China-India Border Clash: What’s Behind China’s Belligerence?

TRANSCRIPT

Discussion

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Husain Haqqani:

Hello and welcome to our worldwide virtual audience. The last two weeks have witnessed some clashes between China and India, the two most populous nations in the world, both nuclear armed, and both with a disputed border of more than 2000 miles. What does this mean for the world? What does it mean for India and China?

The most important context of course, is that it shows Chinese aggressive behavior, and it also points against the conventional wisdom of some, that China's rise is going to be peaceful. We at Hudson Institute have always questioned that notion. And today we will analyze not only the India-China clash, but also what it means both in understanding Chinese behavior and how to deal with it.

With me for this discussion today are Patrick Cronin, who is the Asia Pacific Security Chair here at Hudson Institute. His work analyzes the challenges and opportunities confronting the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.

We also have Dr. John Lee, who is a Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute. He has in the past served as a Senior National Security Advisor to the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, and has served as the Principal Advisor on Asia and for Economic, Strategic, and Political Affairs to the Australian government about the Indo-Pacific region.

Lastly, we have Dr. Aparna Pande. She is the Director of Hudson Institute’s Initiative on the Future of India, and is the author of a forthcoming book, Making India Great: The Promise of a Reluctant Great Power.

So let’s begin with you Aparna. Why don't you tell us what has been happening and what does it mean for India above all?

Aparna Pande:

Thank you, Ambassador. It's a pleasure to be on a panel with Hudson colleagues and friends. The India-China border dispute is a legacy of the colonial era, with modern India accepting the boundary line that it inherited from the British Empire. China, however, has never accepted the borders it inherited and, since the 1950s, has consistently sought to change the ground reality along the 2,167-mile long border that India refers to as the Line of Actual Control.

The last time the two countries fought a war was in 1962, but ever since there have been skirmishes at periodic intervals through the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. The current standoff, however, represents an escalation not seen since 1962. Twenty (20) Indian soldiers were killed, 76 more were injured, and 10 were initially captured and then later released by the Chinese. PLA troops were also injured and killed, though as of now there is no official number released by Beijing.

The latest standoff dates back to April of this year and it took place in Ladakh — in the former Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir — at three different places: Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, and Hot Springs. The PLA moved its troops forward seeking to take over territory it had not taken over in earlier years. This led to border skirmishes. In early June after military and diplomatic level talks, the two sides engaged in what is referred to as de-escalation. However, during this de-escalation process, a violent clash took place which resulted in deaths and injuries on both sides.

China has used the last few decades of peace with India — China is today one of the largest trading partners of India — but it has used these decades to actually build its capability and infrastructure on its side of the Line of Actual Control. It has airstrips, helipads, and the ability to bring in thousands of troops
at short notice. India, however, is far behind and it's still playing catch up. In the last few years, as India has upped its ante and built infrastructure, the standoffs have been increasing and will most likely continue in the months and years to come. I will stop now. Thank you.

Husain Haqqani:

Good. Well, John, it's obvious that this hasn't come in isolation. There has been Chinese aggressive behavior for a while. There's been aggressive behavior in Southeast Asia, what people call the “salami slicing” approach to the South China Sea — you know, get little bits and pieces at one time, not big enough for the rest of the world to think of full-fledged war or full-fledged military action, but regaining territory. Of course, they are not making new islands, at least in the Himalayas, they can't do that, but they are slowly two steps forward, one step backward. They are already one step ahead.

Then there is the behavior in Hong Kong. There have been economic threats against Australia. And there has been belligerence generally towards Southeast Asia, Taiwan, Japan. How do you see the situation evolving and what does it mean for the security of the Indo-Pacific?

John Lee:

Thank you, Ambassador, and great to be with my Hudson colleagues. I've been watching China's behavior for quite a long time being where I am in Sydney or Canberra, Australia. If you look from East Asia to South Asia to the continental borders China has, Beijing has a general approach when it comes to dealing with territorial or political disputes. It will seek to change the territorial or the political or even the psychological status quo in its favor. And then, and only then, seek to deescalate through dialogue and diplomacy, all the while holding on to the gains that it has achieved during that period. But if we include coercive measures to compel the other countries having a dispute with [inaudible 00:06:44] to ensure that that issue remains a bilateral issue between China and that country.

