

Cease fire: on India-Pakistan LoC tensions

The 2003 [ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan](#) is now alive only in the breach, with violations intensifying in number and much damage to life and livelihood along the border. The drift can only be arrested through high-level political intervention to save this very significant bilateral agreement between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. In the latest incident, four Indian soldiers, including an Army Captain, were killed in the Bhimber Gali sector in cross-border firing that went on through most of Sunday. These casualties are a natural extension of what has been unfolding along the International Boundary as well as the Line of Control for the past several months. As a result, 2017 has turned out to be the worst year since the agreement brought calm to the border 15 years ago. The ceasefire agreement had resulted in a dramatic drop in military casualties, and thousands of border residents had been able to return home from temporary shelters on both sides. It is important to see the 2003 agreement in the immediate context of the time. It came just four years after the Kargil war, and soon after India and Pakistan almost went to war following the December 13, 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament. The agreement was historic, and a triumph of diplomacy — Pakistan Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali announced a unilateral ceasefire on the Line of Control on Id; India suggested including the Siachen heights, and the ceasefire was eventually extended to the International Boundary. It was the high point of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's premiership, and his successor, Manmohan Singh, heeded the legacy.

Now, as the two countries are caught in a spiral of almost [daily exchanges of fire](#) along the border, there is a danger of political rhetoric acquiring its own momentum. Already, 2017 has been the worst year along the border since the ceasefire came into force, with at least 860 incidents of ceasefire violations recorded on the LoC alone. By way of comparison, in 2015 there had been 152 incidents, and in 2016 there were 228. January 2018 recorded the highest number of ceasefire violations in a month since 2003, according to estimates. According to data mentioned in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, between January 18 and 22, 14 people including seven civilians were killed and over 70 were injured in firing from the Pakistan side along the International Boundary in Jammu, Kathua and Samba districts as well as along the LoC in Poonch and Rajouri districts. Thousands of civilians have been forced to flee their border homes. Peace on the border is difficult to achieve at the tactical level by military leaders. Restoring the ceasefire requires real statesmanship, not brinkmanship.

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