territories under the Line of Actual Control.

Picture 1: The Himalayan mountain range and surrounding areas with the disputed areas from the "neutral" perspective, representing the Line of Actual Control and current boundaries (The Economist, 2012)

Picture 2: The Himalayan mountain range and surrounding areas with the disputed areas representing the claims from the Indian perspective (The Economist, 2012)

Picture 3: The Himalayan mountain range and surrounding areas with the disputed areas representing the claims from the Chinese perspective (The Economist, 2012)

1.3 State of affairs
1.3.1 Brief historical overview

The main problem stems from the delineation of the border by the British empire. In 1914, Sir Arthur Henry McMahon has drawn up a border of India that mostly followed the crests of the Himalayas and is generally known as the McMahon Line. McMahon drew the border with an idea of dividing Tibet into an outer Tibet and inner Tibet out of which the latter would be under the influence of British India. This Line was later presented to the officials of the Republic of China and Tibet at the Simla conference. There are many versions of the outcome of the event though. One of the versions states that the Simla Accords were signed only by the British and Tibetan representatives, with the Republic of China first signing it, but then retracting its signature (Wei, 2019). Another version states that the Accords were signed only by the British and Tibetan representatives (who were not eligible to negotiate their international agreements without Chinese approval at the time), with China refusing to sign and walking out of the conference. The agreement was then made binding only between the

British Empire and Tibet, which was not independent. However, the original version of the agreement still referred to all three parties, including China. Hence, China has never accepted the agreement and border delineation to this very day (Sinha, n.d.). Therefore, both India (as an independent state, inheriting the situation from the British empire), China and different scholars not only to this day disagree about the legality of the agreement, but also about the versions of what happened. Even though there is a general agreement that Tibet was not independent at the time to sign it, the British (and later India) published it in 1936. This created the disputed situation over the McMahon line in which India claims that the agreement is valid and its territorial claims are legal. Meanwhile, China claims that the agreement is invalid and Indian claims are in fact Chinese territory. Furthermore, Indian claims are not helped by the fact that after the publishing of the agreement in 1936, the claims based on the agreement were at times withdrawn and then re-established again. Making the situation even more complicated (Wei, 2019).

The problem of the British border delineation did not lie only in the McMahon Line though. In the Western sector of the Sino-Indian frontier, there existed two different border demarcations. One of the disputed areas was Aksai Chin and its surrounding territories. The border was first unofficially drawn up by William Johnson in 1865 and later supplemented by John Ardagh in 1987, creating the "Johnson-Ardagh" Line. The Line put Aksai Chin within the Indian territory, due to the fears of potential Russian expansion and the need for more defensible territories. However, the Line was not accepted by the British government and China, meanwhile some British officials proposed a different line that would put Aksai Chin within the Chinese territory. This was accepted by the British government, resulting in the drawing up of a new "Macartney-MacDonald" Line that gave Aksai Chin to the Chinese. In 1899, a diplomatic note about this decision was sent to the Chinese government on which the British received no objection, but also no formal reply. Therefore, despite this agreement, the matter was not fully resolved. After the fall of Qing dynasty, the British pressed claims for Aksai Chin according to Johnson-Ardagh Line again. In 1927, they retracted their claims, but following the end of World War 2 and fear of Soviet expansion, they pressed their claims again. With various maps showing various demarcations during the period. The dispute was not resolved by the formation of an independent India that has inherited it (Ranjan, 2016).

1.3.2 Current situation

From 1975 to recent clashes in June 2020 both sides experienced minor skirmishes and standoffs at the border, but without any loss of human life. The mid-June 2020 skirmish in the Galwan valley left over 20 Indian and an unconfirmed number of Chinese soldiers dead. Most of them died in hand-to-hand combat or by falling from the ridge due to the Sino-Indian agreement forbidding the use of firearms and explosives. The skirmish was a result of India's road construction alongside the Line of Actual Control (LAC), a line that is not a border between the two states, but more of a frozen status quo stemming from the 1962 war. With both sides still claiming parts of the LAC currently controlled by the other side (Green, 2020). After certain de-escalation of the Galwan valley skirmish, another standoff has occurred on 20th January 2021 in Naku La pass in Sikkim, an Indian state just between Nepal and Bhutan. Involving minor clash and a brawl, but with no casualties. After Chinese patrol tried to enter what was considered to be an Indian territory and was forced back. Both sides, later on, brought reinforcements, but the situation did not escalate further (BBC, 2021b).

1.4 Sino-Indian prisoner's dilemma

The complex situation of the Sino-Indian conflict can be even better illustrated on the prisoner's dilemma, a concept borrowed from the game theory that is often used in geopolitical situations. In the prisoner's dilemma, two actors are supposedly making a certain choice at the same time. There are four possible outcomes out of the choices they both make since they are related to each other in the end. The best outcome for the "prisoners" would be to lie and receive a 1-year sentence each, while if they both confess, they receive 10 years each. However, the dynamics of the situation change when one of them lies while the other confesses, in that case, the former receives 10 years and the latter goes home free. Logically, it is then best for both actors to lie and receive a minimal penalty. In real life though, the prize of walking home free is too appealing and there is a high chance the actors will try to betray each other, receiving 10 years each in the end (Gallego, 2017).

We could imagine the situation during the Cold War between the USA and the USSR. The best solution for both would be to disarm, so there is no risk of war while they would have a lot of

money to invest into other parts of the economy. However, the risk of disarming while the other was arming is too big, because that would result in the dominance of one and destruction of the other. Out of this fear, both countries kept arming themselves. Incurring massive costs to their economies, until USSR could not manage it anymore and fell apart.

Picture 4: Graphical representation of the prisoner's dilemma[3] (Gallego, 2017)

If we apply the concept to the Sino-Indian border disputes we can theoretically say that their most rational and reasonable resolution would be to back off on both sides, demilitarize the region and resign on some of its territorial claims while acknowledging some of the claims of the other side. This would equal the "lie – lie/win-win" situation, in which none of the actors completely wins, but the common outcome should be the best for both sides. Without the risk of incurring huge losses. However, this is not to be and the resolution has not been reached for many decades. With India and China instead pursuing the "confess – lie/win-lose" scenario, which might ultimately (and in 1962 Sino-Indian war did) result in a "confess – confess/lose-lose" situation. In which both sides keep incurring losses and the situation just turns into a conflict of attrition. The main idea of this thesis is to research what might be the motivation behind keeping the conflict of attrition running when, economically speaking, China has the upper hand and India simply cannot keep the pace up forever. In 2019, both countries had a similar amount population but the Chinese GDP was approximately 5 times higher than the Indian GDP (World Bank, 2021).

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[3] Numbers in the picture do not represent specific situation. They are rather supposed to represent the approximate costs that will be incurred by either actor. Representing medium loss on both sides in case of confess/confess scenario. Huge loss (or win) in case of confess/lie scenario and minimal loss on both sides in case of lie/lie scenario.

2. Methodology
2.1 Limitations and scope

The analysis of the frozen conflict between India and China will be done in the form of a comparative case study. All analysed actors are nation-states, even though Bhutan enjoys what might be portrayed by some as a junior partnership with India. Nevertheless, Bhutan is considered a nation-state with relatively independent foreign policy as well. In this thesis, however, Bhutan will be addressed mainly through its close ties to India, unless stated otherwise. The main units of analysis are therefore exclusively India and China.

Analytical limitations come in many forms. One of them is the internal structure of India in which there is a set number of regional states led by Chief ministers that enjoy varying degrees of autonomy from the central government. These sub-state entities may then at some point have a different view from the central government, while in China, most of the international interactions are done only from the central level. These country-level interactions are therefore going to be the main analytical focus for this thesis, unless stated differently. Another limitation comes from the fact that the situation we see today was in reality created by different political entities before both independent India and the PRC were established. Hence, both countries inherited it from their polity predecessors and had little effect on its creation. This can cause problems with interpretation of what was behind various policies since in both India's and China's case, their current political systems are a complete overhaul of the systems before. This might result in one of the sides sticking to the interpretation of various policies/agreements (consciously or not) from the former polity that might have been meant differently. Leading to the biggest limitation of all, the varying interpretation of situations, events, agreements, political stances, policies and the like. Interpretation of many things by both India and China are at cases vastly different. Sometimes even rising a level higher, with a different interpretation between "Western" literature and "Chinese" literature. To navigate this conundrum, the focus will be put on the narrative of both sides with not coming to conclusions of who is right and who is wrong. Analysing the effect of these stances on the continuation and possible resolution of the Sino-Indian border dispute instead.

2.2 Choice of theory

The research part of this thesis will highlight the use of realist approaches to international relations. As the focus will be put mainly on the material aspects of the Sino-Indian relationship. For instance, military and economic power, use of the controlled territory and undefined geography or administrative policies. This does not mean that non-material approaches have nothing to say nor that non-material values do not play a role in mutual relationship. However, the realist approaches seem more applicable because both countries own nuclear weapons and possess the significant military capability or do not share the same system of governance, while already having a history of conflicts. For the purpose of which, two theories will be used to answer the research question. Securitization theory will be used to explain how the conflict between India and China came to be and how it got to the stage of a frozen conflict. Creating a national security issue through inherited and improper border delineation. Followed by Defensive Neorealism which is used to address the shortfalls in an understanding of why is the conflict going on to this very day and what might be the motivation of both countries behind keeping the status quo. As both countries might have the realist perception of only safeguarding themselves against the other, always driving the security competition to the breaking point. Followed either by a heated standoff or cooling down of the situation. All while connecting the dots between the re-emergence of conflicts, economic/military power and public/international approval. The reversal of the Securitization theory could then provide an understanding in terms of how de-escalation if the Himalayan conflict affects power dynamics in the whole theatre.

2.3 Choice of data

Aside from the literature backing up the use of the to-be applied theories. I will draw both from the historical data concerning the governance transition between colonial India under the British empire to an independent state or the transition between various systems of government in China. To the study of modern-day policies that are applied on each side of the border. The word policy in the meaning of this thesis will not necessarily be understood only as written law or administrative order, but rather as the general approach of one actor

against the other, with a set of both tangible and non-tangible actions. By tangible, I mean policies of whose effect we can see and to a degree measure, such as the laws, building of infrastructure, intentional control of water streams or budget increases. Meanwhile, non-tangible policies will represent the concepts of national identity and ideology, differing perceptions of what the state should represent and where its borders lie or the invisible hand of public opinion that can guide the decision-making process. For the purpose of which, I will focus on the narrative and interpretation of each side about the events that happened, from either the state and individual perspective. Including official government sources and from the state-run and independent media, non-profit organizations, as well as external experts.

2.4 Research method

The research method will be using the chosen theories as theoretical lenses through which to look at the Sino-Indian border conflict and policies. With Securitization theory serving as the first stepping stone, addressing the issue of how the conflict came to be. Supplemented by Defensive neorealism in the middle, addressing the conflict's relative status quo situation. Followed again by the Securitization theory but in a reverse de-securitization application. Trying to provide a framework for understanding of the effect de-escalation has on the conflict's dynamics. Leading to hypothesises that can through observation lead to analytical statements and answers for the research question(s).

2.4.1 Research approach

The analysis will be divided into three research pillars. Each pillar has a distinctive focus that explores the Sino-Indian border conflict from a hard (and to a small degree, soft) power holistic perspective. However, even though the main focus is on hard power and material factors, there will be a certain marginal space given to rather sociological topics. Especially in the first, socio-geographical pillar. As I believe that without addressing the issue of Indian and Chinese identity (from their own perspectives) and concept of the nation-state due to the country's histories, I would not be able to provide a clear picture. The following two pillars will mainly focus on tangible and materially oriented policies, especially in terms of the second

economic pillar. Meanwhile, the third politico-military pillar will explore the role of the public and international opinion that can drive certain policies in all three pillars combined, as well as the role of the military.

The Socio-geographical pillar is going to focus on two areas, sociological and geographical. The geographical part will focus on the issue of geographical and natural boundaries and their delimitation and interpretation. Parts of the common border between India and China suffer from poor delimitation, and if there is any, there is an open space for its wrongful, but unintentional, interpretation. Chunks of it lie on high peaks or follow certain rivers, but rivers can shift and peaks can be covered in snow. Resulting in both sides interpreting that the border (or line of control) lies somewhere else, leading to conflict. The sociological part will focus on the matter of perception of borders. When Britain ruled India, the seat of the empire was in London and it was in the imperial interest to radiate as far from the core as possible. So, the issue of border delimitation might not have been so problematic back then, since the Himalayas could have simply been seen as a frontier of the empire. The same could be applied to the pre-communist China within Tibet. Moreover, it will also address the effects on ideological and nation identity perspectives, supplemented by the historical data. Since some territories could be claimed by both sides based on historical interpretations as their land, and both might be right.

The Economic pillar is going to focus on three distinctive economic chapter. As economy as a whole is a substantially huge topic. The three chapters were chosen based on the activity of both India and China in respective fields in recent years and their connection to the border dispute, to which they are always somehow related. The first chapter will focus on the effects of infrastructure building inside and close to disputed areas, meaning roads, airports, new villages, military barracks and the like. The second chapter will concern itself with water geopolitics in the Himalayan theatre. China is at the moment upstream controller of seven mightiest' South Asian rivers, 48% of whose water runs into India. Creating a point of contention for a country that is highly dependent on this water. With China actively pursuing mega-scale projects that might reduce the downstream water flow (Singh and Tembey, 2020). The last chapter will address non-tangible economic policies of an administrative character. From various sanctions or bans to economic subsidies, such as India's recent ban on Chinese apps.

