

PINCER PROVOCATIONS?

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

In this August 27, 2019 photo, a pashmina goat is put out to pasture near Durbuk village between Chang La mountain pass and Tangste in Ladakh. | Photo Credit: [AFP](#)

Although the latest news on the Ladakh front suggests that Chinese and Indian forces have begun to disengage in select areas, this does not detract from the reality that in the past few weeks Beijing and Islamabad are making coordinated efforts to challenge India's presence in the Kashmir-Ladakh region. There is stepped-up activity on Pakistan's part to infiltrate terrorists into the Valley. China has undertaken provocative measures on the Ladakh front to assert control over disputed areas around the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

In Pakistan's case the intensification in its terrorist activities is related in part to the dilution of Article 370 that it perceives as undercutting its claims on Kashmir with finality. China seems to have calculated that the division of Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir, that delinks Ladakh from the Kashmir problem, allows India a freer hand in contesting China's claims in the region. Increasing road-building activity on India's part close to the LAC augments this perception.

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In addition to bordering on China's most restive provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet, Ladakh is contiguous to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), Gilgit and Baltistan, where the Chinese have invested hugely under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. When completed, the CPEC will connect Xinjiang with Gwadar port in Balochistan. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's remark last year that India expects to have "physical jurisdiction over (POK) one day" has alarmed Beijing which sees any such Indian move as threatening the CPEC project.

These factors demonstrate the overlapping interests that Beijing and Islamabad have regarding India in this region. Both would like India to be so preoccupied with taking defensive measures in Kashmir and Ladakh as to have little time and energy left to attempt to alter the status quo in POK or in Aksai Chin.

However, there are major differences in Pakistani and Chinese objectives regarding India that are related to their divergent perceptions of their disputes and their different force equations with India. For China, Ladakh is primarily a territorial dispute with strategic ramifications. China also believes it is superior to the Indian militarily and, therefore, can afford to push India around within limits as it has been attempting to do in the recent confrontation. For Pakistan, its territorial claim on Kashmir is based on an immutable ideological conviction that it is the unfinished business of partition and as a Muslim-majority state is destined to become a part of Pakistan. Islamabad also realises that it is the weaker power in conventional terms and therefore has to use unconventional means, primarily terrorist infiltration, to achieve its objective of changing the status quo in Kashmir. China is a satiated power in Ladakh having occupied Aksai Chin and wants to keep up the pressure on New Delhi to prevent the latter from trying to change the situation on the ground.

LAC row | [Not an inch ceded to China, says Union Minister](#)

It is true that China is agitated about the recent vociferous revival of India's claims on PoK but its primary concern with regard to Kashmir is to prevent any Indian move from threatening the CPEC project. It does not challenge the status quo in Kashmir. Pakistan, on the other hand, is

committed to changing the status quo in Kashmir at all cost. It has been trying to do so since Partition not only through clandestine infiltration but also by engaging in conventional warfare. Therefore, while it is possible to negotiate the territorial dispute with China on a give-and-take basis this is not possible in the case of Pakistan which considers Kashmir a zero-sum game. India should, therefore, distinguish the different objectives on the part of Beijing and Islamabad and tailor its responses accordingly without conflating the two threats to its security. Lumping the two threats together because of a tactical overlap between them makes it difficult to choose policy options rationally.

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