The one exception I think is that when it comes to countries more powerful than China, which is to say the United States, this is where Beijing will actively try to... not multilateralize but expand the issue into the global conversation. It will use its tools of propaganda and other messaging tools to win friends and condemn the United States.

Now, if Beijing believes another country that is a very weaker country is itself changing the territorial, the political, or the psychological status quo against Beijing's interests, then Beijing will do its best to [inaudible 00:07:34] wrestle back that advantage, even if that other country is simply responding to what China had previously done, which is particular to the Indian situation. And I think this is when Beijing is most enraged. And this is when you see the most feral side of Chinese diplomacy. It is currently doing that against my country, Australia, and one can argue it's doing that against India at the moment because New Delhi is daring to increase building infrastructure on its side of the Line of Actual Control.

With respect to India, it seems to me that Beijing has become used to getting its way and this is so, I think, for several reasons. One, as Aparna mentioned, China is well ahead on building infrastructure, roads, checkpoints, moving its troops to strategic positions on its side of the Line of Actual Control. And two, Beijing has generally been able to control the pace of escalation and de-escalation, escalating when they're gaining advantage, and de-escalating when it presents that advantage as a fait accompli to Indians.

So, in this context, it seems to me that China has been or has become alarmed by India's bold proactive tendencies in recent times. This includes New Delhi reaching out to Taiwan, restricting Chinese foreign direct investment, greater warming towards the QUAD when before it was being beleaguered, and of
course formally stripping Jammu and Kashmir of autonomy in 2019, which has implications regarding China and India potentially in Ladakh.

So, sure enough, the rage and I would say the scornfulness against India — and you see that from Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi down to the Chinese ambassador down to the state press such as the Global Times — that rage and scornfulness has been dolled up several notches since last year. In fact, I think there are strong similarities between China’s approach to India at the moment with China’s approach to Australia. It is driven by deep anger, as much as it is about some sort of tactical or strategic play by the Chinese.

Now very quickly, and we can discuss the broader region during the questions, but some broad Indian options. Let me just offer some general comments because I think there’s still too many unknowns about the current situation to speak authoritatively on it.

Beijing has been effective because it negotiates with actions while other countries give up leverage and seek to negotiate with words. So, my advice would be to offer whatever soothing words you want, if you’re the Indians, but try to extend your practical leverage and advantage as much as possible whilst that diplomatic conversation takes place. You don’t cease your activities whilst you have that diplomatic conversation.

Beijing has shown that it offers no meaningful concessions, regardless of whether New Delhi is escalating or deescalating, regardless of whether New Delhi is pursuing a proactive or passive policy. And this extends not just to the border dispute but to other issues, for example, the Quad, relations with the United States and Taiwan, investment restrictions, export controls, and so on. So it seems to me that New Delhi, if anything, should err on the side of being too proactive rather than too passive, because to put it very simply Beijing will continue to do whatever it wants regardless of what New Delhi is actually doing diplomatically.

But moreover, New Delhi needs, I think, to wrestle back control of the Chinese narrative that this is a historical dispute between India and China and it is no one else’s business. At issue here, I think, is the totality and the pattern of Chinese behavior and Chinese coercion with respect to all of Beijing’s territorial and political disputes, not just the one with India. And Beijing is by far the most or the more revisionist, by far the more aggressive, by far the more coercive, and by far the less trustworthy when it comes to dealing with countries with which it has disputes.

In a COVID-19 world, which we’re currently in, where Chinese actions are increasingly being called out in all parts of the world, India will win more friends and sympathy than will Beijing if these actions are called out.