The Politico-military pillar is, as well as the first pillar, divided into a political and military part. The military part will aim to research the plans for the expansion of armies and their funding, deployment of units at the border or military strategies of both sides. Meanwhile, the political part will focus on the administrative policies, meaning the policies in some way tied to the governance of certain territories or subjects. As an example could serve the revocation of Kashmir's special governance status by the Indian central government in 2019. As well as exploring the role of domestic and international influence on the decision-making processes of both India and China. Taking into account the public opinion at home from the domestic point of view and obligations and opinions of foreign allies from the international point of view, while taking all of the previous pillars and chapters into account.

2.5 Project graph
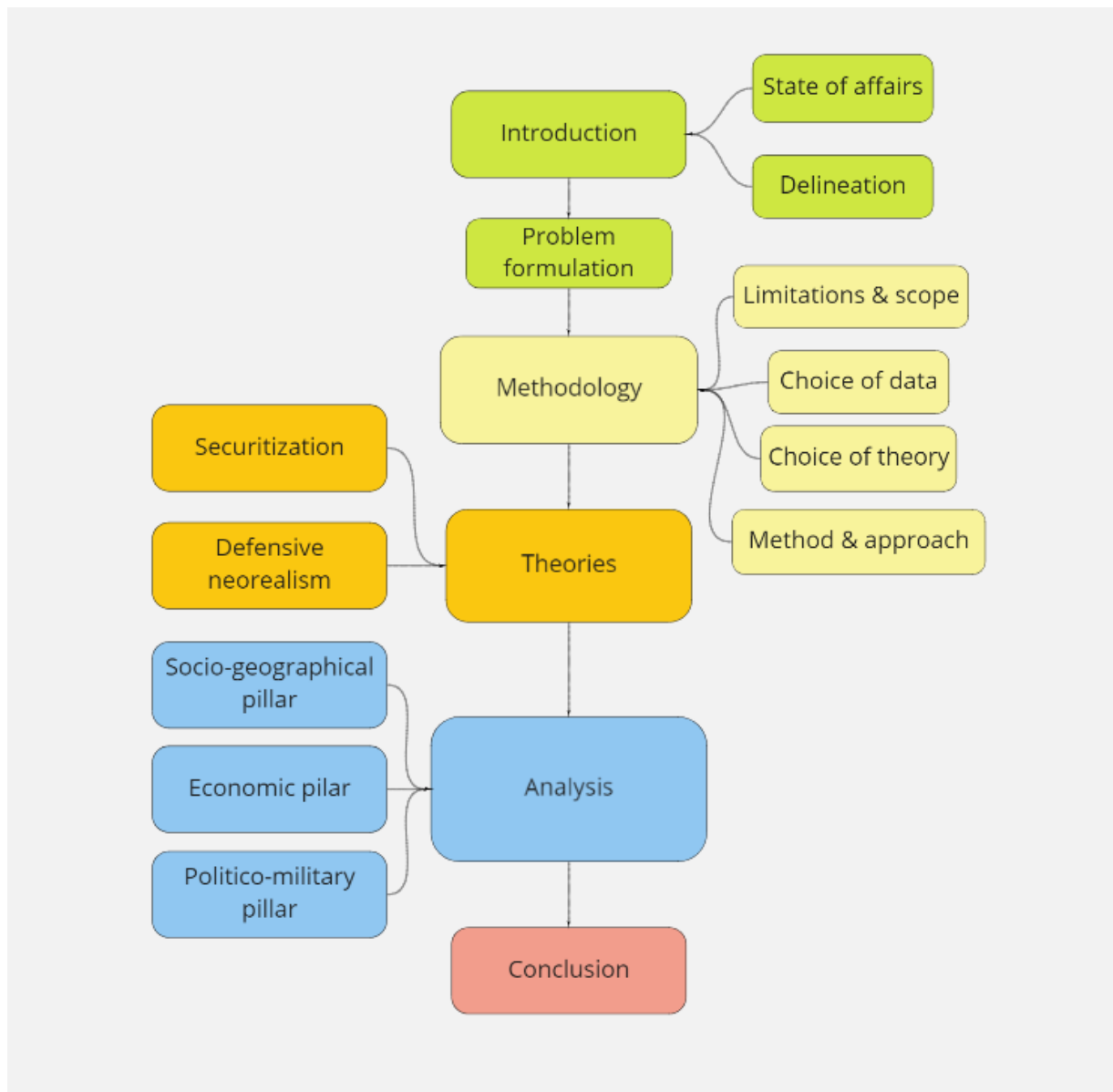
Picture 5: Graphical representation of the thesis' line of progression

3. Theory

3.1 Securitization and desecuritization

Securitization theory is a theoretical concept introduced by Ole Waever in 1993, a representative of the so-called Copenhagen School of security studies. The theory could be inherently divided into two sub-theories, securitization and desecuritization. Both of which are based on the same concept, only with the difference that desecuritization reverses the theoretical process of the securitization theory. Out of the mainstream theories, securitization theory borrows from both classical realism and social constructivism and merges them into a wholly new concept that can be used as a lens through which to look at the origins of security issues. As a point of departure, Waever defines the perception of security, as opposed to insecurity, which in some theories might stand on the opposite sides, putting insecurity in direct binary opposition to security and defining it as a lack of security. Waever instead defines security as "*a situation marked by the presence of a security problem and some measure taken in response* (Lipschutz and Waever, 1995)", while insecurity is defined as "*a situation with a security problem and no response* (Lipschutz and Waever, 1995)". Consequently, by Waever's definition, security is then always relative and not absolute. With "complete security" representing the ideal of being out of any danger. However, at this stage, Waever points out that when one is completely secure, you do not talk about security anymore due to the lack of a security problem (Lipschutz and Waever, 1995).

The basis of Waever's theoretical framework stands on the claim that the security situation can be artificially created. This is achieved via so-called securitization process that involves multiple steps that need to be taken in order for a matter to be transformed into a security issue. First of all, there must be a certain level of willingness from a group of "elites" that will embark on the act of the "securitization speech". In other words, creating a narrative about the perceived insecurity issue and the need for certain actions to be taken through its repeated utterance. The point of the speech is not however to maximize security but to minimize it (or at least devise such perception). To create a situation that will allow further political actions to be taken. The securitization speech, which is mostly fuelled by the ideal of national security, by the elites is directed at the "referent object", an interpretation of which

lies solely on them. It could range from a material object, an ideology, part of society to the state itself. The referent object is then, through the securitization speech act, reformed into a security issue, which, if accepted by a large enough audience, will allow for measures and political actions to be taken by the elites in response (Lipschutz and Waever, 1995).

According to Waever, desecuritization of the security issues can be then achieved by the reversal of the securitization process. By stopping to apply the term "security" to various matters, to open up channels for negotiation and de-escalation. At the centre of the desecuritization process lies "securitization speech failure". The situation in what a certain topic, that might have been previously securitized by the elites, loses their, which is in many cases connected to the change of political regimes in the country. As the topic that had previously enjoyed support within the old elite circle cannot be justified for the new elites to pursue anymore. The speech failure and desecuritization process are also closely connected to the failure to find and keep a large enough audience that enables elites to take political action (Lipschutz and Waever, 1995).

3.1.1 Theory critique

Even though the Securitization theory provides us with a clear and easy-to-use framework we can apply to understand how conflicts are constructed, it has its limits. One of the main critiques by mainstream scholars focuses on the overemphasis securitization puts on the speech act. Meanwhile, neglecting other and more visual means of communication, such as videos or images. The critics also claim that the change does not happen only through some magical power of the speech act, but that the security professionals and their practices play a significant role. Therefore, that the security agenda setting is to a big degree done through institutionalization and routinization of already established security practices. Securitization theory is moreover critiqued for its top-down elitist approach through an idea that most of the securitization process is decided at the top and regarding everyone else as passive listeners who can only accept or reject the securitization process. The last part of the critique focuses on the lack of analysis of rival voices within the elites. As there are almost always rivals who reject the securitization move but are in a minority. Moreover, the securitization theory lacks the theoretical ability to explain why has the conflict between China and India

been going on for so long. Due to its main focus on the explanation of how the conflicts are escalated and de-escalated. For which, a second and more comprehensive hard power theory will be used (Baysal, 2020).

3.2 Defensive neorealism

Defensive neorealism[4] is one of two sub-divisions of neorealism[5], the other being offensive neorealism. The theory was coined by Kenneth Waltz in 1979 as an answer to deficiencies in other mainstream theories at the time. The core idea of defensive neorealism stands on the notion of the anarchical nature of the international system and its self-ordering principle, through which actors fight for their survival. This is achieved through the self-help effort of the states due to the uncertainty of how other states are going to behave. According to Waltz's theory, the primary objective of a state is to achieve its survival by ensuring its security. This is done through the pursuit of moderate policies and non-expansionist behaviour. Provided that expansionist behaviour, according to defensive neorealists, decreases states' security whereas it states that they should not be by nature inherently aggressive. Waltz also claims the expansionist behaviour is almost always properly punished and that being on the defence is more advantageous, so the states are less motivated to go on the offence. As the price to pay is high, especially in terms of international reputation. Therefore, to achieve security and forth, survival, it is in the states' interest not to maximize its absolute power, but rather to maintain the existing status quo relative to other states. As a result of which, the state whose power is rising is likely going to be counterbalanced by another state. One of the only few justifiable reasons for war for defensive neorealists is a "preventive war". An action that is meant to stop the rise of a power that might threaten and disrupt the status quo (Lobell, 2017).

Even though defensive neorealism puts its main focus on "defence", it does admit that reasons for conflict exist. To explain the break out of conflicts, the theory points towards "structural modifiers". Concretely to security dilemma, geography and elite's beliefs. As

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[4] Also called Defensive realism. Even though there is a difference in name, both terms still do refer to one and the same theory.
[5] Also called Structural realism.

mentioned, states are intrinsically pursuing their own security and not seeking expansion. However, when one state aggressively pursues security, only for the sake of safeguarding its existence, it might be seen by a different state as a threat. Resulting in an upward arms race spiral and so-called security dilemma. In which both (or more) actors are locked in a no-escape scenario, as increasing one's security might be relatively related to the perception of decreasing the security of another. Unintentionally creating a point of contention. A second structural modifier is a geography. Defensive neorealists claim that the geography of a state has a significant effect on its behaviour since it usually mostly favours the defender. States such as India that do have geographical barriers as a part of their territory then react more slowly and less intensively to increases in the power of other states. With the focus on the promotion of defensive military strategies. The last structural modifier is connected to the country's elites and so-called "strategic culture". Similarly, to the securitization theory, defensive neorealism believes that the elites are responsible for setting up and driving the state's security agenda. Therefore, it is fairly important who the elites are and what are their perceptions. For example, if most of the elites are connected to the military, the risk of conflict is higher than if they were not. There is a limit on what elites can do though, thanks to the strategic culture. A notion that elites have created to achieve a certain goal, which has entrapped them and they are unable to adjust it after their primary goal has changed (Lobell, 2017).

3.2.1 Theory critique

Defensive neorealism is being criticised by multiple scholars in various areas. One of them is the claim that a security dilemma does not exist. Stating that we cannot look at all states as "security-seeking", but we have to acknowledge the existence of "predatory" states. Ones that do not arm themselves for security reasons, but to secure absolute gains. In which case, the security dilemma is simply not a problem anymore, because there is a clear aggressor against which security-seeking states build a coalition. Another shortcoming of defensive neorealism is the assumption that states are "black boxes" with little to no effect of internal policies and political or economic system on their international behaviour. Most of the analysis predominantly based on the past and present of the observable international

behaviour. One of the biggest critiques however comes from the offensive realists, who claim that defensive neorealism cannot properly explain the maximization of power. They agree that it is logical if a weak state pursues moderate policies, to survive, but they claim that if the state is strong, it will simply expand and accumulate as much power as possible and not pursue moderate and balancing policies. Instead, it will simply expand in places where the state incurs the lowest risks and costs. When a strong states then settle for moderate behaviour, it does not mean they chose the security-seeking "middle way". It means they simply learned from their mistakes and are expanding or waiting to expand in a different area or place (Taliaferro, 2001).

3.3. Application of theories to the research question

The theories in question will not be used at the same time to analyse things, but they will instead be used as a "sandwich". Since the Sino-Indian conflict goes on for a very long time and has roots in a time way before both modern states were formed. It is of utmost importance, in order to understand the possible resolution of the situation, to address how the situation or certain policy came to be a point of contention. Therefore, the first layer of the sandwich will be represented by the securitization theory whose theoretical scope is set to address how a certain policy originated. And most importantly, how it started creating friction between the two superpowers. Due to the securitization's simplified and easy to use but rather shallow design, another layer of the sandwich will be added. Represented by a more comprehensive theory of defensive neorealism. Defensive neorealism will address the status quo situation between the two countries through their policies. Alongside various derivations from it in terms of occasional flare-ups or cool-downs. The analysis through its lens will however not focus just on the observable international behaviour of both states in the past and the present, but also, on the internal policies and the friction they have created through the explanation set by the securitization theory. The middle part of the sandwich will be the most important one, as it will directly address a substantial part of the main question of *"Why hasn't the conflict been resolved yet?".* Nonetheless, to fully comprehend the situation and explore possibilities that are there to resolve the conflict, the third and last layer of the sandwich will be added. Represented by the reversal of the securitization theory. The

"desecuritization theory" will aim to explore ways of overcoming sensitive topics between China and India by their intentional de-heating. Along with examining a possibility for the establishment of a fresh new chapter in mutual healthy relations, without the need for a status quo from the security dilemma perspective.

