



## Tensions in the Himalayas: A Conversation

Ambassador Nirupama Rao, Dr. Arunabh Ghosh, Dr. Shen Dingli, NCUSCR Vice President  
Jan Berris (moderator)

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Transcript (Unedited)

Jan Berris: Let me say good morning to some of you, and good evening to the rest of you. I'm Jan Berris, Vice-President of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, and I'm delighted to welcome all of you, no matter what time zone you're in. And I'm particularly pleased to be moderating today's event, as I know all three of our speakers, and have great admiration for each of them. As you have their bios and presumably have read them, I'm not going to go into great detail, but rather, introduce them quite briefly in the order that they will speak, because we want to leave as much time as possible for our discussion.

Arunabh Ghosh, Harvard historian of 20th-century China, interested in social, economic and the environmental aspects of the relationship, is a relatively new friend, since we just met last year when we selected him to be a member of our latest cohort of public intellectuals. But it was clear right from the beginning that we were going to be very proud of him, and we're really delighted to have him as a PIP fellow.

I was privileged to meet Nirupama Rao over a decade ago, when she very graciously hosted...over the course of a couple of years, hosted three different groups of PIP fellows in her residences to a wonderful Indian meal when she was ambassador, first...India's ambassador to China, and then India's ambassador to the United States. She has also been India's foreign secretary and its high commissioner to Sri Lanka. And on top of all that, she is a wonderful poet and singer.

And then, Shen Dingli, Professor Shen, as both a professor and former Executive Dean at Fudan University at its Institute of International Studies. He is the former director of Fudan's Center for American Studies and one of Shanghai's top China hands and international specialists. He is an old friend of over 30 to 35 years, and we spend a lot of time together at various conferences and [inaudible 00:03:17] dialogues. And I am really pleased that our friendship has weathered not only the intensity of some of those meetings, but also the ups and downs of U.S.-China relations.

We are honored to bring the three of you together to share your views on the long-simmering, recently volatile, and potentially very dangerous border tensions in the Himalayas. We have... We are asking each of our speakers to make some brief opening remarks of about...not to surpass seven or eight minutes. And we've asked our historian Arunabh Ghosh to provide an overview of Sino-Indian relations, but not just relying on history, but also some of the sociological and cultural aspects of this complex relationship. And then, we've asked Ambassador Rao and Professor Shen to lay out a prospectus of India and China, respectively.

After that, we will have a brief discussion among our speakers, but we do want to leave time for ample questions from our audience, because it's a very knowledgeable one. We're very pleased to have so many...a mix of people from, as I said, various countries, various continents. And we welcome all of your questions. We ask that you raise them by clicking the Q&A icon located at the bottom of your screen, and then typing in your question. Please be sure to include your name and affiliation, and identify who you wish to answer the question, if that's applicable.

Please note that we have disabled the chat function, except that we will be using it to post resources and links that are pertinent to the discussion, including interviews, podcasts, and articles by our three speakers. Also, please note that this meeting is on the record and being recorded, so that we can post it on our website. And with that, I'd like to turn it over to Professor Ghosh.

Arunabh Ghosh: All right, thank you so much, Jan. And thank you to the National Committee. It's wonderful to be here with Ambassador Rao and Professor Shen. I'm going to try and make four very brief points, as a way of setting up the discussion. I won't go into too much detail about what's been happening right now. I think we'll hear about that from both Ambassador [inaudible 00:05:59] and Professor Shen. So what I'd like to do is, first, describe to you what I see as the broad frameworks. There are two dominant frameworks, I think, that inform the way in which we think about China and India, sort of one that's largely driven by civilizational comparisons, and the other that was driven by realpolitik.

Then, I'll give you a sense of what I see as being some very interesting symmetries and asymmetries in China and India today. Then, I'll talk about what I see as something that complicates the situation, which is the poor level of general awareness in China and India...sort of a mutual lack of awareness in China and India, which I think exacerbates the probability of things getting out of hand. And then, finally, I'll try and bring the conversation to the U.S. a bit, and reflect a little bit about how some of this might affect the U.S., or how the U.S. might be involved in some of this.

So to the first one, dominant frameworks. As I said, there are two dominant frameworks that sort of, I think, inform the way in which we think about China and India. On the one hand, you have the civilizational comparisons, and then on the other, you have realpolitik. And they are sort of divided, as you can imagine, temporarily. The civilizational really focuses on 19th century and earlier, realpolitik is what begins to become dominant in the era of nation states, in particular after the creation of the Republic of China in 1912, but really after the Second World War, where it becomes much more about international relations and state-to-state relations.

But beyond sort of the temporal, there are other ways in which there are interesting distinctions. The civilizational takes much more seriously an exploration of cultural, social kinds of connections. It's much more interested in mapping out, sort of...say, for instance, the history. What is another way in which it travelled from India to China over millennia? But the realpolitik one is really much more interested in looking at interstate relations and where the border then becomes the primary focal point. There are aberrations, but the border really becomes the central focal point of this.

What's important in this framework is to recognize that each of them comes with significant blind spots. So in the civilizational, what becomes a major blind spot is the actual messiness of pre-modern political history. So given that you have these all-encompassing categories of an Indic civilization and a Sinic civilization, how do you then account for sub-regional qualities that are often fighting with each other or are forming alliances with each other? And I'll just give one example that's pertinent to the conversation today, which is, there was a Tibetan invasion of Ladakh in the late 17th century, which also then drew in Mongol forces and Mughal forces.

And a lot of the fighting and where the negotiation ended up is relevant to where the border is being debated today. But those weren't really qualities that were engaged. We wouldn't think of them as Indic and Sinic. These were, from [inaudible 00:09:01] perspective, sub-national qualities that were engaged. So how do we account for this in that civilizational framework, I think, becomes somewhat awkward.