Finally, it’s heartening that India is invited to attend the G7 summit later this year by President Trump. My suggestion is India should make a show of being a natural maritime and continental counterpoint to the values and the policies of China in the region. The appetite for that is strong. So, there are favorable winds if India and other countries so choose in the next few months ahead.

I’ll stop there and cut back when there’re questions. Thank you, Ambassador.

Husain Haqqani:

Great. The most important thing that I heard from John Lee was about how India sometimes lets China, not sometimes, but most of the time, let’s China get its way. Some people would argue that a lot many countries let that happen and so we will come back to that theme. And why is that?
Patrick Cronin, you've written about China's “total competition” sort of campaign and the need for strengthening US alliances and partnerships. Let us talk about this particular situation in the context of that. Are we really sort of ready for China's challenge? And do we have the alliances and partnerships in place or is it a lot of talk?

I mean, India, for example, had what was known as the Wuhan spirit and then was it the Mamallapuram sort of summit and came back saying, "Now we've talked to China and we've got something under control." President Trump has repeatedly said, "I've talked to president Xi and things are okay and they're going to be very good. They're going to be beautiful." They don't seem to be beautiful. So what direction are we headed?

Patrick M. Cronin:

Well Ambassador Haqqani, as you know so well, international relations are a messy business, but we try to make them seem clear and coherent and rational. And I suspect we're all guilty here today of trying to make policies that are quite complicated and sometimes contradictory seem streamlined and rational.

But in that vein, let me start by saying that I do see what China's doing along the Himalayan frontier with India as part of their “total competition” campaign. The calculus that is been made in Beijing and by Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party seems rather clear, because we now have eight plus years under Xi Jinping to watch the pattern grow.

So, I'd say these actions that were taken on the 15th of June were premeditated. They were part of a pugnacious even overextended foreign policy hand that Xi Jinping is increasingly playing around the region and globally. It's hard not to see Beijing's external policy as driven by this kind of incremental imperial expansion. It wants to control the future economic-technological connectivity and lines of communication, well beyond the old Silk Road and throughout the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

It's asserting administrative, legalistic, and even physical control over its periphery. It's opposed the defense improvements by others. They're always bad by Chinese definition. And their sort of inflated sense of becoming a preeminent regional military power is increasingly showing — not just in the tabloid newspaper like The Global Times that John Lee rightly called out as being always on the front lines of their “wolf warrior” sort of media diplomacy — but, under Xi, the military is looking for its first combat experience since 1985.

If you go back to the 1962 war, China brought in not only tactical military superiority over India, but also recent military experience from, frankly, fighting Americans and South Koreans in the Korean war. And they were bursting, but they've not had that kind of combat experience and not spilled blood in combat until really June 15th, even if that combat in this case was a rather medieval melee, not sort of modern conventional capabilities.

I see ominous parallels as well between China's dredging and reclamation of the South China Sea, something you mentioned Ambassador Haqqani, with what China has done to nudge forward in the Himalayan frontier. Creating the canals that were created in the Galwan River, for instance, over this past decade can be likened to the dredging and the building of artificial island reefs in the Spratlys.

I think that the “nine-dash line” claim and the South China Sea goes back to what Aparna was talking about. The fact that PRC has never accepted the Line of Actual Control, the McMahon line. They were not at that conference from their perspective and they've been challenging it and trying to challenge it with facts on the ground. They did it in the '50s and '62, and they've been doing it incrementally more recently as well.
When you go back to the '62 war, it was very interesting to see that it was Nehru and the Indians seeking the opportunity that they thought existed because China looked like it was down. Its alliance with the Soviet Union was fractured. They were having internal trouble. Remember Mao was worried about some kind of a coup inside. He'd fired his hero defense chief, put him in exile in a traitor’s home in Peking, in Beijing.

And Mao had said, "I want armed coexistence. I want to push back on the Indians. You wave a gun and I'll wave a gun," Mao said. "We'll stand face-to-face and each practice our courage." Well, we saw that at Doklam in 2017. We saw it over the last few months and now on June 15th.

They're really wanting to challenge the neighbors. Not, as John Lee said, United States directly, but they're challenging in all the seams of relations that exist along their borders.

