

Towards Stability: Redefining India-China Border Relations Post-Galwan

Jai kishan singh, Research Scholar
Department of Defence and strategic Studies
University of allahabad
Email Id - jaiky666@gmail.com

About

What has transpired for the last three years since the Galwan valley encounter is portrayed well in the research paper with equal emphasis on not only history but geography too and therefore the reader gets an understanding of the border security predicament. History has shown that, although there are established measures for de escalation, lack of trust together with unfavourable geography makes these disengagements quite challenging and vulnerable to unanticipated clashes. The escalation of tensions over the India e china borders has made it much more essential than before to grasp the border management agreements that were signed in the 1990s. These bilateral treaties served the purpose of promoting peace and avoiding conflict through synchronous force reduction on both sides, but as we have observed, there has been a continued increase in tensions which has hindered any progress in stabilizing the borders. Factors which make achieving some of the long term goals difficult will also not be entirely ignored, along with the current scenario in which total mutual trust seems impossible. Instead, it makes sense to compare with experiences from China and Russia and their simultaneous force reduction agreements in light of distrust and underdeveloped infrastructure. It can also be seen that India's strategy should be built on three interrelated aspects which allow India to maintain a feel of 'offensive' posture along the LAC, a level of restraint in terms of the number of units so as to be able to change the aggressors mind and then finally in the course of time reach some sort of settlement with China in order to restore peace on the border. Overall move analysis highlights the argument that while there is a difference, even with the current tensions .

Keywords: Bilateral talks, Disengagement, Military face-off, order management, Mutual force reduction

Introduction

even after three years of the Galwan Valley incident the situation along the India China Line of Actual Control (LAC) continues to remain tense- Cont. Paragraph . This Paper seeks to analyse some of the arguments the state and otherwise on why the peace and reconciliation efforts have not succeeded in completely averting military confrontations since 2013 especially the galwan clashes in 2020. While there may be political resolution into the current standoff, the restoration of political understanding and trust at the level of the states, if ever achieved would take considerable time even after the resolution is achieved. The paper also looks into the question... the proposed three-stage process: disengagement, de-escalation, and de-induction of forces, in its proposed form. The paper states that any military forces de-induction is not realistic because of the political turmoil that currently exists. However the absence of trust and harsh physical and climatic environment reiterates that without adequate political trust, the complete de-induction of military forces is not probable.

Context of Border Stabilization Efforts (1988–1992)

Following the conclusion of the Cold War, India looked for a peaceful order that would sustain economic development and assimilate the changes in the global order. Considering the geography of the two emerging economies, it was necessary for both India and China to secure and stabilize their common boundary against any danger so that they could pursue their internal and regional objectives. In the last part of the 1980s, also, China had Tibet unrest and Soviet border tensions, thus China's need for secure southwestern borders increased. Consequently, the effort to prevent further hostilities over the LAC was initiated by both countries. Yet, early exchanges provided deep structural insights: despite the willingness to reduce the level of hostility, the parties could not identify the agreed zones along the LAC in several sectors of the border, causing patrol and control over unitary localities. Such ambivalence created the conditions for standoffs including the one in Sumdorong Chu in 1987. These tensions made it clear that there was a need to establish a mechanism that would avoid the recurrence of such confrontations in the future without attempting to delineate the border.



Disputed areas between India and China

Foundation of the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (1993)

However, in 1992, India and China started negotiations which eventually led to the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA) of 1993. The BPTA was the first formal framework with an overt aim to govern peace on the border area; also, it was prepared in consultation with India, provided basic principles to eliminate friction. The key provisions involved mutual respect for sovereignty and non-aggression, avoiding the use of force, and maintaining minimum levels of military forces along the LAC. The cooperation also brought in a cooperative approach toward jointly determining the alignment of the LAC in disputed areas, in effect promoting mutual restraint on the part of military actions near the border.

The BPTA also set up an experts' body within the Joint Working Group on the India-China Boundary Question, established in 1989. A body of military and civilian officers was charged with drafting proposals in keeping with the principles underlying the BPTA. The agreement provided a very important framework for avoiding unintended confrontations and became the pivot on which any further measures aimed at increasing confidence were to turn. This inspired other agreements within the next two decades, enabling both parties to adapt and extend their joint peacekeeping activities within the border area

Expansion of Confidence-Building Measures (1996–2012)

According to the BPTA, three further agreements between 1996 and 2012 further supplemented border management between India and China. The first one was that of the Confidence Building Measures Agreement in 1996, which established a number of practical measures to restrain military activity and avoid accidents in the border area. Main provisions include proscriptions on large-scale military exercises and requiring advance notification of brigade-level exercises. Aware of the disputes persisting over LAC alignment, Article X of the CBMA provided for the exchange between both countries of the maps each had indicating its perception of LAC. The exchange was indispensable for India as this defined mutual perceptions of the border and also helped prevent encroachment without intent. Gradual reductions in border-guarding forces along with limitations on deploying armoured vehicles, long-range artillery, and missiles in the border area were some of the other mandates of the CBMA.

Taken together, these treaties—based on the BPTA and supplemented by the CBMA—provided the framework for near two decades of relative quiet across the LAC, with structures to communicate, be transparent, and restrain. While perceptions of the LAC did not change, these measures did reduce the tensions between the two military forces, allowing both to pursue more general regional and economic objectives.