4. Policy analysis

The analysis will follow the idea of three policy pillars (dimensions) that should provide us with an understanding of the whole picture behind the border dispute. To equip the reader with further information and put these policies into the historical perspective. I would like to present a graph representing the most important dates of the mutual conflict. As the analysis will often draw on these dates and relate policies to certain situations.
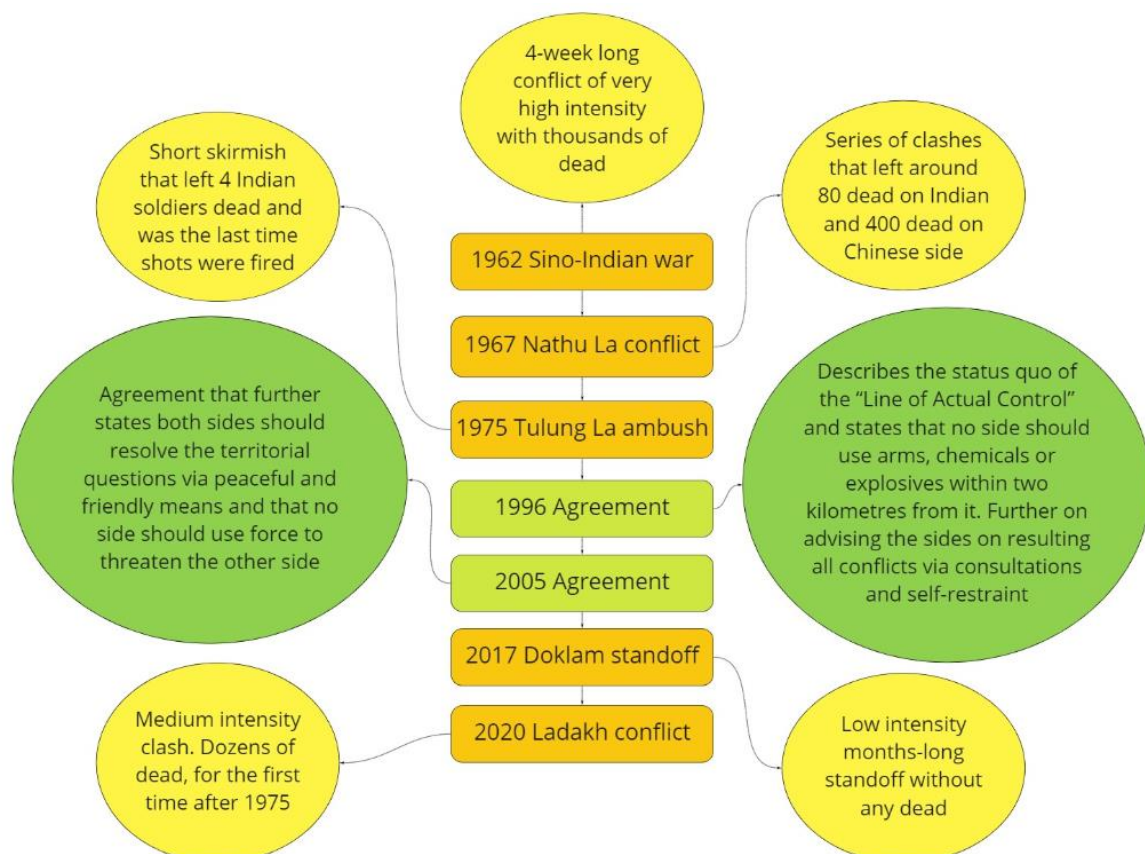
Picture 6: Graphical representation of the biggest clashes and most important agreements in the Sino-Indian border conflict. Does not represent all of the clashes or agreements (Al Jazeera, 2020b; Singh, 2020c).

4.1 Social, geographical and historical dimension

Before we embark on the analysis of exact policies related to the ongoing border dispute itself, it is important to address social and historical evidence of the past and the present to put these policies into a bigger picture. As the people and the way, they interpret various situations inevitably drives these policies. Even though this thesis mainly focuses on the present state of the conflict and why it has not been solved, through the study of regional policies. It is of utmost importance to delve into the past as well, especially since the policies of China and India of today connect to a conflict that has been inherited from previous polities. The sole focus on the economic, political and military policies would not be sufficient. Mainly due to its inability to address shortcomings in the form of a fight for a land that might not be important from neither an economic, political or strategic perspective. Hereby giving us a hint that there is something "more" both sides are fighting for. This "more" does not however need to be necessarily interpreted only as some ambiguous part of their historical heritage or symbolism. Therefore, to provide a truly coherent overview of the situation, a portion of the research, especially in this pillar, will be done via a bottom-up approach. Not just focusing on the politics of the state as a whole, but also the individuals and their perceptions of national identity. Also stemming from different interpretations of the world around them, that might be correct in their own right, but vastly different from the interpretation of the other side. Creating a friction zone and *casus belli* for escalation as a result. The pillar as a whole will aim to answer the research sub-question "How does the historical heritage, geographical limitations and ideology influence power dynamics within the Sino-Indian border conflict?".

4.1.1 Perception of the Himalayan "border" from the historical perspective

One of the main issues in international border conflicts are the perceptions of borders themselves. Even though the word "border" might sound very clear for an average European reader, due to the concept of "nation-state" borders established after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. It might not be so clear in the rest of the world. A prime example is the US' westward expansion into the unknown "frontier" that was slowly incorporated into the

existing colonies with well-defined borders. The distinction of the words "border" and "frontier" is in the Himalayan case very important. Border usually represents a line between political entities or cultural regions and generally serves as a clear and agreed-upon demarcation of what is who's. Meanwhile, the frontier represents only an approximate line of the polity's territory due to the ongoing process of expansion, such as in the US' case. Frontiers usually stretch from actual well-defined borders of a state or political entity outwards, to incorporate the territory into its administration. With a prime goal of turning the frontiers into demarcated borders as a result. The point of contention however comes when two (or more) political entities radiate from their core and demarcated "borders" into what they perceive as their rightly "frontiers". To incorporate this "lawless" frontier territory within its borders. Such was the case in the Himalayas between the British Empire via its colony of British India and pre-communist China (Billé, 2012).

The Himalayas could be, especially during the 19th century, described as such a frontier zone. The main two actors in the area were colonial India (via the British) and pre-communist China, both in a way radiating to the area from their bases. Their primary base was London/New Delhi for the former and Beijing for the latter. With their secondary, and for the expansion into the Himalayas more important, the base being in the Northern India and Tibet. At the time, both sides engaged in the frontier area in commercial and political activity meant to bring it closer to incorporation into its borders. From the commercial perspective ranging from timber harvesting to the development of a plantation economy, to integrate the area into the economic system. Politically, the state actors have kickstarted the process of a securitization speech within its frontier territory and focused on making the local tribes settle and incorporate them into their legal systems. Highlighting the protection living under the umbrella of the British and Qing empire, respectively, would bring them. Connected with the higher economic output of the area that has in time allowed for more deepened political integration into the system, moving ever closer from the frontier to a border (English, 1985).

As a result of this, it was only a matter of time until there will be some form of escalation between India and China, as both sides actively worked on incorporating the frontier into their domain. The situation started to slowly escalate due to the production of maps on both sides, showing various areas that were understood as part of a frontier of one side put under the control of the other. For example, in 1896, the Chinese side has objected that the territory

of Aksai Chin has been included within the borders of British India, even though there was no clear demarcation of the area. Fast-forwarding 70 years, China has built a road through the Aksai Chin, linking Tibet with Xinjiang. India has then used that, through the inheritance of the claim from Britain, as a *casus belli* in its 1962 Sino-Indian war (Morrison, 2019). There were multiple attempts to solve the "frontier" issue and properly demarcate the mutual border between India and China. One of them being the above-mentioned failure of the McMahon Line in the eastern part of the border. Due to which both sides lay a different claim to territories in the frontier. With India claiming that the agreement made at the Simla conference is valid, while China claiming that it is invalid. Providing each with a different interpretation of what is theirs (Wei, 2019). In the western sector, there were two "official" demarcations. The Johnson-Ardagh line and Macartney-MacDonald line. With the acknowledgement of where the official border on both sides changing from one interpretation to the other in the course of a time (Ranjan, 2016).

Up until the formation of both independent India and communist China, the border was not demarcated, except its extreme flanks at Pangong Lake and Karakoram Pass. This has begun to change with Indian Prime minister Nehru in 1954 ordering revisitation of India's maps to show only clear territorial boundaries and not frontiers anymore. As a result of which the previously undemarcated Aksai Chin has been included in official Indian maps as a core part of Indian territory. Effectively kickstarting the securitization of the border issue again. As an answer to that, China has in the same decade built a road connecting Xinjiang and Tibet running straight through the Aksai Chin lying 179 kilometres south of the Indian-recognized Johnson-Ardagh line. This was largely possible because Aksai Chin is very difficult to access from the Indian side, while it is relatively easy to access from the Chinese side. Nehru was later on heard saying that "Aksai Chin was part of the Ladakh region of India for centuries and that this northern border was firm and definite" (Sen, 2014). At the same time, China's Zhou Enlai claimed that the border has never been officially demarcated and that it is already under Chinese jurisdiction, so India should accept the status quo. Ultimately, the dispute has escalated even further due to the mutual unwillingness to back down from their claims. Resulting in the 1962 Sino-Indian war that has only solidified the Chinese position (Sen, 2014).

The power layout and troop positions of both China and India after the 1962 war have turned into a long-lasting status quo that has practically lasted to this very day. The status quo

situation is represented by the "Line of Actual Control[6]" a 3488 kilometres long line running from the west to the east. However, LAC is still not a border and is not an agreed international boundary, even though both sides claim to respect the status quo it represents. Over the years though, it has caused multiple escalations due to its ambiguity. When we look at the list of Sino-Indian clashes, most of them take place after the formation of both states. When their leaders were pushing the border agenda and trying to balance one another. After which, from the year 1975, we can see a rather long and calm period (even though minor standoffs still did occur). In between 1975-2017, interestingly enough, the sides did not work towards solving the dispute itself, but they instead focused on confidence-building measures, such as troop reductions, frameworks for talks or the ban on the use of arms and explosives. Serving as a hint that they are quite comfortable with keeping the status quo and security dilemma they have created. They do not wish war, yes, but they also do not wish to push for complete resolution, instead focusing on counterbalancing each other. The status quo was in a way breached for 72 days in the 2017 Doklam standoff, but even in its course, both sides claimed their adherence to it and the situation after almost two and half months returned to "normal". The most serious breach of the status quo came in June 2020, when dozens of people died after a clash in Ladakh. Nonetheless, high officials at both sides immediately started consultations to de-escalate the conflict via mutual consultations and refraining from further securitization of the issue with return to the status quo in mind (Rossow, Bermudez and Upadhyaya, 2020).

4.1.2 Geography and its effects on the border delineation

The Himalayan area and border between the states of the region is specific in its own right. It is one of the most inhospitable regions in the world, with difficult accessibility. Big parts of the border (Line of Actual Control) lie thousands of kilometres above sea level. Interrupted by the peaks of even higher mountains, areas covered in perpetual snow, hardly accessible valleys or shifting rivers. All of this has a significant effect on defining where the border or line of control lies when comparing with for example quite easy-to-define borders of lowland Europe. It is not helped by the fact that a lot of disputed parts of the border, except to say –

[6] The name itself was not used in official documentation up until the 1996 Agreement that has mentioned it for the first time (Singh, 2020c).

Arunachal Pradesh[7], are barren and largely uninhabited all year round. Therefore, it is hard to tie the border areas to a certain community living there, instead, we rather have to focus on nature itself, which, at the end of the day, might prove tricky.

Even though in the previous agreements, both sides agreed on abiding by the status quo of the LAC, the problem lies in the fact that the LAC is not clearly defined. Therefore, both India and China have different interpretations of where it lies, since they have not yet agreed on even demarcation of the status quo LAC. Effectively, the LAC is still changing, even if only slightly. In which case, the geography of the area plays a big role. For example, in the eastern sector, India still understands that the LAC loosely follows the McMahon Line, which China does not accept. The LAC then does not represent two certain lines with troops positions between which is a buffer zone. Instead, it is a line that is still very much open to interpretation of both actors. This becomes a problem when a line, such as the McMahon line, follows for instance mountain peaks or a river and generally takes geography into account (Sudarshan, 2020). An excellent example that the geography and nature play in border conflicts is the Doklam standoff in 2017. Even though Doklam is not a territory claimed by India, it is claimed by Bhutan and India enforces its claim against the one of China. China bases its claim on the 1890 convention between the British Empire and Qing dynasty, which follows natural lines (Panda, 2017). As quoted from the convention: "*The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into Sikkim Teesta and its affluents from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into the rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gipmochi on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory* (Convention of Calcutta, 1890)". The ambiguous wording of the convention could then be open to interpretation of both parties. Moreover, after more than 130 years, some natural changes have likely occurred. In the case of the Doklam standoff, India stands behind the interpretation that the border should follow the mountain range crest based on the "watershed principle". A principle that the border is decided based on the highest continuous ridge line. The conflict then stems from the fact that China claims the area in part due to the mention of Mount Gipmochi, this interpretation was moreover backed by India's prime minister Nehru in 1959. At the same time, India claims that this delimitation is geographically

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[7] Indian name for the disputed territory.

wrong due to the poor surveying work in the past and that the watershed rule applies instead. Meaning that the border between Bhutan and China does not lie at Mount Gipmochi, but Batang La (Panda, 2017).

