

The Recent Sino-Indian Border Dispute

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The border dispute between India and China along the LAC has been a bone of contention since 1962. The demarcated Line of Actual Control separates both the armies at various points. The current confrontation is in eastern Ladakh and on the border of Sikkim with China. Both countries claim Galwan valley in eastern Ladakh as their territory, even though this has never been a disputed region in the past. Eyeball-to-eyeball situations occur when troops encounter each other in contested zones which are claimed by both sides. Often, changing terrain, caused as a result of landslides, snowfalls and change in course of rivers causes disagreement between the two countries on the demarcation of the border. The LAC versions of India and China overlap. Most of the contested points in eastern Ladakh are at high altitudes, have extremely cold temperatures and are uninhabited. What makes the region significant is that it is important to the countries militarily, strategically, politically and economically. Reports state that the recent stand-off in Galwan valley was triggered by China, with Chinese troops entering the Indian side of the LAC in this area in response to the construction of a road in the Finger area around Pangong Tso Lake and another road connecting Galwan valley.

Since the Doklam crisis in 2017, India has been improving the infrastructure on its side. Roads and bridges have been constructed since then, to facilitate reinforcement and to equip the Indian side in the event of military tensions. China, on the other hand, has enjoyed the advantage of favourable terrain, not to mention their infrastructure. To de-escalate the 40-day face-off, local military commanders of both sides negotiated on June 6 for a mutually agreed upon disengagement process. When 16 Bihar Commanding Officer, Colonel Santhosh Babu noticed that a Chinese camp was still not removed, he initiated talks with the Chinese side. This led to heated arguments and attacks between the troops. Though there was no firing involved; stones, fistfights, barbed sticks and sharp-edged tools were used. This implies that the soldiers brutally attacked each other. No firearms were used by either side as in accordance with the provisions of 2 bilateral agreements between the two countries in 1996 and 2005. This confidence-building measure was undertaken to ensure that skirmishes between the two nuclear powers do not escalate and to prevent hostilities. The tension in the border along Sikkim was unexpected as the demarcated border is widely agreed upon by both the sides. It is possible that along with ground forces, the air forces will also engage due to increased air activity by China along the border. In

order to pursue peace and tranquillity between the two countries, Major General level talks are being held, with India pressing for the withdrawal of Chinese troops and the restoration of status quo.

From ancient allies to contemporary competitors, Sino – Indian relation has undergone tremendous changes. China's hostility towards India won't do any good to it. The first Indian casualties on the border since 1975, an increasing number of confrontations and heavy deployment by China show the straining relation to the once cordial ties between India and China. The Chinese aggression can push India to join forces with some of China's top rivals like the United States, Japan and Australia, though it has always strived for a balanced relationship with the powers. China's increasingly close ties with Pakistan and other South-East Asian countries, its growing military power, economic influence and primacy in Asia are a source of worry to India's foreign policy.

The recent border clash between the two countries has given rise to anti-China sentiment in India. Many public deals and equipment by Chinese investors and firms are being withheld and banned in India. There is a call for a boycott of Chinese goods from all quarters. But it needs to be acknowledged that our trade deficit with China is very huge, with our imports from China more than our exports to China. Moreover, the boycott of Chinese products in India will have no significant impact on China but will rather put untoward pressure on the limited capacity of the Indian manufacturing sector. If the relations continue to strain, the region will face grave geopolitical complications whose damage may not be undone. Article by Sharon R. Thomas, Jesus and Mary College

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