Let me just quickly say that the other two basic drivers here for China's calculus, it's not just been the sense of sovereignty, but it's also been the opportunity that I've just really been trying to highlight — the global pandemic, the economic and social fallout from that, US election, even probably John Bolton's book, who knows? But the point is that the Chinese sense of an opportunity. And they know it's a limited opportunity, because they know that there is a lot of political pushback on China if the democracies in particular can get their act together. So, the Chinese are seizing this opportunity.

If you go back to the 1962 war, when did that war begin? It began right after the Cuban Missile Crisis was setting it. That's no accident. And this was no accident I would submit. This was a deliberate time challenge by the Chinese of the Indians.

And the third issue is: Xi Jinping needs domestic support. He is losing, probably — or gaining really doubts about his leadership, about his governance — ever since the economy started to slow down. That's been hastened further by the pandemic, the handling of the pandemic, the relations souring with other countries around the world. All of those are probably calling into question Xi Jinping's leadership at a time when his doubling down on the Sinosphere, and cracking down on the Uyghurs, in Tibet, and Hong Kong, and threatening Taiwan, all of that, and even threatening Australia, and the “cold war” with the United States so-called in the Chinese press.

All of these actions, I think, are being second guessed by thinking Chinese who really wonder whether Xi Jinping is the man to lead them to this China Dream or whether the China Dream and Xi Thought maybe should take a different direction here in the next few years.

I'm going to stop there because I do want to come back in the Q&A and talk about US policy and what else we can do to build on what I think is bipartisan support for this long-term US-India and US-India-Australia-Japan QUAD, and just supporting India's peaceful rise.

Husain Haqqani:

Well, everyone has spoken about the need for alignments and alliances. India doesn't like the term alliance very much. It usually wants to be a partner, friend, or a whatever else, but not an ally because they still have some hangover from their non-alignment. They think that a military Alliance is somehow flawed.

Do the Chinese sense an opportunity there, Aparna? Because after all India has deepened its partnership with Australia, with the United States, with Japan, with the Southeast Asian nations. But at the same time, there seems to be a reluctance, even now. Prime Minister Modi's sort of attempt to try and play down the significance of what China did and saying that the Chinese haven't taken our
territory, et cetera, which basically means that they are trying to redefine the Line of Actual Control instead of saying, "Hey, the Chinese have by force strike changed the Line of Actual Control."

So, do we sense a reluctance on the part of — On the one hand, to India's credit, they are the one country that has consistently for the last two, three decades said that China's rise is not going to be peaceful. And that China's intentions are not as simple as some American administrations also seems to indicate they thought that they were. So where does India stand, and what is India planning, if anything?

Aparna Pande:

Thank you, Ambassador. Yes, India would prefer a hedging strategy. And that is what India has done in the last decade or two. While India has come closer to the United States, India is part of QUAD, India is part of Indo-Pacific strategy, and India has been building infrastructure. India is still reluctant to openly state or challenge China. Prime Minister Modi's speech, I think two years ago in Shangri-La, had basically said that Indo-Pacific is not anti or against any country and even China can be part of Indo-Pacific strategy if it so desires.

The second part to this concern also is that, however close India becomes to any country, India does not believe that a country will send troops to the Himalayan border. And so, even if India does have support in Indo-Pacific and in the maritime domain from Australia, the ASEAN countries, United States, Japan, on the land border with China, India is alone.

There are those who argue however, that the way to push back against China is, one, maritime. India is a continental and maritime power. For decades, India's policy has always been to view itself as a continental power and not a maritime one. So, India has not really built its maritime capabilities, which can actually push back against China. And there, its partnerships or alliances with other countries would be useful. I think that's where I'll stop. Thank you.

John Lee:

Ambassador, if I could just quickly add something there. I was in the Australian government when the QUAD was re-instituted in 2017. And when we dealt with our Indian counterparts, in Australia — of course, the India-Australia relationship was probably the weakest link in the QUAD — every time we spoke to the Indian officials, they would always raise this issue of non-alignment. And the Australian approach, which I was part of, was to change the language from non-alignment to strategic autonomy.