Further problems may come into play when we look at the 1890 British-Qing convention that China uses as the base for its claim. For instance, compared to mountains, rivers do not need to remain the same for centuries to come. Let's imagine that some of the mentioned rivers or their affluents dry up. Could it then still be used as a base for a territorial claim? If not, would that mean that the natural separation the river has represented is gone and the convention applies to a different mountain range? Or it makes the agreement wholly invalid due to its baselessness?
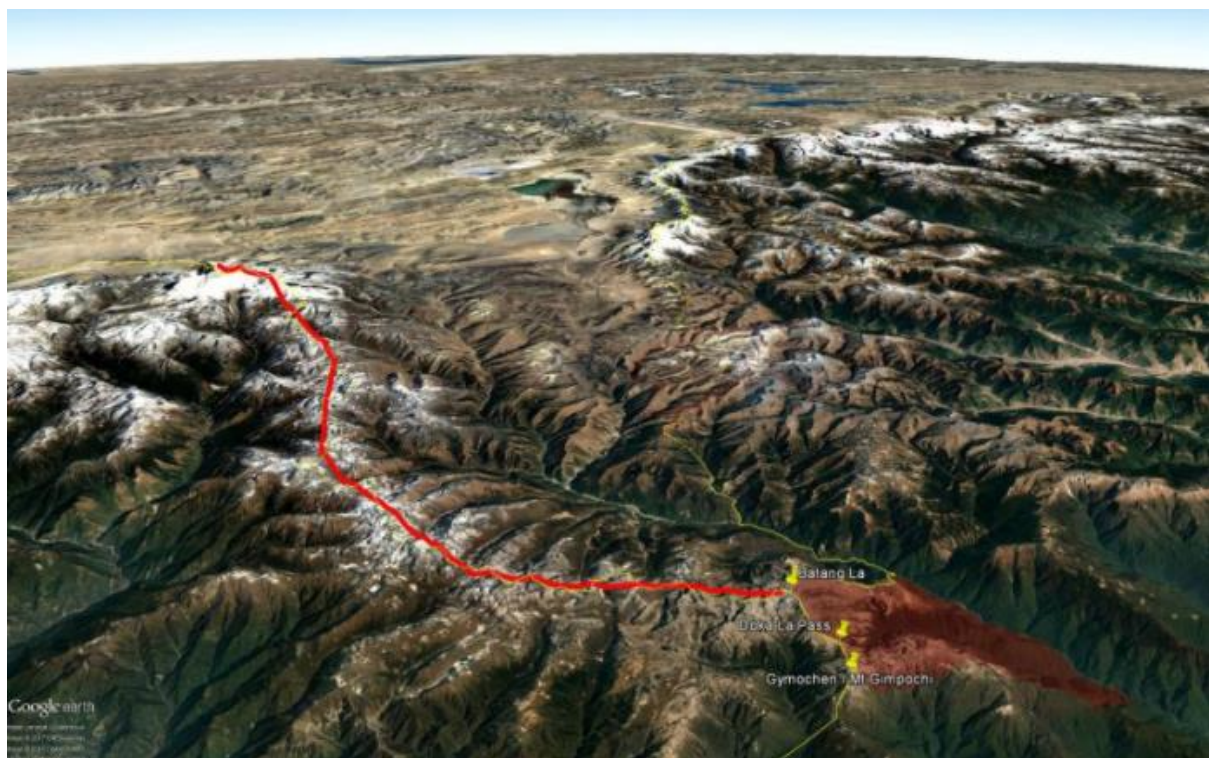
Picture 7: Map representing the mountain range crest leading to the disputed Doklam area (in red) with Indian interpretation of border at Batang La and Chinese at Mount Gipmochi (Panda, 2017).

4.1.3 Ideology and national identity in light of the Himalayan dispute

In the light of previous chapters, the border conflict between India and China does not seem to be rational. Most of the territories in question are barren and barely inhabited (except for sparsely populated Arunachal Pradesh). They do not possess significant material wealth. Are hard to access and the cost for general development is very high. And even if they might hold some strategic value from military or economic (e.g., control of rivers) perspective, the disproportioned number of resources and manpower both sides spend to keep this conflict going does not seem rational. Indirectly hinting to us that there might be something else at play that motivates them to stay involved. When the economic gains of a conflict are little and absolute strategic gains are dubious, it is only logical to look for what we cannot see with our own eyes. Since the conflicts can not only be driven by a lust for material profit, but also by a strategically put historical narrative focused on territory's symbolic value. As well as personal or group connections to the land. A perfect example of such a strategic historical narrative is the case of the Dalai Lama's "Tibetan government-in-exile" and the disputed area of India's Arunachal Pradesh. China claims it as a part of the historical area of Tibet, while the people of the region remain ideologically aligned with the exiled Dalai Lama's "administration". This has been prompting the policy-making elite in Beijing to stress more and more the narrative of the "Indian threat", in order for further steps to be taken. Consciously fuelling the process of the securitization speech by considering and calling Dalai Lama and people around him a threat. However, on the other side of the barricade, the Indian leaders have tried to downplay the situation to avoid further escalation. Largely avoiding any unilateral steps on the matter (Manson, 2010).

From the ideological and national identity perspective, the presence of Dalai Lama and his "government-in-exile" in India is a serious thorn in the Sino-Indian relationship. In 2008, when the "Tibetan leaders-in-exile" gathered in northeast India to discuss the future of their "struggle for independence", China went furious over the matter. Even without the significant participation of India in the discussion. Ideologically, India and China do not necessarily compete, but "Tibetan government-in-exile" and China do. Meanwhile, India is just using the "exiled government" as a part of its Realpolitik grand strategy for the Himalayas, as it cannot just enhance claims on some of the territories or supply its army with highly motivated

"Tibetan exiles". Even so, it can also shift the balance of popular and international opinion to India's side. Giving India certain advantage by not pursuing direct collision course with China and simply trying to downplay the situation by stating it only aims to retain the status quo. As many people at home and abroad remain sympathetic to the Tibetan cause. Meanwhile, China went as far as to call them and Dalai Lama terrorists (Manson, 2010).

Even so, India hosts the exiled government and projects its presence in the Himalayan nearing town of Dharamshala into its region-wide strategy and policy choices. It does not seem to adopt an ideological approach against China, similar to for instance the United States. The US' narrative is pictured as a value-based struggle of democracy against authoritarianism, of freedom against suppression. The Sino-Indian relationship is considerably more pragmatic. Nor India nor China follow a narrative of ideological struggle of one political system and way of the rule against the other. Instead, their relationship is more "down to earth", focusing on actual gains or losses. Therefore, most of the actions both actors take on the ground are based on a thorough analysis of costs. Every issue that arises is then not guided by the ideological narrative (e.g. freeing the people from oppression at any cost), but rather by a mindset aware of potential losses (or gains) that result from each action. Because they are aware that an aggression will be followed by a counterbalancing act on the other side, incurring costs for the aggressor, which explains the trajectory of mutual clashes. Since the 1962 war, the high-intensity clashes were rare, even though the everyday tensions remained high at times. Moreover, every time a rather serious clash or standoff took place, both China and India were able to come back to the negotiating table and de-escalate the situation. The most recent example in Ladakh in 2020, which has been the most serious clash since 1975 with dozens of soldiers dead. Even so, both governments were able to come back together and talk, effectively de-escalating the situation before it gets out of hand. Instead of fuelling an ideological narrative about how the existence of the other state is a grave threat for our state. This does not mean that the situation has been completely defused and that clashes will not happen again. Most probably they will, due to the lack of long-lasting solutions. However, this realpolitik approach has a significant effect on the Himalayan policy of both states. Instead of going "all in" without looking back for casualties and costs, they are motivated to pursue moderate policies which do not incur them extremely high political or economic cost. As their primary objective is not the "destruction" of the political system of the other side, but rather

their survival that can be achieved through the enforcement of the status quo via counterbalancing the other. The prime effect of this is that it is unlikely we will see any large-scale confrontation (e.g., a full-scale war) between the two. Yes, both sides seem to realize they are locked in a security dilemma, but it seems they do not show willingness to embark on a meaningful desecuritization process. With the whole territorial situation remaining unresolved and heated, but unlikely to turn from minor border clashes and standoffs into a full-fledged war on a regional scale. Unless, of course, the ideological perspective of either China or India substantially changes (Singh, 2020b).

4.1.4 Socio-geographical conclusion

The effect of historical heritage, geography and ideology on the Himalayan conflict's power dynamics is significant. The Himalayas are still somewhat perceived as a frontier area that lacks proper delineation. One of the biggest reasons for that was the inability to agree on the border demarcation following the collapse of the British empire and the establishment of communist China. Resulting in both sides owning different maps of the area, having different claims based on their interpretations, all the while not acknowledging the claims of the other side. Creating a fragile and unclear status quo situation. This was not helped by the fact big portion of Chinese and Indian claims are based on ancient agreements that refer to natural objects, such as mountains or rivers. That tend to be either unclear or might have changed over time. As mountains are at times covered in perpetual snow and rivers that were there 100 years ago are gone now, leaving both sides with unclear instructions on what to do, sparking further conflict. Nevertheless, even though historical perspectives and geography distort and fuel the potential conflict. It is not probable it will turn into a full-scale war. The main reason for that is the cost/benefit analysis both India and China conduct when embarking on their separate Himalayan adventures to enforce own claims. The price for that in the Himalayas is extremely high and since the conflict between the two is not based on the clash of ideologies (democracy vs. communism), but rather pure pragmatism. India and China realize that it is not in their best interest to ignore the huge price they would have to pay for profoundly distorting the status quo of the mutual power dynamics. However, they are not

willing to fully abandon their claims either. Resulting in an almost permanent low-intensity conflict with up and downs at times, but without a predictable risk of a full-out war.

4.2 Economic dimension

Commencing the study of economic policies, the research will be focusing on how the two economic giants interact with each other in the Himalayan region to capitalize on their territorial claims. The term "policy" is for this research understood very broadly. Not solely meaning only written laws, regulations, economic strategies, bans or management of natural resources. It is instead understood as a general economic approach with the goal of either solidifying their territorial claims or preventing the other side from achieving the same, while exploring the economic dimension of the Sino-Indian power relationship. Therefore, aside from the mentioned policy approaches, the thesis will also focus on two rather tangible economically related strategies very specific for the Himalayan conflict. The first of them being the effect building of new infrastructure in and close to disputed areas has on the legitimization of territorial claims, as well as occasional flare-ups. After which the second will address the geopolitics of water management and the general importance and weaponization of water in the Himalayan theatre. All in all, the analysis of the economic dimension of the Himalayan relationship between India and China is set to provide us with another piece of the puzzle. Contributing to the holistic understanding of the conflict's dynamics and its possible resolution. The research sub-question for the economic pillar is "What is the effect of economic power and policies on the power dynamics within the Sino-Indian border conflict?".

4.2.1 Role of infrastructure building in the Himalayan conflict

When we talk about the role of infrastructure building in territorial conflicts, we can point out two main reasons why it is being built in or near the disputed areas. By infrastructure, we can understand anything from bridges, roads, railways, airstrips, houses and villages, military barracks, dams[8] to any other kind of "logistical" project that enhances one's capability or

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[8] Even though dams fall within the definition of infrastructure, they will be addressed in a later chapter as a part of the water management strategy of both countries.

claims. Infrastructure in territorial claims can be either used to boost the ability of one actor to press its claims via other means. For example, the actor could build a road or an airstrip that boosts the army's ability to move troops and react to the adversary. Moreover, it could be also used to enhance the economic potential of the local population to garner public support for future actions. The second reason why infrastructure is being built in disputed areas is the way it could be used to unilaterally "legitimize" the territorial claim of the actor. Presenting the adversary with a *fait accompli*. We could imagine this for example as a set of structures being built by one side in the disputed area overnight, the next day proclaiming that "this is India now". Creating a reason for military protection of these "Indian" structures. Zooming out of the Himalayan conflict, the prime example of this is Israel's tactic in the Palestinian territories. Firstly, moving into the area and quickly constructing a village on a well-protected spot. Secondly, calling upon the army to protect this new village. Thirdly, subsidize the moving in of Israeli settlers into the village. Lastly, proclaiming that "this is Israel now" and repeating the tactic elsewhere. Effectively cornering the other side and presenting it with a *fait accompli* that has a very high price in terms of conflict escalation and spent resources to be overturned (Stockmarr, 2012).

