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ANALYSIS OF INDIA AND CHINA'S INFRASTRUCTURE
DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC COMPETITION ALONG THE
BORDER AREAS

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| <i>Keywords</i> | <i>Abstract</i> |
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| <i>India, China, Infrastructure Development, Bilateral Relationship, Disputed Border Areas.</i> | To secure the disputed border areas between India and China, including the Western sector (Ladakh), the Middle sector (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), and the Eastern sector (Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim), both countries have been conducting infrastructure development projects. China has been pursuing its projects since the 1950s. To build up better connectivity with the nearby areas of the border. Although India was not focusing on infrastructure development in the border areas, the present government has sanctioned many projects, highlighting the need to protect its territory from Chinese incursions and, especially, to secure the border villages. Recently, activity in these border villages has increased. The Indian government is more concerned than ever about the safety of Indian citizens. By constructing railways, tunnels, roads, and airports, military movements in these border areas are made smoother in a war-like situation. As both countries have a complicated bilateral relationship, their bond remains on a scale of immense movements. This research paper examines India's and China's infrastructure development in the disputed border areas. |



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| | Protecting their territory has impacted their relationship. |
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Introduction:

India and China are Asia's two most powerful nations. They have always shared an unconditional bond, in which both engaged in minimal cooperation to ease tensions in the disputed border areas. In this changing world, China has been actively taking part in this war to weaken the USA's stance. On the other hand, as India is a peace-loving country, it has not engaged in direct war. In the contemporary period, both countries have strategic importance not only on their own continent but also in world politics. They share a key geographical territory. To improve their impact in the neighbourhood country, they have engaged in fierce competition with one another. Both have large-scale industry, International markets, and, greatly importantly, military power, youth power, and advanced technology and intelligence. Though China has made great strides in technology, India has also advanced its technology.

For centuries, India and China have shared international connectivity. They were connected not only by trade but also by culture, tradition, and religion from ancient times. In the second century bc, the southern end of the Silk Road, interconnected by land and sea routes, was linked to the cities of Xi'an in China and Patliputra in India. On the other side, Buddhism spread in China from India in 67 AD. Many monks, inspired by Buddhism and by Indian culture and tradition, went to India to learn more. One of the famous monks was Fa-hsien, who toured from China to India to study Buddhism, referring to the latter as "Madhyades", which was similar in significance to Zhongguo. Zhongguo was a Chinese term for China. Even during British imperialism, both countries have had many scholars and wise, virtuous people who have continued to visit each other's countries. To stabilise their political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Even today, visits by Chinese and Indian leaders include a trip to a Buddhist shrine in the host nation.¹

Research Questions:

- How have the border infrastructure development projects enhanced competition between India and China?
- What are the major implications of Chinese infrastructure developments in the border areas on Indian territory?
- How has the Indian government been developing its infrastructure projects in border areas to counter Chinese movements?

¹ Tarun khanna, "China+ India: The Power of Two", Harvard Business Review, Mumbai,December, 2007, Source-<https://hbr.org/2007/12/china-india-the-power-of-two>



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews, 5(5),90-100.

Research Objectives:

- To analyse the border infrastructure development projects, tensions between India and China have been heightened.
- To examine the major implications of Chinese infrastructure developments in the border areas on Indian territory.
- To assess the Indian government's strategies to develop its infrastructure development programs in border areas to counter Chinese movements?

Research Methodology:

This research paper is based on a qualitative and analytical research design. In the changing geopolitical landscape, both countries want to stabilise their bilateral relationship, but due to territorial disputes, they have been engaged in developing infrastructure projects in border areas. Mainly, secondary data have been collected from government reports, policy documents, academic journals, and newspaper reports. India and China's major infrastructure development competition has been building tensions between them.

India -China Bilateral Relationship Evolution after 1950s:

After the 1950s, their bond was no longer substantial. From 1962 to 2020, wars have shown that the absence of trust between the two countries is not conducive to a peaceful relationship. China is continuously targeting India not to be a powerful nation, as they deliver support to India's foe, Pakistan. They have engaged in building the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to enhance their strategic economic and political international connections with Southeast, South, and Central Asia. But in this project, India has objections because it corresponds to Pakistan's name, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).² In many international forums, India was not in support of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.

After independence, India sought a friendly relationship with its neighbours, including China. India was the second non-communist country, after Burma, to recognise China as a communist nation in 1950. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, took the first step toward friendship and raised the slogan "Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai" ("Indians and Chinese are Brothers"). The Indian and Chinese governments signed an agreement in 1954 that set out the five principles: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual understanding on non-aggression; non-interference in each other's affairs; equality and co-operation; and peaceful co-existence.

