

# THE LAC IS THE NEW LOC

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

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India and China are inching their way towards a new equilibrium on the border. The new border equation is likely to make the Line of Actual Control (LAC), marked by large buffer zones and winter withdrawals, similar to the Line of Control (LoC), marked by permanent deployments, firing range distances, and constant friction. Managing this transition, while restoring, to use the euphemism adopted by both governments, “peace and tranquility” along the border, is now the primary challenge. During this, India must show no signs of weakness or impatience as these will be exploited by a China which respects only power in its rawest, hardest sense. The two governments have been talking at multiple levels. Despite this, they have barely budged from their original positions and tens of thousands of soldiers are digging in for a stand-off that will, in all likelihood, run through the winter. Or they could well be further rounds of fighting designed to strengthen negotiating positions.

There has been a sharp change in the options with New Delhi since Indian troops moved to the heights of Chushul Ridge in late August. If China is baulking at rolling back its intrusion along Pangong Tso, India will not pull its soldiers back from the heights. There is now insufficient trust between the militaries for such a move. On paper, this will seem as if India has conceded a chunk of land behind its version of LAC. And all effort must be geared even now to get China to vacate. But in reality, neither side had “actual control” of either bits of territory. They had been part of a no-man’s land and their forward deployments have now shrunk that buffer to nothing. This is a reality which Indian border policy is adjusting to.

Restoring status quo ante would also imply returning Sino-Indian economic relations to what they were before. That is also out of the question. New Delhi had once seen trade and investment as a confidence-building exercise with Beijing. Today, New Delhi must draft a five-year plan to reduce China’s economic footprint in India as much as possible. And it should be working out how to do so in conjunction with other countries. Peace along the border is the obvious short-term goal, but struggle everywhere else should be India’s new long march.

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