

# SINO-INDIAN BORDER SINCE 1962 WAR

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**T**he Sino-Indian border talks at the major-level held on 31 August 2022, India pulled up Beijing for the latter's infrastructure development along the Karakoram Highway. China's construction along this highway is said to be the world's

highest paved international road connecting China and Pakistan have seen India's red for violation of Sino-Indian treaties on maintaining peace and tranquillity along the LAC.

Beijing's construction of infrastructure along the 3,488 km long India-China border has

repeatedly violated India's territorial and strategic interests. On numerous occasions, the development of infrastructure has triggered standoffs and clashes, notably those at Doklam in 2017 and Galwan in 2020.

Sixty years of the ceasefire of the 1962 War, China's border infrastructure has continued to concern its Southern neighbour India, pushing the latter to upgrade its own infrastructure. The chain of a constant infrastructural upgrade along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is a case of a 'security dilemma', presenting serious consequences, threatening to escalate into a full-fledged war between the two nuclear powers and destabilize the entire region.

## **China's Infrastructure Upgrade Since 1962**

China's enhanced military and infrastructure capability could be a decisive factor where China decides to launch a full-scale military attack along the entire border, as happened in 1962.



*'Stay away from Ladakh border...,' India gave strong advice to Dragon.*

Thus, a key lesson learnt by India back then was the salience of infrastructure upgradation in expanding military power.

It was in the year 1962 that China for the first time raised constructions along the international border in the Karakoram ranges in the Ladakh sector. The strategically located KK highway further consolidated Pakistani control of the occupied part of Kashmir and built on

China's position in Aksai Chin. It also acted as a conduit of arms and ammunition, including nuclear and missile material between Pakistan and China.

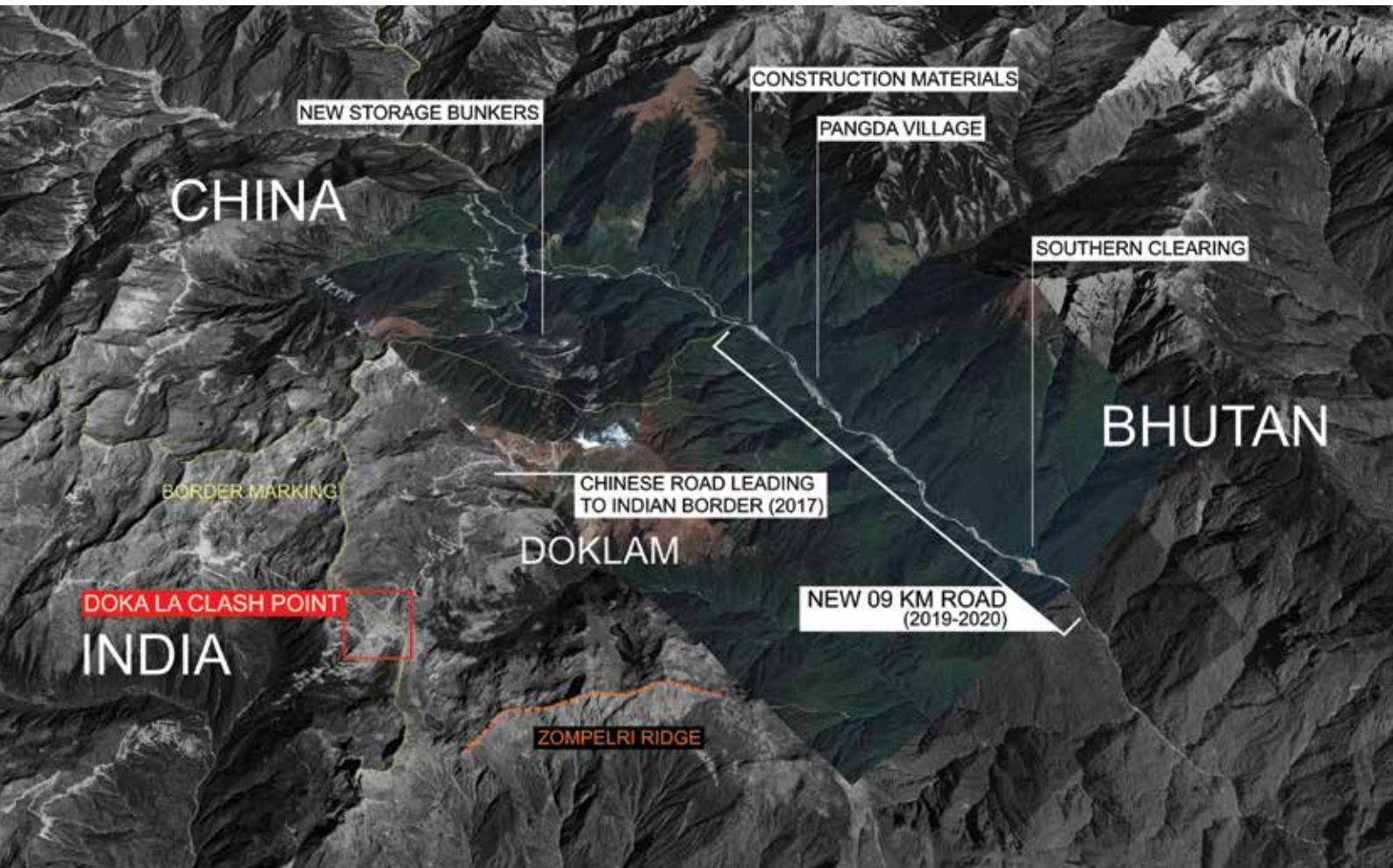
Since the 1960s, China constantly upgraded its hard infrastructure including road, rail and air connectivity, fortifying its military supply lines. It has managed to connect all passes and military posts along LAC with highways and logistical systems. China's