Now, of course, the realpolitik framework also encounters significant blind spots, which is that it doesn't account for the tremendous amounts of exchanges that do exist between China and India in the 20th century, across cultural, economic, social realms that are not just between the two countries, but are taking place in what you can think of as third countries or third places, places like southeast Asia, and now increasingly in the U.S., which I'll come to at the end. So the other interesting point, I think, in thinking about these frameworks, is that as we have transitioned from one to the other, there's been a need slippage, where the sense of this Indic sphere and the Sinic sphere has mapped onto the modern nation states of the Republic of India and the Republic of China.

So they have, in some ways... You can talk about it as inheriting imperial legacies. Jim Millward, the historian of the Chinese [inaudible 00:10:03], recently published...well, yesterday, published an essay on [inaudible 00:10:06], where he talks about, actually, the aggressive appropriation of these imperial legacies. So it's not just something that was done passively, but very actively. And I think that, again, lies at the root of some of the conflicts that we are seeing today. So moving on to the second major point that I wanted to make, which is to outline some...sort of what I see as asymmetries and symmetries that are...that were interesting. So first, just to outline a few major asymmetries, which were sort of...

These are sort of trends that have diverged in the past 30 or 40 years, things that are much closer, if you look at most of these metrics in the late 70s, certainly in the 1950s. Economics, China is five times as large by...in nominal terms, three times as large in [inaudible 00:10:44]. The military is significantly larger, and seems to be much more advanced, especially when it comes to high-tech forms of electronic warfare or other kinds of AI-based warfare. Social indicators have also diverged. But what's interesting is that there are also divergences in the global ambitions, as we might call them. And this is most easily evidenced by the Belt and Road Initiative that the Chinese state has been pushing for the past several years now. There's nothing comparable that the Indian state has let alone executed or even imagined.

And then, there's an interesting other asymmetry that is...you can broadly call it strategic, where China enjoys significant advantages in geography, which are natural, and then the infrastructure that they have built. And this is important, because as I think has been pointed out by others, China doesn't see India as the primary threat. So China, the way in

which it focuses its militarization and its foreign policy, it's the U.S. that is the primary focus of a lot of this, and India is sort of secondary. But as for India, China really has become the primary focal point for its...for a lot of its foreign policy. So those are some of the asymmetries.

What's interesting to me is that as these trends have diverged, there's been an interesting convergence in a somewhat surprising area. By my reckoning, politically, the two countries have not been this close since their founding in '47 and '49. And by that, I mean in particular, the trends that we see in a growing and very aggressive ethnonationalism in both countries, in China and India. I mean, you see this, particularly in recent times, expressed particularly through language politics and the frequent of minorities. So whether it's Kashmir or Xinjiang or Tibet, and even Hong Kong, and then the language policies of Mongolia and also India.

And then, accompanying that is a crackdown on dissent and civil society broadly construed. Lawyers, journalists, intellectuals, activists, students, they're all under tremendous duress in both societies right now. And this is accompanied by a kind of technological utopianism, right? So the kind of big data-driven desire to... It's couched always in the language of delivery of public goods and services, but it is essentially empowering the state and the state [inaudible 00:13:06] corporations to have finance and other control over people. So if you combine these trends, I think the asymmetries are actually very interesting to observe. And when you look at the symmetries and the asymmetries together, I think structurally, we are in a place where the possibility of poor decision-making is compounded.

So I think it's sort of... I won't call it a perfect storm, but I think it's structurally leading to the possibility of things becoming potentially much, much worse. And one of the things that is actually contributing to this...this is my third point, is the lack of mutual awareness, and in some ways, the lack of actual mutual interest, even, beyond the superficial interest in the border itself. And this plays out... I won't go into detail, but I'm happy to elaborate if people are interested. But I think this rings true, whether you look at the media, sort of look at the kind of journalism that's produced on both sides about each other. It's true in scholarship, and it's also true in pop culture, the way in which, then, this infuses a general perception of how the Indians think about the Chinese, and the Chinese think about India.

Okay, and very briefly on the final point, I want to...since this is the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, to talk a little bit about the U.S., also. And I think the obvious way in which the U.S. has figured is, of course, in conversations about, "Well, is this going to push India into a more formal kind of arrangement with the U.S., where even if it's not a formal alliance, but perhaps a greater amount of integration of, say, military maneuvering, sharing logistical details, and so on. And I think this is, of course, a hugely important issue. It brushes up against India's long-standing commitment of being strategically autonomous. But again, this is something that I believe my co-panelists are much more qualified to comment on.

What I'd like to draw everyone's attention to is, actually, something else that I feel is interesting. But I haven't seen a lot of work on this, and I would love to try and understand this [inaudible 00:15:05] better, which is the role that the diaspora populations...so people of Chinese origin in the U.S. and people of Indian origin in the U.S., might play, as these tensions continue to become... Because I think the tensions

are not going to go away. These are now something in the short and medium-term that's going to be part of international politics. So how are these very large...? Together, it's about a little under 10 million people.

The Chinese-American population is a little larger than the Indian-American, but a lot of them are recent arrivals. So they arrived in the U.S. in the past 20 to 25 years. So their ties to their native countries are actually significantly stronger than people who, say, arrived in the late 19th century, in the Chinese case, but even the Indians who arrived in the 1960s, which was a major wave at that time. But how this plays out, I think, will be really interesting to observe, especially as we have seen with [inaudible 00:15:56] reports of the ways in which money and influence is being exercised by political parties in India or China, to influence politics in the U.S.

Again, not... The most visible example of this [inaudible 00:16:12] making is, of course, the potential future vice-president of the U.S. But what I'm interested in much more is, at a lower level, at sort of local-level politics, how this might actually affect popular perception and public opinion, and then, how that might filter into U.S. [inaudible 00:16:27]. So I'll stop there. Thank you.

Berris: Thank you very much, Arunabh. That was fascinating and gave us a wonderful macro view of the situation. I'd now like to give the floor to Ambassador Rao.