Both China and India have recognized infrastructure building in the border areas as one of the vital components of their strategy to counter the other. However, China is at the moment well ahead of India. Mainly since its extensive focus on building infrastructure in the Himalayas began already with Mao Zedong. Who identified (securitized) it as a matter of national security and utmost importance. Building, at a great cost, major roads linking Tibet and border areas with each other and the rest of China. As well as connecting it with railways, oil pipelines or enhancing its logistical capability with new airstrips in Tibet and alongside the border. All in all, the Chinese sweeping approach to infrastructure building took India off-guard. It connected its army division headquarters with high-quality roads to the LAC, sometimes even crossing it to an area claimed by the Indian side, sparking further conflict between the two. According to the author, the Indian approach was rather moderate, in comparison with the approach set by China. The Indian leaders still identified the infrastructure building alongside the border as important, but they were afraid that it would enable China to enter the Indian heartland in case of war. So, in many cases, the Indian roads and railways end 50-70 kilometres from the LAC and the supplies to army outposts at the

border have to be airlifted. Moreover, big parts of Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh from the Indian side are mostly inaccessible during the four winter months due to the lack of all-weather roads and infrastructure. India did not adopt this approach just from the fear of another 1962 defeat, but it became set to pursue moderate way in this area instead (Ramachandran, 2016). However, China does not officially recognize the Ladakh Union territory (as well as Arunachal Pradesh) and is opposed to India's building on infrastructure in the region for "military control", as mentioned by the foreign ministry spokesperson. Therefore, India has been wary of pursuing such a direct and resourceful infrastructure strategy as China does, because China has a significant upper hand at the moment and would probably respond to Indian actions by some counterbalancing act. Nonetheless, with prime minister Narendra Modi, there have been voices to finally match and balance China's strategy. Otherwise, India would fall too behind and would not be able to counter China at all. India's defence minister was recently even heard saying that India "will not back down from taking any big and tough step in the interest of our country" (Al Jazeera, 2020a).

This strategic approach in which infrastructure building is weaponized in the Himalayan border dispute is best shown on two examples, one from the past and one from the present. Such a weaponization was fundamentally apparent as one of the main causes leading to the 1962 war. The main point of contention at the time was the hardly accessible area of Aksai Chin. Territory claimed by both, but effectively controlled by China, mainly due to better geographical access. Until 1957, there was a relative status quo between the two, before India discovered that China built a national highway just through the middle of Aksai Chin, linking Xinjiang with Tibet. India has launched a protest to this, but to no avail. After which the situation has turned into an upward security spiral dilemma since India has, as an answer to the Chinese highway, started building forward border posts inside what was perceived as the Chinese controlled territory. Afterwards, instead of trying to kickstart negotiations and cool down the situation, leaders on both sides started arguing for a "no step back" policy. Either straight away refusing even sitting with the other side at a negotiating table until it completely withdraws from the area. Or building more posts and sending further troops to the disputed regions. Laying the groundwork for a security dilemma that has eventually spilt into a full-

scale war[9] due to the high securitization of the topics and unwillingness to back down. The 1962 war, that India has lost, has contributed to somewhat de-escalation of the situation, as well as confirmation of China's claims. However, not due to a willing desecuritization of the infrastructure building from the elites on both sides. But rather as a pragmatic necessity, as India was in no position to challenge the status quo China has established as a result of the conflict and had little choice but to accept it (Abitbol, 2009).

More recently, the infrastructure building has escalated the situation at the tri-border area between China, India and Bhutan at the Doklam plateau[10] in 2017. As a part of China's leaders' comprehensive border infrastructure strategy, it has moved into the territory of Doklam, disputed by China and Bhutan[11]. Chinese troops began to construct a road in the disputed area, after which they have been forced to stop by the Indian army and two months-long standoff ensued. The standoff represented a serious change in the status quo situation, which was since 1975 rather quiet as both sides tried not so much to aggravate the other by changing it, potentially resulting in another upward security spiral as in 1962. However, in recent years, we can see a shift from the "moderate" stance as China starts to flex its muscles. Not just in the Himalayas, but also for example in the South China Sea, pursuing hawkish infrastructure building policy there as well. Even though the policy leaders managed to successfully de-escalate the 2017 conflict, it was thus far not resulted and claims still stand. Both China and India have simply withdrawn from the plateau and returned to the pre-conflict status quo in the Doklam area (Blank, 2017).

4.2.2 Sino-Indian water geopolitics

Water is an extremely important resource in the Sino-Indian relationship. Both countries are water and power hungry. In 2014, China's population accounted for 19% of the world's population, but it had access to only 6,7% of the world's usable water, while India accounted

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[9] Infrastructure building has not been the single and sole reason behind the 1962 Sino-Indian war, but it has significantly contributed to the escalation leading to it, as well as the unwillingness to abandon gained ground (Abitbol, 2009).

[10] Doklam plateau is deemed to be of utmost strategic importance to India. Not only it controls the high ground of its surroundings, but it also serves as a forward base protecting India's Siliguri corridor (Chicken's neck). A 20 km wide corridor connecting the west and the east of India (Blank, 2017)

[11] Bhutan's claim is de facto enforced by India

for 17% of the world's population, but had access to only 4,3% of the world's usable water. Moreover, the lack of water also inhibits the GDP growth of both giants. Just in China, the water scarcity costs it approximately 2,3% of its GDP a year. It is, therefore, no surprise the Himalayan region is so important for both of them, as it holds one of the largest reservoirs of non-salt water in the world. In the water relationship between China and India, China holds the upper hand. Controlling at its stream not just most of the water that flows downstream to India, but in general being the Riverhead for many neighbouring countries, more than a dozen. Normally, that is not an issue. However, as Chellaney states, China is pioneering the policy of "no water-sharing", being almost the sole country in the region that does not take part in any water-sharing agreements or frameworks. It does take part in some water management initiatives, but they mostly focus on the selling of hydrological data or mutual research initiatives, not on water-sharing. Internationally, China also rejects the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Waters. A prime international agreement that sets down water-sharing principles. Combined with China's love for megaprojects, such as dams. Then seriously affects the borderland areas that further affect the whole basin community, and especially India. Who depends on the rivers flowing downstream from China for its survival. Therefore, China with its more than 25000 large dams (more than half of all the dams in the world) and a rush to build more, is severely affecting the geopolitical mood in the Himalayas. This rush has started under Mao Zedong and intensified under Deng Xiaoping when both leaders connected water with the topics of national security and development. As a result, though, less water started flowing into India and Indian leaders started identifying it as infringing on their national security while starting "counter-dam" projects. Essentially, the water management has created a serious point of contention between the two, with a potential for further escalation as neither side wants to back down (Chellaney, 2014).
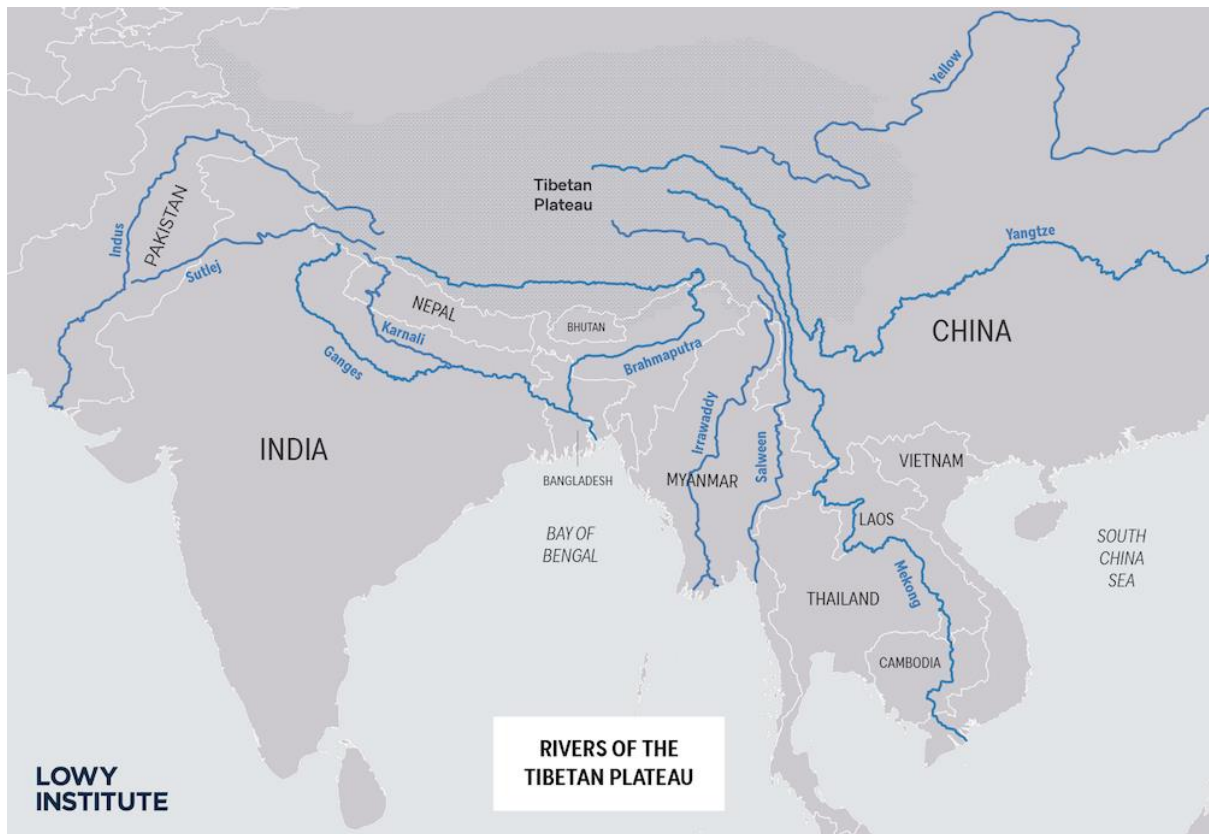
Picture 8: Rivers originating in the Tibetan plateau, out of whose nearly 48 percent of all their water flows directly to India (Singh and Tembey, 2020).

It is, therefore, no surprise that usually mostly economic issue has turned political, with both of the actors being on the brink of a "water war". The area of Tibet plays a central role in this. Most of the rivers flowing down to India originate there and already first Indian prime minister Nehru identified it as a potential security problem. The Chinese leaders' "dam-rush" has only contributed to the straining of relations between the two powers. Especially due to India's inability to address the situation in any meaningful way, therefore the Indian leaders have largely adopted a conformist approach to not even further escalate the situation with China. Fast forwarding from Mao's and Deng's years to the present, the situation has principally remained the same. With China pursuing a rather assertive water policy and with India having few options at the table to do something about it. On both sides, water has therefore become an issue of national interest. For China, due to its economic need for clean energy and drinkable water. For India, due to China threatening its water supply. As a result of which leaders on both sides are pressured to not make a single step back, creating another security dilemma both countries are locked in. Without the end in sight, thanks to unwillingness and

lack of trust on both sides to undergo a water-sharing resolution of the situation (Holstag, 2011). As was for instance the case with 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan. In which India, as an upstream state of the Indus water basin, has reserved a whopping 80 percent of the water flowing through its territory for Pakistan, keeping only 20 percent. Contributing to a certain level of mutual de-escalation as leaders on both sides stopped using the sticker of "national interest" on the water flowing via the Indus water basin (Chellaney, 2014).
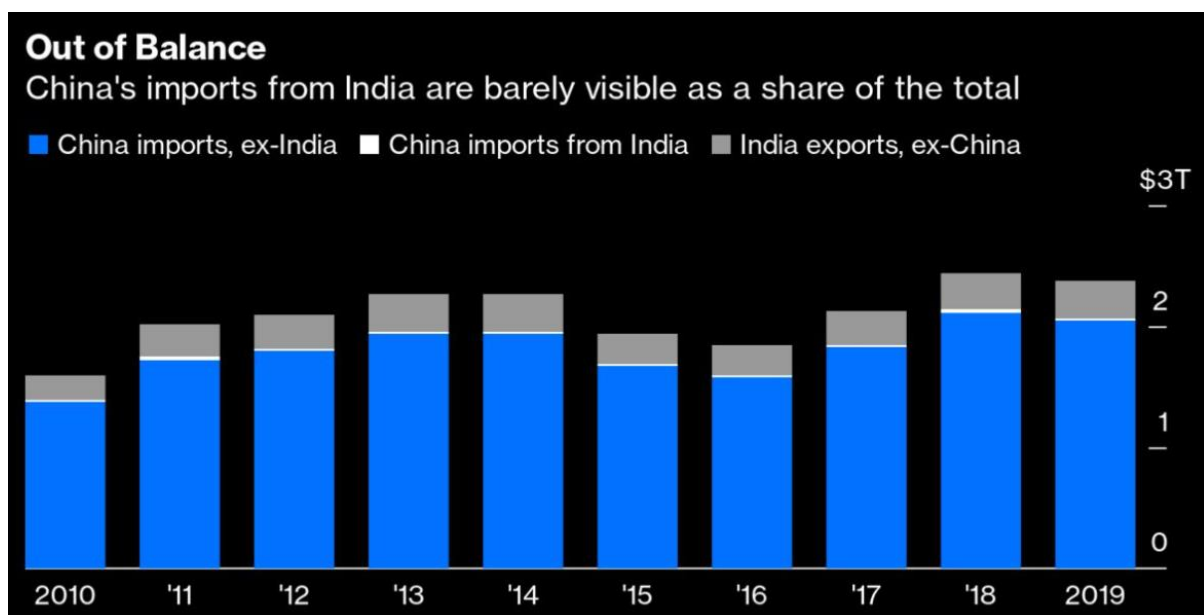
If we are to focus on one certain and probably the most contentious case of water weaponization in the Sino-Indian relationship, that is moreover resurging in recent years, it is undoubtedly the case of the Brahmaputra river. The Brahmaputra originates in Tibet, flows down to Arunachal Pradesh, later flowing down to Bangladesh and merging up with the Ganges after finally emptying into the Bay of Bengal. The 1800 kilometres long and on average 38m deep river is prone to flooding and is vital for the Indian irrigation system. The problem lies in the fact that both China and India are extremely water-stressed economies and lack of water inhibits their economic growth. It did not take long then for Mao Zedong to propose a "North-South water diversion project", whose goal is to effectively direct water flowing into the Brahmaputra proper. Rerouting it into the northern yellow river before it flows down to India. Effectively causing natural devastation to most of northern India. China has already started rerouting some of the rivers with its 1,2 billion-dollar Zangmu dam, without any prior notice to the Indian government. Breaking the status quo between the two. The complexity of the situation lies though in the fact that both actors have few other options. China needs energy from the Brahmaputra to kickstart its economic growth, while India needs it just to survive. China just strategically holds the upper hand and is not afraid to use it (Mahapatra and Ratha, 2015). Chinese leaders have started building five new dams on the Brahmaputra with possible plans to finalize its complete diversion to India. As was already done with Xiabuqu, one of Brahmaputra's tributaries. Another concern is the exchange of hydrological data. Under the mutual agreement, India is paying for hydrological data to prevent flooding, but during the 2017 Doklam standoff, China has withheld these data, resulting in the floods in Assam and Uttar Pradesh. With more alleged cases in which China has polluted rivers flowing downstream or held water at certain points to create artificial floods. This, no wonder, makes Indian leaders wary of further developments in the water management area. Without

