

# India and China on the brink of War?

CLINCH IN A CORNER INDIA-CHINA-BHUTAN



CENTRE  
FOR INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS

Comment

7/2017

[www.csm.org.pl](http://www.csm.org.pl)

# IN FA

**Prof. D. K. Giri**

Comment published on courtesy of India News & Feature Alliance (INFA). India News & Feature Alliance (INFA) - CIR's partner in New Delhi is an independent communication agency, established in 1959. INFA offers a daily fare of news, features and analysis by experts on Indian politics, business and economics. It also reports major developments in India and its States as also about international relations. INFA Publication Division brings out two exclusive annuals: "India Who's Who" and "Press & Advertisers Year Book".

The stand-off that began in mid-June at the tri-junction between India, China and Bhutan seems to escalate into a full-scale war. Experts believe that a war is imminent between India and China unless the stand-off is de-escalated through talks. China demands the withdrawal of Indian troops before any talks could begin. India says troops from both sides should pull-out, the status quo ante at the tri-junction be restored, then only talks could start for the long-term solution of the border disputes. Neither side is prepared to accommodate the request of the other. Consequently, the stalemate continues, pushing both China and India to the brink of war.

## INDIA AND CHINA ON THE BRINK OF WAR?

CLINCH IN A CORNER INDIA-CHINA-BHUTAN

| Prof. D. K. Giri

2

In the media, speculations on war, albeit a limited one, continue to pour in. China would not back off, risk a loss of image of the biggest regional power and of an aspiring world super power. India would not pull out unilaterally lest it should be seen as a lesser power than China, unable or unwilling to defend its friends and allies. Secondly, for China, it would be giving up part of its territory for negotiation, on which it has bonafide claim.

India, although, at the moment is defending Bhutan's territorial claims, has serious security risks to let China build a road through Doklam. The road will bring China close to a spot, called the 'chicken neck' that connects India to its eight North-eastern States. India, at no cost, can allow this to happen. So, how will the impasse be resolved, with a war or diplomacy, or both? The jury is still out on these three possible scenarios.

### What is happening in Doklam?

Beijing was building a road up to a military base of Bhutan called Zompleri through a plateau known as Doklam. The plateau lies at the tri-junction between China, Indian State of Sikkim and Bhutan, and is currently disputed between Beijing and Thimpu. India supports Bhutan's claim over it. Beijing contends that as per the 1890 Border Settlement Agreement between China and Imperial Britain, the plateau belongs to China. Thimpu not being a part of the Agreement, disputes the claim. India, as the closest ally of Bhutan, and a stakeholder in the geo-politics of the area, backs up Thimpu on this. India also invokes China's position way back in 1955 and the recent agreement of 2012. In 1955, at the famous Bandung Conference, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai had said, "with some of our neighbouring countries, we have not yet fixed our border lines and we are ready to do so. But, before such negotiations can be held, we are willing to maintain the present situation by acknowledging that these parts of our border are parts which are undetermined. We will restrain our government and people from crossing even one step across our border (and) if such things do happen we (would) admit our mistakes. As to the



### INDIA AND CHINA ON THE BRINK OF WAR?

CLINCH IN A CORNER INDIA-CHINA-BHUTAN

| Prof. D. K. Giri

3

determination of common borders which we will be undertaking with our neighbouring countries, we shall use only peaceful means and we shall not permit any other kind of method. In no case, shall we change that.”

Beijing and its foreign policy establishment have obviously forgotten such a historic statement made by their famous leader, or they conveniently ignore it to undertake their territorial expansionism. Similarly, only five years ago, in 2012, India and China agreed that all disputed border areas will be re-determined through negotiation. China has clearly violated all these commitments. China commits these violations in a calculated way. It is just that it miscalculated its move this time around. Beijing thought of clandestinely constructing the road as Bhutan would not have the gall to resist. It did not anticipate such a strong reaction from New Delhi who, on a request from Kingdom of Bhutan, stepped in swiftly and stopped the construction work, mobilized its forces to prevent Chinese incursion. There have been such incursion by Chinese grazers, which have been ignored by Bhutanese, but a construction of a road up to Bhutanese border is unacceptable.