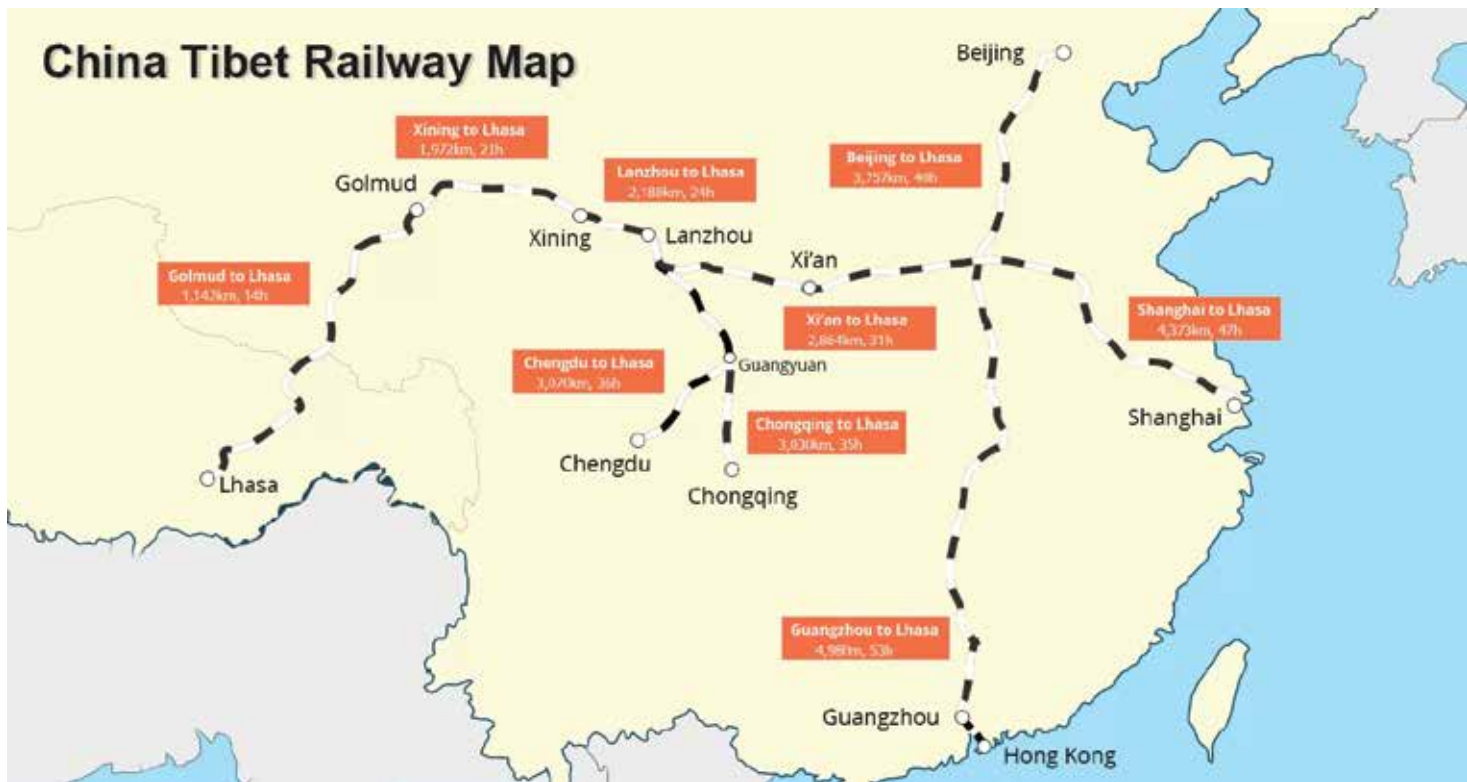
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The **chain of a constant** infrastructural upgrade along the Line of Actual Control (**LAC**) is a case of a **'security dilemma'**



