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AN INTERVIEW WITH JABIN T. JACOB

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India has reportedly [drafted plans to increase its military presence](#) along its border with China. In an email interview, [Jabin T. Jacob](#), assistant director of the Institute of Chinese Studies in Delhi, India, and the assistant editor of China Report, discussed the state of the India-China border conflict.

**WPR:** *What are the core unresolved issues regarding the India-China border?*

**Jabin T. Jacob:** The main point of contention in the Sino-Indian boundary dispute was originally the Aksai Chin area in the Indian northwest. China had built a road to Lhasa through the area, setting off the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962. This area remains in Chinese possession. In the late-1980s, however, the core of the dispute shifted eastward to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which the Chinese claim and call “Southern Tibet.” It is not clear what set off this new Chinese emphasis, but there seem to be at least two factors. First, Arunachal is rich in mineral, water and timber resources and is therefore important for the economically underdeveloped Tibet Autonomous Region. Second, Tawang, a Buddhist-majority town in Arunachal, is the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama and is believed to have paid taxes to the traditional Tibetan administration in Lhasa. The emphasis on Tawang -- which has come to symbolize the dispute -- appears to be part of a Chinese attempt to reinforce its legitimacy in Tibet and to be seen as capable of defending Tibetan interests better than the present Dalai Lama.

**WPR:** *What is driving India's decision to increase its security infrastructure and troop presence along the border?*

**Jacob:** India's recent emphasis on improving security infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control with China is driven by a number of factors. First, it is part of an attempt to make up for a decades-old policy of deliberately keeping its border areas underdeveloped in an effort to prevent easy Chinese access in the event of another conflict. Thus, much of the development actually involves putting in place only basic roads and telecommunications infrastructure. Second, infrastructure development is a natural corollary of India's rapid economic growth and is part of development all around the country. Finally, the increased security infrastructure and troop presence is most likely a reaction to China's own rapid military modernization and active development of security infrastructure in Tibet.

**WPR:** *What diplomatic avenues are being used to address the issue, and how effective have they been?*

**Jacob:** The two sides have had a variety of dialogue mechanisms on the boundary dispute ranging from joint working groups to the present special representatives (SR) dialogue. Progress remains difficult to measure, but landmark treaties were signed in 1993, 1996 and 2005. In essence, through the SR mechanism and the 2005 treaty, the two sides have signaled that their dispute must be resolved politically rather than purely on the basis of historical or legal factors. This, however, probably means that resolution of the dispute has now become tied to other factors, including Chinese perceptions of Indo-U.S. ties, the state of affairs inside Tibet and the broader ups and downs in Sino-Indian economic relations. □