And I think there's a big difference there, because the argument we're trying to make to New Delhi was: what you really want is strategic autonomy, strategic freedom. So, the question is: what gives you more autonomy and freedom of action? Joining the QUAD or not joining the QUAD, in light of China's actions?

That's the way, in Australia, we tried to get around this non-alignment concept and move to strategic autonomy. There are people here on this call who are much more educated about Indian policy than I am, but I sense that strategic autonomy is probably where India is heading as opposed to strict non-alignment.

Husain Haqqani:

Strategic autonomy is the term that is used more in India now. But the fact still remains that India's military modernization is behind schedule. India also has not increased its defense budget significantly for several years. And India's foreign policy still remains one in which they sort of come to Western
nations and democracies and talk about the potential of China encircling India, but at the same time, they go to China and they say nicer things there.

Aparna talked about a hedging strategy. John, don’t you think that maybe a lot of countries, including Australia, have had a hedging strategy. There are people like you, there are others, there have been officials, who do not want to hedge. But by and large, China has had the advantage of — because of its deep economic ties, because of its penetration of intellectual institutions, academic institutions, debate, discourse — two, three decades of not being seen as a challenger. It has actually been able to install itself in a situation where people are kind of divided. “Do we really need to confront them?” “Should we just kind of get along?” “Why can’t we all get along?” And that does produce a hedging strategy that is not conducive to a strategy of collective containment of the kind that was put in place after the second World War vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.

John Lee:

Yes. I think China has been very clever until recently in persuading countries that, “hey, you’re better off hedging, you’re better off staying on the sidelines, seeing what the future holds for you, rather than taking tough decisions.” And that suits China because it is China who is the one changing the status quo. So, if you want to change the status quo, it's in your interest to tell everyone else essentially to remain on the sidelines or not take any hard decisions.

In the current or the present day, my personal assessment of my region is that outside of the United States, Japan, Australia, increasingly India, and Vietnam, every other country is essentially hedging. No particularly maritime country likes what China's doing, but it's only those countries that I mentioned that have moved decisively from hedging to balancing and countering. Every other country's hedging. And I think that presents problems, as you raise, for the QUAD countries and countries like Vietnam, because it is very difficult to move these countries out of that hedging mindset given they've had this mindset for so long.

Husain Haqqani:

It's interesting that Vietnam itself has experienced Chinese aggression in the past. So, one understands why they are, along with India, countries that are concerned about Chinese aggression. And the others, sort of possibly have hedging strategies also because they don't have the kind of muscle that might be needed to confront China if a stage of confrontation arrives.

Patrick, two things. You spoke about Xi Jinping's domestic compulsions. Now he has of course abandoned the whole notion of collective leadership and has emerged as the leader and wants to be the leader for an indefinite period. That definitely encourages a more aggressive external policy because, when things are not going right, such leaders usually do try to generate nationalism by taking on external enemies. Should we be even more concerned than the four of us already are about Xi Jinping's domestic compulsions leading to greater assertiveness and aggression abroad?

And secondly, what do you think the United States is doing and can be doing in relation to China's assertiveness or aggression?

Patrick M. Cronin:

Well, those are excellent questions. I think we should be worried, but in measured terms of trying to shore up deterrence all around where there are flashpoints. Obviously Hong Kong, I think, was collateral damage for some of what Beijing was feeling and wanting to do to exert its nationalism, knowing that
there was very little the international community could do directly in response to imposing this national security law, which is still in draft, but probably be completed in the next couple of weeks, and will essentially end the one country, two systems. It'll be one system imposed on Hong Kong well before the 2047 deadline of the handover treaty of Hong Kong.

Talking about strategic autonomy, Hong Kong thought it had some, but time ran out early because Xi Jinping needed to exercise that power because his drive to be in power for a third and maybe longer term is called into question.