² Chinatsu Tsuji, " Belt and Road Initiative Chinese-led infrastructure Project", Britannica, 15th April, 2026, Source - <https://share.google/nyWoImuc2NQkG4Okj>



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),90-100.

But China was not satisfied with India's five principles of peaceful coexistence, because of the Tibet issue. As a result, China and India have gone through three major conflicts, the first one is the 1962 war when China's People's Liberation Army, 1962 engaged in the war from the site of Ladakh and across the McMahon Line, the second one is in Nathu La and Cho La clashes in 1967, and third one is the Sundurong Chu Standoff in 1987.³ But in the 1980s, both India and China agreed to resolve the boundary disputes through diplomatic and economic channels. In 1988, with Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing and Premier Li Peng's visit, the relationship between the two countries took a new boost. In December 1991, India and China set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on the boundary issue, headed by the Indian Foreign Secretary and a Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs on the Chinese side. After that, India-China relations have been going well. As from China Primers, and from India, PMs and the President are visiting each other's country to increase bilateral ties. They both agreed to build up a cooperative partnership. For example, in 2005, when Premier Wen Jiabao visited India, India and China signed an agreement on the political parameters and guiding principles for the settlement of the India-China border. In 2020, both countries celebrated the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and China.⁴



Figure 1: India-China disputed border lands. Source - <https://www.dw.com/en/what-is-next-in-the-china-india-border-conflict/a-60586745>

³ Piyanka Desgupta, "Indo-China Relations: History and India's Foreign Policy", *Current Affairs*, July 27, 2022, Source - <https://currentaffairs.adda247.com/indo-china-relations/>

⁴ H.E. Sun Weifong, "70 years of Diplomatic Relations between China and India (1950-2020)", *The Hindu*, March 31, 2020, Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/brandhub/70-years-of-diplomatic-relations-between-china-and-india-1950-2020/article31219737.ece>



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews, 5(5),90-100.

Strategic Significance of India-China Dispute Border Areas in the Contemporary Period:

India and China have been engaged in strategic efforts to resolve their disputed border areas. But due to China's aggressive nature, its diplomatic relationship has been facing tragic consequences. China has demanded that India return some of their territory, and they want it back. On the other hand, India does not agree with their demand and is not ready to grant permission to capture those territories. But China has a strategy to capture those areas, which it always claims as part of its own territory. When the whole world was struggling to fight against COVID-19, again, China attacked at the Galwan Valley. Hence, they again broke the agreement not to attack each other's territory. On June 15, 2020, China attacked the Galwan Valley in Ladakh. In this clash, 20 Indian soldiers were killed.⁵

After this clash, the Indian government is more concerned about securing its border areas abutting Chinese territory, especially in Arunachal Pradesh, which has become the most crucial area as China has been developing infrastructure near the Indian border to occupy it. Their demand is not new, as China's first President, Mao Zedong, said that Tibet would be the right hand's palm of China, with Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Arunachal Pradesh as its five fingers. At present, China's President Xi Jinping has taken Mao's task very seriously, and he is ready to fulfil his dream of liberating the "Five Fingers". On the other hand, the Indian government claims the entire Arunachal Pradesh as an integral part of India.⁶

India-China Strategic Capacity Building of Militarisation by the Infrastructure Development Projects:

Since the 1962 war, the Chinese government has been implementing a strategy to enter Indian territory more easily; it has been continuously building roads, bridges, railways, airports, and, most importantly, villages in the immediate vicinity of the Indian border. They also have greater technical capabilities and advanced weapons to start a war. According to the Chinese government, they entered Indian territory to occupy their claimed areas. To prevent their activities, the present Modi government is now more concerned than in the past and has been sanctioning infrastructure development projects in border regions as required. To secure better connectivity, build communication with the local people of these territories, and protect the internationally disputed border areas, it's important to highlight these infrastructure development projects. India is more active than in the past era, as it has improved political and economic connectivity with Southeast

⁵ "Galwan Valley: A year after the violent clash", The Indian Express, June 14, 2021, Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/galwan-valley-clash-timeline-india-china-disengagement-7358554/>

⁶ Brig Anil Gupta, "Five Fingers Dream of Mao Zedong", IDR, New Delhi, January 28, 2021, Source- <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/five-fingers-dream-of-mao-zedong/>



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),90-100.

Asian countries. They have been constructing tunnels to reach border areas in any weather and can build up better military camps with advanced technology.

