

**LEADERSHIP STYLES OF XI JINPING AND NARENDRA MODI:
IMPACT ON THE BORDER ISSUE**

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ABSTRACT

Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi are transformative leaders who aspire to leave their names in history. With a strong political portfolio and extensive growth in the economy, they are developing a confident and robust stance towards the role of their country in the global order. The paper aims to analyze the domestic and international strategies of Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi in order to explore the implications of their leadership on the border issue. The paper first explores the theoretical frameworks of leadership studies and their implications for security aspects. Then the contextual and individual characteristics of leaders are assessed. Further, the paper focuses on the foreign policy approaches of both leaders that impact the border issue and prospects for a border settlement. In the conclusion, the author summarizes the possible outcomes of the leaders' policy on the development of the border issue.

Keywords: China, India, China-India relations, Leadership, Border issue.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, China and India are known for their strong economic and political stances. Their robust economic growth allowed them to establish themselves as regional powers. Their global and regional aspirations have become more decisive and comprehensive. Multinational initiatives launched under their current leadership, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have sparked debate about the future of the global order. Influenced by transformations in the domestic and international arena, bilateral relations between China and India have also undergone significant transformations. The roles of the paramount leaders of China, Xi Jinping, and Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, in orchestrating these processes are crucial.

Despite the fundamental differences in the political systems, with China as an authoritarian state and India as the largest democracy, Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi are two transformative leaders who gain massive support from their followers. The strong public support for Xi Jinping was seen when the National People's Congress members voted unanimously to remove presidential term limits for Xi Jinping. Narendra Modi popularly won two national elections with a record number of votes. Both Xi and Modi are widely promoting their grand visions domestically and internationally—Xi through his “China Dream” approach and Modi through his “New India” vision. Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi proposed fundamental changes in their foreign policies, including the establishment of new institutions and structures that would challenge the international order. China's Belt and Road Initiative and India's alternative strategies such as SAGAR forced us to reconsider the importance of connectivity and infrastructure.

The transformative leadership styles of Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi and their aspirations, meanwhile, impact the development of their bilateral relations. The recent border clashes, geopolitical rivalry, and their engagement on international platforms demonstrate the negative implications of their competitive confrontation. Accordingly, given that China-India relations are influenced by their historical memories, conflicting interests, and unresolved differences, it is critical to understand the foreign policy approaches of the leaders (Pardesi, 2022).

The paper argues that Xi Jinping's and Narendra Modi's assertive foreign policies have complicated border developments, making it impossible to resolve the border issue in the near future.

The paper aims to explore the implications of Xi Jinping's and Narendra Modi's domestic and international strategies to explore the implications of their leadership on the border issue. The paper first explores the theoretical frameworks of leadership studies. Then the contextual and individual characteristics of leaders are assessed. Further, the paper focuses on the foreign policy approaches of each leader that impact the border issue and prospects for a border settlement. In the conclusion, the author summarizes the possible outcomes of the leaders' policy on the development of the border issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of the individual characteristics of political leaders in maintaining foreign policy has been widely recognized. The classical literature on leadership believed in the theory of the “great man” when the leader possessed unique leadership qualities that distinguished him/her from the others-making them “born, not made.” From the 19th century, leadership studies started to assess the contextual features of leaders such as their personalities, styles, and periods of governance. These scholars examined the context of leadership in decision-making, believing that the emergence of leaders is a product of the situation rather than the unique qualities of a certain person (Preston, 2010). These situational analysts believe that leaders sometimes occur due to the situation itself, when the historical environment, specific characteristics of society, and specific time lead to the formation of leadership (Stogdill, 1975). In foreign policy analysis, the understanding of the context helps to determine whether to focus on the leader himself or on leadership groups, coalitions, parties, cabinets, bureaucracies, or militaries while examining the foreign policy strategy (Preston, 2010).

Classical realists see leadership through the analysis of its relation to power and international order (Waltz, 1959; Lobell et al., 2009). Joseph Nye believes that leaders, followers, and the contexts in which they interact are major factors that impact the political process of decision-making (Nye, 2013). Constructivist theories of leadership focus on the personality, style, and behavior of the leader, while emphasis is given to the processes and outcomes of the interaction between social actors, hence viewing leadership as a co-constructed reality (Johnston, 2018; Fairhurst and Grant, 2010).

