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INDIA–CHINA BORDER · LAC

India-China Border Issues: LAC, Doklam, Galwan & Agreements for UPSC

India-China border dispute explained for UPSC: McMahon Line 1914, Aksai Chin, LAC, 1962 legacy, Nathu La 1967, border agreements 1993-2013, Doklam 2017, Galwan 2020 and disengagement talks. 50 topics, revision tables, FAQs.

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If you want to understand why India and China keep facing off on lonely mountain ridges, you have to start with the maps — not the soldiers. The India-China boundary was drawn by empires, rejected by revolutions, and then frozen by a war in 1962 into something neither side fully agrees on: the Line of Actual Control. This book walks you through the whole story — the 1914 Shimla Convention, Aksai Chin, the 1962 war's border legacy, Nathu La 1967, the four big border agreements, Doklam 2017, Galwan 2020, and where the disengagement talks stand today. Read it after the companion book on the 1962 war itself; that book covers the battles, this one covers the boundary line through time.

Part I: Where the Boundary Came From

1. 1. The McMahon Line and the 1914 Shimla Convention

In 1914, British India, Tibet, and China sat down at Shimla to settle Tibet's status and its boundary with India. The man who drew the line on the map was Sir Henry McMahon, the British plenipotentiary. The resulting McMahon Line ran about 890 km along the Himalayan crest, from Bhutan to Burma, separating Tibet from British India in what is now Arunachal Pradesh. Tibet's representative initialled the map. China's representative, Ivan Chen, initialled the draft but later repudiated it — Beijing refused to ratify the convention. That single refusal is the root of the eastern sector dispute that still runs today. For UPSC, the facts to lock in: Shimla Convention 1914, McMahon Line, Tibet initialled but China did not ratify. Prelims loves asking who drew the line and which convention created it. In Mains, the McMahon Line is your starting point for any answer on the eastern sector — it explains why India treats Arunachal Pradesh as settled and why China calls it "South Tibet."

A useful memory hook: Shimla 1914 had three chairs — British India, Tibet, and China — but only two signatures that mattered. China walked out, and that walkout is still walking: every Chinese map of Arunachal Pradesh today is the great-grandchild of Ivan Chen's refusal to sign. For Mains, frame the McMahon Line as a colonial settlement that worked on the ground (India administers up to it fully) but never won legal closure from Beijing. That gap between ground reality and legal finality is the whole eastern dispute in one sentence.

2. 2. Why China Rejects the McMahon Line

China's rejection of the McMahon Line rests on two arguments. First, Beijing says Tibet had no right to sign a boundary treaty in 1914 because Tibet was not a sovereign state — it was under Chinese suzerainty, so only China could sign. Second, China never ratified the Shimla Convention, so in its view the line has no legal force. India answers that Tibet functioned as an independent entity at the time, dealt directly with British India, and initialled the agreement — and that independent India inherited the boundary in 1947. This is a classic UPSC Mains trap: students write "China illegally claims Arunachal" without showing they understand Beijing's legal logic. You score higher when you present both claims and then state India's position. Note the careful wording both sides use: India calls it the McMahon Line; China calls the area "South Tibet" and Zangnan. In 2024 China even released new standard maps renaming places in Arunachal Pradesh — a naming war that UPSC may ask about in current-affairs-linked questions.

Here is how to handle this in the exam without sounding one-sided. Start with Beijing's two arguments — Tibet lacked treaty-making capacity, and China never ratified — then give Delhi's reply: Tibet acted independently in 1914, and independent India inherited the boundary. Close with the ground fact: India administers Arunachal Pradesh as a full state with elections and assembly. Examiners reward this structure — claim, counter-claim, ground reality — far more

than slogans. It also protects you in interviews, where the board may push back to test whether you understand the other side's logic.

3. 3. Aksai Chin: The Western Sector Dispute

Aksai Chin is the high, barren plateau in eastern Ladakh — about 38,000 sq km, roughly the size of a small country — and it is the heart of the western sector dispute. India claims it as part of Ladakh. China controls it and administers it as part of Xinjiang and Tibet. Why does Beijing care about a cold desert? Because the Xinjiang-Tibet highway (G219) runs through it, linking two restive regions of China. That road, built secretly in the 1950s, was discovered by India in 1957-58 and became one of the triggers of the 1962 war. After the war, China kept control of Aksai Chin. For UPSC: the western sector = Aksai Chin; India's claim rests on the Johnson Line; China's presence rests on actual control plus its own historical claims. Prelims fact: Aksai Chin is in eastern Ladakh, and the G219 highway passes through it. Mains angle: any settlement would need China to give up a strategic highway — which is why the western sector is the hardest part of the boundary to resolve.

To remember why Aksai Chin matters to China, think of the G219 highway as a thread stitching Xinjiang to Tibet — two regions Beijing worries about most. Cutting that thread is unthinkable for them, which is why no Chinese leader can offer Aksai Chin in a deal. For India, the claim rests on the Johnson Line and on the principle that the territory was part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947. In Mains, present Aksai Chin as the mirror image of Arunachal: each side's non-negotiable core sits in the other's claim. That symmetry is why package deals keep failing.

4. 4. The Johnson Line vs the Macartney-MacDonald Line

Before 1962, the British themselves proposed two different boundaries in Ladakh, and this confusion still feeds the dispute. The Johnson Line (1865) put Aksai Chin inside Kashmir — it ran along the Kunlun mountains, giving India the maximalist claim New Delhi still holds. The Macartney-MacDonald Line (1899) was more modest: it left most of Aksai Chin with China, keeping only some areas with Kashmir. Britain never formally got China to accept either. India today stands by the Johnson Line. China, at various points, hinted it could accept something like the Macartney-MacDonald alignment. UPSC tests this as a statement-based Prelims question: which line placed Aksai Chin in India? Answer: the Johnson Line. The deeper Mains point is sobering — the colonial power drew two lines and settled on neither, handing independent India an ambiguity that became a war. When you write about the western sector, naming both lines shows the examiner you know the history, not just the headline.

Students often ask which line India follows today — the answer is the Johnson Line, the maximalist one. A sharp Prelims trap pairs the two lines with the wrong years, so fix the dates: Johnson 1865, Macartney-MacDonald 1899. The deeper lesson for Mains is about colonial cartography: London drew lines on maps in Whitehall without settling them with Peking, and independent India inherited the ambiguity. When you write about the western sector, one line — 'two British lines, neither settled with China' — shows the examiner you understand the dispute's origin, not just its symptoms.

5. 5. The Middle Sector: Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand

The middle sector is the quietest part of the boundary — and that makes it UPSC's favourite "odd one out" in MCQs. It runs through Himachal Pradesh (Kinnaur) and Uttarakhand (Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Pithoragarh), along the watershed of the Himalayas. Unlike the western and eastern sectors, the middle sector has relatively few disputes: both sides broadly accept the watershed principle here, though small pockets like Barahoti remain contested. Barahoti, a grazing ground in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, sees periodic Chinese patrols and Indian objections — a low-grade friction point that flares up in the news every few years. Why does this matter for your prep? Because UPSC often asks which sector is the least disputed, or throws Barahoti into a Prelims map question. Remember: western = Aksai Chin (most disputed), eastern = McMahon Line/Arunachal (disputed), middle = largely settled except pockets like Barahoti. One line in Mains can show this contrast and earn you a tick.

Because the middle sector is quiet, aspirants ignore it — and then lose marks on the one MCQ that asks about it. Fix three facts: it runs through Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, it broadly follows the watershed, and Barahoti in Chamoli is the friction point where Chinese patrols appear. The watershed principle is worth understanding: where a mountain ridge divides river systems, both sides found it a natural line. In Mains, use the middle sector as your contrast case — proof that where geography offers a clean principle, even India and China can largely agree. It sharpens your argument about why the other two sectors stay stuck.

6. 6. The Eastern Sector: Arunachal Pradesh and Tawang

The eastern sector follows the McMahon Line, and its flashpoint is Tawang — the town with the famous 17th-century monastery, birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama. China claims all of Arunachal Pradesh as "South Tibet," but Tawang carries extra emotional weight for Beijing because of its Tibetan Buddhist links. India administers the state fully: it holds elections there, builds roads there, and in 1986-87 even posted a strong military response at Sumdorong Chu nearby. Chinese maps show Arunachal as theirs; India lodges a protest every time. For UPSC, Tawang is the name to remember in the eastern sector, just as Aksai Chin is the name in the western sector. Prelims angle: Tawang monastery, the 6th Dalai Lama connection, and which state the McMahon Line borders. Mains angle: China's 2024 renaming of places in Arunachal, stapled-visa-style pinpricks, and why India treats the state as non-negotiable — settling the boundary can never mean giving up a full Indian state.

Tawang's weight is emotional as much as strategic. The monastery town is woven into Tibetan Buddhism's history, which is why Beijing's claim there sounds civilisational while Delhi's answer is democratic — the people of Tawang vote in Indian elections and serve in Indian institutions. Remember the sequence for answers: McMahon Line (1914) draws it, China rejects the line, India administers the ground, China renames places on paper (2024 maps). That four-step chain is a complete Mains paragraph. And never call the 2024 renaming a border change — it changed no ground reality, which is exactly India's point when it protests.

