

LAC Conflict

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Content Team

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In recent days, dramatic border encounters have erupted between Indian and Chinese troops, with casualties on both sides and the first fatalities in 45 years in a border confrontation between the two countries.

But why are the two nations fighting? What do they stand to gain? And could the confrontation have more wide-reaching consequences?

The disputes all center around an area of Himalayan territory the military superpowers have been arguing over for decades.

Though at high-altitude and largely uninhabited, the area is hotly contested between the two countries along a 2,100-mile long shared border; it is considered strategically important by both sides.

The current arguments arose from the building of a road built by India, along the so-called 'Line of Actual Control' (LAC) which divides the sides.

China deployed troops and retaliated with its own building projects in the territory, which only brought the two countries' soldiers closer in proximity, which in turn increased the risk of fighting.

What happened in the battle?

India and China LAC conflict: the diplomatic and military stand-off explained, what it means for trading relationships – and if it could lead to war

‘This is extremely, extremely serious’

A hotly contested area of strategic Himalayan territory has been cause for confrontation for decades (Photo: DIPTENDU DUTTA/AFP via Getty Images)

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But why are the two nations fighting? What do they stand to gain? And could the confrontation have more wide-reaching consequences?

Here’s everything you need to know:

Why are they fighting

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What happened in the battle?

Things came to a head on Monday (15 June) when at least 20 Indian soldiers were killed in a clash between the two sides.

The skirmish came after China accused the Indian troops of crossing the border twice, "provoking and attacking Chinese personnel".

It sounds a gruesome affair too, with both sides claiming no shots were fired; both countries' soldiers fought only with bare hands, iron rods and stones.

China reported no casualties of its own, but there has been no official confirmation on this, and the ruckus apparently subsided when military officials from both countries met to "defuse the situation."

Should I be worried, and could it lead to war?

Clashes of any sort between two superpowers can be worrying at the best of times, but especially when the world is under such extraneous pressure from the coronavirus crisis. With economic and military gains at stake for both sides, neither will be willing to back down, which could have destabilizing consequences for the region.

These could be very nasty indeed, with two of the most populous nuclear powers at each other's throats – a war doesn't seem out of the question.

“This is extremely, extremely serious, this is going to vitiate whatever dialogue was going on,” former Indian army

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on reports of the Chinese incursions. “Established mechanisms are used to resolve such situations,” the MEA spokesperson said, when asked whether national Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval, or External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had been in contact with Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi. Mr. Doval and Mr. Wang, who are the designated Special Representatives of India and China, had met last on December 21, 2019, to discuss bringing an “early settlement of the boundary question” as per talks between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi on the issue.

Over the last decade, India has significantly augmented its infrastructure and deployments in Ladakh. For instance, in a major operational change, since 2012 the Army began deploying units on longer tenures along the LAC which prior to that were on six month short tenures before heading to or returning from the Siachen Glacier called loop battalions. This has meant availability of more acclimatized troops and also more patrols in the claim areas resulting in more face-offs.

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