There are also studies that analyze leadership through its psychological and psychoanalytic characteristics. Scholars explore the personalities, styles, and characteristics of leaders (Barber, 1972), the motives of individual leaders (Winter and Stewart, 1977), and Freudian concepts of id, ego, and superego (Preston, 2010). Some scholars analyze through the study of historical analogies, learning how the political leaders used “lessons of the past” as a source of historical comparison and how they instrumentalized it in their foreign policy strategy (Dyson and Preston, 2006). However, since not all political leaders leave a historical legacy that could be stamped in history or the historical importance of certain leaders is sometimes slightly exaggerated (Jervis, 2013), political leaders “matters a little more, a little less, depending on...” different conditions and factors (Tucker, 1995).

The present study relies on the classical work of James MacGregor Burns (1978), who explores two basic types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Burns believes that leadership is built on the relationship between leaders and followers in order to realize mutual goals. He distinguished between transactional leadership as when the leader exchanges one valuable thing for another, like providing subsidies, jobs for votes, etc., and transformational leadership, which is driven by a higher level of motivation and morality (Preston, 2010). Nye (2013) applied this approach in his analysis of American leadership. He described transformational leaders as those who rely on their soft power skills with “higher ideals and moral values” and with a strong inspirational style; and transactional leaders, who rely on hard power resources of carrots and sticks to appeal to their self-interest. The paper defines Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi as

transformative leaders, whose inspirational styles of governance influence their foreign policy and specifically the development of China-India relations.

The transformation styles of Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi also impact the security dimensions of their foreign policy. In particular, the border dispute, which once again demonstrated its conflicting potential, increased its value in accordance with the assertive strategies of both leaders. If earlier, due to the high level of economic interdependence, the border issue was relegated to the background in bilateral politics, the present aspirations of leaders prompted a revision of the value of the disputed territories and increased their significance in bilateral relations. Considering that territorial disputes are more war-prone than other conflicts (Vasquez, 2011), the territorial dispute during the tenure of the current leadership was exacerbated due to the assertive policies of leaders. Although territorial disputes can play as bargaining leverage depending on the value of the territory, in the present context they provoke new incentives for tensions due to rapid infrastructural enforcement of borderlands.

In general, territorial disputes are considered to be the main cause of interstate wars in the modern global system, and the use of power politics is seen as a direct cause of war. Yet it depends on the value of the disputed area the more valuable the territory, the more a state will pay when considering compromise or concessions (Wiegand, 2011). Consequently, the paper examines how the leadership styles of China and India influence the developments along their contested borders and the politics underlying their approaches.

LEADERSHIP AND FOREIGN POLICY APPROACHES OF XI JINPING AND NARENDRA MODI

The paramount leader of China, Xi Jinping, came to power in 2012 during the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party and in 2013 became the President of the People's Republic of China. Often called the most authoritarian leader since Chairman Mao, Xi Jinping was, from the outset, determined to return to strong politics (Erling, 2021). During his inaugural speech, he introduced the "China dream" vision, which assured a return to strong politics and abandoned Deng Xiaoping's vision of "hide your strength and bide your time". His "community of common destiny for all mankind" envisaged the shift toward a new type of governance with an active stance by China. At the 19th National Congress in 2017, he set China's centennial goal of becoming a "fully developed nation" by 2049. The two-phase goal was divided into 2020-2035 years when the socialist modernization and in-between goals of China's rejuvenation would be achieved; and 2035-2045 years when China will become a global leader both in terms of comprehensive national power and international influence (Muratbekova, 2019). Simultaneously, Xi Jinping initiated massive military reforms to "transform the PLA into a political power base" (FT, 2016). The government set the goal of becoming a first-tier force by 2049, surpassing all military powers, and by 2035 to complete the modernization of national defense and forces. On top of that, in 2019, with the elimination of two-term presidential limits, which were introduced by Deng Xiaoping to prevent lifetime rulers like Mao Zedong, Xi Jinping further cemented his power. The constitutional change in 2019 allows Xi to remain in office after his second term. He had encoded his "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era"

doctrine on par with Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the Theory of Three Represents (Gov.cn, 2019). Accordingly, Xi Jinping's decisive and affirmative strategy in transforming China's development and confident outward-looking strategy, which is seen in his signature BRI that became a core of his "Major Country Diplomacy," demonstrates the transformative features of the leader (Zreik, 2022). The massive support of the population and the high popularity of his policy also demonstrates the inspirational features and charisma of the Chinese leader.