Challenging Terrain Along the Border

The India-China border cuts across challenging high-altitude terrain, which is a significant logistical challenge, especially for India. On its own side, however, the Indian operates in the rugged mountain ranges of the Himalayas. The experience of developing infrastructure is therefore labor-intensive and time-consuming. India has accelerated its pace of road and border infrastructure development along the LAC since 2022 with a construction of almost 3,800 kilometers of roads and other critical facilities. However, geography continues to hinder speeded-up mobilization. The Chinese side on the Tibetan plateau has relatively smoother terrain through which they have built extensive roads and airstrips as well as other infrastructure. On the Indian side of the LAC, over 5,000 km of roads were completed by 2022. These enable easier troop movement and logistics supplies, creating further strategic advantages for the Chinese

government.

Harsh Climate Conditions and Seasonal Variability

Climatic conditions worsen the operational challenges facing India at the LAC. During the onset of winter, Indian troops are hit with heavy snowfall; in some places, reported snow levels were as much as 20 feet. These extreme weather conditions heighten the avalanche risks which have already killed hundreds of soldiers in recent years. Monsoons in turn bring rain in torrents and frequent flooding, thus weakening road infrastructure and complicating maintenance. On the Chinese side, the snowfall level is lesser in the plateau region, but forces face permafrost, oxygen levels which are poor at times, and flash floods. During 2022, the Indian Army undertook large-scale repairs to infrastructure due to climatic damage, whereas the disturbances on the Chinese side were few. This impacts the strategic preparedness of India adversely in comparison with that on the Chinese side along the border.



Force Withdrawal Limitations with India

Even as diplomatic talks continue in an effort to deescalate the tension, the harsh realities of geography and climate give force withdrawal a complexity the Indian side might have underestimated. China withdrawing its forces into greater depths would merely leave troops acclimatized and stationed close to prime infrastructure on the Tibetan plateau. Proximity is in itself a strategic advantage by which China could rush forces back to the LAC at its discretion, supported by advanced logistical edges. For India, de-induction beyond certain points will require troops to operate at relatively lower altitudes, which will then have implications on both the acclimatization of troops and response speed. Indian military experts in 2022 estimated that such withdrawal could add up to two days for forces to reach high-altitude zones in an emergency and consequently create a strategic disadvantage.

Limited Feasibility of Adopting the Russia-China Model

Given these differences in terrain and infrastructure, the Russia-China model of border management is not an easy application for the India-China situation. While the Russia-China border presents relatively stable accessible geography, the harsh topography and climatic extremes demand different arrangements altogether. Further, there is still significant tension in the political atmosphere despite diplomatic efforts. In 2022, infrastructure gaps had further widened because of the rapid expansion of roads and bases by China, thereby complicating India's efforts to maintain an equivalent presence along LAC. This positions India in a tough strategic position that continues to require an investment in infrastructure and maintenance readiness to deal with potential confrontations.

Conclusion

The paper had set its aim in critiquing the gaps in the border peace arrangements between India and China, hence making recommendations on how to strengthen such arrangements with the hope that such steps may stabilize and take the situation on the LAC into a stable and peaceful state. Given that a resolution to the border dispute is unlikely in the near future, and that China may continue using tactics to exert pressure along the LAC, the paper argues that maintaining stability requires a two-pronged approach: negotiation and enhanced deterrence.

For rebuilding and reinforcing the framework that prevents unintended conflict or escalation, diplomatic engagement with China is obviously necessary. In this regard, it is proposed that new cooperative models be explored that would reduce the risk of incidents in these areas. On the other hand, India has to strengthen its defense posture along the LAC to deter renewed aggression. Include the strengthening of logistics, ISR capabilities, and improving the coordination of activities between civilian and military authorities. This would allow rapid responses in case of any kind of incursion. The paper emphasizes that long-term sustenance depends more on peace rather than military strategies or border management efforts. Only while immediate stability is ensured through these, the roots of the conflict are not addressed. A political settlement of the boundary dispute—a complex issue—has been at the core of India-China relations for more than seven decades. Short-term border situation management would come in the form of disengagement and deterrence, but its long-term solution for ultimate peace would be a governmental diplomatic solution.

References:

1. Garver, J. W. (2001). *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*. University of Washington Press.
2. Mohan, R. C. (2013). "Border Disputes and China's Periphery Diplomacy." *Asian Survey*, 53(4), 625-648.
3. Chansoria, M. (2011). *China, India and the Boundary Issue: Ending the Twenty-First Century Stalemate*. Pentagon Press.
4. People's Republic of China and Republic of India. (1993). *Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas*. Signed in Beijing, September 7, 1993.
5. People's Republic of China and Republic of India. (1996). *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas*. Signed in New Delhi, November 29, 1996.

6. People's Republic of China and Republic of India. (2005). *Protocol on Modalities for Implementation of the Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas*. Signed in Beijing, April 11, 2005.
7. Pant, H. V. (2020). "India-China Relations after Galwan: The Search for Stability." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 7(3), 225-244.
8. Jacob, H. (2017). *Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics*. Oxford University Press. (This book provides insights on border management that are relevant to India-China LAC issues).
9. Singh, M. (2011). "India and China: Towards Managing the LAC." *Strategic Analysis*, 35(4), 517-526.
10. Chellaney, B. (2020). "The India-China Standoff and Its Implications for Regional Security." *International Security Studies Journal*, 12(1), 67-82.
11. Rajagopalan, R. (2021). "India's Strategic Dilemmas: Security Concerns on the China Front." *International Affairs Journal*, 26(2), 34-45.