Map showing extent of Chinese construction in Doklam area.



2,000 km rail line from Xining in Qinghai to Lhasa in Tibet.

massive infrastructural build-up along the LAC is enabled by the Western Theatre Command, by far the largest theatre command oriented towards India and counter-terrorism missions along China's Central Asian borders.

India watched China add thousands of kilometres of new road and rail links across Tibet, constructing an elaborate infrastructure connecting China's western frontier and its Han heartland. Also, Beijing upgraded its highway network in the Tibetan Autonomous Region comprising of the Western Highway, the Central Highway and the Eastern Highway.

Today, China has a formidable 96,000 km road network in Tibet and a 2,000 km rail line from Xining in Qinghai to Lhasa in Tibet. Additionally, China has expanded the railway line to Shigatse, a border town near the

## Beijing has ambitions to extend the Tibet train line from Lhasa to Yadong

Indian state of Sikkim. In Tibet, near Arunachal Pradesh, a railway line is also being built between Lhasa and Nyingchi.

Beijing has ambitions to extend the Tibet train line from Lhasa to Yadong, which is close to Nathu La in the vital Chumbi Valley on the Sino-Indian border. It has also developed four new airbases in Tibet in addition to three in southern China. It is developing and upgrading airports and helipads in the country, a large number of which are dual-use or military facilities.

Following the violent skirmishes in Galwan, China has upped its infrastructure upgrade with

a massive bridge able to carry heavier vehicles near the Pangong Tso Lake which has been the location of skirmishes between the two armies since May 2020.

Thus, what characterizes Chinese strategy today is the integrated use of political, economic, and military power, and it is using such assets to achieve its goals without engaging in a war. It has tended to avoid war altogether, following Sun Tzu's dictum of 'winning wars without fighting'.

Besides, Chinese 'Salami Slicing' tactics are being employed along the LAC in which it tests other claimants through aggressive actions and then backs off when



**October 2020**



**December 2019**

*New Chinese ammunition bunker facility seen 7 km from Doklam has been constructed in less than one year.*

it meets significant resistance. Thus, the Chinese are engaging in a malevolent form of war combined with pressure tactics and lawfare.

### India's Catch-up

The Galwan clashes in June 2020 and its aftermath saw quick troop deployment by both armies in the mountainous terrain with supplies or armaments bracing for a protracted conflict. India was successfully able to mobilize the resources to thwart China's advances in the Ladakh region. India's infrastructure upgradation played a crucial role in the logistics of the deployment.