Xi Jinping's reliance on the historical achievements of China, to which he refers, also demonstrates his strong personal characteristics and transformative approach to the leader. Dyson and Preston argue (2006) that high-complexity leaders draw more analogies with other generations and cultures in comparison to low-complexity leaders. Xi Jinping has a strong sense of historical responsibility, seeing a national rejuvenation as the historical mission and the greatest dream of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021). The link between achieving "moderate prosperity" by the centennial of the Communist Party of China (2021) and becoming a "modern socialist country" by the centennial anniversary of the People's Republic of China (2049) demonstrates his strong commitment to "never forget why we started" (Hu, 2019). His strong sense of responsibility and ambition to change the nation is other evidence of a transformative leader.

Xi Jinping's foreign policy also encountered fundamental transformations with a more confident and forward-looking position for China. Since 2013, Xi Jinping has invoked the Chinese government and media to "tell China's story well, disseminate China's voice well, and strengthen our discourse power internationally." China's global "charm offensive" diplomacy has evolved into the pursuit of a "right to speak" or "discourse power," which necessitates not only increased Chinese soft power efforts but also the "construction of an external discourse system" and "enhancing its discourse power internationally" (Kania, 2018). The spread of the so-called Wolf Warrior diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic was another demonstration of the assertive rhetoric of Chinese diplomacy.

In accordance with assertive diplomacy, the Chinese government has pursued a tough stance in maritime and territorial disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea, as well as with Japan in the East China Sea. Xi Jinping, while emphasizing the importance of the "good neighbor policy," firmly demonstrated the red line when it comes to the national interest of China (Hu, 2019).

At the same time, Xi Jinping is keen to promote his global governance vision. During the Boao Forum for Asia from 2013 to 2015, Xi Jinping reiterated the concept of the "community of a shared future for mankind," which calls for making Asia peaceful, prosperous, and open (China Daily, 2018). During the 4th CICA Summit in 2014, Xi Jinping introduced the "New Asian Security Concept," which aimed to establish new regional security cooperation architectures (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2014). Similarly, during the various international platforms, such as the G20, BRICS, SCO, and other summits, Xi promotes his global vision and advocates his shared vision with "Chinese characteristics". On top of that, Xi Jinping's primary tool of institutionalizing Chinese influence worldwide is the Belt and Road Initiative, which has won global recognition. The scale and coverage of projects speak for

themselves about global awareness and China's contribution to the regional and global economy.

Hence, the role of Xi Jinping in conducting China's domestic and foreign policy is critical. While positioning himself in a slogan that "Mao Zedong made China stand up, Deng Xiaoping made it become rich, Xi Jinping will make it strong", he engraves his historical importance for China's history. By pursuing an assertive foreign policy, he also intends to influence the changing of the global order.

The level of nationalism in India's politics has increased since the election of the former chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, as Prime Minister of India in 2014. As a life-long member of the right-wing Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Modi continues the line of his party. He developed Hindutva politics (Hindu-ness), which is seen as a basis for true national security and the global recognition of India (Basrur, 2017). Modi portrayed himself as a defender of Hindu values. He was called an "aam aadmi ("common man") since he was positioning himself for the business community as a technocrat reformer and for society as an ordinary Indian from the middle class, being simple, clean, and practical vikas purush ("development man") (Hall, 2021).

From the onset, Modi was very popular. During the 2014 elections, he achieved a historical single-party majority in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian parliament), notably for the first time since the one-party dominant system led by the Indian Congress Party during 1952–1989 (Sridharan, 2014). The results of the re-election in 2019 also demonstrated strong support when his party won the highest number of votes since 1989 and Modi was unanimously re-elected as the prime minister of the country.