a properly institutionalized framework encompassing further downstream states affected by China's water politics, there is little to no way how India can respond. None of the sides are moreover interested in de-escalating or de-securitizing the topic, as India did with Pakistan. China is simply free to roam and not abide by the status quo. That it has to follow in other fields, such as infrastructure building, for the fear of retaliatory measure (Singh and Tembey, 2020).
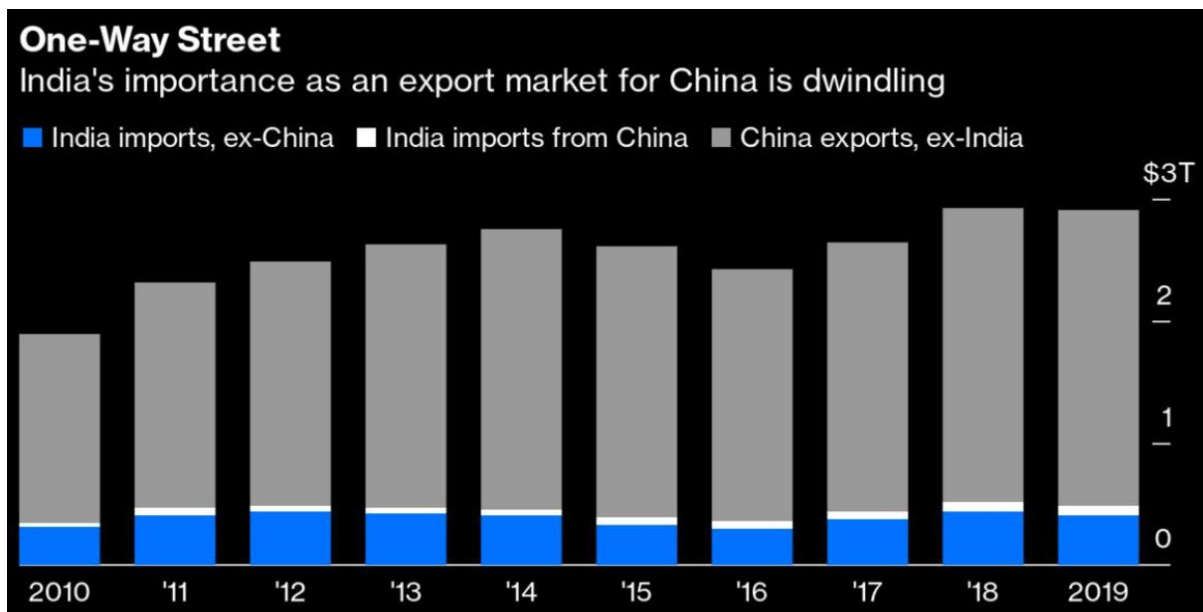
4.2.3 Sino-Indian economic and trade relations

Structures of the Chinese and Indian economy are somewhat related. They both started as mostly planned economies, with the state assigned a leading role in the building of key industries. With India opening up in 1991 and China, to a smaller degree, in 1978. Even though both countries hold the status of emerging economic powerhouses, China again holds the upper hand. When we look at the period between 2000 and 2016. Chinese GDP has increased from 1,2 trillion US dollars to 6,4 trillion, while India's GDP has increased only from 0,5 trillion US dollars to 1,8 trillion in the same timeframe. Nevertheless, both countries are having one of the highest GDP growths in the world, averaging 6 to 10 percent in normal years. When we look at the economic relationship of the two giants, they have never been significant until recent years. After the Indian defeat in 1962, the relations have stalled well until the 1984 signature of a bilateral trade cooperation agreement. In which leaders of both sides decided to put on the sidelines the border conflict and agreed to cooperate on "non-controversial issues, such as the economy". It was later strengthened by the Indian Prime minister's Gandhi's visit to China in 1988, China's Jiang Zemin's visit to India in 1996 and Indian Prime minister's Vejpayee's visit to China in 2003. This warming-up of mutual economic relations corresponds with the period of calm between 1975 and 2017, during which there were no significant flare-ups at the Line of Actual Control. Trade between the two, despite all territorial differences, was therefore booming. As both sides decided at that point to de-securitize the topic of economy and trade relations within the framework of the border conflict and treat it as a separate topic from territorial issues. Eventually, China for a while overtook the US as India's largest trading partner in 2008 (Caussat, 2020).

Despite all of the Sino-Indian indifferences and territorial issues, the mutual economic relationship, as a result of its relative de-securitization, runs very deep in recent years. In 2020, China has accounted for 5 percent of India's export and 14 percent of its imports. Just between 2000-2020, India's imports from China have increased more than 45 times. This points out the fact that China runs a huge trade surplus with India and India's heavy reliance on Chinese goods. In some fields, Chinese domination is even larger. For example, Chinese cell phone brands Xiaomi, Vivo and Oppo had a 72 percent share of the Indian cell phone market in 2020. India's pharmaceutical industry, which is by volume 3rd largest in the world moreover imports around 68 of all its supplies from China. Creating a clear picture of how some Indian industries and the economy as a whole are so reliant on China. Serving as something China can leverage during a potential conflict if Chinese leaders decide to start securitizing the Sino-Indian trade relations by connecting it to the border dispute in the Himalayas (Kapoor, 2020).

Picture 9: Visualisation of the China-India trade situation (Fickling, 2020).

One-Way Street
India's importance as an export market for China is dwindling

■ India imports, ex-China ■ India imports from China ■ China exports, ex-India

Picture 10: Visualisation of the China-India trade situation (Fickling, 2020).

Indian economic overreliance on China is however starting to change. Indian leaders have already realized that they did not get much from the moderate approach to China. They have concluded that so far India has got a huge trade deficit with China, little investment amounting to just around 4 billion US dollars and some brands Chinese brands completely taking over the Indian market. All the while Indian companies face heavy limitations when trying to do business in China. Instead of deepening the Sino-Indian relationship, India has looked up to the United States, which overtook China as India's largest trading partner. Or it has refused to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a China-led trade block of Asian economies established in November 2020. This is an unsurprising turn from Modi's side, as India starts to feel threatened by the economic presence of China's Belt and Road Initiative in almost all of its surrounding countries. With BRI projects in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. At the moment, economic de-escalation is unlikely and we will probably see further unilateral actions being taken unless a level-playing field will be established between the two. With China for example providing easier market access to India's prime exports, such as IT and pharmaceuticals. Otherwise, the countries will remain locked in a slowly escalating upward economic-security spiral (Fickling, 2020).

Security in the perspective of mutual economic relations started to become a point of contention around the time both sides clashed in the Galwan valley in June 2020. With the

topic starting to be accented as early as 2017, around the time India and China clashed in the China/Bhutan claimed Doklam plateau. Even though Prime minister Modi was heard to envision "a beautiful future" for Sino-Indian relations, the border clashes in 2020 significantly contributed to the reinvigoration of his nationalist agenda. Shifting to the narrative that complete control over the Indian economy is of utmost importance and that India should not allow foreign adversaries to use open market access against the country. By for example hostile takeovers of Indian companies or by controlling too big a share of a market with no place for domestic competition. Indian people have responded to this narrative by openly calling for the boycott of Chinese goods and services, which has Modi followed up firstly with a ban of 59 popular Chinese apps, later on extending the ban to further 118 apps. Citing concerns about the data security of their users. Secondly, India has passed legislation putting restrictions on Chinese investments in the country, for instance excluding China's ZTE and Huawei from building India's 5G network. Hitting as well India's technology start-up sector that desperately lacks domestic and international funding. Nonetheless, it is debatable if Modi's approach will have any real economic implications. So far, China has not put forward any counter-measures, except launching an infringement procedure at the World Trade Organization against India for violating its rules, but India is economically far more reliant on China than vice versa. Therefore, Chinese countermeasures to these bans could hurt India badly. For now, though, China keeps the long-lasting policy of not connecting the Sino-Indian trade relations with security, same as India. However, if China decides to scrap its moderate economic approach towards India in near future, we ought to see some escalation in the border dispute as well. India will likely turn to its now largest trade partner, the United States. That are already engaged with Beijing in a tit-for-tat trade war and would happily jump on the opportunity to join forces in slowing down China's way to further economic dominance (Singh, 2020a).

4.2.4 Economic conclusion

Economically, China holds a huge upper hand in almost all fields. The Chinese infrastructure network is much more advanced and efficient than the Indian one. Not only allowing faster movement of troops, their better logistical support and more efficient deployment, but also

boasting an ability to build infrastructure more quickly in the disputed areas that can then be "protected" and used to legitimize claims of the actor who built it. Usually sparking some conflict, as we for example saw in the 2017 Doklam standoff. The water situation is even more tenuous. Both India and China are hungry for water and subsequently, energy. However, as an upstream country and with policy of "no water-sharing", China controls the rules of the game and there is little India can pragmatically do. Especially as China rushes to build more and more dams and at times withholds water data, causing floods in India. The economic disadvantages of India are then even more apparent when we look at its reliance on Chinese imports, mainly for its vital pharmaceutical industry. As well as India's trade deficit. With Chinese companies roaming free in the Indian market, while Indian ones being severely limited in China. Again, there are but a few options on how India can fix its economic overreliance from day one. So, there is little India can do in case of conflict to hurt China, aside from the economic perspective largely inconsequential apps bans and limits on the Chinese investments. That will probably hurt more the Indian side and serve more as a political statement than a viable geopolitical tool. Nevertheless, even though China dictates the economic rules of the game, all-out conflict with India is not in its interest. Mainly due to the fears for its continuing high GDP growth. That does not mean though, China will be worried to assertively pursue its economic interests. We could therefore expect constant low-intensity conflict with ups and downs once in a while, but in the upcoming years, full-scale war is unlikely. As complete breaking off of the mutual economic relations would be too costly for both sides.

4.3 Political and military dimension

The understanding of the complex picture of the Sino-Indian border dispute would not be whole without addressing maybe the prime and on the first sight most visible reasons behind it. Role of the political and military policies, as well as the role of domestic and international opinion that might shape the decision-making process within the conflict's framework. The three mentioned fields are closely intertwined and depend on each other, therefore there will be some research overlaps between them. As policies in one field are usually followed by policies in another of these fields. We could understand it in a way that India for example

takes away the special governing status of Kashmir, as a result of which China increases the budget for its border troops. To which India, under domestic and international pressure, has to respond. Leading to a security dilemma and further escalation. The word "policy" in the politico-military context will again be understood rather broadly. Covering not just written laws and regulations, but also strategies and strategic interpretations or personal approaches of the country leaders that then translate into the state's cross-border behaviour. The research sub-question for the politico-military pillar is "How does domestic territorial control, military approach and role of the domestic and international opinion influence power dynamics within the Sino-Indian border conflict?".

4.3.1 Domestic administrative policies and territorial control

The international behaviour of a state and its domestic policies are closely interlinked. Therefore, if we want to understand the state's international policies, we should put some research into the domestic ones first. Especially since the state's elites who set its international agenda, such as the country's president, prime minister, foreign minister or defence minister have an already clear track of what they have done domestically. Thus, by following their domestic track of records, we can better explain their international attitude. From a theoretical perspective, it is important since these figures are in most cases responsible for the securitization of various topics and putting them at the front of the state's international agenda. Such an overreach of domestic policies into the Himalayan theatre, with an effect on the border conflict itself, could be perfectly pictured on the case of administrative and political control over the various regions in both countries. Both China and India are divided into many different regional polity levels of varying sizes and with varying power for every entity. Usually ending with a provincial level for China and regional state level for India at the very top, just before the central governments. The regional governments in most cases do not play a significant role in international politics, as the official foreign relations are delegated to the centre. However, in the case of China and India, we could observe the effects of centre-region behaviour on the power dynamics of the whole conflict. When we look at the regions surrounding the areas of mutual conflict – Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim on the Indian side, and Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) on the Chinese

side, all of these regions are relatively new within their respective countries. Jammu and Kashmir joined India in 1947[12], Sikkim joined India in 1975 and Arunachal Pradesh was established in 1987. Meanwhile, TAR has been established in 1965, previously functioning as a "Tibet Area" within China since Seventeen Point Agreement in 1951. It is, therefore, no surprise that leaders on both sides have a high motivation to integrate the regions into their central political establishment as much as possible. This approach, however, can create tension with the other side, as every single border dispute between India and China lies or was lying in one of these four regions, while the area of Arunachal Pradesh is even disputed almost as a whole. It is then curious when we see major border clashes, such as the one at Tulung La in 1975, in the same year that Sikkim joined India as a state. Or when the second-largest conflict, the one at Nathu La in 1967, sometimes even called the second Sino-Indian war, is preceded by the establishment of TAR in 1965. Going to more recent times, one of the biggest confrontations since 1975, in Galwan valley in 2020, is preceded by the revocation of special governance status of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019. A region bordering one of the main disputed areas, Aksai Chin, as well as the aforementioned Galwan valley (Ma, 2014).