The main problem between India and China is that they share a 3,488 km-long international border, divided into three sections. The first section stretches eastward into Bhutan, where China claims the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as part of southern Tibet. The second section is a narrow 50-mile stretch of land that spans between Nepal and Bhutan. This border region is small but strategically important to India, as it connects India's far eastern states with the bulk of the country. The third section runs north of Tibet and borders the Indian territory of Ladakh and the Chinese region of Aksai Chin. The border region is particularly mountainous, leading to poorly defined boundaries and frequent accidental incursions. It has become very important for the central government to be well prepared by upgrading infrastructure across all sectors to secure the border areas, especially in remote areas like Arunachal Pradesh.

China's Robust Infrastructure Development Strategies in the connecting Indian border land:

China began road construction in the Himalayan region in the 1950s. Basically, China was required to facilitate infrastructure development near the border areas of Tibet to claim its authority and in the Indian border areas to occupy its claimed regions, through the robust development of roads and railways to gain control over Tibet. China's well-developed infrastructure in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has enhanced its military capabilities. With advanced technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Chinese military has been using its intelligence to patrol disputed areas. Hence, the Chinese government has begun implementing strategies to build well-connected roads, railway projects, tunnels, airports, and border villages for military base camps and to occupy those regions.

They enhanced their infrastructure development projects in Tibet to improve connectivity and extended them near the borders with India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Many infrastructure development projects have been undertaken by the Chinese government, such as the Golmud-Lhasa railway line, inaugurated in 2006 and linked to Xigaze in 2014, and extended to Gyirong, a land port near the Nepal border, and to Yadong. According to the report, the railway line has created a trading centre a few kilometres from Nathu La, a very important part of the route linking Tibet with the Indian border state of Sikkim, also known as the Chicken's Neck. They have more infrastructure development projects, including railways, which would connect Nyingchi, a trading centre and garrison town just north of Arunachal Pradesh, and onward to Dali in Yunnan province. Near the McMahon Line, the Lhasa-Nyingchi-Dali railway line would enable the support of the People's Liberation Army's 14th



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),90-100.

Group at its headquarters in Kunming, with its divisions at Dali, Kaiyuan and Kunming, to be deployed rapidly along the McMahon Line.⁷

After the 2017 Doklam clash, China has expanded road construction near the Indian northern border in the two autonomous regions of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR). These national highways are a response to a threat to the Indian government, as these roads are fully covered from the Sakhgam Valley in the region XUAR to the India-China-Myanmar tri-junction in the southeast. Those roads are G-314, G-694, G-695, G-315, G-214 etc.⁸