India emboldened response could have been possible only because it had departed from its decades-long policy of neglecting infrastructure along the LAC. The year 2006 was a watershed year as after India's

Cabinet Committee on Security, chaired by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, cleared the construction of 608 km of roads along the India-China border.

This was after India came out from the 'defensive mindset' of letting old roads fall into disuse and refraining from building new ones thus doing away with the apprehension that China could use new roads to make quick inroads in the event of a military assault.

India reactivated a crucial airbase in Ladakh barely 20 km from the Chinese border. It also gave the green-light for the construction of four strategic roads along the China border, which are expected to radically improve India's ability to induct troops and reinforcements promptly.

Work on rail links too moved forward in 2014 when India took up the construction of four top-priority strategic railway lines along the China border. The 1,000 km of lines identified by the defence ministry were Missamari-Tawang (378 km) in Assam, Parashuram Kund- Rupai (256 km) in Assam-Arunachal Pradesh and Bilaspur-Mandi-Manali-Leh (498 km) in Himachal Pradesh-Jammu and Kashmir.

The Galwan clashes of June 2020 necessitated that India expedite the infrastructure development along the LAC. In 2021, India decided to build 44 key highways across the LAC. The government also identified 73 critical roads of 4,203 km in length on the borders with China.

Apart from these, over 21 roads of over 800 km are being constructed and upgraded by the Border Roads

Organisation. It was stated that the construction of 42 roads with a length of 1,530 km has been completed.

India also has strengthened its air infrastructure in Ladakh and other border areas and started constructing 36 new helipads, with a goal of linking remote parts across the border (especially in the western sector).

### Addressing The Asymmetry

China's massive military build-up along the LAC in the recent past has pushed India to mobilize forces to deter Beijing's advances. However, Indian troops are fully familiar with the alignment of the LAC in all sectors of the India-China border areas and abide scrupulously by it. They have been patrolling all along the LAC, including in the Galwan Valley, for a long time. All infrastructure



India's Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

built by the Indian side has always been on its own side of the LAC.

This was reiterated in a reply by the Ministry of External Affairs in 2021 when it said, "The Indian

side has never undertaken any actions across the LAC and has never attempted to unilaterally change the status quo. However, that has not been reciprocated by the Chinese side and that from time to time has led to face-offs."



Big Military Upside to China's New Bridge across Pangong Lake.



*An Indian Army convoy carrying reinforcements and supplies in the Ladakh region.*

Even then two years after the Galwan clashes in 2020, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army is yet to vacate some parts of eastern Ladakh on India’s side of the Line of Actual Control or ensure a return to the status quo ante. The Chinese have even made new permanent structures all along the LAC, thus contravening the past bilateral agreements and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), the latter devised by United Nations.

### **Border Violations**

Since 1981, when the first round of border talks was held, officials of both sides have met a number of times to find a solution to the protracted border issue. The two countries are also engaged in Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) on the border with bilateral agreements signed in 1993, 1996, 2005, 2012 and 2013.

Post-Galwan of June 2020, the CBM regime established to maintain peace and tranquillity

## India’s **infrastructure upgradation** played a **crucial role** in the **logistics** of the deployment

along the LAC has broken down due to China’s reluctance to disengage. India’s External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar had stated in June 2022 that “India will not allow any unilateral attempt by China to change the status quo or alter the Line of Actual Control (LAC).”

Jaishankar even added China, in violation of the 1993 and 1996 agreements not to mass troops on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), chose to do so, and added that its attempt was obviously to unilaterally change the LAC.

Post-Galwan, China has maintained that it abides by the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as proposed by Premier Zhou Enlai to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru

in a letter dated 07 November 1959. India is in denial of any such claim by Beijing and has termed the 1959 LAC calling it untenable and unilateral. India had indicated that the CBMs of 1993, 1996 and 2005 impressed upon the commitment of both sides to reach a common understanding of the alignment of the LAC.

Thus, differing perceptions on the alignment, LAC itself presents a problem. Given the present situation, there is a need for renegotiating the CBMs and ascertaining where the LAC lies today. However, Beijing’s preference of employing ‘Salami Slicing’ tactics to put India off-balance undermine efforts in the strengthening of the CBMs. 