The case of Kashmir is especially thought-provoking. Each of the three actors – India, Pakistan and China effectively control a portion of it and vie for control of further areas. Boiling down to a trilateral conflict in the region. Leaders on all sides, including Pakistan, forcefully created an atmosphere in which Kashmir is domestically viewed as a serious security issue for the respective country in control, justifying spending further resources in the battle over its dominance. Since all three countries have the opinion that they rightfully should own whole or parts of Kashmir and they consider the "Kashmir issue" to be an international matter, not a domestic one. Over the years, there have been many armed conflicts between the three countries. Four wars between India and Pakistan, one full-scale war between India and China and many more low or medium-intensity clashes. However, since the Indo-Pakistani war of 1999, the conflict has boiled down to sort of a frozen dispute in which either side still does invest heavily in its economic and military presence in the region. Nevertheless, they are unwilling to take decisive actions to solve the dispute, as especially the price for significant military action would be too high. Yet, the situation took a dramatic turn in February 2019

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[12] Maharaja of then semi-independent Jammu and Kashmir asked in 1947 for accession to India. However, big parts of the region are still disputed and held by Pakistan and China (Ma, 2014).

when, after verbal escalations between the leaders of Pakistan and India, the conflict turned violent again with shelling and air raids. As a consequence of Indian jets being shot down and long-lasting "incursion" within Kashmir. It is then no surprise that the Indian government via its Home minister[13] Amir Shah has decided in August 2019 to withdraw the special governance status of Kashmir. This status, enshrined in the Indian constitution, guaranteed Kashmir wide-ranging autonomy in almost all but foreign policy, defence and communications matters. Shah argued that these steps were necessary to protect Indian sovereignty and safeguard its security, further stating that it is purely Indian domestic matter. Both Pakistan and China have of course viewed this not as an Indian domestic matter, but as an international matter due to their claims on parts of Kashmir's territory. Both countries then felt like they need to react to this Indian overturn of the established status quo. With Pakistan downgrading its diplomatic relations and recalling ambassador from New Delhi, to China launching an official complaint. From India's point of view, however, is strengthening of control over Kashmir might have been taken only to counterbalance the actions of Pakistan and China. However, it has only further fuelled the trilateral security competition. As we could see on not just the kickstarting of open hostilities between India and Pakistan, but also between India and China in the Kashmiri Galwan valley and Pangong lake in 2020 shortly thereafter (Medha, 2019).

On the Chinese side of the border, all of the disputed areas border the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). It is therefore either no surprise that control over this turbulent region is of utmost importance for the Chinese government. Same as with Kashmir, pre-dominantly Muslim area in mostly Hindu India, TAR used to be made up of mostly Tibetans and not ethnic Han Chinese[14]. Becoming a point of contention when the Dalai Lama, then "Tibetan government" and many people of Tibetan ethnicity found their exile in northern India. Moreover, TAR is further extremely important for China due to its abundance of natural resources, said to contain around 40 percent of China's minerals, as well as water. In contrast, India dealt with Kashmir mostly via administrative control through its laws and governance structure, China went with TAR a step further. Already Deng Xiaoping recognised the importance of Tibet and he decided on a noteworthy approach to assert control over the strategic region. To prevent Indian incursion that could for example rally the ethnic Tibetan

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[13] In the West, minister of interior
[14] Pre-dominant ethnic group in China

population against China. Instead of focusing only on administrative control as India did, Deng pushed forward the "Help Tibet Prosper" policy in the 1980s that has resettled large amounts of Han Chinese into TAR from the rest of the country. This was an obvious counterbalance reaction to India's assertion of administrative control in its border areas. Mainly related to Sikkim joining India as a state in 1975 and Arunachal Pradesh (formerly called North-East Frontier Agency) receiving Indian statehood in 1987. To promote Han migration, the Chinese government has offered people advance in wages, relaxation of *hukou* rules, lower taxes, subsidized housing or study opportunities. Leading to a massive influx of Han Chinese and ethnic Tibetans becoming a minority in the TAR. As a side effect, causing many ethnic Tibetans to leave TAR and join one of many Tibetan communities in northern India governed by India supported "Tibetan government-in-exile" in Dharamshala. These Tibetan escapees then usually settled in areas such as Arunachal Pradesh, Indian-controlled territory that has formerly been part of Tibet and China lays claim on it. Fuelling further security spiral competition, as India has an obligation to protect these communities, while China eyes reclaiming these areas due to their historical connection to Tibet that it now effectively controls. Therefore, providing both sides with justifications for their public relations security narrative (Zangmo, 2019).

4.3.2 Military policies and strategic approach

One of the most important factors in the border issue is the military itself, as the military enforces the political claims on the ground. Historically and up to the present day, China has held significant military and strategic advantage over India. Not only China controls, as mentioned in previous chapters, the economic resources of Tibet that have strategic value, such as the rivers at their upstream source, but it also has a much better position in the military field. China controls the high grounds of Tibet from which it can descend on India, while India has to tackle serious logistical challenges. For example, the Aksai Chin territory is part of the China-controlled Tibetan plateau, while India has significant problems accessing it. Moreover, from Tibet, it is almost only a stone throw to India's population centres and its capital New Delhi in northern India. While for India, in case of significant military confrontation, it is thousands of kilometres from the sparsely populated Tibet to the Chinese

heartland, which is especially relevant in the time of missiles and airstrikes. China has been busy installing missile launch sites all across the TAR and can easily hit the Indian heartland in case of conflict, causing significant damage. At the same time, India could probably cause only token damage to China's border areas, as population centres like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen or even Chengdu simply lie too far away. Furthermore, an orchestrated and successful conventional attack on the India-held Siliguri corridor could effectively cut the country in half. Both countries realize this, especially after the Indian debacle in the 1962 war. After which China was able to dictate the terms of a new status quo due to its sweeping victory. Since then, both sides have stressed the importance of the militarization of the region, while at the same time, improving infrastructure in the border areas that could support its logistical capability to transport troops fast, if needed. A prime example is the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet railway in 2006, which has upset the balance of the status quo even more in China's favour in case of military conflict. This followed by a statement of Indian military and political leaders that they do acknowledge the significant strategic and military advantage China holds over India in the Himalayas (Scott, 2008).

Since China holds the military, economic and strategic upper hand, while India lacks behind. It has led to two distinctive military approaches for each side. China has, especially in recent years, adopted a more assertive posture to the border conflict, usually initiating the standoffs and crises and waiting for how India is going to react. In most cases, India counterbalances China's act, throwing the ball back to China. Resulting in further spiral escalation in which both sides have to respond to each other by moving in more troops, more material, conducting mass drills in the vicinity or by using other political or economic tools of pressure. Unless one side stops and space for de-escalation is opened, such as in the case of the 2017 Doklam standoff. China has initiated it by moving into the disputed area with troops and building equipment to construct a road. To which India has responded by moving its troops to the vicinity, after which each side was balancing the each other's presence and a months-long standoff ensued. Until both actors agreed to withdraw from the area. India's approach is based on the fact that it lacks the strength to match China and therefore it does not usually initiate conflict situations. Instead, India's focus is mainly put on matching China's actions in certain areas. Therefore, a lot of the disputed border areas ended up being heavily militarized. Since China always moves in troops to challenge India and India has to respond in the same

manner. Notably, even though this has led to more or less permanent low-level military tension at the whole length of the LAC. It has also prevented the occurrence of large-scale military actions the like of 1962, in which China has adopted a similar approach, while India was woefully unprepared and failed to counterbalance its actions. Creating a military security dilemma between the two that serves a significant deterrence purpose. An important role in the large-scale combat deterrence also plays the nuclear arsenal of both countries. China has tested its first nuclear bomb in 1964, while India in 1974. Both countries maintain a "no first use" policy, however, the Chinese nuclear strategy also states that it does not shy use nuclear weapons for "deterring others". It is therefore unlikely that the occasional border clashes will spill into a full-fledged war, as it would have devastating consequences for both countries, and especially for India (Bajpaee, 2015).

On a positive note, aside from the largely already established "passive" deterrence mechanism. Both countries tried to desecuritize the conflict by embarking on a stream of military-related confidence-building measures meant to, if not de-escalate the situation, to at least stabilize it in the current status quo. Especially noteworthy are the 1996 and 2005 agreements on "Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control". The 1996 Agreement has completely outlawed the use of explosives and gunfire alongside the LAC. As well as provided instructions for de-escalation in case of conflict, along with guidelines for regular meetings between Chinese and Indian army staff and border authorities. Moreover, the agreement importantly also made the sides exchange maps of their view of the LAC. With an establishment of the Sino-Indian Joint Commission on Boundary Issues, tasked with addressing the border question (Sino-Indian Confidence Building Agreement, 1996). In the 2005 Agreement, both sides further reaffirmed the reality of the status quo, suggest avoiding the organization of military exercises larger than 15 000 troops, all the while stressing the intention to avoid confrontations. As well as further clarifying communication channels and guidelines in case of conflict. For example, for the intrusion of each other's air space, while including further border areas to the mutual confidence-building mechanism (Sino-Indian Confidence Building Protocol, 2005).

These confidence-building mechanisms do not necessarily provide space or solutions for desecuritization of the conflict, which is rather a political matter. However, from the military perspective, they are an important tool for de-escalation of the occasionally heated standoffs.

For instance, as could be seen in 2020-2021 at Pangong Lake. After the deadly Galwan valley 2020 clash, the situation at the whole length of the border started to get hot again. To prevent a larger conflict, both sides engaged in nine rounds of military-level consultations until they decided to start de-escalating the situation via internal and external de-securitization speech. It did not directly address or solve the situation in Galwan valley, but rather provided space for blowing off steam elsewhere. On 11th February 2021, both China and India withdrew significant forces from the heavily militarized area around the disputed Pangong Lake lying in the Western sector of the border. Signalling that if there is a willingness on both sides, the situation can be resolved peacefully and without the use of the military to threaten the other (BBC, 2021a).
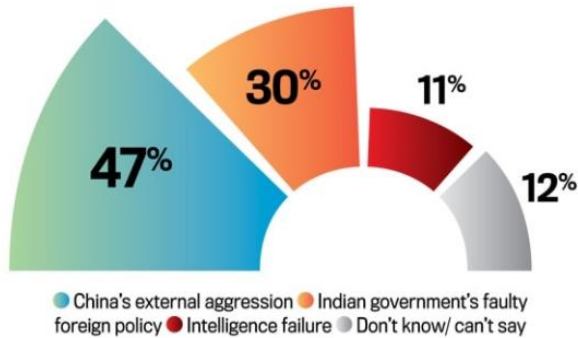
4.3.3 Role of domestic and international opinion on the decision-making

The stark difference between China and India is when it comes down to the role of domestic opinion on influencing the country's foreign policy, and concretely in this case, the Himalayan dispute. In the meantime, the Chinese government, as a non-democratic entity, holds a tight grip on mostly state-controlled mass media and chooses what is presented to the public and what is not. The same does not apply to the world's largest democracy, India. Where even if the state tries to discourage the flow of information, they usually find its way to the public. In China, due to the nature of its political system, most of the state and party leaders do not need to fear the same popular backlash as democratically elected leaders would. In a case that their policy approach is ill accepted within the public. Because, at the end of the day, leaders of a democratic country are chosen as a result of a popular vote, as well as political bargaining and coalition building. It does not mean that the Chinese government can simply ignore the will of the people. It means that it has significantly more space for political manoeuvring than Indian leaders have. Who, at some point, might be forced into a decision they do not prefer, only because of the information leaked to the public. When China clashed with India in Galwan valley in 2020, the information was heavily downplayed at home, not even featuring between the top 50 topics on Weibo. With little to no classic coverage by the Chinese media and close to zero public pressure on state administration. Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership were provided with many potential solutions to the situation. In India

however, the news about the clash have filled most of the country's media, effectively providing Modi with very few options. To counter the enraged Indian public, Modi, who became elected on running the agenda of economically and militarily strong India, had to provide a strong response to quell the unrests. Pushing through with at least economic sanctions on Chinese investments and apps. With the common people starting a boycott of Chinese goods, while in China, the general public barely knew about the conflict (Tian and Miglani, 2020).