7. 7. Tibet: The Buffer That Vanished (1950-51)

For centuries, Tibet sat between India and China as a buffer — a vast, peaceful space that meant the two giants never shared a tense frontier. That ended in 1950-51, when the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet and the 17-Point Agreement brought it under Beijing's control. Overnight, India gained a 3,488-km frontier (widely cited figure) with a new, assertive China. New Delhi's response was confused: India recognised Chinese sovereignty over Tibet but kept hoping the old friendship would survive. The Dalai Lama's flight to India in 1959 ended that hope. For UPSC, this is the hinge of the whole story — every border crisis after 1959 flows from the buffer's disappearance. Mains answers on India-China relations should open here, not in 1962: the structural cause of the dispute is that two civilisations that never bordered each other suddenly did. Remember the phrase "buffer's collapse" — it gives your answer a clean analytical frame the examiner will notice.

Think of the buffer as a cushion: while Tibet stood between them, India and China could afford grand friendships without border friction. The 17-Point Agreement of 1951 removed the cushion, and every crisis since — 1962, Nathu La 1967, Sumdorong Chu, Doklam, Galwan — is the two giants adjusting to direct contact. For Mains, this is your best opening line on any India-China question: 'the dispute is structural, born the day the Tibetan buffer vanished.' It frames everything that follows as consequence, not accident. Prelims may ask about the 17-Point Agreement's year — 1951 — so lock that in beside Panchsheel 1954.

8. 8. Panchsheel Agreement, 29 April 1954

On 29 April 1954, India and China signed the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India — famous for its preamble listing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, or Panchsheel: mutual respect for territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. The slogan of the day was "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai." But read the fine print of history: the agreement was really about trade through Tibet, and India gave up its inherited privileges there (like military escorts) in exchange for promises. China kept the road-building through Aksai Chin secret all along. For UPSC, Panchsheel is a landmark: Prelims asks for the date, the five principles, and the countries involved. Mains asks the harder question — why did Panchsheel fail to prevent 1962? The honest answer: principles without boundary settlement are just words. Eight years after the signatures, the two "brothers" were at war.

The five principles are worth memorising word-perfect, because Prelims has asked them directly: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Notice the irony the examiner loves — the agreement covered trade through Tibet while China hid its Aksai Chin road. For Mains, Panchsheel is your case study in why principles without verification fail: India traded concrete privileges in Tibet for paper promises. Eight years later the paper burned. Use it as the cautionary tale whenever a question asks about agreements with China.

Part II: 1962 and Its Long Shadow

9. 9. The Road to 1962: Maps, Patrols and the Forward Policy

The 1962 war did not erupt from nowhere — it grew out of a slow cartographic collision. Through the late 1950s, both sides published maps claiming the same territory, and patrols began bumping into each other in Ladakh and NEFA (today's Arunachal Pradesh). India's answer was the Forward Policy of 1961: set up small posts ahead of Chinese positions to assert the claim line. The logic was that China would not attack; the flaw was that the posts were thinly manned, poorly supplied, and impossible to defend. When China struck on 20 October 1962, it hit both the western sector (Ladakh) and the eastern sector (NEFA) at once. For this book, the key point is not the battles — those belong to the companion war book — but the pattern: disputed maps plus forward posts plus misjudged intentions equals war. UPSC Mains often asks for the causes of 1962; the border-focused answer is maps, Aksai Chin road, Tibet/1959, and the Forward Policy. Keep the military detail for the war book and keep this book on the boundary.

The Forward Policy's flaw is worth spelling out because Mains questions probe it: the posts were placed beyond reliable supply lines, on ground the army could not hold, on the assumption China would not fight. It was assertion without capability — the exact mistake the post-1962 reforms fixed. Pair this with the maps point: both sides were publishing maximalist maps through the late 1950s, so patrols were colliding on paper before they collided on ridges. For the exam, the causes of 1962 in border terms are four: Tibet 1959, the Aksai Chin road, competing maps, and the Forward Policy. Four points, one paragraph, full marks.

10. 10. What 1962 Changed on the Ground: The Birth of the LAC

The war ran from 20 October to 21 November 1962, when China declared a unilateral ceasefire and pulled back in the east — but not in the west, where it kept Aksai Chin. The line where the guns stopped became the Line of Actual Control: not a legal boundary, not an agreed line, just the line of where troops actually stood. That is why the LAC is so strange. It was never jointly surveyed, never marked on the ground with pillars, and the two sides carry different maps of where it runs in at least a dozen spots. Every standoff since — Depsang, Chumar, Doklam, Galwan — is, at bottom, an argument about where this unmarked line lies. For UPSC, this is the single most important conceptual point in the book: the LAC is a military fact, not a legal boundary. Prelims asks when the LAC concept emerged (post-1962). Mains expects you to explain why an un-demarcated line keeps producing crises — and this topic is your answer.

The LAC's strangeness deserves emphasis because students treat it like a normal border. It is not: no treaty created it, no survey marked it, no pillars stand on it. In at least a dozen areas the two sides' maps disagree, and those grey patches are where every standoff happens. When China says 'our understanding of the LAC differs,' it is pointing at exactly these patches. For Mains, the line to use is: 'the LAC is a military fact awaiting a political settlement.' That single sentence

explains Depsang, Chumar, Doklam, and Galwan — all four were arguments about where an unmarked line runs.

11. 11. The Henderson Brooks–Bhagat Report (1963)

After the defeat, the Army ordered an internal inquiry led by Lt Gen Henderson Brooks and Brig P.S. Bhagat. Their report, submitted in 1963, examined the higher direction of the war — the decisions in Delhi, not just the fighting in the hills. The government classified it, and it remains officially secret; only leaked portions have been seen publicly. What the leaks suggest is a political leadership that ordered an unprepared army forward and a military leadership that failed to push back. For UPSC, the report matters in two ways. First, as a Prelims fact: Henderson Brooks–Bhagat, 1963, still classified. Second, as a Mains lesson in civil-military relations: the report is cited in every debate about who decides when soldiers are sent into a fight they cannot win. You do not need the report's contents for the exam — you need its existence, its date, and what it symbolises: an honest post-mortem the country was not allowed to read.

The report's continued secrecy is itself an exam point: a democracy that will not publish its own army's inquiry into its worst defeat. In Mains answers on civil-military relations or defence reforms, cite it as the moment India learned that political direction of war needs institutional honesty. You do not need leaked details — in fact, avoid quoting leaks in the exam. What matters is the pattern: defeat, inquiry, classification, and the reforms that followed anyway. The report symbolises the gap between learning lessons quietly and accounting for them publicly.

12. 12. Defence Reforms After 1962

Defeat forced the rebuild. After 1962, India doubled defence spending, raised new mountain divisions, created the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) in 1962 itself for the Himalayan frontier, and began treating the China border as a permanent military problem rather than a diplomatic misunderstanding. Intelligence was reorganised, and border roads — neglected for years — became a priority, though the real road-building push took decades more. The lesson for your answers: 1962 converted the boundary from a map dispute into a defended frontier. When Mains asks about the "1962 legacy," this is the concrete half of the answer — the other half is psychological (topic 13). Prelims may ask which force was raised in 1962 for the China border: ITBP. Link this to Part V: the border infrastructure push of the 2020s (DSDBO road, tunnels) is the great-grandchild of the post-1962 realisation that roads decide Himalayan wars.

Two institutional births matter most for Prelims: the ITBP in 1962 for the Himalayan frontier, and the doubling of defence spending that funded new mountain divisions. But the slower reform was mental — Delhi stopped treating the China border as a diplomatic file and started treating it as a military frontier. That mental shift is what made Nathu La 1967 possible. For Mains, link the chain: 1962 defeat, then reforms, then 1967 deterrence, then the 1988 management era. It shows the examiner a mind that connects decades, which is exactly what history questions reward.

13. 13. Why 1962 Still Shapes India's China Policy

Ask any Indian diplomat what 1962 means and you will hear the same answer: never again be surprised, never again be unprepared, and never trust a boundary that is not settled. The war taught Delhi that China negotiates from positions of strength and that "friendship" slogans are no substitute for border management. Every agreement after 1993 — peace and tranquillity, CBMs, the Special Representatives — is, in a sense, an attempt to build guardrails so that 1962 never repeats. It also explains India's caution: Delhi settles nothing under pressure and builds strength first. For Mains, this is analytical gold. When the question is "discuss India-China relations," open with the structural point (buffer's collapse, topic 7), pass through 1962 as the trauma that set the policy DNA, and land on the present: engagement plus deterrence. Examiners reward answers that show history living inside current policy — this topic is how you do it.

The policy DNA from 1962 has three strands, and naming them makes a strong Mains paragraph. One, no surprises: intelligence and border infrastructure became permanent priorities. Two, no settlement under pressure: Delhi negotiates only from prepared positions. Three, no blind trust: every Chinese promise is measured against the LAC's ground reality. You can see all three in the 2020s — the infrastructure push, the refusal to normalise ties before disengagement, the verification-first approach at Depsang and Demchok. History living inside policy: that is the analytical move that separates toppers' answers from average ones.

14. 14. Companion Read: The Full 1962 War Story

This book deliberately keeps the 1962 war's battles, commanders, and day-by-day fighting in the background — because UPSC Hub has a whole companion book for them: Sino-Indian War 1962: Causes, Battles & Aftermath. Read that book for the NEFA and Ladakh fronts, the key battles, the Henderson Brooks findings in military detail, and the war's political fallout. Read this book for what the war left behind on the map: the LAC, the lost control of Aksai Chin, and the boundary dispute as it runs from 1962 to Galwan. The two books are designed as a pair — war in one, boundary through time in the other. In the exam hall, that division helps you too: if the question is about the war, reach for battles and causes; if it is about the border dispute, reach for lines, agreements, and standoffs. Mixing them up is the most common mistake aspirants make on this topic.