Nirupama Rao: Thank you. Thank you, Jan, and thank you to the National Committee for inviting me to be a part of this panel discussion on India and China. It's wonderful to reconnect with Jan and...or everybody at the National Committee. Arunabh has spoken to you about the larger civilizational and the present context, also, the setting for the India-China relationship, as it were. I'd like to speak about the bilateral context of this relationship, especially flowing from the recent events along the line of actual control in Ladakh...in the Ladakh region of India.

And let me begin by saying that it is a season of change in Sino-Indian relations and defined by crisis, and crisis that looks like it's going to be a prolonged one with no immediate end in sight. There've been signs of a shift, more than a seasonal turbulence, in this relationship for some time. The Doklam crisis, which happened in Bhutan. But Bhutan and India are treaty partners, and India is committed to assisting Bhutan in the defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. So when this Chinese presence in the Doklam plateau of the southern border of Bhutan, really, the southeastern border of Bhutan...southwestern, sorry, border of Bhutan was detected in the summer of 2017, Indian troops were also present with the Bhutanese to defend Bhutanese interests.

And that was a real cloud-burst, and the relationship tensions were at a very high point, and the crisis took about 72 days to resolve. But it was an inflection point, because today, in retrospect with the benefit of hindsight, I think things began to get more and more complicated in the Sino-Indian relationship from that point. We also saw the adversarial approach of the Chinese on the issue of UN sanctions against the Pakistani terrorist, Masood Azhar, holding out on the entry of India into the nuclear supplies group, on which the United States was one of India's most strong supporters.

And of course, what India sees as the misadventure of the China-Pakistan economic corridor, which snakes through territory in Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir, occupied currently by Pakistan and claimed by India. So there is a dispute. It runs along this axis of

the China-Pakistan economic corridor, enters from Xinjiang into territory that is contested between India and Pakistan. And of course, there's been the prolonged [inaudible 00:19:48] in Delhi about the successful forays that the Chinese have made into India's neighborhood of South Asia outside Pakistan. And I'm talking of Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.

And unfortunately, no real panacea was provided by the two informal summits that Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping held at Wuhan and Chennai in southern India in 2018 and 2019. I believe it was a case of spectacle overwhelming substance, and the core instabilities that were straining the relationship remained where they were. Now, the unresolved boundary question between India and China involves a continental space, and it straddles a land border of close to 4,000 kilometers. I'm just giving you the metric length. You can, of course, express it in miles also, which would make it, I think, about 2,500 miles or so.

So even the length of that border is contested between the two countries. The Chinese say it's considerably shorter, which deepens the [inaudible 00:21:05]. And memories of the conflict that India and China fought in 1962 have not...over the border, over this contested border, have not faded in India. So this, as far as India, is a live volcano which erupts from time to time. For decades, India never acknowledged that there was a dispute with China on the issue, referring to it only as a question, the boundary question.

In recent years, however, the term "boundary dispute" has entered our lexicon, injecting a welcome dose of realism into the Indian perspective. As it should, given the fact that India sees China as occupying around 38,000 square kilometers of territory, which is about, I believe, 14,500 square miles or so of territory in the forbidding, high-altitude Aksai Chin plateau of Ladakh. And Chinese maps show about 90,000 square kilometers of India's state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of what they call South Tibet. And this term, "South Tibet," is a term that is increasingly entered into the Chinese discourse on the dispute in recent years. It wasn't there before. Earlier, they referred to the so-called "illegal..." I'm putting it in quotes, McMahon Line, which defines the boundary in this sector of the border.

Now, in recent years, as India has tried to match China's build-up of infrastructure in the border areas, along what both sides call the line of actual control along the border, the situation has changed. And China has regarded these actions as threatening, which they really are not. But we're trying to build better access for our personnel who guard the line of actual control by improving infrastructure, by building roads in the area. And I'm afraid the asymmetry, as people have referred to between India and China, is also very pronounced in this area, where we are nowhere near the level of infrastructure availability and strength that China has built up on its side of the line of actual control.

But what we have to make a note of is, in the last, let's say, four and a half decades since the October of 1975, we hadn't seen a single incident of bloodshed along this frontier between India and China until June the 15th of this year, when 20 Indian soldiers and their commanding officer lost their lives in the Galwan Valley in a confrontation with Chinese troops. We don't know how many Chinese lives were lost. Some reports say five Chinese soldiers lost their lives, but we have no real information confirmed about the casualties of the Chinese side.

But let me just say that this incident has turned this line of actual control, made it pretty [inaudible 00:24:24] in the confrontation between troops of the two sides. And they built up...amassed personnel from both sides. I mean, there's been a build-up of troops on both sides since then. So the situation is pretty fraught, and you have three or four areas along the line of actual control where such confrontation continues. Now, since the incident at Galwan, there've been ongoing diplomatic and military efforts to see whether we can achieve some disengagement. I'm not talking of de-escalation, that's completely different, but disengagement of troops between the two sides.

It has happened to some extent in the Galwan Valley where you saw the bloodshed. But it's not happening in the other areas where there is confrontation. We are approaching winter, and temperatures in Ladakh usually fall to about minus 35 degrees Celsius in winter. That's really very arctic type of temperatures. And the troops are going to hunker down, I'm sure, on both sides during the winter, and we'll have to see how the situation develops. Obviously, it is serious, and there appears to be no satisfactory conclusion to achieving the disengagement that both sides want to see happen. Or at least, India would like to see happen a restoration of the status quo which existed in April, before this crisis began.

And that hasn't happened, and there appears to be no sign of Chinese willingness to give on that front. So let me say that Galwan was a crisis waiting to happen. A shared sense of acute nationalism...Arunabh referred to it, coupled with the need to defend sovereignty, as defined by each country, provided for the tinder waiting to be set alight. And the various agreements and mechanisms. You know, we had five such agreements and protocols between India and China from 1993 onwards, to maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas along the lines of actual control. And those agreements have just fallen by the wayside.

It would seem they had held very well until the Galwan tragedy happened. And today, it would appear that that entire superstructure of relations that we had built has been rendered infructuous and weak. And these agreements, unfortunately, didn't provide sufficient guard against the tragic events of the night of 15th of June. We had an operating system, as far as this relationship was concerned, from 1988 onwards. It held for 30 years, and we developed relations in oil fields, in trade and business-related interaction, people-to-people ties. Even though the boundary dispute had not been resolved, we kept up the efforts to resolve the problem, but we haven't...we were not able to achieve any resolution. But that didn't prevent us from developing relations in other fields.

But post June 2020, I believe that this operating system has become largely defunct. And what was proven, I believe, that it lacked the resilience and the durability to withstand those shockwaves that we saw happen at Galwan. So the Indian government has taken various steps since then, to kind of decouple on the trade and economic front...at least the investment front, from China. I won't go into those details, I possibly am running out of time. But the question of how to strengthen internal balancing vis-à-vis China, and also to strengthen external balancing, which is where our relations with the United States and partners like Japan and Australia, and with the [inaudible 00:28:37], all that comes in.

Obviously, India would like to leverage these relationships to the maximum extent possible, to strengthen its ability to at least dissuade China from taking the actions that

it has along the border. I'll stop here, because I believe I'm running...I've run out of my time, Jan. And I'll yield the floor to Professor Shen. Thank you.

Berris: Thank you, Ambassador. Professor Shen.

Shen Dingli: Well, thank you, Jan, and the National Committee for inviting me to this panel. I'm happy to see Ambassador Rao again, and also to be connected to Professor Ghosh. I would like to make three points. First, the source of the problem. Second, our efforts...or I mean, Indian and the Chinese effort, to make peace. And this has not succeeded. Third, I was educated as a physicist. I have a PhD in hard science, physics. How to simplify the very complicated border issue to a simple issue? And I do have a proposal, I think, that can [inaudible 00:30:09], completely, eventually, to managing our border dispute. So it would not resolve the dispute. But at least, I am sure, with my formula, there will be no loss of life with young men of both countries.

First point. China and India basically do not have a border line, except for the sector where [inaudible 00:30:45] is situated. China and India have an agreed border line between India and China, and actually, between the former Sikkim and China that was made by Britain and the Chin dynasty. China accepted. Even though it was unhappy, it accepted. And that was carried on by India. And China has admitted this, actually, Sikkim is a part of India, to show China's kind of realism to accept as reality.

So to say China and India do not have any border...agreed border area is not fact. But the narrative to say the two countries do not have a border line applies to majority of the landscape area of their connection. East sector, China thought the border line should be such that entire south Tibet, or what India would call Arunachal state, should be on Chinese side of a final border line. India said, "No, no, no. It should be McMahon Line." McMahon Line is a line, but...which is based on Britain's unilateral invention without receiving any chance of government...central government official approval by both the Republic of China, or People's Republic of China.

But China is still interested in turning it to a final agreed border based on some meaningful adjustment. On the west side, India thinks the border line should make Aksai Chin to be a part of India. And China's side thinks the border line should make what we are calling Ladakh a part of China. But this is not the case. So this is my first point. We have a huge amount of disagreement, as to where the final border line should be. The second point is that the two countries have made a tremendous amount of effort.

I think [inaudible 00:33:19] visit to China more than 30 years ago...almost 40 years ago, that, "Look, two countries have indicated their interest in negotiating, is stabilizing the peace, security in the area of China-India connection." This is a border area without an agreed border. Then, we have a very complex, ever-changing phenomenon, which we call the line of actual control. China thinks, "This is my current line of actual control. But my ideal line of actual control should extend to where India has occupied." India thinks this is where they currently possess, but the ideal line should include where China has occupied.

Every winter, when the temperature...the weather challenges our survival, both countries may withdraw some personnel from the region. But the next spring, they would return. So such a line... We have three lines for each side. One is my current line, second, ideal line, and the third, ever-changing line. Because next year, I may take more. So it would be

better than this year's line, but still not perfect. India has their own three lines, altogether, six lines. So when we say the two countries made agreement, that's key to the stability, peace in the area. But how to legally interpret the agreed line of actual control?

The two countries failed by this day. And even worse, they fought, they agreed not to shoot, but they can use fists. And it is... I feel very bad, our young men and your young men using fists to kill each other. So India said, some 20... India lost some 20 young lives. Chinese side has not announced. Why? Probably not to excite the Chinese, "We lost more life," or not to excite India, and [inaudible 00:35:42] lost less life. But both countries may have lost some life. And these young men should cherish their lives, they should live longer for their country. But their parents lost their sons, sisters, brothers lost their brother, and the kids may lose their father.

It's very bad. I feel bad for our Chinese soldiers and Indian soldiers. We are human. My final point is how to make a permanent area of peace. We may never be able to agree to have a border, but how to turn an area of dispute to an area of peace? So I would suggest the following. China would propose the ideal Chinese intended line of actual control that may pierce into some parts that India has occupied. India proposes India's ideal line of actual control, but don't tell us it should be a part of Aksai Chin. And we would not tell you it will be the...it would be the entirety of Ladakh, to be reasonable and humble, to propose what were the...our ideal line of actual control. But certainly, these two ideal lines would differ greatly.

Second, make them an area, because these two lines would not overlap. Then, we define the entire area defined by the two lines as an area of dispute. Third, to make it a DMZ, demilitarized zone, like what existed for some 70 years between the two Koreas. That place is very secure. Only animals would live there peacefully, nobody would disturb them. But in our area of dispute, some local people, villagers, would be still living there. Let them live there, and...as they would not be disturbed by any military people. Because in my idea, both countries should sign, honor the agreement. Both militaries should not enter this area.

Probably some police would occasionally inspect. Or when the local villagers would have some [inaudible 00:38:32] dispute, some police by Chinese side and India's side may make a plan to joint-mediate, and cut out a paper. This is not a permanent zone of peace. This is a temporary fix of an area of dispute to an area of stability, disengagement, and demilitarization. Let's make it 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, verify neither side what enters this area through our national technical means, satellite imagery. And private citizen can access to some private satellite imagery. Some company may be willing to release the imagery for free.

And then, using our drone to... We would allow this drone to enter this area to take a picture, and then, we share the picture to say, "You may have violated, and I may have not violated." This is my proposal: define a reasonable area of dispute, turning the area defined by the different ideal definition of line of actual control into a temporary area of peace, demilitarization. That's a lesson learned, how to live with the new reality. Neither military would enter. Without entering, you have zero chance to see other, to using fists to shoot a gun. You have no chance.

Each side would be unhappy, because, "This is my land. Why I leave? Because you ask me to leave, I leave?" But the other side would do the same. Don't exaggerate the size of such an area of dispute. We cannot say, "Entire south Tibet," or, "Entire Arunachal should be under dispute." Reasonable. This is what the two countries use to cut a deal, to turn...through negotiation, to turn this line of actual control to a permanent border. The trick is that we do not agree with each other about where the line should locate. Then, using our maximum different definition, drawing a circle, which is the area of dispute. And we draw each other's military from the area.

And in case of need, India making...might Nepalese, Bhutanese, to take a look. And then, we may take some Bengalese people to take a look. This is to assure each other's confidence that, "I withdraw, I give concession. And you withdraw and you give your concession." And then, that can make such a meaningful concession for 10 years, 15 years. So I end my points this way. China, India should have ability to learn to respect each other, and to find a way... We do not need others to teach us. And actually, North Korea and South Korea have already been able to teach us. They don't have a war. Occasionally, one [inaudible 00:42:08] people may sneak into this dangerous place, where they're hit by a landmine. And we should not put landmines, because people are living there. We should make them to feel more secure. Thank you very much.

Berris: Thanks to all three of you for very thoughtful and interesting presentations, from which I think we can take away a lot of different things. Well, I would... We have questions coming in, we have questions that were pre-submitted, I have some questions of my own. But before going to those, I'd like to ask the three of you if you would like to comment on anything that one of the other of you has said.

Rao: Well, I think that we can, probably in the question-and-answer session, take up some points that... Professor Shen had some interesting points, and I think both sides are agreed... I think both countries are agreed that we have to reasonable, we have to be fair. We have to understand that there has to be some degree of adjustment of when it comes to discussing a solution, but that is really for the two governments.

Berris: And Professor Shen, anything...? Any questions you have for either Professor Ghosh or Ambassador Rao?

Shen: Well, I appreciate Professor Ghosh's presentation with his greater view about this issue, and how... He especially mentioned how this would impact...involve America. Especially, President Trump has presented his vision in the Pacific...probably, that started an even earlier time, and announced that four foreign ministers have met for the second round. China would not think that this is a great scene, nice scene, that would make China more secure. But how to make such a kind of attempt to liaise with each other, to reinforce each other in that area, to be unnecessary?

I think China and India need to shake hands, respect each other, and understand each other's sensitivities, and take no further step for each other to be viewed as negative. And also, I hope China's leader and India's Prime Minister Modi will listen to me, turning the different interpretations of line of actual control into an agreed peace zone. This is not a permanent solution, this is a temporary fix. So for this, I appreciate, like, two friends to raise their issue with the Americans' involvement. And also, Ambassador Rao's mentioning why China and India may have different views as to the place, [inaudible 00:45:45], should have been on, too. But between China and Bhutan, there has been an

ongoing dispute. That is something that many of us think, "I should have taken...[inaudible 00:46:01] a note of it." Thank you for mentioning this.

Berris: I find myself, in listening to you, Professor Shen, transported back to so many different [inaudible 00:46:16] dialogues that I've participated in, when very thoughtful people...generally retired diplomats, even some retired military senior officials, and academics, are able to come together and just very reasonably approach these issues that are issues of life and death. And the proposals they put up, especially the one that you've just enunciated today, seems so eminently reasonable when you're sitting in a conference room with like-minded people, even like-minded people with different backgrounds and from different cultures.

The trouble is, of course, in translating that into actual effect, but I think it's a wonderful idea you have. And as a colleague of mine just texted to me, maybe we should send you to the Middle East and get the Israelis and the Palestinians to [inaudible 00:47:13] use your same plan. But let me ask some more specific questions. So Professor Shen, you did a broadcast...a podcast, wherein...for [inaudible 00:47:31], the German think tank on China, wherein you and an Indian colleague, I might add, were both very optimistic about this year, 19... It was in January of this year. And this is the 70th anniversary, and it was supposed to be a very celebratory year between India and China.

So what do you think took us...took the two countries off the track? Is it...? You know what? Listening to Arunabh and looking at the way the world is evolving in China, in India, certainly in the United States and elsewhere, nationalism seems to be taking hold to such a great extent, and alas, in many places, including India and the United States, unfortunately, a violent sort of nationalism. Is this what we attribute this recent flare-up to? Is it just part of this violent nationalism that is overtaking the world at this point? Or are there other factors that caused this 30 to 40-year peace to suddenly be disrupted and turn violent? And that's a question to any one of the three of you, or all of you, to answer.

Shen: Well, let me start. Ideally, for this year, 70th anniversary of China and India establishing the official tie, Chinese side should be thankful to India, because India was the earliest foreign country that accorded a legitimacy to the making of PRC. We thank our Indian friends. We should reflect on why the relationship has gone through a twisted past to this year, why an ideal year of the 70th anniversary, which has been argued about as a truly just reciprocal visit, informal meeting every year. We have created a new institution like the informal meeting, but still, that cannot assure the permanent peace and stability around the border area.

The reason is that we are very nation state. China cares its own nation's interest, and our leader said we should not lose any point of China's land that belongs to us, and we should not take an inch of other countries' land. That's great. We should not take an inch. But our definition is that this belongs to us, therefore, we cannot abandon. With the rise of China's capacity, and backed by China's nationalism at a social media age, to show our concession through negotiation may be viewed by the public as not legitimate. So for many reasons, can't China share...show its strength to honor the entire area which we think belongs to China.

But India is at the same page. They are rising. Without COVID, they are rising very fast, and they also have a very nationalistic leadership. And they have a far more widespread

media environment, which would avail all sorts of information in their platform. So showing any concession to China at this time, especially on such a hardcore issue of sovereignty, would be beyond imagination. I cannot answer questions that sudden twists of the past is due to any leader's intent. Personally, I would guess my president, Mr. Jinping, is uninterested in [inaudible 00:51:43]. He wants to have a stability between China and India, which is good for China to build our economy, which it would look good, so China's neighboring relationship is stable, peaceful, and they can enjoy...so, prosperous.

I would also highly suspect that Prime Minister Modi instigated this, and maybe some battlefield military people without authority. There may have been something, and even without ill intent which can be interpreted by the other side as not [inaudible 00:52:25]. I do not know, but I think probably a combination of these scenes' possibility may explain what has happened. But now, how to revert? Come to my formulation. Using the different...maximally different drawing of the line of actual control to make a demilitarized zone. Then, we draw. Devise certain verification means, then honor our paper through certain institutions. We can fix it. It's not very difficult. We need to have goodwill to make peace.

Rao: I certainly would agree with Professor Shen when he says that both sides need goodwill to make peace. I've often spoken of the need for a Himalayan consensus between India and China. And this idea of a demilitarized zone that Professor Shen just spoke of perhaps fits into the realm of thinking on such a consensus. But it is an idea. It's an interesting idea that both sides would need to look at, because our primary aim must be to defuse tensions in this very, very fraught situation. Because neither side, I believe, wants this to be turned into a battleground between the two countries, because that would have enormous ramifications not only for India and China, but also for the rest of the region.

I don't believe either government would like a situation of prolonged conflict between the two countries, which all the more points to the necessity that we need to sit down and arrive at some middle ground, because diplomacy is all about reaching middle ground. And that context, I believe we need to be sensible, we need to be cool-headed. And nationalism certainly infuses the public imaginary in both countries much more than before. But this boundary just built between India and China is a legacy dispute. It's a 20th-century legacy dispute, which we see unfolding before our eyes today in the current situation.

So it will require a lot of political prowess and far-reaching perspective on both...the sides of both governments, to reach a solution. I don't believe we'll be able to resolve the boundary question. But I believe the primary focus should be to see how we can ensure a regime that holds the peace along the line of actual control, not only in Ladakh, but also in the middle sector, in Sikkim, and in Arunachal Pradesh.

Berris: I fully endorse the spirit in which Professor Shen and Ambassador Rao made their comments, but just a couple of reflections on the question you asked about why we had the events of earlier this year. I think, again, we can think of the longer-term trends that have been building up, I think, that creates the conditions for something like this. They don't explain, necessarily, the timing of it, but then, that makes something like this likelier. And I think that really has to do with the broader divergence that we are seeing, in terms of the increasing capacity of the Chinese state, where this becomes a kind of

expansion that we are seeing more broadly, that the PRC is engaging in across the world. Not always militarily, of course, but in expanding its ambit, I think.

So that's one, I think, contextual thing that's important. In terms of the specific timing, though, I think a couple of things happened, already discussed a fair bit in the media and the press, and by diplomats and scholars, which has to do with, of course, the way in which the Indian state changed the nature of Jammu and Kashmir, which was a state in the union. And it was changed into a union territory, that means it was directly governed by the central government, as opposed to having some kind of autonomy within a federal system. And Ladakh was made a... So Jammu and Kashmir was made a Union territory, and Ladakh was made a separate Union territory.

And that has definitely... That certainly falls in line with what Professor Shen was saying, in terms of how the Chinese perception would therefore be one of...or their response would be one of alarm, in that this is a unilateral attempt to change an underground reality about something that they view very differently. What's interesting to me is not so much whether this was a trigger or not. But from my reading of the discussion that we've seen in India, there doesn't seem to have been a sense that this should be anticipated, that if we do something like this, how are we going to respond?

So the kind of confusion we saw in May and June and July in India, in the press, in the way in which the government [inaudible 00:57:43] signals, that suggests to me that this wasn't really thought through. If we're going to make such a major move which affects our international relations, how should we be prepared to respond? Because we should game out potential scenarios, potentials of things that the Chinese might do. And that's one point that I think is somewhat interesting to me.

The other is, I'm curious about how much... This is entirely based on, again, reading the newspapers and following the news. But how much the assessment of the Modi regime has changed on the Chinese side, from one that saw the regime as really led by a strong man and really powerful, to one that perhaps is not...is hollower than it seems. And this is something that I would love to see more welcomed, because it's something that I...conversations I've certainly anecdotally sensed, where there was a sense of real...

So thinking of Modi as a [inaudible 00:58:36] figure, in terms of...which is a strong leader who's going to move India forward, to a much more, shall we say, less flattering sense of being in leadership that has emerged amongst a lot of, I think, Chinese intellectuals in most recent years. So yeah, I'll stop there.

Rao: If I can just say a word here about what Arunabh said. Well, yes, you may have to prove how the Chinese look at the leadership in India further. But let me say that if I look back at the last six years of the Modi government and its policy towards China, I think there was a considered attempt to build bridges and to focus on how, on a more political level, understanding and trust could be forged between the leadership of the two countries. The second point is that the Modi government has been very, very restrained in its statements about the tensions with China along the line of actual control, never mind how the media...the social media and the electronic media, have discussed it, and the kind of very alarmist projections that they have made.

But I think, at the government level, there's been a great deal of restraint, it's been very measured. And I think the government of India deserves some acknowledgement and

credit for the manner in which it has spoken of these tensions, even if... You can argue, and I agree, perhaps there's need for more communication...more regular, more systematic communication on this issue, in order to guide the public debate a little more, in a focused way and in a more rational way, let's say.

Berris: So I really would like to continue this conversation, but we did promise our audience that we would get some of their questions in. And let me turn through a couple of those. Two of them sort of converge, one from Patrick...and I...sorry if I'm mispronouncing this, [inaudible 01:00:54], who interestingly said he's in [inaudible 01:00:58] to be part of the Union Public Service Commission, and another from someone by the name of Bruce, who doesn't identify himself any further. But both of them wonder if the resolution of the conflict between China and India, because each side believes so fully in...that they are right, as usually, countries do when there's a dispute, are they going to be able to work it out between themselves?

Or would it be beneficial...more beneficial for some intervention by the UN, by the International Court Of Justice, by a variety of international institutions that might be able to offer some sort of mediation or assistance? I actually am... I might want to vote for Professor Shen's solution. But would both sides agree to some mediation or some assistance from outsiders? Or is this something that you think is only going to be resolved between the two countries? And can it be?

Shen: Well, I cannot represent my government. Actually, my heart and brain are split. My brain says that mediation is a way to help with cooling down the temperature. Mediation, for instance, a friend from Cambodia may visit India and may visit China, and [inaudible 01:02:44]... Actually, we don't need such a person to pass, we have lots of channels to pass. But he or she may propose some idea, which might be exactly or similar to what I have proposed. And if India were to propose, China would refuse. And what China would propose, India would refuse. But if a common friend would propose, and we think, "This give us faith," why not? But I'd presume my government would refuse.

"We are a major country," or, "a major power. We are [inaudible 01:03:20]. We don't need any person to tell us how to do. We are very smart, we're very confident. So why we would listen to someone who pretends to be a friend, not from Cambodia, but possibly from New Zealand, Canada, or Australia?" Until two years ago, they still [inaudible 01:03:43] friend, but they... Some of them don't think China is their friend. And we think such a so-called friend may be partial, may propose something which would not be in the interest of our face, and of our tangible rights. And Prime Minister Modi might be...may think that in some way. "We are very national, we are very sovereign. Why do we need America to give hand?" He would resolutely refuse President Trump to say, "I want to help." So most likely...

Berris: Well, apparently, Professor, President Trump did offer to help recently. But I'm not surprised that no one took him up on that. But Ambassador Rao, do you want to add anything to that?

Rao: Well, I think, at the level of the two governments, the approach would be, "Leave it to us. We will resolve this bilaterally. We don't need a third party to come in and advise us or mediate between us." So I don't believe that position will be altered. I think the fact that we have been discussing this problem...the boundary problem in the current era, let's say, since the 1980s... From 1981 onwards, we've had discussions relating to the

boundary question. So we have all the skill sets needed, you know, to solve this problem. I think it's a question of political will. Both Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi Jinping are very strong, popular leaders in the country, and I'd probably...

And I would, in my estimation, think that this is the time for both of them to sit down and say, "Let us resolve this, once and for all, peacefully. Let's bring these negotiations to a reasonable, mutually acceptable conclusion." And I think that's where the efforts should be concentrated. So we shouldn't abandon that idea of these two strong, very, very prominent leaders, personalities who enjoy a great deal of popularity and credibility in their own countries, to sit down and resolve this.

Berris: Professor Shen, you... Oh, I'm sorry. Arunabh, you wanted to say something?

Ghosh: Yeah, just a quick comment.

Berris: Briefly.

Ghosh: I concur with what has been said, in terms of the unlikelihood of something like that. But I'll just point out that we have to look at older cases that are like this, where there's third-party intervention. But the Korean case is interesting to think about, because it actually came at the end of a very bloody war and a long, then, sort of military stand-off. And my sense is that third-party mediation really normally kicks in once you've actually...once things are completely broken down. And we are not there at this point, so I think it's structurally going to be unlikely for...

Again, these are two much larger countries, much more economically larger...economically, much larger, but also militarily, much more powerful, for that to be even possible, I think. So I'm very... I'd be very pessimistic of that kind of possibility, at this stage.

Berris: Professor Shen, in some of your comments, you mentioned COVID. And one of our questioners, although it's an anonymous question, has asked how much the spread of COVID in both countries played into the recent escalation. We know that India's economy has been hit very hard. And so, is this a form of distraction for domestic nationalism? Or how has it played out, do you think, in relation to the flare-up? Anyone can answer here.

Shen: I can only speak for my country. China is domestically free of the COVID threat already. For 57 consecutive days, there had been no report of a single case of COVID in China. We don't have cases from international flights. Passengers from other places enter into China, and we test them. And a few of them may have been reported as positive, and we would quarantine them. So we are free, which means China is more able to do the things it wants to do. During the past week on a national day, holiday, the Chinese people go to every place, and we have booming tourism, people spend money.

That's good, for us to have this so-called internal kind of consumption and circulation of economy. I do know... I think our Indian friends that may tell us how Indians would perceive their situation of COVID may have something to do with their action around the area of contact. [Inaudible 01:08:48]...

[Crosstalk 01:08:48]

Berris: And [inaudible 01:08:50] I'm sorry to interrupt you, but we need to move along, because we're reaching very quickly our ending time. So let me ask Ambassador Rao, what do you think of...? How has COVID, if at all, played into this flare-up?

Rao: I personally don't believe that COVID was a trigger to what we've seen happening along the border. Perhaps the onset of the COVID pandemic and the lockdown in India, in a sense, took the attention off the build-up that was happening on the Chinese side of the line of actual control. Of course, I'm not, you know, an authoritative spokesman for the government. But this is what one picks up from the information zone through the media. So there may have been some slackness there, perhaps, which did not enable a quick reaction to this Chinese build-up in the areas which were seen as on the Indian side of the line of actual control.

So there thereby hangs us a tale, as it were. But I don't think COVID was a trigger to the current tensions, or that it was a way or a stratagem to take the attention off the COVID situation. I don't believe that.

Berris: Okay, let... Because we are the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, I do want to make sure we get in some discussion of the U.S. role in the flare-up, if there was one. But first, our president Steve Orbinski has a question, and wants to know, will the ban in India on hundreds of Chinese apps, including TikTok, be reversed? And how damaging are these actions to long-term relations, and what's the reaction to these bans in both India and China? Ambassador Rao, why don't you go first? You're muted. Ambassador Rao, you're muted.

Rao: Yeah, thank you, Jan. I believe that in the wake of the Galwan Valley tragedy, and the huge public outcry and concern and alarm about what had happened, the whole atmosphere of the India-China relationship was eroded and was blighted, as a result. And the government really was left with no alternative but to look at these areas where you had seen a steady rise in Chinese presence in the technology sphere, especially, because all this kind of investment in the technology start-ups and in the technology ecosystem had happened in the last three to four years.

And the ban on the apps was announced in the wake of that. Even the... I think the public definitely accepted it. There was really no outcry against being deprived of TikTok, as you would imagine, given the high popularity that TikTok had in India. I think, about 200 million...100 million or 150 million to 200 million users, I believe. But the public has accepted it, and I don't see any prospect of any reversal of that decision. In fact, now, the Indian government is looking at banning Huawei in the 5G space, they're looking at all the areas of national security that could be impacted by any Chinese technological presence. So this is a process that has begun.

But I think the greater challenge for India, if I may say, is, we have a huge trade dependency on China. We have a huge trade deficit with China, but China has come into... The active pharmaceutical ingredients that are used for India's pharmaceutical industry, about 70% to 80% of the APIs come from China. And if you looked at the situation 20 to 30 years ago, much of this was manufactured in India. And why... And this is the story I think that is echoed in the United States. So we really have to look at our own systems, and to see how we can build more self-reliance.

Prime Minister Modi has spoken of a self-reliant India, but this process is going to take three to five years. I don't believe we should cut our nose to spite our face. There are areas of dependency on China, which probably will have to continue for some time. We can't completely cut the Gordian knot, as it were. But certainly, the government is now looking at this whole ecosystem and this whole sphere of Chinese presence in India, to see how a more rational set of circumstances can prevail, rather than what you have now.

Berris: Arunabh?

Ghosh: Just to amplify something that Ambassador Rao mentioned, which is, really, the large trade relationship that exists. And so much of this is really...besides pharmaceuticals, is manufactured goods. And there's been talk in the Indian press that as the global opinion is sort of changing about China itself, there might be an opportunity for India to become the world's factory. And one of the big challenges here is, really, not so much of an emphasis on innovation and high-tech research, but really, the disparity that exists in the capacity to become a manufacturing hub.

And there's one index that I'll just mention, I think, that's really important and very telling. This data's about 10 years old. But if I remember correctly, about 10 years ago, China had roughly 500,000 vocational training schools. You know, they're training mechanics, plumbers, staff at coffee shops, that kind of training. By comparison, India had about 25,000. So that gives you a sense of the scarcity. We can talk about, we're going to step into the shoes of the next manufacturing center of the world, but there are these capacity-building challenges that really exist that complicate the picture.

Berris: And I think that we all need to take a page out of China's book on that, if we want to grow our manufacturing capabilities and our innovation capabilities in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Professor Shen, we really... We're over time by a couple minutes. So is there anything brief that you want to add, before I thank you all?

Shen: One minute.

Berris: Go ahead.

Shen: Pertaining to the question about TikTok. Chinese side and those companies operating in India should understand Indian sensitivity to defend its data security. But if there is an alternative way, I agree with Ambassador Rao. Rather than banning them, India should make a law, all data collected by those app... Domestic app, foreign app operating in India should not be transferred beyond the Indians' territory. And TikTok in India should... If India should make such a law, TikTok should sign. If it refuses, it would not be permitted to operate in India. But if it would sign and be verified often that it has not violated its legal commitment, TikTok may still be allowed to operate in India.

China has, already, such a law in China about China's information security. So if Indian apps operating in China would abide by China's law, China should not punish any of them, because India is doing... Many Chinese apps operating in India.

Berris: Okay, thank you for that addition, and thanks so much to all three of you. It's been a wonderful discussion, very stimulating. A new peace proposal on the table here, that we can think about. And I not only want to thank our three speakers, but also our

audience members. We know you're busy, and you now have lots of webinars to choose from on a daily or hourly basis, so we're very pleased that you did join us. Remember, if you want to watch this again, or if you want to encourage friends to do so, we will be putting it up on our website within the next week.

And speaking of our website, we hope that you will go to it and look at our future programs, because we have a lot of interesting programming coming up during the rest of this month. And in November, we have our "Fly to China" town hall, which we hope all of you will join us for. So again, let me thank our three speakers, my three friends. It's wonderful seeing you here and all together, and we appreciate your time and your illumination for us, what's a very troubling issue. But hopefully, Shen Dingli's resolution perhaps will help us out there. Thank you so much, everyone. Bye-bye.

Rao: Thank you.

Berris: And have a nice weekend, and thank you.

Rao: Thank you.

Professor Shen: [Inaudible 01:18:32].

Berris: [Inaudible 01:18:34].

Professor Ghosh: Bye. Bye.

[Crosstalk 01:18:36]

Ambassador Rao: [Inaudible 01:18:36]. Bye.

Berris: Good bye.