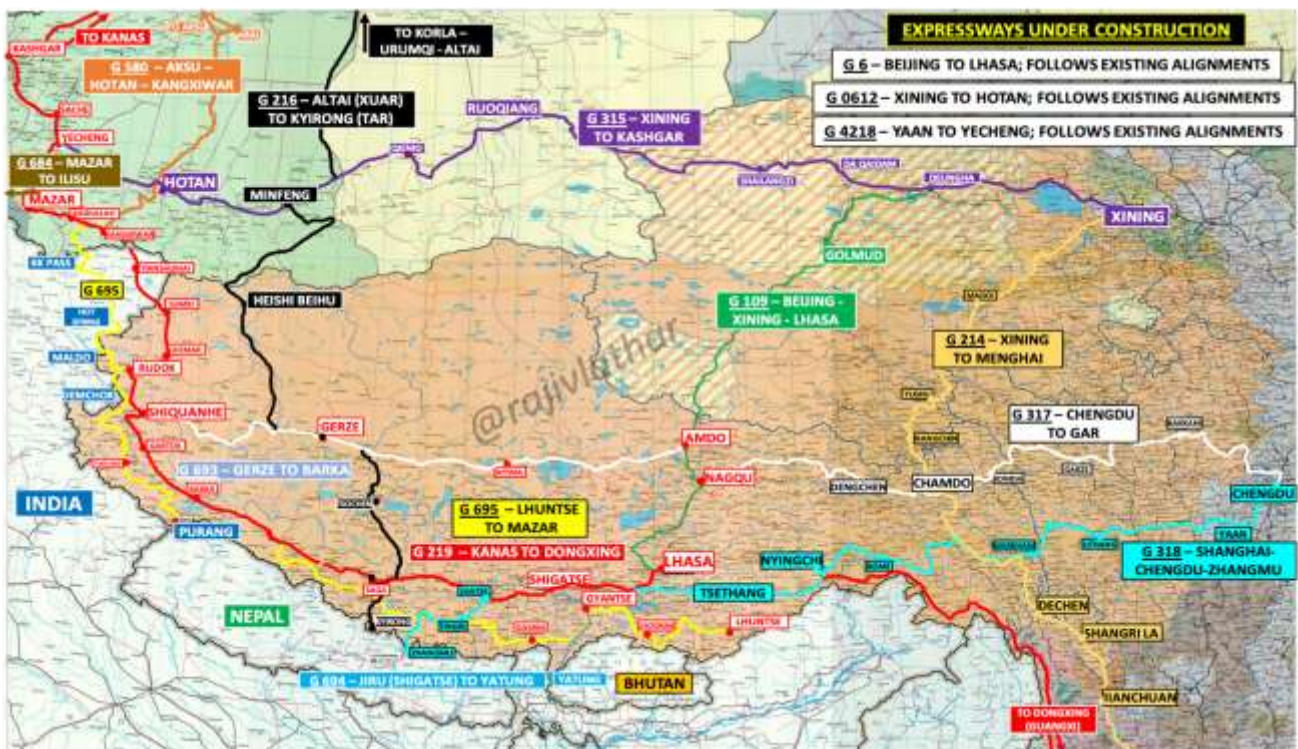


Figure 2 – China's robust infrastructure development after the Doklam clash near the northern border of India. Source- <https://www.orfonline.org/research/china-s-infrastructure-buildup-near-india-s-northern-borders-the-eight-year-surge-since-doklam>

⁷ Sudha Ramachandran, "China and India's Border Infrastructure development Race", refworld, September 13, 2016, Source- <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57dfe0534.html>

⁸ Rajiv Lathar, "China's Infrastructure Buildup Near India's Northern Borders: The Eighth-Year Surge Since Doklam", Observer Research Foundation, Nov 4, 2025, source- <https://www.orfonline.org/research/china-s-infrastructure-buildup-near-india-s-northern-borders-the-eight-year-surge-since-doklam>



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews, 5(5),90-100.

India's Response to China's Infrastructure Development Projects:

The Indian government understand that Indian territory is not safe as China has been attacking massively from various areas of the border. On December 13, 2022, Chinese troops again tried to cross the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh to change the status quo unilaterally. Still, they failed as Indian military commanders fought back.⁹ The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) was formed on 7 May 1960 to protect India's disputed borders with foreign countries and, most importantly, to develop infrastructure projects in the remote areas of the country, especially in the north-eastern states. To ensure security and the smooth execution of projects, the Government of India established the Border Roads Development Board (BRDB), with the Prime Minister as Chairman and the Defence Minister as Deputy Chairman. The organisation's motto is "Shramena Sarvam Sadhyam" (everything is achievable through hard work). BRO is tasked with maintaining this infrastructure, including snow-clearing operations. BRO is instrumental in significantly upgrading and building new India-China Border Roads.¹⁰

To enhance connectivity between the Indian mainland and the northeast, especially with Arunachal Pradesh, the Government of India has undertaken the construction of 27 roads, and the Ministry of Defence has endorsed the construction of 48 roads along the India-China border.¹¹ The most important project is the Sela Tunnel road project- the world's longest bi-lane tunnel at an altitude above 13,000 ft, built to connect Tawang to Guwahati, Assam and the Arunachal Frontier Highway. In addition, Indian Railways is building three railway lines in the northeastern states. A 200 km broad-gauge line between Bhalukpong and Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh), an 87 km line between Silapathar (Assam) and Along via Bame (Arunachal Pradesh), and a 217 km line between Rupai (Assam) and Pasighat (Arunachal Pradesh).¹²

India is now more concerned with competing with China by developing more infrastructure projects, such as airbases and villages, to enhance military capabilities and improve connectivity in wartime, as China has been improving its capabilities by building new airports in the LAC, Tibet, and

⁹ "India-China clash in Arunachal: All you need to know", Times of India, December 14,2022, Source- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-china-clash-in-arunachal-all-you-need-to-know/articleshow/96202332.cms>

¹⁰ "Border Roads Organizatin (BRO)", Vajiram IAS, May 8, 2023, Source -<https://vajiramias.com/current-affairs/border-roads-organisation-bro/6458d771c302e77eddd4835c/>

¹¹ Raile Rockey Ziipao, " An Infrastructure Revolution Along the Indo-China Border", South Asia Institute, Harvard University, August 13, 2020, Source- <https://mittalsouthasiainstitute.harvard.edu/2020/08/infrastructural-revolution-along-indo-china-border/>

¹² Milan Sharma, " India plans massive infra along China border, road, rail, projects in pipeline", India Today, April 26, 2023, Source- <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-plans-massive-infra-along-china-border-road-rail-projects-in-pipeline-2365049-2023-04-26>



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),90-100.