### Rather peace than war

Many argue that a limited military confrontation to end the deadlock is possible as a diplomatic solution is not in sight. The Indian NSA, Ajit Doval is in China to participate in the BRICs security conference. But, China has pre-empted any peaceful negotiation with Doval by branding him as a ‘schemer of the stand-off’. It is a continuation of their belligerent bullying tactic. However, a military conflict is unlikely for the following reasons:

1. There have been stand-offs in the past, in 1987 in Sumdorong Chu Valley, Arunachal Pradesh, which was resolved after six years through an agreement to ensure peace along the LAC. There were heavy posturing from both sides, but eventually they had to back-off and talk.
2. China’s strength is mainly its economy, the second largest in the world, which it has built through trade. It has huge trade deficits in its favour with many big countries, 346 billion USD with United States and 46.6 billion USD with India. In the trade negotiation with US last week, China has been strongly snubbed by US negotiators for dumping cheap steel into their country and creating a huge trade deficit against them.

### INDIA AND CHINA ON THE BRINK OF WAR?

CLINCH IN A CORNER INDIA-CHINA-BHUTAN

| Prof. D. K. Giri

4

China has been rattled. Likewise, they would not like to lose any part of the Indian market. Although Indians might go for cheaper Chinese goods, in case of war between the two countries, China need not underestimate the sudden surges of nationalism and mass boycott of Chinese goods. That will hit China below their belt. Beijing will not risk such a counter action.

3. China may be proving the Marxian axiomatic prognosis that the next stage of capitalism is imperialism. But, they would also heed the foreign policy dictum that pragmatism is the name of the game. Whilst China tries to encircle India by penetrating into India's neighbourhood, India is squeezing China internationally through its strategic partnerships with big powers Beijing would have to be mindful of - United States, Japan, Israel, Chinese antagonists in South East Asia, Mongolia, countries of European Union etc.

4. Both countries are nuclear powers. There are no winners or losers in a nuclear war, only losers. In desperation, nuclear countries can use the most disastrous earth-destroying nuclear weapons in a war situation. China is heavily wary of a tiny country like North Korea because of latter's nuclear arsenal. So, it may not mess up with India.

5. The whole world will like to prevent a war between the two most populous countries in the world, to big markets.

One is not sure of any occurrence in world politics including in bilateral relations. Anything is possible, even a war. At any rate, India needs to recognize China as the biggest threat to its security and growth. The big power play between New Delhi and Beijing will continue for long in the Asian theatre. India needs to match up to China in economy and military strength.

The only decisive edge India has over China is in diplomacy as it is a democracy and is not perceived by any as an aggressor country. So, until India is an equal power, in theory, to China it has to use its diplomatic prowess to contain and neutralize China. No doubt this is the biggest foreign policy challenge facing the Indian government led by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He may try to use his so-called 'charm-offensive' to meet this but there is no guarantee the conservative foreign policy establishment support him effectively.

**Prof. D. K. Giri**

Centre for International Relations (CIR) is an independent, non-government analytical centre established in 1996 which deals with Polish foreign policy and the most important issues of international politics. CIR is active in research, education and publishing, organises conferences and meetings, and participates in international projects in collaboration with similar institutions in many countries. CIR creates a forum for debate and exchange of ideas in matters of international politics, relations between states and challenges in the global world. CIR's activities are addressed above all to local-government officials and to entrepreneurs, as well as to officials of the central administration, politicians, diplomats, political scientists and the media. In 2014, CIR was again recognised as one of the best think-tanks in East-Central Europe in the study "The Leading Public Policy Research Organisations in the World" conducted by the University of Pennsylvania.

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ul. Mińska 25, 03-808 Warszawa t: +48 22 646 52 67

 [www.twitter.com/CIR\\_CSM](https://www.twitter.com/CIR_CSM)

 [www.facebook.com/CIR.CSM](https://www.facebook.com/CIR.CSM)



CENTRE  
FOR INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS