



India's strong stance on India-China Border Conflict: International Law and Territorial Claims

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Abstract: This article delves into the intangible reasons that support India's strong stance towards China, with a particular emphasis on the lens of national reputation. It includes audience costs and negotiating power as key intervening factors, providing a theoretical framework for understanding the significance of national reputation motives in determining India's diplomatic behaviour. By examining three pivotal cases—the 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict, the 2017 Doklam standoff, and the 2020 Galwan Valley border dispute—the analysis concludes that India consistently takes a strong stance on border issues due to higher domestic audience costs and a lower bargaining power relative to China. As a result, there is a strong desire to protect the nation's reputation. The article concludes with the assumption that, given the critical importance of protecting national reputation, long-term strategic rivalry between India and China over border issues is expected, necessitating an ongoing evaluation of India's attitude towards China.

Keywords: Sino-Indian border issues, national reputation, Indian diplomatic motivations, India-China relations.

Introduction

The territorial issue remains a major obstacle to the development of bilateral relations between India and China. Although not the sole cause, this conflict has grown in significance in recent years, having a considerable impact on Sino-India ties. Frequent border clashes pose a significant threat to the proper development of the bilateral relationship. Notably, since Narendra Modi took office as Prime Minister in May 2014, despite India's outward acceptance of a policy promoting friendly relations with China, actions in contentious regions have continued. The increased presence of troops and reinforcement of legitimate authority led to intermittent border disputes between India and China. This raises the question of why, despite its relative weakness, China is willing to jeopardise bilateral relations with India by inciting events and taking a confrontational approach on the border issue, even if it means jeopardising the entire relationship.

Scholars, both local and foreign, have mostly handled this topic using three fundamental analytical frameworks. First, the “geopolitical explanation” claims that India's forceful stance on the Sino-Indian border problem stems from structural worries about China's rise, with an emphasis on geopolitical security and the dynamics of great power competition. India's disruptions in the border area are interpreted as a demonstration of concern over China's growing influence in South Asia rather than a response to genuine threats. The key motivation for India's apparent response is its desire to limit China's regional progress.

Secondly, the “Domestic Factors Perspective” delves into the intricacies of India's domestic political landscape. Proponents of this viewpoint emphasise shifts within India's internal political dynamics. They highlight the emergence of Hindu nationalism, the complexity of interparty and intergroup relations, alterations in political power structures and decision-making mechanisms, and the evolution of domestic social tensions within India as pivotal determinants.

Lastly, the “Cognitive Psychology Perspective” explores cognitive biases and cultural disparities between India and China. Scholars aligned with this perspective argue that the border issue between the two nations is characterised by cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, they posit that India's entrenched notions of “big country mentality,” “victim mentality,” and “resentment mentality,” along with other abnormal cognitive patterns, serve as underlying factors motivating its resolute stance on the Sino-Indian border dispute.

The aforementioned studies provide theoretical insights from various angles regarding India's recent assertiveness towards China in territorial disputes, contributing to a nuanced comprehension of the issue. However, the author argues that research based on these perspectives is not entirely comprehensive. Behind a nation's foreign policy and actions, two primary motivations prevail: material and non-material. While the “Geopolitical Perspective” and “Domestic Factors Perspective” primarily focus on material explanations, highlighting structural contradictions in the Sino-Indian border dispute and domestic political factors, they tend to overlook non-material considerations, particularly the desire to maintain national reputation. It is noted that a nation's adoption of a tough stance in foreign policy is not solely driven by geopolitical or realist considerations, as deeper non-material “irrational” motivations often exert significant influence. Although the “Cognitive Psychology Perspective” acknowledges the relevance of non-material factors such as cognition, concepts, and culture, it falls short in providing compelling explanations for the origins of India's cognitive biases and their dynamic impact on policy behaviour towards China.

Drawing upon existing scholarship, this paper endeavours to propose a novel perspective for comprehending India's assertive posture towards China. It directs attention towards non-material “irrational” factors underlying India's policy behaviour, particularly introducing the variable of national reputation. This approach seeks to explore the logical correlation between motivations related to national reputation and a nation's foreign policy conduct. The study conducts an examination of three cases—the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, the 2017 Doklam standoff, and the 2020 Galwan Valley border conflict—to elucidate the fundamental drivers of India's decision-making processes.

Conceptual Definitions and Theoretical Analytical Framework

(1) Conceptual Definition of National Reputation

The concept of “national reputation” holds significant importance within the realm of international political practice, encapsulating notions of “fame,” “credibility,” and “trustworthiness.” It embodies the perception and prestige of a nation in the eyes of others. Both classical political theorists and contemporary scholars in international relations acknowledge reputation as a pivotal non-material driver influencing human conduct.

In ancient Greece, Socrates posited that human behaviour is influenced by three primary motivations: desire, reason, and spirit.¹ Spirituality, which encompasses the need for reputation, respect, physiological well-being, and self-esteem, is universally present in human society. Thucydides underscored the pursuit of security, reputation, and interest as the chief motives driving actions, particularly evident in the Athenians' endeavours for imperial expansion. Machiavelli asserted that the pursuit of glory and reputation is a fundamental impetus behind the expansion of empires and the initiation of wars, transcending mere aspirations for power, wealth, and territory. Hobbes identified competition, differences, and honour as the underlying causes of conflict between nations. While competition and differences prompt nations to vie for material interests and survival security, honour incites irrational behaviour, fostering a quest for reputation and status.

Evidently, reputation, serving as a crucial non-material motivator behind both human and national behaviour, has long been a focal point of inquiry for classical political theorists.

In contemporary international relations discourse, there is a growing recognition of the significant role played by national reputation. National reputation is defined as the perceptions and judgements held by other actors in the international system, formed based on a nation's enduring characteristics or past behaviours. Nations often gauge their own optimal actions by continuously evaluating the behaviours of other nations to ascertain whether they demonstrate characteristics of strength or weakness. An essential function of national reputation is to analyse the past behaviours and attributes of other actors, thereby aiding in the prediction and explanation of their future conduct.

Realist scholars perceive national reputation through the lens of power, considering it an intrinsic aspect of national power. According to Hans Morgenthau, the objective of a nation seeking national reputation is to convey a potent impression of its power to other nations, regardless of whether this power is actual, perceived, or desired to be believed. Neoliberal institutionalist scholars, on the other hand, view national reputation from the perspective of interests, emphasising its role as a critical factor influencing a nation's decision to engage in international institutional cooperation amidst a volatile global environment. Robert Keohane argues that a positive national reputation promotes international cooperation, as governments take into account their reputation when deciding to adhere to international norms and weigh the benefits and costs of deviating from institutional arrangements. Constructivist scholars emphasise the cultural aspect of understanding national reputation, regarding it as a construct shaped by various viewpoints, identities, and cultural factors. Alexander Wendt suggests that in addition to considerations of security and economic interests, national interests also encompass a collective desire for respect and status, termed "collective self-esteem."

In conclusion, national reputation demonstrates several salient characteristics:

Firstly, it serves as a significant non-material motivator influencing both individual and national behaviours, intricately linked with numerous historical power struggles and interstate conflicts. Despite the potential absence of tangible material gains or even the incurring of significant costs, actors may consciously prioritise

¹ [Classical Greece] Plato (2003): "The Republic," translated by Guo Binhao, Zhang Zhuming, et al., Beijing: Commercial Press, p. 367.

the pursuit of values such as national reputation and ethnic pride over material interests in specific circumstances.

Secondly, national reputation emerges as a product of ongoing bidirectional social interactions. It is not inherently or naturally predetermined but rather shaped through continuous exchanges and engagements among actors within the international arena.

Thirdly, national reputation displays diversity, non-uniqueness, and complexity. During foreign relations engagements, a nation may emit varied signals of reputation across different issue domains, indicating the acquisition of multiple reputation types rather than a singular reputation.

(2) Theoretical-Analytical Framework

Reputation, as a significant intangible motivator influencing human behaviour, holds a pivotal role in shaping a nation's foreign policy. On one hand, it represents a crucial non-material aspiration within the decision-making framework of a nation. Beyond the pursuit of power and interests, nations also strive to acquire reputation, respect, and prestige to fulfil inherent desires. Jennifer Erickson underscores this perspective by highlighting that nations value their reputation not solely for potential material gains but also for the social benefits it confers, including national pride, international status, and legitimacy. Conversely, the perceptions and evaluations of one's reputation by other nations significantly impact the formulation and execution of foreign policies by national leaders. Robert Jervis emphasises the importance of national reputation, citing its direct influence on the psychological environment of leaders and their diplomatic decisions. Leaders often draw the interpretations drawn by other countries from their actions over pragmatic concerns.

This study advocates for a comprehensive examination of the shaping and development of national reputation from both domestic and international standpoints. The preservation of domestic reputation predominantly revolves around ensuring the legitimacy of governance and is thus susceptible to constraints imposed by domestic public opinion. Conversely, the establishment of an international reputation underscores the protection of the country's international status and interests against encroachments, underscoring the significance of a nation's strength and negotiating prowess in this endeavour. Consequently, the paper proposes the establishment of “national reputation motive” as the independent variable and “the impact of national reputation on foreign policy behaviour” as the dependent variable. Additionally, two intermediary variables, namely “audience costs at the domestic level” and “bargaining power at the international level,” are introduced to elucidate the inherent logical relationship between national reputation and foreign policy behaviour.

Audience cost plays a crucial role as an intervening variable in how national reputation shapes foreign policy behaviour. It refers primarily to the pressure that national leaders face when formulating foreign policy, where failure to honour commitments or yield to threats can lead to repercussions from the audience. Audience cost involves both domestic and international elements, with domestic audience cost typically imposing more direct and significant constraints on national leaders. Consequently, this study primarily focuses on examining domestic audience costs.

The domestic audience comprises not only the general public but also opposition parties, parliamentarians, political adversaries, and bureaucratic interest groups. James Fearon conducts a systematic analysis of the

interaction mechanism between domestic audience costs and international crises. He proposes that during international crises, national leaders often confront diplomatic decisions such as aggression, concession, or crisis escalation. Given the domestic audience's keen interest in preserving national reputation, any actions by leaders that compromise the nation's reputation during an international crisis are likely to elicit punishment from the domestic audience.

The magnitude of domestic audience costs leads to varying outcomes in foreign policy behaviour. When domestic audience costs are high, leaders face significantly constrained manoeuvrability in foreign policy, making compromises or concessions extremely challenging and often resulting in a hardline diplomatic stance. Conversely, in situations where domestic audience costs are low, there is greater flexibility in foreign policy decisions, enabling the adoption of a more moderate diplomatic approach.

In the realm of territorial disputes, a nation's bargaining power emerges as a pivotal intervening factor shaping the influence of its reputation on foreign policy conduct. This bargaining power intimately correlates with the nation's tangible control over the military capabilities projected in the contested region. When a nation exercises control over disputed territories and wields robust military projection capabilities, it typically enjoys a negotiating advantage in border discussions. Theoretically, the nation's negotiation prowess tends to be amplified in border-related concerns, frequently leading to a more forceful stance since increased bargaining strength means lower costs associated with using force to defend territorial claims. Conversely, lesser negotiating strength, combined with the high costs associated with direct confrontations, typically encourages the weaker side to concede during negotiations.

Nevertheless, empirical observations in international political practice reveal instances where powerful nations occasionally opt to extend generous concessions in border disputes, while weaker counterparts may eschew compromise in favour of risk-taking strategies. This enigmatic policy behaviour finds better comprehension through the lens of reputation motives. Nations harbouring a fervent desire to safeguard their national reputation in border disputes, particularly powerful ones, tend to exhibit reluctance towards unilateral alterations or upheavals in the territorial status quo. This hesitance stems from apprehensions regarding the preservation of their international reputation. Conversely, weaker nations, apprehensive of projecting weakness and potentially emboldening their adversaries' territorial ambitions, tend to resist easy compromises, even when their bargaining leverage in border negotiations is feeble.

As a result, the strength of bargaining power produces a variety of outcomes in foreign policy conduct. In scenarios where a country has strong border negotiation capabilities and faces relatively low risks of tarnishing its national reputation, there is greater flexibility in foreign policy decision-making, allowing for the adoption of a more temperate diplomatic stance. In contrast, when a country's ability to negotiate borders is limited and the dangers of harming its national brand are high, leaders may adopt a more confrontational diplomatic stance.

India's Reputation Motivation for Demonstrating Strength on the Sino-Indian Border Issue

Utilising the aforementioned analysis framework, the article chooses three events—the 1962 Sino-Indian Border War, the 2017 Doklam Standoff, and the 2020 Galwan Valley Border Conflict—to analyse and clarify India's underlying reputation motivation in these conflict events. It is crucial to emphasise that this paper

aims to uncover the non-material origins of India's adoption of a hardline stance on border issues, rather than focusing on the conflicts themselves and their outcomes.

(1) 1962 Indo-China Border Conflict

The Sino-Indian border, divided into eastern, middle, and western segments, has witnessed continuous actions by India since the 1950s, involving the illegal occupation of significant Chinese territories. In August and October 1959, India initiated two large-scale conflicts in the eastern sector at Longju and the western sector at Kongka Pass. Despite China consistently advocating for resolving border territorial disputes through friendly negotiations to safeguard bilateral relations, its restrained approach only fueled India's escalations, hastening its "Forward Policy." Between 1961 and April 1962, India illegally established 43 military outposts within Chinese territory in the western sector. In October 1962, military authorities issued orders to India to "expel Chinese troops from the Chinese territory occupied by the Indian army." With negotiations yielding no results, China was compelled to engage in defensive counterattacks along the border.

Substantial domestic audience costs significantly influenced India's overall decisions. In the late 1950s, the increasingly publicised border disputes between China and India prompted India to initiate conflicts at Longju and Kongka Pass, resulting in the expulsion of Indian border troops from Chinese territory. These incidents elicited strong reactions from India's elite groups and domestic population, leading to protests against the government's China policies and exerting continuous pressure on subsequent Sino-Indian border negotiations. On one hand, India's elite groups exerted significant political pressure on Nehru's diplomatic decisions, with right-wing politicians, political opposition, intelligence agencies, and the military criticising the government's stance on border issues and demanding a tougher approach towards China. Following the Kongka Pass conflict, the Socialist Party of India staged a demonstration outside Nehru's residence, demanding his resignation as Prime Minister. The Indian People's Union passed a resolution directly condemning Nehru's government for failing to halt China's "aggression" and viewing its China policy as detrimental to India. On the other hand, strong anti-China sentiments among the Indian domestic population criticised Nehru's government for overlooking threats in the Sino-Indian border region and concealing the true situation of the border issue. This heightened attention from India's elite and ordinary citizens led to a significant shift in Nehru's government's border policies and attitude towards China.

To mitigate the growing anti-China sentiment within India and uphold social and political stability, the Nehru administration disclosed diplomatic documents pertaining to the Sino-Indian border negotiations. This decision, made in September 1959, involved the sudden release of correspondence between India and China regarding the border issue over the preceding five years. The government periodically updated the domestic audience on progress through the publication of white papers. However, Nehru's action did not garner approval from the Indian populace; instead, it subjected his border policy to the influence of domestic public opinion, thereby exacerbating tensions between India and China. According to Srinath Raghavan, Nehru's release of the white papers was a significant error in judgement as it generated immense domestic political pressure, necessitating continuous assessment of the domestic political landscape and adherence to diplomatic policies acceptable to the public. Additionally, in January 1960, the Nehru government published an official report on the Sino-Indian border issue, further fueling nationalist sentiments domestically, escalating domestic audience costs, and reinforcing misconceptions among the Indian public. Consequently, the Nehru government veered towards adopting a hardline stance towards China. Despite holding high-level

talks with Premier Zhou Enlai on the border issue in April 1960, the results were minimal. Furthermore, in 1961, the Nehru government accelerated the implementation of the “Forward Policy,” contributing to the failure of peaceful negotiations between China and India on the border. In summary, Indian nationalism drove Nehru to have little choice but to adopt an increasingly assertive stance on the Sino-Indian border issue to safeguard the governing position of the Congress Party and the national reputation. Confronted with significant pressure from domestic audience costs, the opportunity to resolve the border dispute between China and India through peaceful negotiations was effectively closed.

India's diminished negotiating power, along with its significantly elevated domestic audience costs and imperative to preserve national prestige, played pivotal roles in shaping the decision-making process of the Nehru government. As the initiator and leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, India deemed it imperative to project strength on the border issue to safeguard its global image and status, fearing reputational harm. Nehru's correspondence in December 1952 underscored the importance of maintaining cordial yet resolute relations in India's China policy, recognising the risk of exploitation by the Chinese Communist Party of any perceived weakness in other nations. Following the conflicts at Longju and Kongka Pass, Nehru's statements underscored the importance of upholding national prestige, emphasising that territorial disputes with China transcended mere geographical boundaries when national reputation and dignity were at stake. Despite India's inferior bargaining position relative to China's, the Nehru government saw the “Forward Policy” as a means to bolster national prestige, signalling India's resolve to safeguard territorial sovereignty through a display of force in hopes of dissuading China from pressing its sovereignty claims. India believed that, given China's fragile domestic and international circumstances at the time, demonstrating unwavering determination would compel China to acknowledge India's territorial control. India's strategic circles briefly entertained the notion that establishing Indian outposts in border areas, despite military inferiority to China, would deter Chinese military retaliation. However, the outcome proved otherwise, as India's miscalculation of audience costs and misuse of bargaining power culminated in its decisive defeat.

(2) 2017 Doklam Standoff

In June 2017, China and India engaged in a military conflict over the extension of a road on the Doklam plateau southward near the Doka La Pass. This area, known as Donglang in China, is located in Bhutan and is defined by a high plateau and a valley. China's Chumbi Valley borders it to the north, Bhutan's Ha District to the east, and India's Sikkim State to the west. Bhutan has depicted Doklam as part of its territory on its maps since 1961, yet China also claims it, leading to unresolved conflicts despite numerous rounds of boundary discussions between Bhutan and China. The strategic importance of the territory for all three countries cannot be overstated.

India intervened in response to China's road construction activities, asserting that it was acting on behalf of Bhutan, with which it maintains ‘a special relationship’. Bhutan, in turn, has formally objected to China's infrastructure development projects in the contested region. This incident led to the 72-day standoff between China and India, known as the “Doklam Standoff.”

Viewed through the lens of audience cost theory, the “Doklam Standoff” emerged as a consequence of the Modi administration's deliberate use of media channels to inflame nationalist fervour and heighten domestic audience costs, resulting in a rigidity in the government's border policies. The 1962 Sino-Indian Border War significantly set back India, inflicting substantial costs and making the Sino-Indian border issue a focal point

of sensitivity that domestic media and the populace readily paid attention to. The Modi government strategically leveraged media platforms to disseminate "provocative" narratives aimed at inciting nationalist sentiment domestically and amplifying domestic scrutiny of the Sino-Indian border issue. Despite the passage of more than fifty years since the Sino-Indian border conflict, India has consistently portrayed itself as the aggrieved party, eagerly anticipating an opportunity to erase the stigma of defeat. Sustained political messaging from successive administrations and media outlets has influenced a segment of India's political elite to persistently advocate the "China threat theory," urging the government to adopt a firm stance on border issues. Shortly before the Doklam Standoff, Indian Army Chief Bipin Rawat emphasised the imperative for India to be constantly prepared for a '2.5 front war' to confront simultaneous security threats from China, Pakistan, and within the country. Alongside pressure from hardliners, the Modi administration also endeavoured to cultivate negative perceptions among the domestic populace regarding China's actions along the border, as evidenced in recent Indian defence reports. The 2017 Indian Defence Report depicted China as a "territorial invader" and asserted a rise in the number of "intrusions" by Chinese border patrol personnel in the preceding year. By publicly disclosing official documents pertaining to sensitive issues in Sino-Indian relations, the Modi government tapped into the innate sentiments of the domestic audience, which places a premium on national reputation and ethnic dignity, thereby fostering a fervent nationalist sentiment and embracing a resolute border policy under the banner of safeguarding national honour to garner public support during elections. However, this strategy presents a dual challenge: while enhancing political dominance, it simultaneously escalates domestic audience costs in India, consequently constraining policy manoeuvrability.

From the standpoint of bargaining power, akin to the 1962 Sino-Indian Border War, a similar "principle" resurfaced during the 2017 "Doklam Standoff" after a span of 55 years. Indian analysts evaluating the military capabilities of India and China in the border region noted that India's ground forces lagged significantly behind China's, which possessed superior military infrastructure and logistical support. With China initiating road construction activities in the Doklam area, India perceived this as potentially granting China a strategic advantage in military deployment along the border, posing a substantial threat. Consequently, recognising its inferior bargaining power compared to China's, the Modi administration opted to impede China's activities in Doklam by crossing the border. Notably, this marked the first instance of Indian border troops trespassing into Chinese territory where no sovereignty dispute existed, rendering the justification of "fulfilling obligations under the security agreement with Bhutan" untenable. India sought to bolster its standing in South Asia by leveraging the pretext of fulfilling obligations under the security pact with Bhutan to intervene in China's construction endeavours, driven by dual objectives to safeguard its national reputation. Thus, the Modi government's decision to intervene and cross the border was largely aimed at signalling to Bhutan and other South Asian nations India's reliability as a partner and its commitment to fulfilling its security obligations to Bhutan. Secondly, India's move was deliberate, demonstrating its resolve to halt China's border activities under any circumstances. Through this action, the Modi government aimed to convey to China and the global community India's capability to defend its dominance in South Asia and enhance its international standing. In the words of Dalbir Ahluwalia, "India's intervention in the Doklam region is likely intended to instill apprehension in the adversary, compelling it to acquiesce and secure its objectives without resorting to direct confrontation."

(3) 2020 Galwan Valley Border Conflict

In the eastern Ladakh region, specifically in areas such as Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley, Demchok, and Daulat Beg Oldie, Indian and Chinese troops are engaged in a standoff. In multiple locations, including Pangong Tso, Chinese military personnel have crossed over to the Indian side of the de facto boundary. The activities on the northern bank of Pangong Tso are aimed at asserting control over the resource-rich lake, with objectives extending beyond territorial gains on land.

The standoff in Ladakh's Galwan Valley has intensified due to recent infrastructure developments by India. In particular, the construction of a critical road across the Galwan Valley, near the Chinese border, is underway to facilitate connectivity to an airport. The absence of demarcation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and differing perceptions between China and India regarding its location frequently cause border violations. A violent clash ensued when the Chinese side disregarded the agreed-upon consensus to uphold the LAC and attempted to unilaterally alter the status quo.

China's "nibble and negotiate policy" is held accountable for these developments. Their objective is to impede India's infrastructure development along the LAC and achieve political goals through military means while simultaneously expanding territorial control.

The escalation of audience costs posed challenges for the Indian government in adopting a conciliatory stance. Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh asserted, "A significant number of Chinese border troops have breached the actual control line of the China-India border. We do not seek submission from any nation, but we will not readily submit either." India's repeated official pronouncements with a firm tone illustrate its resolute stance and resolve to face China. Sensationalised media reporting amplified the surge in domestic audience costs, ultimately causing the "Galwan Valley Border Conflict" incident.

Viewed through the lens of negotiation capabilities, India, recognising its inferiority in border negotiation prowess and overall military strength, deemed it necessary to display determination and respond forcefully to China in border disputes to prevent significant harm to its national standing. Within India's strategic community, there was a prevailing belief that displaying vulnerability in border matters would embolden China to further assert itself, necessitating a resolute border policy to safeguard national interests and international reputation effectively. Mohammed Zeeshan articulated that China's "aggression" capitalises on India's vulnerabilities, suggesting that India should bolster its capabilities to counter China, utilising them as bargaining leverage in border negotiations. Consequently, the Modi administration systematically bolstered military deployments along the border to narrow the gap with China's capabilities. In January 2020, Chief of Army Staff Manoj Mukund Naravane underscored the imperative for assertiveness in dealing with China and the deployment of advanced weaponry to bolster combat capabilities along the border. Subsequently, in March 2020, India's Ministry of Home Affairs sanctioned the establishment of a strategic command centre for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police along the Sino-Indian border's front lines, along with plans to augment border infrastructure. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Western nations continued to highlight anti-China sentiments, casting China in an unfavourable light internationally. Meanwhile, India's mishandling of the pandemic exacerbated domestic discontent, prompting the Modi government to perceive an opportunity to steer domestic opinion and enhance its bargaining power. Consequently, the government initiated unilateral actions in the Sino-Indian border issue. Overall, the conflict in the Galwan Valley area between India and China stems from India's misjudgment of its bargaining power.

India's desire to uphold its national reputation drives its conduct regarding the Sino-Indian border issue, which exhibits consistent patterns influenced by two intervening factors: domestic audience costs and international bargaining power. Despite recognising the disproportionate costs of confrontations with China compared to the potential gains, successive Indian administrations have struggled to resolve incidents, prioritising the maintenance of national territorial integrity as an overt objective while implicitly aiming to safeguard India's reputation and elevate its global standing. Consequently, protracted and challenging negotiations between China and India over border matters ensue. While the recent resolution of the conflict in the Galwan Valley may provide temporary relief, continued scrutiny of India's reputation-oriented actions towards China in the Sino-Indian border issue is warranted. This framework provides a theoretical foundation for assessing the future trajectory of Sino-Indian relations, managing bilateral disputes effectively, and promoting stability along the border.

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