We've seen the decibels of the rhetoric of China rising over the last six months. We've seen their nibbling strategy get more aggressive, including in the South China Sea, including the military threats toward Taiwan. And now we've got actual bloodshed by Chinese troops on their border.

The Chinese are very reluctant to talk about the casualties. Aparna said we don't know the number of casualties. That's correct. Although the Indian press has been reporting from government sources, presumably, that the Indian government handed over 16 bodies. Sixteen dead Chinese soldiers. So, at a minimum, 16 Chinese soldiers were killed in that melee on the 15th of June that happened over five hours on that night in the Galwan Valley and nearby. That is a watershed.

If we go back to the 1950s, we go back to China pushing and pushing and pushing, Mao's strategy of “armed coexistence” as he called it was to gradually raise the escalation. And eventually in '62 between the spring and October when they finally really sort of clobbered, from their perspective, taught the Indians a lesson, thought Nehru a lesson — although the numbers of casualties on both sides were not so disproportionate, nonetheless — the Chinese came out looking like they were the stronger power and they had proven their power at the time. And China was not to be underestimated.

And that was certainly a lesson for India. And ever since then, India has built up greater capabilities, including on the frontier. But I think, as Aparna and you have said Ambassador, it's lagged behind what they need to do. And I think that's really one of the lessons here.

US policy needs to be building on the bipartisan support that we've seen growing over the last couple of decades in particular. Remember our strategic partnership, the new framework for US-India defense relations, was struck only 15 years ago. It's amazing what we've been able to do in that 15 years, if you want to look at the glass half full. If you're looking at the glass half empty, then you're asking all the doubts about why hasn't there been more specific concrete sort of achievements with the US defense technology and trade initiative that was struck under the Obama administration and has been redoubled under the Trump administration.

But there is progress going on in that defense relationship. And it's not just on maritime domain awareness and anti-submarine warfare, it's also on technology. Very important for us to keep improving that to help make sure that India is able to maintain deterrence.

John was absolutely right about the limits of what India was willing to do, the weak link of the QUAD — of the Quadrilateral arrangement and that strategic dialogue plus of Japan, Australia, India, and United States — but in the Indian Ocean, in South Asia, that's where India has the proximity. That's where India has the maximum strategic interests. And so, we're simply pushing on an open door to try to help them economically, technologically, militarily.

Final thought here, Ambassador Haqqani, is that the QUAD, for all of its absence of architecture and institutionalization, is a potent latent capability. It's one that really does frighten leaders in Beijing. Because the idea that these four large capable democracies could combine their forces against China's interests, well, they do worry about that and they want to kind of nip that in the bud.
So, the short answer to your question is: we should be concerned, but there are a lot of things that we can continue to do to deter China and to push back and to expand our own interests and values. And yes, look for a vision that can bring China into this inclusive Free and Open Indo-Pacific in the long-term. Thank you.

**Husain Haqqani:**

So, is the consensus here that these incidents along the Himalayan border do reflect a more aggressive, more assertive China? That the democracies need to not only shed any doubts they have about China's aggressive behavior, but they also need to come together to have a strategy that bolsters those who will physically be facing the Chinese aggression, like the Indians and other countries in the Indo-Pacific? Final thoughts, anyone? John?

**John Lee:**

Well, I would certainly say that what's occurred on the border — and it's been interesting, in Australia, we never really used to pay a lot of attention to the border dispute between India and China — it's not just that there have been casualties. This is the first time, strategically and politically, our political class have watched what has occurred between India and China and linked that to the common maritime and economic interests that we have with India and the other QUAD countries.

As I mentioned, the four QUAD countries are the four countries that recognize the need to balance, recognize the need to counter, and in some respects recognize the need to contain China. They are also the four countries that are having a genuine conversation about economics and supply chains and so on in terms of how to re-orientate those outside China. So, I think what this border clash has done... you know, Xi has done many things to anger many countries at many different times, but I think this border clash, as far as the QUAD countries are concerned, has given the QUAD quite a big push forward.