A practical tip for using the two books together: read the war book first for narrative — the fronts, the battles, the timeline of October-November 1962 — then read this book for structure — lines, agreements, standoffs. In revision, test yourself by asking 'war or boundary?' about each fact. Henderson Brooks: war book. BDCA 2013: boundary book. Galwan's 20 dead: boundary book (it changed the LAC's management). The 1962 ceasefire date 21 November: both. This sorting habit is what keeps your Mains answers focused instead of sprawling.

Part III: Nathu La 1967 to the 1988 Reset

15. 15. Nathu La Clashes, 1967

Five years after the humiliation of 1962, Indian soldiers stood their ground at Nathu La in Sikkim — and this time the result was different. In 1967, as India fenced the pass, Chinese troops opened fire; the exchange lasted several days and ended with the Chinese pulling back. Indian accounts describe it as a sharp, successful defence; the lesson Delhi took was that a prepared army could hold the line. The clash is less famous than 1962 or Galwan, but for UPSC it is a useful counterpoint: 1967 shows what changed after the post-1962 reforms. Prelims fact: Nathu La clashes, 1967, in Sikkim sector. Mains use: when writing about India's evolving border posture, 1967 is your evidence that the army of 1967 was not the army of 1962. Note the geography — Nathu La sits on the Sikkim-Tibet frontier, the same corridor where Doklam would flare up fifty years later.

The 1967 clashes are under-taught, which makes them high-value in the exam — a fact your competitors may not know. The core point is transformation: the same army that broke in 1962 held firm in 1967 because of the reforms in between. For Mains, 1967 is your evidence that deterrence works on this frontier: after the clashes, the Sikkim sector stayed quiet for decades. Remember it as the 'proof of reform' — when a question asks whether military preparedness prevents conflict, Nathu La 1967 is your Himalayan example. Pair it with Cho La in the same year; UPSC treats them as a pair.

16. 16. Cho La, 1967

Weeks after Nathu La, in October 1967, Chinese troops clashed with Indian soldiers at Cho La, another Sikkim pass. Like Nathu La, it ended with the Chinese withdrawing. The two 1967 clashes together form a pair in UPSC prep: they are the forgotten bookend to 1962, proof that the border had become a managed military frontier rather than an open wound. Aspirants often confuse Cho La with other passes — fix it in your mind as "Nathu La's twin, same year, same sector." Prelims occasionally clubs the two: "the 1967 clashes took place at..." with Nathu La and Cho La as the answer pair. The Mains lesson is about deterrence: after 1967, the Sikkim frontier stayed quiet for decades, suggesting that a firm, prepared response can stabilise even an unsettled boundary. That logic would be tested again at Doklam in 2017, a short distance away.

Cho La's exam value is almost entirely as Nathu La's twin — same year, same sector, same outcome. If Prelims asks about 'the 1967 clashes,' both passes are the answer. Do not confuse Cho La with Chumar (2014, Ladakh) — the names sound alike and that is exactly the trap. A simple fix: Cho La 1967 Sikkim, Chumar 2014 Ladakh. Write that line in your notes. In Mains, Cho La rarely needs its own paragraph; one clause — 'Nathu La and Cho La, 1967' — is enough to show command of the frontier's history.

17. 17. Sikkim's Merger, 1975 — and China's Long Non-Recognition

In 1975, Sikkim voted in a referendum and became India's 22nd state — a smooth, democratic merger. China, however, refused to recognise it for nearly three decades, continuing to show Sikkim as independent on its maps. Beijing only acknowledged Sikkim as part of India in 2003, during Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit, as part of the thaw that also created the Special Representatives mechanism. Why does this belong in a border book? Because Sikkim sits on the middle of the frontier, and China's map games there were pure boundary politics: non-recognition was a bargaining chip. For UPSC: Sikkim merger 1975, Chinese recognition 2003. The Mains point is about how China uses recognition as a bargaining chip — the same playbook appears in its refusal to recognise Arunachal Pradesh today. When you see "map wars" in current affairs, remember Sikkim: today's Arunachal renaming is yesterday's Sikkim non-recognition.

The Sikkim story is really about maps as weapons. For 28 years Beijing's maps showed Sikkim as separate, not because China cared deeply about Sikkim, but because non-recognition was a card to play. When the card was traded in 2003 — recognition for the SR mechanism and warmer ties — it showed how China prices its map positions. For Mains, this is your precedent paragraph on 'map wars': today's renaming of Arunachal places is the same tactic, and India's answer is the same too — ground reality does not change because a map does. The 1975-2003 gap also teaches patience: some of these games run for decades.

18. 18. Sumdorong Chu (Wangdung), 1986-87

In 1986, India discovered Chinese troops had set up a position at Sumdorong Chu (Wangdung) in the Tawang sector — north of the McMahon Line as India sees it. General Sundarji responded with Operation Chequerboard: a major airlift of troops to the area, showing Delhi would not be caught napping again. The standoff lasted into 1987, with both sides massed and talking. It ended without firing, through diplomacy. For UPSC, Sumdorong Chu is the bridge between 1962 and Doklam: the first big post-1962 standoff, resolved by a mix of military firmness and talks. Prelims fact: 1986-87, Tawang sector, Operation Chequerboard. Mains lesson: it set the template India still uses — move troops fast, hold ground, then negotiate. The crisis also pushed both sides toward the 1988 thaw, because it showed how easily an unmarked line could spiral.

Operation Chequerboard deserves a sentence in your notes because it named the response doctrine: airlift troops fast, occupy the heights, then talk. General Sundarji's move showed Beijing that salami-slicing would meet immediate mass. The standoff's peaceful end also proved the other half of the doctrine — firmness creates the conditions for diplomacy, it does not replace it. For Mains, Sumdorong Chu is the ancestor of Doklam 2017: same sector family (Tawang region), same method (block, hold, negotiate). When you cite both in one answer, you show the examiner a pattern across thirty years, which is precisely the analytical depth GS papers reward.

19. 19. Rajiv Gandhi's Beijing Visit, 1988: The Reset

In December 1988, Rajiv Gandhi became the first Indian prime minister to visit China in 34 years. The visit did not settle the boundary — nobody expected it to — but it changed the method: both

sides agreed to keep the border peaceful while working on a settlement, and set up the Joint Working Group on the boundary question. From 1988, the mantra was "peace and tranquillity pending settlement." That mantra produced the 1993 and 1996 agreements (Part IV). For UPSC, 1988 is the hinge between the confrontation era and the management era. Prelims: Rajiv Gandhi's China visit, 1988; Joint Working Group. Mains: the visit shows how India separated the boundary dispute from the rest of the relationship — trade and ties could grow while soldiers watched the line. That separation held until Galwan 2020 broke it. When you write "1988 to 2020: the managed decades," this visit is your opening date.

The 1988 formula — 'settle the boundary eventually, keep the peace meanwhile, grow the rest meanwhile' — held for 32 years, which makes it one of independent India's most successful diplomatic frameworks. Its collapse in 2020 is therefore not just a border story but the end of an era. For Mains, use 1988 as your period marker: '1988-2020: the managed decades.' Everything before was confrontation or war; everything after is the new unsettled phase. The Joint Working Group it created is also a Prelims fact. And note the personal diplomacy angle — leader-level visits resetting deadlocked ties, a pattern repeated at Kazan 2024.

Part IV: The Agreement Years — Managing the LAC

20. 20. Why the LAC Was Never Demarcated

Here is the puzzle at the centre of everything: India and China signed four major border agreements between 1993 and 2013, yet never once sat down to jointly survey and mark the LAC on the ground. Why? Because demarcation means agreeing where the line is — and neither side wants to give away its claim first. China has at times suggested clarifying the LAC; India has been wary, fearing that "clarification" would freeze Chinese positions gained by nibbling forward. The result is a line that exists on two different sets of maps, with a dozen-odd "differing perception" areas where patrols overlap. For UPSC Mains, this is a first-class analytical point: the agreements managed the symptoms (no firing, prior notice of exercises) but never treated the disease (no agreed line). Every answer on "why do standoffs recur" should land here. Prelims angle: the term "differing perceptions of the LAC" — learn it, because official statements use exactly these words.

This topic is the analytical core of the book, so give it weight in Mains. Demarcation is a prisoner of distrust: India fears 'clarification' would legitimise China's nibbled positions; China fears it would freeze the status quo it wants to keep revising. Both sides therefore prefer the ambiguity they complain about — it preserves options. That is the paradox to state plainly: the LAC stays unmarked because marking it would force concessions neither side will make first. Once you grasp this, the four agreements read differently — not as steps toward settlement, but as shock absorbers for a dispute both sides chose to live with.

21. 21. 1993: Agreement on Peace and Tranquillity

Signed during Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to Beijing in September 1993, the Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC was the first formal deal of the

management era. Its core promise: neither side would use force or threaten to use force, both would respect the LAC, and military strength along the line would be kept to a minimum — only what good relations required. Crucially, the agreement said that where the LAC was unclear, the two sides would work it out through talks. For UPSC, 1993 is the foundation stone: every later agreement builds on it. Prelims asks the year and the prime minister (Narasimha Rao). Mains asks what it achieved and what it left out — it achieved a no-force pledge, but left the line itself undefined. That gap is why 1996, 2005, and 2013 had to follow. Think of 1993 as the promise; the rest are the plumbing.

A detail that sharpens your answer: the 1993 agreement explicitly said pending a settlement, the two sides would 'strictly respect and observe' the LAC — the phrase 'pending settlement' is doing heavy work, admitting the line is provisional. For Prelims, link the agreement to the visit: Narasimha Rao, Beijing, September 1993. For Mains, 1993 is the 'promise' in the promise-plumbing sequence: 1993 promised peace, 1996 built the procedures, 2005 set the political terms, 2013 patched the holes. Memorise that four-beat rhythm — promise, procedures, principles, patch — and you can reconstruct the whole agreement era from memory in the exam hall.

22. 22. 1996: Confidence-Building Measures

The 1996 Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field took the 1993 promise and added working detail. Troops would not open fire or use explosives within 2 km of the LAC; neither side would conduct major military exercises near the line without telling the other first; and the two armies would hold regular meetings at designated border points. This is the agreement that made the LAC liveable for soldiers — flag meetings, hotlines, and advance notice became routine. For UPSC Prelims, the "2 km no-fire" detail is exactly the kind of statement-based fact the paper loves. For Mains, 1996 shows the logic of the era: since the line could not be settled, make it safe. The agreement worked for years — which is also why Galwan 2020 shocked the system so badly. When soldiers who had not fired a shot in decades suddenly fought hand-to-hand, it meant the whole 1993-96 framework had cracked.

The 2-km rule is the most quotable detail in the border agreements, and it explains Galwan's strange character: soldiers fought with clubs because guns were banned by the very agreement meant to keep them safe. For Mains, 1996 illustrates both the achievement and the trap of CBMs — they made the border liveable for 24 years, but they also assumed goodwill that 2020 proved fragile. When the question asks 'did the agreements fail?', the nuanced answer is: they succeeded at their real job (preventing war) until a political decision in Beijing overrode them. Agreements manage armies; they cannot restrain capitals.

23. 23. 2003: The Special Representatives Mechanism

During Vajpayee's 2003 Beijing visit — the same visit where China recognised Sikkim — the two sides created the Special Representatives (SR) mechanism: senior political figures empowered to find a boundary settlement from the political angle, above the level of working officials. India's first SR was Brajesh Mishra; the mechanism has run through many rounds since. The SR talks

produced the 2005 Political Parameters (next topic) but never a final settlement. For UPSC, the SR mechanism is the answer to "how do India and China negotiate the boundary?" — at the political level through SRs, at the working level through the WMCC (2012), and at the military level through Corps Commander talks. Prelims fact: SR mechanism created 2003. Mains point: the SR channel shows both sides treat the boundary as a political problem needing a political package deal, not a technical survey exercise. Twenty-plus rounds without settlement also tell you how hard the problem is.

The SR mechanism's real significance is that it moved the boundary from the foreign-ministry file to the political-leader file — an admission that only a grand bargain, not technical talks, can settle it. Brajesh Mishra as the first SR is a possible Prelims name. The twenty-plus rounds since, with no settlement, are themselves the lesson: the mechanism survives because both sides value the channel, not because it delivers. For Mains, cite the SR talks as evidence that the dispute needs a political package — and that the politics have never been ripe. Process without progress is still process; it keeps the dispute from turning violent.

24. 24. 2005: Political Parameters and Guiding Principles

The 2005 Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the boundary question was the high-water mark of optimism. It said any settlement must be fair, reasonable, and mutually acceptable — and, importantly, that it should safeguard "due interests" of settled populations in border areas. India read that as protection for Arunachal Pradesh: you cannot hand over a state with over a million Indian citizens as part of a "swap." China later seemed to cool on the clause, but the text stands. For UPSC, 2005 is the Mains agreement — Prelims may ask the year, but Mains asks what "political parameters" means: that the settlement must be a political package, not a legalistic line-drawing, and that populated areas cannot be traded like empty desert. When China claims Arunachal today, India's quiet answer is 2005: we agreed settled populations stay where they are.

The 'settled populations' clause is the agreement's most quoted line, and India's reading of it is straightforward: a boundary settlement cannot transfer a state of over a million Indian citizens. This is why the clause matters more now than in 2005 — every time Beijing presses its Arunachal claim, Delhi's unspoken reply is the document both sides signed. For Mains, 2005 is your 'principles' beat: any settlement must be fair, reasonable, mutually acceptable, and politically packaged. It is also a good example of how a single sentence in a joint document can become a decade-long shield. Learn the phrase 'due interests of settled populations' — it may appear verbatim in a Prelims statement.

25. 25. 2012: WMCC — The Working Mechanism

The Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), set up in 2012, is the officials-level talk shop: diplomats and military officers who meet to handle day-to-day friction — a patrol blocked here, a tent pitched there — before it becomes a standoff. During the 2020-21 crisis, the WMCC met repeatedly alongside the Corps Commander talks, grinding through disengagement step by step. For UPSC, WMCC is useful as the middle

rung of the three-level system: SRs at the top (political), WMCC in the middle (official), Corps Commanders at the ground (military). Prelims fact: WMCC established 2012. The Mains lesson is institutional: India and China built a ladder of talks precisely because the line is unmarked — friction is constant, so the talking must be constant too. When news says "the WMCC met," you now know which rung that is.

The WMCC's finest hour was 2020-21, when it met again and again to grind out disengagement while soldiers stood nose-to-nose. That is the institution's exam lesson: working-level talks are unglamorous and slow, but they are what prevent standoffs from becoming wars. For answers, place the WMCC in the three-rung ladder — SRs decide direction, WMCC manages friction, Corps Commanders handle the ground. Prelims fact: 2012. A common mistake is confusing WMCC with the SR mechanism; keep them separate by level — WMCC is officials, SRs are political appointees. One line of distinction earns the mark.

26. 26. 2013: BDCA — Border Defence Cooperation Agreement

The Border Defence Cooperation Agreement of October 2013, signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Beijing visit, was the last big agreement of the management era — and it came just months after the Depsang standoff. The BDCA said border troops would not tail each other's patrols, would show restraint in face-offs, and would use existing channels (flag meetings, hotlines) rather than force. It also restated the no-use-of-force pledge. For UPSC, the BDCA's timing is the point: agreements kept following standoffs, like bandages after cuts. Prelims: BDCA 2013. Mains: the BDCA shows the pattern of the 2010s — each crisis produced a new piece of paper, but the underlying problem (no agreed LAC) stayed untouched. Within seven years, Galwan would show the limits of paper. When you list the four agreements in an answer, BDCA is the closing entry: 1993 promise, 1996 detail, 2005 principles, 2013 last patch.

Read the BDCA's timing as a confession: it was signed in October 2013, months after Depsang, because Depsang had shown the 1993-96 framework leaking. Each agreement in this book follows a scare — 1993 follows the post-1988 thaw's fragility, 1996 follows early-90s friction, BDCA follows Depsang. For Mains, this 'scare-then-paper' pattern is your critical lens: paper follows crisis, but paper never fixes the unmarked line. The BDCA is also the last entry before Galwan, which makes it a poignant closing beat — the final patch before the framework broke. End your agreement-era paragraph here.

27. 27. Depsang Standoff, 2013

In April-May 2013, Chinese troops pitched tents 19 km inside what India sees as its side of the LAC in the Depsang Bulge, near Daulat Beg Oldie in Ladakh — and stayed for three weeks. India responded with its own tents nearby, and the standoff ended through talks, with both sides pulling back. Depsang mattered because it was the first big Ladakh standoff of the 2010s and it exposed the "differing perceptions" problem in its purest form: both sides sincerely claimed the same ground. For UPSC, Depsang 2013 is the textbook case of an LAC standoff: intrusion, tents, talks, mutual pullback, no shots. Prelims: Depsang, 2013, Ladakh. Mains: use Depsang to explain why the LAC's un-demarcated nature makes such incidents inevitable — and note the timing,

weeks before Premier Li Keqiang's India visit, a reminder that border friction and diplomacy run on parallel tracks in this relationship.

Depsang's most instructive detail is the depth — 19 km inside India's perception of the LAC. That is not a patrol brushing past; it is a deliberate test of where Delhi's red lines lie. The three-week tent-versus-tent standoff, resolved by talks, became the template for the decade: intrude, hold, negotiate, withdraw. For Mains, Depsang is the purest illustration of 'differing perceptions' — both sides could sincerely claim the same ground because no joint map exists. It also teaches the two-track lesson: the standoff unfolded just before Premier Li's visit, yet the visit went ahead. Friction and diplomacy, parallel tracks.

28. 28. Chumar Standoff, 2014

In September 2014, even as President Xi Jinping was visiting India, hundreds of Chinese troops faced off against Indian soldiers at Chumar in Ladakh — while, separately, Indian and Chinese troops stared each other down at Demchok. The optics were striking: summit handshakes in Ahmedabad, soldiers nose-to-nose in the Himalayas. The standoffs were resolved after talks, but the message lingered — the PLA's border actions and Beijing's diplomacy do not always move together. For UPSC, Chumar 2014 is the classic "two-track" example: engagement at the top, friction at the line. Prelims: Chumar, 2014, Ladakh. Mains use: when asked whether summits can fix the boundary, Chumar is your evidence that leader-level warmth does not automatically reach the LAC. It also foreshadowed 2020 — the same gap between Beijing's words and the PLA's moves, only much bigger.

Chumar's lasting image — Xi in Ahmedabad while troops faced off in Ladakh — captures the central puzzle of the relationship: Beijing's left hand and right hand do not always coordinate, or the disconnect is deliberate. Either reading leads to the same policy lesson for Delhi: never let summit warmth lower border guard. For Mains, Chumar is the evidence that leader-level chemistry does not transmit to the LAC. It belongs in any answer on 'why engagement failed to prevent 2020' — the warning signs were visible in 2014, when handshakes and standoffs shared the same week. The examiner values aspirants who connect 2014 to 2020 as one arc.

29. 29. Doklam, 2017: The Full Story

On 16 June 2017, Chinese troops with bulldozers began extending a road in the Doklam plateau — territory claimed by Bhutan, near the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction. Indian troops crossed into the area on 18 June at Bhutan's request (Thimphu issued a formal protest note against Beijing) and physically blocked the road work. The standoff ran 73 days, until 28 August 2017, when both sides pulled back. India acted because the road pointed toward the Siliguri Corridor (next topic). For UPSC, get the skeleton right: 16 June – 28 August 2017, Bhutan's claim, India's intervention on Thimphu's behalf, road construction as the trigger, disengagement without firing. Prelims loves the dates and the "whose territory" question (Bhutan's, claimed by China). Mains asks why India intervened in a third country's dispute — and the answer is the corridor, plus the principle that the tri-junction's status was settled by earlier agreements.

Three facts make Doklam exam-proof. One, the dates: 16 June to 28 August 2017 — 73 days. Two, the legal position: the land is Bhutan's, claimed by China; India's presence was at Thimphu's request after its formal protest note. Three, the trigger: a Chinese road crew with bulldozers, not a patrol clash. Get these three right and no MCQ can trap you. For Mains, Doklam's significance is the precedent of intervention: India acted militarily on a neighbour's territory to protect its own security — the clearest Himalayan example of the 'extended neighbourhood' doctrine. It is also the success story Delhi measured 2020 against.

30. 30. Why Doklam Mattered: The Siliguri Corridor

The Siliguri Corridor — the "Chicken's Neck" — is the narrow strip of West Bengal, only about 22 km wide at its slimmest (widely cited), that connects mainland India to the Northeast. A Chinese road through Doklam would have let the PLA sit overlooking this lifeline. That is why India treated a Bhutanese border dispute as its own security problem: lose the corridor's safety and the entire Northeast is cut off. For UPSC, the corridor is a map staple — Prelims asks what connects the Northeast to the rest of India, and the answer is the Siliguri Corridor. Mains use: Doklam shows India's "extended security" thinking — New Delhi will act beyond its own claimed line when a neighbour's territory affects Indian security. The 2017 outcome (China stopped the road, both sides withdrew) is also cited as proof that firmness plus diplomacy works — the template India tried to repeat in 2020, with far bloodier results.

The corridor's numbers are worth fixing: about 22 km at its narrowest, linking the Northeast's eight states to the mainland. Lose it and 45 million Indians are cut off by land — that is why a road on a Bhutanese plateau became a Delhi red line. For map questions, the Siliguri Corridor is among the most-asked features in the region, alongside the Chicken's Neck nickname. In Mains, use the corridor to explain 'security beyond borders': India's Doklam move is the textbook case of acting outside one's own claim line when geography demands it. It also explains why China keeps probing near the tri-junction — the corridor is India's permanent vulnerability.

Part V: Galwan 2020 and After

31. 31. The 2020 Build-Up: Where Troops Massed

In April-May 2020, as the world watched the pandemic, the PLA moved large forces to multiple points along the LAC in eastern Ladakh: the Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso's north bank, Hot Springs, and Gogra. Indian patrols found their routes blocked at points they had patrolled for years. By June, both sides had tens of thousands of troops, tanks, and artillery facing each other across the high desert. The trigger is still debated — India was building the DSDBO road (next sections), China may have wanted to punish Delhi or test it — but the fact pattern is clear: a coordinated, multi-point PLA push, not a local accident. For UPSC, the 2020 build-up is the "what happened" behind Galwan. Prelims: the friction points (Galwan, Pangong Tso, Hot Springs, Gogra — all in eastern Ladakh). Mains: the build-up shows China's salami-slicing method — small, deniable moves at many points, adding up to a changed status quo.

The multi-point character of the 2020 push is the detail that separates informed answers from vague ones: Galwan, Pangong Tso, Hot Springs, and Gogra simultaneously, in April-May 2020, while India was locked down for the pandemic. That coordination suggests planning, not accident — the salami-slicing playbook applied at four points at once. For Mains, the build-up is your evidence for the 'intent' debate: whether Beijing wanted to punish the DSDBO road, test a distracted Delhi, or simply grab, the method was the same — move fast at many points, present a new status quo, dare India to reverse it. Naming all four points shows the examiner you know the ground.

32. 32. Galwan Valley Clash, 15 June 2020

On the night of 15 June 2020, Indian and Chinese soldiers fought hand-to-hand in the Galwan Valley — with stones, sticks, and clubs, because the old agreements barred firearms near the LAC. Twenty Indian soldiers were killed, including the commanding officer, Colonel B. Santosh Babu (official Indian figure). China long stayed silent on its losses, then in February 2021 officially acknowledged four deaths. It was the first deadly clash on the LAC since 1975. For UPSC, Galwan is the landmark every answer needs: date 15 June 2020, 20 Indian dead (official), no shots fired, first fatalities in 45 years. The Mains significance is larger than the valley: Galwan ended the "managed decades" that began in 1988. After that night, India-China relations could never go back to "trade grows while the border stays quiet." Everything in this book's final sections flows from Galwan.

Two details define Galwan's strangeness and must appear in any answer: no firearms were used — the 1996 agreement's shadow — and it was the first deadly LAC clash since 1975. The official toll, 20 Indian soldiers including Colonel B. Santosh Babu, is the figure to quote; China's February 2021 acknowledgment of four deaths is the attributed counterpart. For Mains, Galwan is the hinge of the entire modern story: before it, the 1988 formula; after it, linkage of border to everything. Write the date as 15 June 2020 without hesitation — it is now as fixed in this topic as 1962 itself.

33. 33. What Galwan Changed Beyond the Border

Galwan redrew the whole relationship, not just the LAC. India banned dozens of Chinese apps, tightened screening of Chinese investment, and accelerated the Atmanirbhar push to cut supply-chain dependence on China. Border infrastructure spending jumped. Diplomatically, Delhi deepened the Quad and spoke more openly about the Indo-Pacific. The message to Beijing: the boundary dispute now infects everything — trade, tech, and strategy move together. For UPSC Mains, this is the "linkage" argument: Galwan proved the 1988 formula (separate the border from the rest) was dead. Prelims may ask about the app bans or investment screening as current-affairs facts. When you write on India-China relations post-2020, structure it as "before Galwan / after Galwan" — the examiner will see a mind that thinks in turning points, which is exactly what this topic rewards.

The aftermath's breadth is the point to stress: app bans, investment screening, supply-chain rethinking, Quad deepening, border infrastructure surge — a whole-of-relationship response to a

border clash. That breadth is what 'linkage' means in practice, and it reversed 32 years of deliberate separation. For Mains, the aftermath gives you the 'consequences' paragraph: economically (decoupling talk), strategically (Quad), domestically (Atmanirbhar). The official formulation to quote is that the relationship cannot return to normal while the border situation is abnormal — learn that sentence, because it is Delhi's entire China policy in one line since 2020.

34. 34. Pangong Tso, Gogra and Hot Springs, 2020-21

While Galwan grabbed headlines, the longer standoff played out at Pangong Tso — the high-altitude lake whose north bank has "fingers" (ridgelines) numbered 1 to 8. China occupied the area between Finger 4 and Finger 8, blocking Indian patrols; in August 2020 India made its own move, occupying the Kailash Range heights on the lake's south bank, gaining bargaining power. Gogra and Hot Springs saw similar face-offs. Disengagement at Pangong came in February 2021, with both sides pulling back and creating a no-patrol zone in between. For UPSC, Pangong is the detailed case study: fingers, Kailash Range, February 2021 disengagement. Prelims: Pangong Tso is in eastern Ladakh; the "fingers" are its ridgelines. Mains: the episode shows disengagement mechanics — mutual pullback plus buffer zones — the same formula applied later at Gogra (2021) and Hot Springs (2022).

The Kailash Range move of August 2020 is the operation to remember: India occupied heights on Pangong Tso's south bank, turning the tables and creating bargaining power that produced the February 2021 disengagement. It is the clearest post-Galwan example of the Sumdorong Chu/ Doklam doctrine — seize the heights, then negotiate. For Prelims, the 'fingers' (numbered ridgelines on the north bank) are the famous detail; the disengagement created a no-patrol zone between Finger 3 and Finger 8. For Mains, Pangong shows disengagement mechanics in action: mutual pullback plus buffer, the formula repeated at every later point.

35. 35. Disengagement Rounds, 2021-22

Through 2021 and 2022, the two armies ground through round after round of Corps Commander talks, disengaging point by point: Pangong Tso (February 2021), Gogra (August 2021), Hot Springs/PP-15 (September 2022). Each round followed the same script — talks, mutual pullback by a set distance, and a buffer zone in between where neither side patrols. Slow, frustrating, but it worked without firing a shot. For UPSC, the disengagement sequence is a timeline question waiting to happen: which point disengaged when. The Mains lesson is about process: disengagement is not settlement — it only restores the pre-2020 quiet at each point, and the buffer zones mean India gave up patrolling some areas it used to reach. Critics call that a concession; the government calls it stabilisation. In an answer, present both views — that balance is what fetches marks on disputed current issues.

The sequence — Pangong February 2021, Gogra August 2021, Hot Springs September 2022 — is a timeline the examiner can easily convert into a question, so learn it in order. Each round's identical script (talks, pullback, buffer zone) shows the process working, but the buffer zones' cost needs honest treatment: India stopped patrolling areas it once reached. For Mains, present the balanced assessment — stabilisation achieved, access conceded, settlement untouched. That

three-part judgment is the mature answer. Avoid the trap of calling disengagement a 'solution'; it is a return to the pre-2020 quiet, nothing more.

36. 36. Yangtse (Tawang Sector), December 2022

In December 2022, the LAC flared in a new place: Yangtse, in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh. Chinese troops tried to cross the line; Indian soldiers pushed them back in another sticks-and-stones scuffle, with injuries on both sides but no deaths. The clash mattered because it showed the crisis was not confined to Ladakh — the eastern sector could ignite too. It also confirmed the post-Galwan pattern: no firearms (the old agreements still held on that), but regular physical shoving. For UPSC: Yangtse, December 2022, Tawang sector — the eastern-sector echo of Galwan. Prelims may place it on a map. Mains use: Yangtse proves the whole 3,488-km LAC is live, not just Ladakh. When you write that the boundary dispute is "pan-Himalayan," Yangtse is your eastern evidence and Galwan your western evidence.

Yangtse's exam importance is as the eastern proof of a pan-Himalayan crisis: if Galwan showed the west could burn, Yangtse showed the east could too. December 2022, Tawang sector, scuffle without firearms or deaths — the post-Galwan pattern in miniature. For Mains, Yangtse strengthens the 'whole LAC is live' argument and justifies the infrastructure push in Arunachal (Sela Tunnel 2024 belongs in the same paragraph). It also reminds the examiner that the McMahon Line sector, quiet since 1987, is not settled — only dormant. One line on Yangtse in a border answer shows you track the issue beyond Ladakh.

37. 37. The 2024 Patrolling Arrangement

In October 2024, India and China announced an arrangement restoring patrolling rights at the two remaining Ladakh friction points, Depsang and Demchok — the last gaps left after the 2021-22 rounds. The deal was followed within days by a Modi-Xi meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit at Kazan, their first formal bilateral in years. Delhi was careful to call it disengagement, not normalisation: troops still massed nearby, and the relationship stayed frozen on trade and tech. For UPSC, October 2024 is the latest hard date in the story — the "current status" line for any answer written in 2026-27. The Mains point: the arrangement shows talks can work, but it settled nothing about the boundary itself. Depsang and Demchok patrols resumed; the LAC stayed exactly where it was — unmarked and disputed.

October 2024 matters as the closing date of the crisis arc: Depsang and Demchok were the last friction points, and the patrolling arrangement restored India's old patrol routes there. The Kazan Modi-Xi meeting days later was the diplomatic punctuation — the first formal bilateral in years. For Mains, the careful official wording is the lesson: Delhi called it disengagement, not normalisation, and kept every restriction in place. That distinction — troops step back, trust does not — is the honest 'current status' for any 2026-27 answer. End the crisis narrative here, but note the pending items: de-escalation and the boundary itself.

38. 38. Buffer Zones and Patrolling Rights: What They Mean

Every disengagement since 2021 created "buffer zones" — strips of land, usually a few kilometres wide, where neither side's troops patrol. They stop face-offs, but they have a cost: Indian patrols can no longer reach points they used to visit, like parts of Depsang. "Patrolling rights" became the key phrase of the 2024 arrangement — India wanted its old patrol routes back. For UPSC Mains, buffer zones are a ready-made debate: are they sensible de-escalation or a quiet surrender of access? The government's line is that they prevent clashes; critics say China keeps what it grabbed and India loses patrol access. You do not need to pick a side in the exam — you need to show you understand both. Prelims angle: the term "buffer zone" in LAC news. One crisp paragraph on buffer zones in a border answer signals to the examiner that you follow the issue past the headlines.

The buffer-zone debate is tailor-made for Mains because both sides have a case. The government's case: buffers stop face-offs and save lives; they are reversible and technical, not political. The critics' case: buffers sit mostly on India's former patrol routes, so China keeps its gains while India loses access. Your answer should present both, then land on the institutional fact: buffers are a management tool, not a settlement, and they leave the LAC as unmarked as ever. Prelims may simply ask what a buffer zone is — a strip where neither side patrols. One balanced paragraph here can carry the 'critical analysis' portion of a border answer.

39. 39. Corps Commander Talks and WMCC: How Talks Work

Since 2020, the boundary has been managed through two parallel channels. The Corps Commander-level talks — the local army commanders meeting at border points like Chushul and Moldo — handle the ground: disengagement steps, buffer zones, patrol schedules. The WMCC (topic 25) handles the diplomatic track in Delhi and Beijing. Above both sit the Special Representatives and, occasionally, leader-level meetings like Kazan 2024. For UPSC, this is the "institutional framework" paragraph every Mains answer needs: SRs (political), WMCC (official), Corps Commanders (military). Prelims may ask where Corps Commander talks are held (Chushul-Moldo and other border meeting points). The deeper point: the system worked — no shots fired since 2020 — but it manages friction without resolving the dispute. Talks are the treatment, not the cure.

The three-rung ladder — SRs (political), WMCC (official), Corps Commanders (military) — is the framework paragraph every Mains answer on process needs. Its 2020-24 record is genuinely mixed in a way the examiner respects: it prevented any shot being fired, yet it took four years to finish disengagement. That is the honest assessment — effective at crisis management, incapable of settlement. For Prelims, the border personnel meeting points (Chushul-Moldo and others) are the locational facts. Remember the ladder's logic: friction on an unmarked line is permanent, so the talking must be permanent too. Institutions do not solve the dispute; they survive it.

40. 40. LAC vs LoC: Why the Terms Differ

Students mix these up, and UPSC punishes it. The LoC (Line of Control) divides Indian and Pakistani Kashmir — it came from the 1972 Shimla Agreement, is marked on maps both sides accept, and is a de facto border everyone understands. The LAC (Line of Actual Control) is vaguer: a 1962 ceasefire line, never jointly demarcated, with differing perceptions on both sides. The LoC is defined; the LAC is disputed. The LoC has a ceasefire agreement and cross-border trade history; the LAC has "peace and tranquillity" agreements that keep breaking down. For Prelims, this is a classic distinguish-between question. For Mains, the contrast explains India's different strategies: the LoC is managed as a settled-enough line with Pakistan, while the LAC with China is an open dispute needing settlement. One line in your answer — "the LoC is demarcated, the LAC is not" — clears the fog instantly.

The one-line distinction — the LoC is demarcated, the LAC is not — is among the highest-value sentences in this book, because UPSC directly tests the confusion. Build it out: LoC from the 1972 Shimla Agreement, mapped and mutually understood; LAC from the 1962 ceasefire, never jointly surveyed. The LoC has seen wars and a ceasefire regime; the LAC has seen agreements that keep fraying. For Mains, the contrast explains strategy: India manages Pakistan's line as a known quantity and China's line as an open question. Students who blur the two lose credibility instantly; students who separate them crisply gain it.

41. 41. India's Border Infrastructure Push

After Galwan, Delhi poured money into the border it had neglected for decades. The star project is the DSDBO road — Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie — running through Ladakh to the Karakoram Pass area, giving India all-weather access to its northernmost posts. The Atal Tunnel (2020) cut travel time to Leh; the Sela Tunnel (2024) did the same for Tawang. New airstrips, bridges, and troop habitats followed. China's 2020 push was partly a reaction to exactly this building — Beijing dislikes Indian roads near the LAC as much as Delhi dislikes Chinese ones. For UPSC: DSDBO road, Atal Tunnel 2020, Sela Tunnel 2024 — the infrastructure trio. Mains angle: roads are strategy in the Himalayas. The side that can move troops and supplies in winter holds the advantage. India's build-up is the material answer to 1962's lesson — never again lose for want of a road.

Infrastructure is strategy in the Himalayas — the side that supplies its posts through winter holds the ground. That single principle explains the DSDBO road (Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie, to India's northernmost Ladakh posts), the Atal Tunnel (2020, to Leh), and the Sela Tunnel (2024, to Tawang). Note the action-reaction loop for Mains: India's roads alarm Beijing, China's roads alarm Delhi, and each side's building justifies the other's. The loop is why the LAC keeps tens of thousands of troops in place years after disengagement. In answers, present infrastructure as both deterrence and dilemma — necessary, yet itself a friction source.

42. 42. The China-Pakistan Angle: CPEC Through PoK

The boundary dispute does not stop at the LAC — it runs into Kashmir through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. CPEC, the flagship of China's Belt and Road, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (Gilgit-Baltistan), territory India claims. Delhi has protested CPEC since 2015 and boycotts the Belt and Road Forum over this sovereignty issue. For the border story, CPEC matters twice: it gives China a stake in PoK's status, and it binds Beijing and Islamabad into the partnership India faces on two fronts. For UPSC, CPEC-through-PoK is the standard sovereignty objection — Prelims asks what CPEC is and where it runs; Mains asks why India opposes the Belt and Road. Link it to the companion Kashmir book: the western edge of the China dispute meets the northern edge of the Kashmir dispute in Gilgit-Baltistan. One map, three disputes.

CPEC's route through Gilgit-Baltistan is India's standing sovereignty objection to the Belt and Road, raised since 2015 and the reason Delhi skips the BRI Forum. For the border book, the point is the knot: the China dispute's western edge and the Kashmir dispute's northern edge meet in territory India claims. That makes any India-China boundary conversation inseparable from the Pakistan factor — the 'two-front' reality. For Mains, CPEC is the link between this book and the Kashmir companion book; for Prelims, the facts are the corridor's name, its PoK route, and India's objection. One map showing all three disputes is worth a page of prose.

Part VI: UPSC Angles — Maps, Answers & Revision

43. 43. Map Work: The Three Sectors

Draw the map once and the whole book falls into place. Start at the Karakoram Pass in the north: the western sector runs down through Aksai Chin (Ladakh) to the middle sector's Himachal-Uttarakhand stretch, then the long eastern sector follows the McMahon Line across Arunachal Pradesh to the tri-junction near Bhutan. Mark these points: Daulat Beg Oldie and Depsang (north Ladakh), Pangong Tso and Galwan (eastern Ladakh), Barahoti (Uttarakhand), Nathu La and Cho La (Sikkim), Doklam (tri-junction), Tawang and Yangtse (Arunachal). For UPSC Prelims, map questions on this frontier are routine — "which of these lies in Ladakh" or matching passes to states. Practice by placing every standoff from this book on a blank outline map: Depsang 2013, Chumar 2014, Doklam 2017, Galwan 2020, Yangtse 2022. Ten minutes with a map beats an hour of re-reading, because the examiner tests locations, not paragraphs.

Make the map exercise active, not passive: take a blank outline of India and place ten items from this book — Karakoram Pass, Depsang, Pangong Tso, Galwan, Barahoti, Nathu La, Doklam, Tawang, Yangtse, Siliguri Corridor. Then add the year each became famous. That single sheet becomes your visual revision for the whole topic. UPSC's map questions reward exactly this drill: passes to states, lakes to regions, corridors to connections. In Mains, a rough sketch-map in your answer (where permitted) instantly lifts it — examiners remember the candidate who drew the three sectors.

44. 44. Agreements and Standoffs at a Glance (Prelims Facts)

Compress the book into a Prelims-ready list. Agreements: 1993 Peace and Tranquillity (Narasimha Rao visit); 1996 CBMs (2 km no-fire rule); 2003 Special Representatives mechanism (Vajpayee visit, Sikkim recognised); 2005 Political Parameters (settled populations protected); 2012 WMCC; 2013 BDCA (Manmohan Singh visit). Standoffs: Sumdorong Chu 1986-87; Depsang 2013; Chumar 2014; Doklam 16 June – 28 August 2017; Galwan 15 June 2020; Yangtse December 2022. Clashes with firing: Nathu La and Cho La 1967. Lines: McMahon 1914 (Shimla Convention); Johnson Line 1865 (Aksai Chin in India); LAC born 1962. Turn this into flashcards — agreement on one side, year plus one detail on the other. UPSC Prelims asks these as match-the-following and statement questions, and they are free marks if you have drilled the dates. The revision tables below give you the same facts in grid form.

Turn this topic into a self-test: cover the right column and recite. 1993 — Peace and Tranquillity — Narasimha Rao — no force. 1996 — CBMs — 2 km no-fire. 2003 — SR mechanism — Vajpayee — Sikkim recognised. 2005 — Political Parameters — settled populations. 2012 — WMCC. 2013 — BDCA — Manmohan Singh. Then the standoffs: 1986-87 Sumdorong Chu, 2013 Depsang, 2014 Chumar, 2017 Doklam (73 days), 2020 Galwan (20 dead), 2022 Yangtse. If you can recite both lists without looking, the Prelims section on this topic is already secured. The tables below are the same facts in grid form — use whichever format your memory prefers.

45. 45. Key Terms and Personalities

Learn the vocabulary and the names drop into place. Terms: LAC (Line of Actual Control); McMahon Line; Aksai Chin; "differing perceptions"; buffer zone; patrolling rights; salami-slicing; CBMs; Special Representatives; WMCC; BDCA; Chicken's Neck (Siliguri Corridor); Finger area (Pangong Tso). Personalities: Sir Henry McMahon (1914 line); the Dalai Lama (1959 asylum — the political earthquake); Brajesh Mishra (first Special Representative, 2003); Colonel B. Santosh Babu (Galwan, 2020). Places-as-terms: Tawang, Doklam, Depsang, Galwan, Yangtse. For Mains, using the exact official vocabulary — "differing perceptions," "peace and tranquillity," "political parameters" — signals that you read primary sources, not just guides. Examiners notice when an aspirant writes "buffer zone" correctly instead of "no man's land." Precision in terms is precision in thought, and this topic rewards it more than most.

Examiners scan answers for official vocabulary, so treat these terms as marks in themselves: 'differing perceptions,' 'peace and tranquillity,' 'political parameters and guiding principles,' 'patrolling rights,' 'buffer zone.' Each phrase comes from a real document, and using it shows source-level preparation. For personalities, keep the list short: McMahon (1914), the Dalai Lama (1959), Brajesh Mishra (first SR, 2003), Colonel Santosh Babu (Galwan). In the interview, dropping 'salami-slicing' correctly — small incremental moves changing the status quo — signals you follow the strategic debate, not just the news.

46. 46. Why Can't the Boundary Be Settled? — The Mains Answer

This is the 250-word Mains question the whole book builds toward, so here is the answer in skeleton form. First, history: colonial lines (McMahon 1914, Johnson vs Macartney-MacDonald) were never jointly accepted, and 1962 replaced negotiation with a ceasefire line. Second, strategy: Aksai Chin carries China's Xinjiang-Tibet highway, and Arunachal is a full Indian state — neither side can concede its core without domestic political cost. Third, process: the LAC was never demarcated, so "clarification" itself is a negotiation neither side trusts. Fourth, linkage: the boundary is now tied to Tibet, to CPEC through PoK, and to the wider rivalry — it cannot be settled in isolation. Fifth, trust: Galwan destroyed the belief that the line can be managed while the rest of the relationship grows. Close with the honest line: settlement needs a political package deal (the 2005 idea), and the politics are not ripe. Write this structure once from memory and you own the toughest question on the topic.

Practice delivering this answer aloud in under three minutes — that is the Mains time budget. The five causes in order: colonial lines never settled (1914, Johnson/Macartney-MacDonald), strategic cores (Aksai Chin highway, Arunachal's people), the un-demarcated LAC nobody trusts clarifying, linkage to Tibet/CPEC/wider rivalry, and post-Galwan trust collapse. Close with the 2005 insight: settlement needs a political package, and the politics are not ripe. Five causes, one closing line — that is a complete 250-word answer. Rehearse it until the structure comes without thinking; structure under pressure is what separates good answers from great ones.

47. 47. India's China Policy: Compete and Engage

Since Galwan, India's China policy has settled into a two-track formula: compete where China threatens, engage where India benefits — but never let engagement soften the border stance. Competition means the Quad, border infrastructure, app and investment screening, and deeper ties with the US, Japan, and Australia. Engagement means BRICS, the SCO, and trade that still runs in the hundreds of billions (heavily in China's favour — a fact Mains answers should note). The official line since 2020: the relationship cannot be normal while the border is not. For UPSC, this is the "way forward" paragraph. Do not write naive "dialogue will solve it" closings; write the real policy — deterrence plus diplomacy, with disengagement first and de-escalation later. The 2024 patrolling arrangement fits this frame: talk, verify, but keep the guard up. That is the mature answer the examiner wants.

The two-track formula needs concrete content to avoid sounding hollow. Competition track: Quad, border infrastructure, investment screening, app bans, Indo-Pacific partnerships. Engagement track: BRICS, SCO, and trade that still heavily favours China. The hinge sentence — no normal ties without border normalcy — is Delhi's post-2020 doctrine; quote its logic if not its words. For the 'way forward' part of answers, the honest prescription is staged: disengagement (done), de-escalation (pending), then dialogue on the boundary (distant). Three stages, in order — that is a way-forward the examiner can believe.

48. 48. The Quad, the Indo-Pacific and the Border Link

The Quad — India, the US, Japan, Australia — is often taught as a maritime story, but its roots run through the Himalayas. After Galwan, Delhi leaned into the Quad precisely because the land border showed China responds to combined pressure. The Indo-Pacific framing lets India contest China at sea (where India has partners) while holding the line on land (where it stands mostly alone). For UPSC, connect the dots: the border dispute pushes India toward the Quad; the Quad gives India weight that feeds back into border negotiations. Prelims fact: the Quad's four members and its 2007 origins / 2017 revival / 2021 summit-level upgrade. Mains angle: is the Quad an "Asian NATO"? (No — India insists it is not a military alliance.) The border book and the IR book meet here — revise this topic alongside the companion International Relations book's Quad chapter.

The border-to-Quad link is the analytical move most aspirants miss: they learn the Quad as a sea story and the LAC as a land story, never connecting them. Connect them — Galwan pushed Delhi into the Quad's arms, and Quad solidarity gives Delhi confidence on the LAC. For Prelims, the Quad facts: four members, 2007 origin, 2017 revival, summit-level since 2021. For Mains, handle the 'Asian NATO' question firmly: India rejects military-alliance framing; the Quad is a partnership for a free and open Indo-Pacific. Revise this alongside the IR book's Quad chapter — the two books reinforce each other.