Modi also likes inspiring calls for uniting his country's achievements, along with supporting the local products. He started campaigns such as Clean India, Smart India, and Make in India, encouraging sanitation and protective policies. Internationally, the Make in India campaign attracted investors, specifically targeting the wealthy Indian diaspora abroad. Overall, Modi aspires to create a "New India" by promoting a new form of authoritarianism consisting of weakened institutions and centralization of power while moving towards an authoritarian Hindu Raj (Hindu nation-state) (Jaffrelot, 2021).

In comparison to his predecessors, Modi's foreign policy has been characterized by exceptional dynamism and is driven by his personal ambition. By easing the 'non-alignment' past of India towards developing multilateral politics based on geo-economic vision, his muscular foreign policy pursues strong relations with major powers, at the same time providing a platform for balancing China's ambitious foreign initiatives. India's economic well-being, which has been demonstrating stable growth during the last decade, allows Modi to implement more optimistic policies for India's development, hence positioning a strong stance on India's foreign policy.

Modi's foreign policy is transformative, he established himself as a world leader and policy entrepreneur (Hall and Ganguly, 2022). In 2014, Modi launched an action-oriented Act East policy, which relies on the robust economic and global profile of India and aims to intensify cooperation with regional powers that share concerns over China's growing ambitions in the region. The strong US-India ties allow Modi to build his line of foreign policy while at the same time

balancing China's ambitions regionally and globally. He deepens relations with the US and like-minded countries. He is stressing the regional coalition with the Asia-Pacific, especially within the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known as the Quad.

In 2015, Prime Minister Modi formulated India's vision in the Indo-Pacific as SAGAR, which stands for "Security and Growth for All in the Region". Although SAGAR was not formalized as a doctrine or vision, it has been mentioned multiple times during Modi's foreign tours, including the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue. Within the SAGAR, Modi's government enhanced its maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific, while the Indian Navy has been assisting in various security activities in the Indian Ocean region. Modi's government is also keen on building a military coalition in the Indo-Pacific, as well as promoting collective security through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2018).

Modi also strengthened India's cooperation with the Eurasian states, including enhancing cooperation with Russia and Central Asian states. In 2017, India succeeded in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which reinforced India's interests in the Eurasian direction. Modi's "Neighbourhood First" policy moreover extends and instrumentalizes India's foreign policy in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia (Hall and Ganguly, 2022).

Overall, Modi is very enthusiastic about enhancing India's foreign ties, with a greater interest in intensifying India's presence in regional and global forums. Similar to Xi Jinping, he has been calling for the building of a new regional order that should be open, rules-based, and equal (Kesavan, 2020).

CHINA-INDIA RELATIONS UNDER XI JINPING AND NARENDRA MODI

Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi are transformative leaders who aspire to leave their names in history. With a strong political portfolio and extensive growth in the economy, they have a very confident and robust stance towards the role of their country in the global order. China and India are the first and second-largest countries in terms of population and have the second and fifth-largest economies, respectively. They play a crucial role in contemporary world politics. The global and regional aspirations of their leaders consequently influence the development of regional and global agendas.

China-India relations, meanwhile, are experiencing the "close neighbor syndrome" (Zhu, 2011). The relations are complicated by several structural factors, such as the unresolved borders, the presence of the Tibetan government-in-exile and Dalai Lama in India, the Pakistan factor, and the growing competition between the two for regional and global dominance.

China has a sense of superiority over India and does not recognize India as an equal power (Zhu, 2011). Its approach towards India is more holistic, while the government averts aggressive diplomacy from India, demonstrating that India is not China's main diplomatic rival (Ye, 2018). Although Indians consider their country as a rising global power and believe that in the long term, it can surpass the Chinese economy, China never sees India as a main challenger to the current international system.

The rivalry between China and India is asymmetric since India sees China as its most consequential rival, while China places India behind its major rivalries such as the US and Japan. Moreover, despite both showing dynamic economic growth, India is far behind China in terms of economic development. The Modi administration lacks a viable strategy to economically catch up with China's development, and India also cannot compete with China in almost all human development indexes (Pardesi, 2022; Zhu, 2011).

Despite this asymmetry, Modi's diplomacy toward China has become more aggressive in comparison to his predecessors (Ye, 2018; Bajpai, 2018). Due to stable indicators of the Indian economy and strong support from anti-Chinese allies, the Indian government demonstrates a stronger stance that also speculates on the bilateral partnership. The so-called "issue-by-issue" diplomacy that was adopted by Modi toward China was directed to stress the specific problems between the two countries and work on each case separately. In the 2015 address, Prime Minister Modi mentioned that between India and China there existed not one but many problems. Since 2016, it was clear that the Indian government measured China-India relations by raising "issues" with China depending on the context (Ye, 2018).