**Husain Haqqani:**

And the very fact that China didn't use regular means of warfare — the Indian soldiers who died were clubbed with special clubs that actually had barbed wire put onto them to make them more effective — actually kind of reflects China's overall approach. "Hey, we didn't shoot," but they still managed to kill.

Aparna, what are your final thoughts?

**Aparna Pande:**

Three quick points. I'll echo part of what John said and Patrick said. One, the QUAD is something that China is worried and concerned about, especially because now we are talking about QUAD plus, which includes ASEAN — and even many of the European countries, like France and Germany, are playing a bigger role. So, you may have more democracies which have military and maritime presence in the region.

Second, India has been speaking about including Australia in the Malabar military exercises in addition to Japan. So, it would be a kind of a QUAD military exercise, even if not under QUAD, and that would send a message to Beijing.

Finally, India as part of the Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific, and QUAD strategies, maybe India could also finally boost its Andaman and Nicobar Command, because that lies straight on the Malacca straits and that will have an impact on how China use Indo-Pacific. So, I think there's a lot India can do.
Final thought, India does not like alliances, but in 1971, India did sign a treaty with the Soviet Union. Even if temporary, the aim was to send a message to China and maybe to United States.

Husain Haqqani:

Yeah. One issue we did not address was, what Aparna talked about, India's concerns that it is alone when it comes to defending its land borders. And even if it became part of formal alliances or the QUAD became a formal arrangement, that would not serve it against its land-based adversaries. And there the China-Pakistan tie-up matters a lot more to Indians than it has so far mattered to most of India's partners.

I think that those issues may have to be dealt with to make sure that the QUAD is more effective, not only as a maritime arrangement for the Indo-Pacific, but also for the Indo-Pacific littoral, which includes the Himalayan border and the Pakistan border.

Patrick, what are your final thoughts?

Patrick M. Cronin:

Well, I think the Himalayans provide a pretty good natural frontier even in the 21st century. So that land border is not quite as permeable as it may seem, even if the Chinese keep making encroachments.

Secondly, while the United States and Japan and Australia may not want to get involved in India's land border struggles, that doesn't mean they don't fully support democratic India's aspirations, technology, economy, politics, exchanges, all of those things indirectly, at least, and some of them maybe more directly do help. We don't have to go back to the covert war of “Establishment 22” — go back and look it up, read your history, very good covert cooperation between India and the United States into Tibet — but, if the Chinese are watching, I hope they do think about that lesson because maybe there is that potential for covert cooperation between the United States and India, Japan, and Australia against malign threats, against things that specifically are aggressive. Not against China. Not against the Chinese people for certain, but against the aggression or aggressive acts taken by the CCP.

If they want to get aggressive, we have capabilities. I think we have to take the long view. I think John Lee rightly pointed out the G7/11 that hopefully will come up here this fall. Even with our election underway, if the QUAD could meet on the side of that arrangement, if democracies could speak up on behalf of India, I think that would be very useful. And I would encourage, as well, any Indian and other leaders to meet with Joe Biden at the same time during that visit, because there is bipartisan support for the QUAD, for US-India, for Australia, Japan to kind of take a leading role in helping work with ASEAN and Europe and others around the world to make sure we remain in a peaceful, rules-based system. So, we have to take the long view, regardless of all the upheaval we see this year.

So, I'm optimistic, Ambassador Haqqani, that this is going to be a great growing relationship for the US, India, Australia, and Japan.

Husain Haqqani:

I think most people on this panel would share that view. In fact, all of us would share that view. I think it's very obvious that the Indo-Pacific and its security remains an important concern for all the countries that we mentioned — not only in the QUAD, but others as well. And that China's aggressive and assertive behavior continues to be an important concern. Above all, we need to be aware of it.
So, thank you all for joining me today, Patrick Cronin, John Lee, Aparna Pande. And that brings our discussion to an end.

Aparna Pande:
Thank you.

Patrick M. Cronin:
Thank you.

John Lee:
Thank you.