Xinjiang. To develop a strong, smart way to fight back, the Modi government has been building several airports at various locations along the three border sectors. For example, after the 2017 Doklam standoff in Sikkim, Greenfield Pakyong Airport, the Himalayan state's first, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 23 September, 2018. The airport, located nearly 60 km from the border with China, obtained the required license for operations in May, 2018. Many more airbases are in the process of being started.

Border Village Development near the India and China Border areas:

China has new strategies to secure and develop villages near the LAC to occupy their claimed regions. For that matter, China has been building border defence villages along the border with Arunachal Pradesh, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and Uttarakhand since 2016. In 2023, they built villages in Uttarakhand, 11 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC). China has also constructed 55-56 houses, located about 35 kilometres from the LAC, adjoining Uttarakhand, which remain under the supervision of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). It has plans to construct 400 villages in the eastern sector along the border alone.¹³ According to the report, China constructed 628 villages along the India-China border to occupy disputed borderlands. This project is called Xiaokang border defence villages. In these villages, again, an alarm was raised for the Indian defence system. Hence, these villages are spread from the Lohit Valley and the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh. Basically, these villages have been chartered for dual use of the strategic infrastructure development program. Military movements and civilian statements in these areas are important to the occupation of their own claimed areas.¹⁴

The Indian government showed little interest in village development in remote areas. Still, after the 2017 Doklam clash between India and China, the central government is now ready to face the challenges by increasing development. According to the Military commanders, it is very important to have places to stay and secure positions in case of an emergency. From 1997-98, the Border Area Development Programme was initially introduced in Arunachal Pradesh for the State's Indo-Myanmar Border, with an allocation of Rs. 4.00 crores. And from 1998-99 the programme was extended to the international borders of Indo-China (1126 Km) to meet the special needs of the people living in 1863 Km long border areas of Arunachal Pradesh to remove the critical gaps in physical and social infrastructure needs and to strengthen the economic conditions and raise the standard of living amongst the inhabitants of the remote border areas of the State as per the

¹³Jitendra Bahadur Singh, "China building border defence villages 11 km from LAC in Uttarakhand, say sources", *India Today*, May 26, 2023, Source- <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/china-building-border-defence-villages-11-kms-from-lac-in-uttarakhand-sources-2384575-2023-05-26>

¹⁴ "China 'Xiaokang' Border Defence Villages along the LAC", *drishtias*, 24th Feb, 2024, Source- Source: *Drishti IAS* <https://share.google/8y4k90miWs41LZ2oO>



Chandana Sahu (2026). Analysis of India and China's Infrastructure Development and Strategic Competition along the Border Areas. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),90-100.

guidelines of BADP. The Border Area Development Plan (BADP) for villages was announced in 2015. In its March 2023 report tabled in Parliament, the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs noted the dwindling BADP funds. For the financial year 2021-22, the home ministry had projected a demand for Rs 839 crore but received Rs 566 crore. India is building villages in Arunachal Pradesh, a Himalayan region, and many more will be developed under the Vibrant Village Program. As an example, the Indian government has sanctioned these villages at the Ladakh (Chushul, Karzok); Himachal Pradesh (Lalung, Gipu, Charang Khas); Uttarakhand (Mana, Niti, Malari, Gunji); Sikkim (Lachen, Lachung, Gnathang); and Arunachal Pradesh (Zemithang, Taksing, Chayangtajo, Tuting, Kibithoo).

Conclusion:

As third-world countries, India and China both entered the global political arena in the late 1950s. Whereas China has already achieved its goal and is now targeting world domination. Compared to China, India is far from achieving its goals and has not yet succeeded due to many internal problems. But after the COVID-19 geopolitical shift, Indian technology saw a boost over the next few months. Especially as they have better cooperation with almost all countries, India has been developing advanced weapons. India has been boosting its pending infrastructure projects, while China has already developed roads, railways, and airports. From the beginning of the friendship between India and China, China has been breaking trust by attacking Indian territory. After several attacks, India is now better equipped to defend against China's. As China is not ready to give any chance to India for the relief in the border area, India should not let down their own people by losing control in front of China. The Indian government has set the goal of developing infrastructure in border areas to secure its territory.

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The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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