Some scholars suggest that India's position on China is formulated under three mainstream positions that do not consider China either as a short-term or a long-term threat; consider China as a hostile and not hostile country (Zhu, 2011). On the other hand, Pardesi (2022: 44) believes that Modi's approach toward its asymmetric rivalry includes "accommodation/cooperation at the multilateral level (e.g., the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), competition at the regional level (in the Indo-Pacific), rejection of China's unilateral initiatives (such as the Belt and Road Initiative), and deterrence (along the Himalayas and in the Indian Ocean)". Hence, Modi's foreign policy is rooted in acknowledging the geopolitical importance of India in the growing global ambitions of China and India's opportunity to provide alternative policies to the Asia-Pacific.

Nevertheless, Modi's foreign policy, despite bringing new energy, still follows the traditional line of Indian foreign affairs. Some scholars believe that Modi's foreign policy is predictable and moderate, while others suppose that no substantial changes could be made by Modi (Ganguly, 2017; Basrur, 2017; Pardesi, 2022). Moreover, scholars even suggest that Modi's China policy shows more "continuity than change" (Madan, 2020: 3), with others viewing India's transformation of 'Look East' into 'Act East' as consistent with the previous government (Pardesi, 2019).

On top of that, there are ultra-nationalist groups and individuals in India who speculate on the growing economic and military threat coming from China (Zhu, 2011). Among the most recent manifestations of anti-Chinese sentiments was a call to boycott Chinese goods. The Confederation of All India Traders in June 2020 declared a boycott of over 3,000 Chinese products amid the border crisis in Ladakh. Despite the Chinese condemning India's "illogical boycott", the ultranationalist populists used the situation once again to remind us about the "China threat" (Guardian, 2020). Furthermore, those populists were dissatisfied with the growing trade imbalance of India, which in 2020 was little less than \$60 billion. Yet, given that the trade imbalance is a persistent problem in India due to its inability to propose export items to China, and almost all countries have a trade imbalance with China, it is difficult to blame China for that. However, de-

spite India's boycott calls and the subsequence of border clashes, trade between China and India in 2021 reached a historic peak of over \$125 billion. In spite of Xi Jinping's promises to open the Chinese market to India's pharmaceutical, IT, and non-Basmati rice sectors during the Wuhan summit in 2018, India's trade deficit with China reached \$69.4 billion (Economic Times, 2022).

In addition to the economic threat of China, the classical "security dilemma" concerns the Indian public, especially given the wide modernization of the Chinese PLA. The Indian public, which is always hyper-sensitive to China's aspirations, is raising concerns over Chinese plans, while the number of commentators in India on China-related topics is much higher compared to the Chinese interest in India's reaction.

On the other hand, while Modi's government asked Beijing to respect Indian vulnerability over its strategic contradictions (for instance, with CPEC), India itself irritates the Chinese audience. In particular, in 2015, Prime Minister Modi visited Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as part of Southern Tibet. In 2016, the 14th Dalai Lama went to Arunachal Pradesh, which despite the claims of India that he went for "purely religious" purposes, annoyed the Chinese. In 2021, for the first time in several years, Modi tweeted personal congratulations on the Dalai Lama's 86th birthday, which was seen as another speculation during the already worsening China-India relations (Miglani, 2021). Given the activities of the Central Tibetan Administration in India and the exile of the Dalai Lama, there are still concerns that India might play its Tibet card when needed.

Meanwhile, Xi's administration does not regard India as the primary focus of Chinese diplomacy, nor does it regard India as the primary challenger to China's ambitions in the transformation of global order. China, therefore, demonstrates its interest in conducting good neighborhood relations. The frequent engagement of both leaders, their integration into the international arena, informal summits, and general improved communication, including their defense officers, demonstrate this approach (Ye, 2018).