In August 2020, just after the major clash in Galwan valley, 84 percent of the Indians taking part in the "Mood of the Nation poll" stated that they believe Xi Jinping has betrayed Modi and India. Furthermore, 91 percent believed that banning Chinese apps and limits on investments was the right approach and 67 percent said that they are willing to pay more for goods that are not made in China. Shockingly, 59 percent of respondents stated that India should go to war with China, while 72 percent of them believed that India could win such a war. However, the poll gets especially interesting when we look at the question about the causes behind the Galwan valley clash. With 47 percent of respondents blaming China's aggression, but 30 percent of them surprisingly blamed India's foreign policy and 11 percent blamed the Indian army's intelligence failure. Therefore, even though the majority still blamed China as the primary reason, 41 percent of respondents focused their blame directly on the Indian government. Creating pressure for Modi and other leaders to act. As in this case, we could say that instead of an elite securitizing a topic for the audience, to be able to take political steps. An audience has securitized the topic for the elites, forcing their hand. However, Modi has probably realized that he cannot face China in direct military confrontation, as majority of the respondents wished. Opting instead for economic sanctions. Since doing nothing would most likely have significant repercussions for him in the domestic political arena (Unnithan, 2020). English public opinion polls in India are somewhat regular, however there are almost none conducted in China, especially in direct relation to the border conflict with India.

Q. WHO WOULD YOU HOLD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INDIA-CHINA BORDER DISPUTE IN LADAKH?

47% 30% 11% 12%

● China's external aggression ● Indian government's faulty foreign policy ● Intelligence failure ● Don't know/ can't say

Q. IS BANNING CHINESE APPS AND DENYING CONTRACTS TO CHINESE COMPANIES THE RIGHT APPROACH TO COUNTER CHINESE AGGRESSION?

2% 7% 91%

● Yes ● No ● Don't know/ can't say
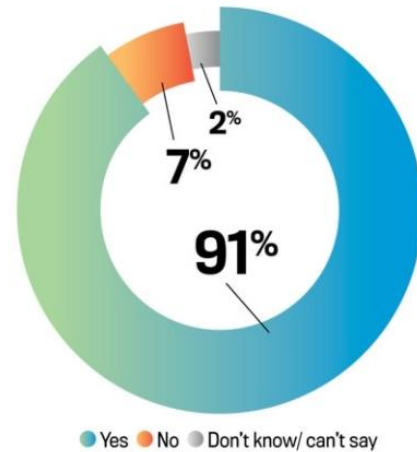
Picture 11: Selected questions from the Indian "Mood of the Nation" August 2020 poll (Unnithan, 2020)

Even though China holds the upper hand in many areas related to the conflict, from the geography to economy to military, there is one area in which India wins on almost all fronts, its allies. China has only a single formal ally treaty, with North Korea, but it is doubtful if such an ally is even beneficial for China in the context of the Himalayan conflict. Apart from that, China has a few "strategic partnerships" with autocratic countries such as Russia, Iran or Pakistan. Moreover, it also has several states, especially in and around Central and East Asia, that fall under its influence. These relationships however can hardly be called true friendships and are rather based on cold hard calculations and economic subsidies from the Chinese side. It is then questionable if they would come for China's rescue in case of conflict. Even in the case of a relatively tenuous relationship with Russia almost solely based on the fear of the United States. The only one of China's nebulous partners, Pakistan, has then some effect on the conflict's dynamics. Nonetheless, Pakistan mostly represents its own claims in the area and leans on China from time to time than vice versa (Kroenig and Cimmino, 2021). India, on the other hand, can as a democratic country rely on support from the West. Especially on the countries focused on the Indo-Pacific neighbourhood, such as Japan, Australia and the United States. Who since 2006 all cooperate within the Quad military framework and conduct common military exercises, renovate each other's military arsenal's or have varying degrees

of further military cooperation. It is in all three countries' interest to limit the influence of China, and India is the perfect vehicle for that policy. India's Modi knows that, which allows him to comfortably push back on China, even though China holds huge military, economic and technological advantage. This backing thus allowed him to pursue a policy of non-aggression and no first move, but whenever China steps in, Modi was heard to make sure that India will strongly respond, while India's Quad partners seem to be more and more willing to get involved in countering China. Just in 2020, Australia for instance signed a military agreement that will allow its troops to be stationed within India and vice versa. Just after which Modi said that "India wants peace, but if provoked, India is capable of giving a befitting reply" (Abi-Habib, 2020).

4.3.4 Politico-military conclusion

Militarily, as well as economically, China also holds an upper hand. China does not only have a much higher military budget and a technologically more advanced army than India does. It also mostly holds an upper ground with its positions on the Tibetan plateau and has easier access to strategically important areas. Further than that, it has much bigger infrastructure and logistics coverage, allowing China to move troops faster than India does. Moreover, it is much easier for China to hit India's cities and heartland with rockets or airstrikes than vice versa. This is reflected in China's assertive strategic approach of usually initiating mutual clashes to which India has to respond. On a positive note, the military domain is one of the few fields that is between the two sides regulated by confidence-building measures. That for instance prohibit the use of firearms or explosives, as well as providing a framework for de-escalation via military talks mechanism. To be able to comfortably deploy the military to the areas in question, it is first of all important for both sides to assert control over their territory at home. Because the area of the dispute is flanked by historically troubled regions on both sides, Kashmir and Tibet. Such an assertion of control via either administrative (revocation of the special status of Kashmir) or population (attracting ethnic Han Chinese to the TAR) means also has its role in the escalation of the conflict. Since some of these regions are not recognised by the other side and while for example, India views it as a domestic issue, China does view it as an international issue. The single advantage that India holds over China are its

international allies in the form of Quad[15] framework. As well as many other sympathetic countries abroad. Allowing India to assert a certain degree of self-confidence when dealing with China's much larger force. Because India knows that China has all but no international friends that would unconditionally support it, aside from some "strategic partners", such as Pakistan. Nevertheless, from the domestic perspective, China holds an advantage again. Due to the limits on the freedom of expression, China can filter out the information that gets to the public. Effectively control the public mood via government-run narratives that then leave open hands for the Chinese leaders in terms of decision-making options. Meanwhile, India's relatively free press has the ability to sway the general population one or the other way, to which the Indian leadership has to respond if they want to have the favour of the people. Potentially putting them into a position in which they have to respond, even though they know the situation is heavily unfavourable.

5. Conclusion

From the first sight, the Sino-Indian conflict could be solved very simply, as each side lies claims to different areas and effectively controls some other. This could be illustrated on the case of China's claim on Arunachal Pradesh, which is effectively controlled by India, while India claims Aksai Chin, which is effectively controlled by China. After the establishment of both countries, a simple land swap solution was proposed, which has however never happened until the modern times. Hinting to us that the roots of the conflict run very deep and it is not just about the territory anymore, which sometimes is even barely inhabitable. Bringing us to the main research question: *"Why hasn't the conflict been resolved yet and what contributes to its re/de-heating?"*.

Starting with the second part of the question, as the research has shown, there are many examples of how the tensions flare-up or cool down. From the socio-geographical perspective, there are reasons stemming from the direct behaviour of both actors, as well as escalations originating from the vagueness caused by unclear historical data and poor border demarcation. Defining ambiguity is easier out of the two. The sole fact that the Himalayan

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[15] United States, Australia, Japan, India

area is extremely inhospitable with high altitudes, perpetual snow and shifting natural barriers are already a cause for concern. It is especially true knowing that border demarcation agreements are based on these natural objects, word by word. It contributes to the re-heating of the conflict just by forceful interpretations of ancient legal texts. Even though the interpreting actor might be correct, this approach does not apply only to the literal interpretation of legal texts and different maps, but also to the perception of the border itself. When zooming out, the Himalayas might be seen as a true natural boundary between India and China, but there is still a lot of ambiguity to be addressed and usually sparking escalations when it happens. An excellent example is the case of Arunachal Pradesh. Historically, culturally and ethnically linked to Tibet, based on which the territory is claimed by China. However, it is de facto administered by India, as one of its states. Providing a space for conflict when one of the sides seeks to change the status quo (in the case of China) or make it permanent (in the case of India). Re-heating then takes place when one of the sides starts to securitize the narrative for the change of the established status quo. Fortunately, this escalation spiral does not go only upwards. Due to mutual pragmatism, the border conflict between India and China is not ideological, compared to for example rivalry between the United States and China. If it does not prevent occasional re-heatings; it does provide relatively extensive space for quick de-heating. As the conflict is not based on the fight of the "free world" against the "communist world", but rather on a thorough analysis of costs and benefits. First of all, for preventing full-scale unpragmatic escalations, while secondly, letting both actors de-heat quite fast, due to the high-level realization that it might not simply be materially and politically beneficial to keep the escalation going on. Instead, rather always following ideologically unbiased pragmatic reasoning.

From the economic standpoint, the reasons for the re/de-heating of the situations are much more tangible and could be rather easily pointed out. Building infrastructure in the disputed areas and around them is one of such examples. Even though the building of roads, airports, railways or military installations around the disputed areas, within the acknowledged territory of either India or China, does not directly affect the demarcation of the disputed territories itself. It does re-heat the situation, as one side will usually have to respond to the other side's infrastructure build-up. That will allow it to move troops faster and in larger numbers, allow for more warplanes to be stationed or shorten general travel times within the region, with a

high potential of resulting in an upward infrastructure building spiral and obvious security dilemma.

The escalations are even more grave when one side uses the infrastructure as a way to legitimize its territorial claims by building in the disputed area, such as when China was building a road near Bhutan in 2017, which has resulted in the Doklam standoff with India. De-heating can be then achieved by the destruction of such infrastructural projects or by the limitation of construction activity in certain regions. Another significant contributor to the heat-ups within the conflict are the ongoing "water wars" between India and China, who as an upstream state, holds almost all keys to the game with few options for India on what to do. Resulting in the escalations caused by China's policy of "no water-sharing", as well as the rush to build as many dams as possible for the water-scarce nation on rivers that stream down to India. Occasionally even causing floods when China withholds the water data. From the purely trade and market perspective, the heat-ups could be attributed to India's longstanding frustration with its huge trade deficit with China. When looking at the commodity import dependence of some for instance pharmaceutical industries, as well as general fear from China's economic might and the need of doing something about it. Along with more obvious political steps, such as the Chinese app bans and investment limitations, causing further straining of mutual relations, although India is aware of its heavy economic reliance on its neighbour. Providing India with a certain limit on protectionist economic policies, because it knows it will hurt it more than vice versa. Setting a line for potential heating of the conflict from an economic perspective.

From the political and military standpoint, re/de-heating can happen as a result of both domestic and external policies and approaches, especially due to the unclear line between the domestic and external ones. The disputed territories in question are on both sides flanked by further troubled areas of Kashmir and the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Boasting, on both sides of the border, long-lasting resistance towards the administering country. It is then no surprise that both India and China have a great interest in asserting complete control over these domestic regions. Hence, this assertion of control can then further escalate the border conflict between the two, such as when India in 2019 revoked the special administrative status of Kashmir, granted to it by its constitution. China then claimed it is an international matter to which it has the right to respond, flaring up the conflict. This does not apply only to

recent times, but also to history. For example, when in 1975 Sikkim joined India as a state and we have seen clashes in Tulung La in the same year. Surprisingly, the purely military domain provides mostly space for de-heating of the conflict, despite its obvious involvement in most of the mutual clashes. Mainly via the confidence-building framework and military talks mechanism established via 1996 and 2005 Agreements that have helped to de-heat most of the situations. For instance, as we recently saw through its application in the situation at Pangong Lake and after the Galwan valley clash in 2020. The Agreements prevented significant heating-up of the situation via its limits of firearms and explosives on a general level. The general de-heating and interest to not have a full-scale war, like the one in 1962, also contributes to the fact that both India and China have nuclear weapons, that serve as an effective deterrence. On the other hand, though, to an Indian disadvantage, mostly unregulated domestic public opinion serves as an effective tool to either re-heat or de-heat the conflict. As growing anti-Chinese sentiment in India might force the hand of its leaders if they want to stay in grace. A problem which China either does not have or simply has much larger control over, while from an international perspective, India's further alignment with Australia, United States and Japan is sure to heat the situation even further. Due to China looking for ways how to counter this emerging alliance. On the other side, China's strategic partnership with Pakistan is set to create more barriers while affecting Indian decision-making, and not for the better.

There is no single answer for *"Why hasn't the conflict been resolved yet?"*, but rather many. The origins of the conflict fall on the ambiguous work done by the British empire and further political turmoil on both sides of the border in the coming years. Talking about resolution, however, one of the main reasons would be the unwillingness to compromise. If the conflict would be only about the bare territory, the compromise would be simple. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. The conflict is not about kilometres of mostly uninhabitable land thousands of meters about sea level. It is about the assertion of regional dominance by two rising powers that have inevitably found themselves clashing with each other. Both of whom know that backing down and accepting loss of, mostly unimportant areas from an economical point of view could have serious political repercussions. It could discredit both the hold on power of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as of the government of the world's largest democracy. The land both sides claim within the Sino-Indian border conflict is actually not so important.

What is important are the power dynamics that drive it, and through which India and China want to assert their regional, if not global, dominance. From the fight over water, military show-offs, or infrastructure rush to simple discreditation of the political system of the other side for its deficiencies. The actual resolution of the conflict is not then only prevented by these regional and, to a degree, self-interested goals, but also, by the difficult geographical, ethnical and political landscape. A big chunk of the blame lies on Great Britain and the resulting radical changes of political systems and turmoil on both sides. It also stems from the inability to reach consensus just after the establishment of both countries, well before the conflict turned violent and became marred with power objectives and securitized historical narrative, while also getting intertwined with a whole host of other social, political, military and economic topics, each of what has turned it harder to solve by every passing day. Until we got to this very moment, at which point a complete, mutual, long-lasting and internationally accepted resolution is unlikely.

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