

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

Examine the Geo-strategic points of contention in the bilateral relationship between India and China.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 not a stray boundary row → structural contest for space + status between two rising powers **R2** **Pardesi's** overlapping spheres → Himalayas / South Asia / Indian Ocean as one rivalry, not many

Body flow

three-sector border → west: Aksai Chin (Xinjiang-Tibet highway) → east: "South Tibet" / Tawang → dispute rooted in Tibet + exiled Dalai Lama → second axis = encirclement → Pakistan + CPEC-through-PoK → BRI rejected on sovereignty → String of Pearls (Gwadar-Hambantota) → newer pressure = water → Yarlung Tsangpo mega-dam (Dec 2024), lower-riparian India → Galwan 2020 breaks 1988 consensus (**Banerjee**) → border now conditions everything → India-US + Quad convergence resented

Counter-view

interdependence + BRICS pull toward engagement → Oct 2024 Dapsang-Demchok accord restores some calm

Conclusion routes

R1 points interlock — territory, Tibet, Pakistan, ocean, water — one contest for Asian primacy **R2** thaw incremental, not settlement (**Joshi**) → frontier peace the precondition → contention stays geo-strategic and open

The friction between India & China is not a stray boundary quarrel but a structural contest for space & status between two rising powers with overlapping spheres.

The rivalry, Manjeet S. Pargesi argues runs across shared arenas i.e. the Himalayas, South Asia & increasingly, the Indian Ocean. The oldest fault line is the unsettled border in three sectors. In the West lies Aksai Chin, valued less in law than for the highway linking Xinjiang with Tibet. In the east China calls Arunachal Pradesh "South Tibet" & presses hardest on Tawang. The dispute is inseparable from Tibet: its 1950-51 annexation made China a neighbour, and the exiled Dalai Lama keeps it politically live.

China's all-weather ties with Pakistan, and the corridor through PoK, pushed India to reject the BRI on sovereignty grounds.

Its ring of ports from Gwadar to Hambantota contests Indian primacy in the neighbourhood.

In December 2024 China cleared a mega-dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo before it enters India as the Brahmaputra, leaving lower- riparian India exposed to manipulated flows.

Galwan (2020) hardened all of this. It broke the 1988 consensus that had kept the border apart from the wider relationship, Mayuri Banerjee argues the frontier now conditions everything. China resents India's convergence with the US & the quad.

Manoj Joshi argues that the October 2024 patrolling accord at Depsang & Demchok brings incremental calm, non-settlement. The contention stays geo-strategic & open.