Hence, India's engagement with China is characterized as "competitive engagement with Indian characteristics" (Madan, 2020: 1). Modi is interested in using the potential of China's ambitions to change the global order, including via its infrastructure connectivity, by proposing an alternative coalition-building against China. China, for its part, aims to maintain good neighbour relations while remaining firm on strategic issues under Xi.

XI JINPING AND NARENDRA MODI'S INFLUENCE ON BORDER DEVELOPMENTS

In 2020, China and India marked the 70th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations. Despite that Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi announced plans to mark the anniversary by arranging 70 events within the India-China Year of Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges, the arrangements were disrupted by the border crisis in Ladakh.

The unresolved borders are the Achilles' heel in China-India relations. China and India share over 3440 km of disputed borders. These disputed territories are divided by the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which differs from a few meters in some places to tens of kilometers in others because each side has different

perceptions of the extent of their territories. Within these ill-defined borders, transgressions and border clashes happen from time to time. Before the 2017 Doklam standoff, the most serious escalation after the 1962 war was in 1986-87, when a large number of troops were moved to the borders in the Sumdorong Chu valley. Since then, the borders have been relatively stable, although transgressions and clashes sometimes take place. The 72-day-long border crisis in the Doklam plateau in the summer of 2017 changed this relative tranquillity of the borders, while the border clashes in Ladakh in the spring of 2020 demonstrated that the border clashes had become a “new normal” in the China-India borderlands (Singh, 2020).

The aggressive developments on the borders are linked with the assertive policies of both leaders, their regional and global aspirations, along with the reevaluation of their military potential and consequent transformations of their border infrastructure. During the decades of economic reforms and growth, the border issue was viewed through the economic interdependence perspective and downshifted its importance in virtue of the economic interests of both countries. However, the Doklam standoff demonstrated that the border issue continues to be among the strategic obstacles to bilateral cooperation.

The Doklam standoff happened in the summer of 2017 when the Indian forces formed a human wall of 300 soldiers on the Doklam Plateau on the Bhutanese side to protest the Chinese construction activities in the Bhutanese territory. As a result of the conflict, the Chinese and Indian governments upgraded the importance of border infrastructure facilities and intensified the development programs in the border regions.

China, in accordance with its development strategy, between the 1990s and late 2000s, expanded and maintained its existing roads and railway connections across Tibet and the Himalayan borders. In line with the BRI, China has also advanced its road infrastructure, including bridges, tunnels, and highways domestically and along the Indian border. The condition of this transport infrastructure has improved significantly and is far better than India's. However, after the Doklam standoff, the Chinese government announced the building of a new model of villages on the Tibetan side of the border, which was officially linked to “poverty alleviation” and “defense of the borders” (Arpi, 2018). The Chinese have already renovated their Lhasa-Nyingchi-Chengdu railway, and in 2021 the first electric railway in the region was launched. The railway, while enabling touristic opportunities in Tibet, also allows fast transfer of reinforcements from the Chengdu Military Region, where the majority of military provisions and forces are deployed (Muratbekova, 2020).

India has pointed to the need for border development when faced with issues of access during crisis times. But India's infrastructure in the border areas remains poor and underdeveloped - a fact that was emphasized during the 2018 session of the Indian parliament's Standing Committee on Defence following the assessment of the Doklam standoff. The problem was that, despite huge plans for the construction of border roads, only a small percentage of those roads were actually completed by 2018. In the aftermath of the Doklam crisis, the Indian government reconsidered the issue of the capacity of the India-China Border Roads (ICBR) and urged the Border Roads Organization (BRO) to complete the planned projects. The BRO has on numerous previous occasions complained about the difficult mountainous terrain and natural disasters which resulted in

major delays in road construction – however to no avail. In the face of the perceived and growing threat from China, the Indian government felt urged to rashly allocate additional funds to overcome these obstacles and speed up the pace of road construction. The post-Doklam reforms allowed the extension of the ICBRs from 962 km in December 2017 to 2,501 km in December 2019 (Dubey, 2020). Overall, the BRO plans to complete all 61 border roads along the Chinese border by December 2022 (Singh and Choudhury, 2020).