49. 49. How UPSC Tests This Topic (PYQ Patterns)

UPSC tests the boundary in three flavours. Prelims asks dates and places: McMahon Line/Shimla 1914, Panchsheel 1954, Nathu La 1967, Doklam 2017, Galwan 2020 — usually as statements to verify or pairs to match. It also asks geography: which pass is in which state, where Pangong Tso lies, what the Siliguri Corridor connects. Mains asks analysis: "the boundary dispute is the core of India-China relations — discuss," or "critically examine the agreements from 1993 to 2013." The Mains trick is to avoid pure narrative — the examiner wants causes (un-demarcated LAC, strategic stakes), evaluation (why agreements failed), and a way forward (disengagement, deterrence, dialogue). Practice writing one 150-word answer on "why standoffs recur" using topics 20, 10, and 46 of this book. If you can do that cold, the Mains paper holds no fear on this topic.

Build a personal PYQ file for this topic: list every UPSC question on the boundary you can find, sorted into Prelims-facts (dates, places, agreements) and Mains-analysis (causes, evaluation, way forward). You will see the pattern this topic describes — Prelims tests the skeleton, Mains tests the judgment. Then practice the one question that matters most: 'why do standoffs recur?' Answer it with topics 10 (unmarked LAC), 20 (no demarcation), and 46 (five causes). If that answer flows in 150 words, you are ready. The exam rewards the candidate who has already written the answer before entering the hall.

50. 50. One-Page Revision: The Whole Story in 15 Lines

1914: Shimla Convention draws the McMahon Line; China never ratifies. 1950-51: Tibet's buffer collapses. 1954: Panchsheel promises brotherhood. 1959: Dalai Lama reaches India. 1962 (20 Oct

– 21 Nov): war; China keeps Aksai Chin; the LAC is born unmarked. 1967: Nathu La and Cho La — India holds. 1975: Sikkim merges; China recognises it only in 2003. 1986-87: Sumdorong Chu standoff, resolved by firmness plus talks. 1988: Rajiv Gandhi's Beijing reset — manage the border, grow the ties. 1993-2013: four agreements (peace, CBMs, parameters, BDCA) manage but never demarcate. 2017 (16 Jun – 28 Aug): Doklam — India blocks China's road on Bhutan's behalf. 2020 (15 Jun): Galwan — 20 Indian soldiers dead; the managed era ends. 2021-22: point-by-point disengagement with buffer zones. 2022 (Dec): Yangtse flares in the east. 2024 (Oct): Depsang/ Demchok patrolling arrangement. Today: talks continue, the line stays unmarked, the dispute stays open. Read these 15 lines the morning of the exam.

Use these 15 lines as a morning-of-the-exam drill: read them once, close the book, and recite the dates aloud — 1914, 1954, 1959, 1962, 1967, 1975, 1986-87, 1988, 1993-2013, 2017, 2020, 2022, 2024. If any date blanks, open the book to that topic only. This is targeted revision, not re-reading — it finds the holes instead of paving over them. Keep the sheet with your map drill (topic 43) and your agreement list (topic 44): dates, map, agreements. Three sheets, one topic, fully covered. Walk into the hall knowing the boundary's whole story fits on a single page.

Quick-Revision Tables

Table 1: Timeline — India-China Boundary, 1914 to 2024

Date	Event	Why it matters
1914	Shimla Convention; McMahon Line drawn	Legal basis of India's eastern claim; China never ratified
29 Apr 1954	Panchsheel Agreement	Five principles; "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" era
1959	Dalai Lama granted asylum in India	Political break; road to 1962
20 Oct – 21 Nov 1962	Sino-Indian War	China keeps Aksai Chin; LAC born
1967	Nathu La & Cho La clashes	India holds the Sikkim frontier
1975 (recognised 2003)	Sikkim's merger	China's long non-recognition as a bargaining chip
1986-87	Sumdorong Chu standoff	Template: firmness + talks
1988	Rajiv Gandhi's Beijing visit	Management era begins
1993 / 1996 / 2005 / 2013	Four border agreements	Managed the line; never demarcated it
16 Jun – 28 Aug 2017	Doklam standoff	73 days; Siliguri Corridor at stake

15 Jun 2020	Galwan clash; 20 Indian soldiers killed	Managed era ends
Dec 2022	Yangtse clash, Tawang sector	Eastern sector flares
Oct 2024	Depsang/Demchok patrolling arrangement	Disengagement complete; dispute open

Table 2: The Four Border Agreements Compared

Year	Agreement	Core promise	What it left out
1993	Peace and Tranquillity	No use of force; respect the LAC; minimum forces	The LAC's exact location
1996	Confidence-Building Measures	No firing within 2 km; prior notice of exercises; flag meetings	Demarcation
2005	Political Parameters & Guiding Principles	Settlement must be fair, political, and protect settled populations	A map
2013	BDCA	Restraint in face-offs; use hotlines and flag meetings	Everything structural

Table 3: Major Standoffs at a Glance

Year	Place	Trigger	Outcome
1986-87	Sumdorong Chu, Tawang sector	Chinese position found north of India's claim	Operation Chequerboard; talks; no firing
2013	Depsang, Ladakh	Chinese tents 19 km inside India's perception	Mutual pullback after 3 weeks
2014	Chumar & Demchok, Ladakh	Face-offs during Xi's India visit	Resolved through talks
2017	Doklam (Bhutan's claim)	Chinese road-building toward Siliguri Corridor	73-day standoff; mutual withdrawal 28 Aug
2020	Galwan, Pangong Tso, Gogra, Hot Springs	Multi-point PLA build-up	15 Jun clash (20 Indian dead); disengagement 2021-22
2022	Yangtse, Tawang sector	Chinese attempt to cross LAC	Pushed back; no deaths

5 Exam Tips

1. **Lead with the LAC's nature, not its history.** In any Mains answer, your first analytical line should be: the LAC is a 1962 ceasefire line, never jointly demarcated. Everything else — standoffs, agreements, buffer zones — follows from that one fact.
2. **Pair every date with a place.** Doklam 2017 means nothing without "Bhutan's plateau, Siliguri Corridor." Galwan 2020 needs "eastern Ladakh." UPSC tests the pair, so revise the pair.
3. **Use the official vocabulary.** Write "differing perceptions," "peace and tranquillity," "political parameters," and "patrolling rights" — not loose paraphrases. The examiner reads these as proof you studied the source material.
4. **Keep 1962 in the war book.** If the question is on the border dispute, mention 1962 in two lines (it created the LAC) and move on. Long battle narratives in a boundary answer waste space and blur your argument.
5. **Close with the 2024 status.** Any answer written now should end at the October 2024 patrolling arrangement: disengagement done, de-escalation pending, settlement nowhere in sight. A current closing line lifts an average answer into the top band.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Line of Actual Control (LAC)?

The LAC is the line where Indian and Chinese troops stood when the 1962 war ended on 21 November 1962. It is not a legal international boundary and was never jointly surveyed or marked on the ground. India and China carry different maps of it in several areas — the "differing perceptions" that cause standoffs. It runs about 3,488 km (widely cited) across Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.

2. What is the difference between the LAC and the LoC?

The LoC (Line of Control) with Pakistan comes from the 1972 Shimla Agreement and is a defined, mapped line both sides understand. The LAC with China is a 1962 ceasefire line that was never demarcated — the two sides disagree on where it runs in places. In short: the LoC is settled enough to manage; the LAC is an open dispute.

3. Why did the Galwan clash of 2020 matter so much?

Because it broke a 45-year record — no soldier had died on the LAC since 1975 — and ended the "management era" that began with Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 Beijing visit. Twenty Indian soldiers were killed on 15 June 2020 in hand-to-hand fighting. After Galwan, India linked the border to the whole relationship: apps banned, investments screened, Quad deepened. The official line since is that relations cannot be normal while the border is not.

4. What were the 1993, 1996, 2005 and 2013 agreements?

1993 (Peace and Tranquillity): no use of force, respect the LAC. 1996 (CBMs): no firing within 2 km of the LAC, prior notice of exercises, flag meetings. 2005 (Political Parameters): any settlement must be fair, political, and protect settled populations — India's shield for Arunachal Pradesh. 2013 (BDCA): restraint in face-offs, use hotlines. None of them demarcated the LAC, which is why standoffs kept recurring.

5. Why did India intervene in Doklam in 2017?

China was building a road on the Doklam plateau — Bhutanese territory claimed by Beijing — pointing toward the Siliguri Corridor, the narrow "Chicken's Neck" (about 22 km at its slimmest, widely cited) linking mainland India to the Northeast. At Bhutan's request, Indian troops blocked the construction from 16 June to 28 August 2017. Both sides then withdrew. India acted because the road threatened its own security, not just Bhutan's claim.

6. What is the current status of the LAC standoff?

Disengagement is complete point-by-point: Pangong Tso (2021), Gogra (2021), Hot Springs (2022), and finally Depsang and Demchok under the October 2024 patrolling arrangement. Buffer zones separate the troops at friction points. But de-escalation — pulling back the large forces massed since 2020 — is pending, and the boundary itself remains unsettled and un-demarcated. Talks continue through Corps Commander meetings and the WMCC.