India's investment and augmented attention directed at border road infrastructure have led to further skirmishes along the LAC in May-June 2020 when Chinese and Indian army personnel engaged in hand-to-hand combat and stone-pelting in Eastern Ladakh, North Sikkim, and in the Galwan Valley, resulting in 20 deaths from the Indian side and an unknown number from the Chinese, as well as a diplomatic crisis that caught the global attention. One of the possible reasons for this escalation was the infrastructure construction activities on the Indian side of the contested border. The construction of the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) road that runs close to the LAC allows a shortening of the distance between the capital city of Ladakh, Leh, and the DBO post near the Chinese border from two days to six hours. The road provides India with easy access to the Karakoram Pass that divides Ladakh from China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. India's construction activities triggered China into accusing India of altering the LAC position since India fosters the improvement of its roads and airfields to reduce the infrastructure lag on its side of the LAC (Reuters, 2020). The revocation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, allowed the state to be split into two different union territories - Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh - also impacted the developments on the Chinese borders. As a result, Chinese officials claimed that Indian troops crossed the LAC and attacked the Chinese, while Indian officials condemned the Chinese for deliberately luring Indian soldiers to pressure Delhi on the status quo.

In order to pacify the border skirmishes and ameliorate bilateral relationships, the heads of the states, Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi, held informal summits in Wuhan in April 2018 and in Mamallapuram in October 2019. Although the border issue was the very reason for initiating the informal dialogues, the leaders focused on potential cooperation fields such as trade and cultural exchanges rather than the border issue. Some experts suggested that the summits were designed to “reset” the relationship, while others believed that the “Wuhan spirit” and the “Chennai connect” did not shift the major pivot of competitive dynamics yet changed the tone and temperature of the relationship (Madan, 2020). Routine interactions are not enough to move the border issue forward (Bajpai, 2018).

Given the increased number of military troops along the borders and the facilitation of border infrastructure development on both sides of the borders, it is clear that border settlement is not on the agenda of both leaders. As the former National Security Adviser, Shivshankar Menon (2016) mentioned, “settling the boundary, through technical possible, is politically unlikely.” It is still in action. The border settlement, meanwhile, is in the second most difficult stage out of the three, when the creation of a framework for the resolution of discussions is needed. Although the Special Representative meetings have made significant progress since the 1980s, when the initial border talks were initiated, it is still far from reaching a consensus on a border resolution framework (Muratbekova, 2019).

Moreover, Xi Jinping's aggressive territorial diplomacy in the South China Sea,

where he unilaterally announced the establishment of two new administrative structures, along with tightening the national security law in Hong Kong, demonstrates his assertiveness and lack of desire to consent to India's conditions. India's policy under Narendra Modi when in 2019 revoked the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir state by splitting the state into two federal territories (Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh), as well as ambitious construction, and works along the Chinese border, also demonstrate India's "offensive defense" policy towards China.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the domestic, regional, and global aspirations of China and India's leadership. Both Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi are charismatic leaders who emphasize their transformative role in promoting their country's position in the global arena. Their tenure coincided with the economic prosperity of their countries, which allowed them to implement broader political initiatives. Their foreign policy strategy became assertive and sometimes aggressive, supported by their confidence in their economic leverage and their historical mission of national revival.

The paper argues that the leadership of Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi and their ambitious policies exacerbated the developments in the border issue, which was demonstrated during the Doklam and Ladakh standoffs. Although China-India relations were always complicated due to differences in strategic issues such as undefined borders, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile's activities in India and relations with Pakistan, under the leadership of Xi and Modi, their rivalry sharpened further. With a few cooperation successes in areas such as economic and cultural exchanges, their competing and even conflicting potential has increased (Madan, 2020). Moreover, the border clashes and ways to solve the border tensions demonstrate that while both leaders are playing each other's game in easing the border tensions, they are not interested in elaborating on the border issue. Hence, the border settlement is further from realization than ever.

China does not consider India a major competitor, and Xi Jinping's administration is not interested in facilitating the conflict over specific issues. India under Modi, by providing alternatives to China's approaches, aims to gain the support of his policies internationally and domestically. Yet for both, the border issue is not an obstacle to implementing their ambitions. Consequently, despite more than 70 years of discussions and negotiations on a border settlement, with periods of success, under the leadership of Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi, initial obstacles such as personalization of politics, irredentism, aggressive diplomacy, and geopolitical rivalry are again hampering progress in a border settlement. Economic interdependence, which influenced the development of border management, is no longer a driving factor.

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