

LOCKED IN A STALEMATE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON NEED TO RESTORE NORMALCY ALONG INDIA-CHINA BORDER

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

In the coming week, [military commanders from India and China are expected to hold the 13th round of talks](#) to continue the effort to find a way out of the LAC crisis. Sharp exchanges between Beijing and New Delhi have served as a reminder that relations are undoubtedly at their lowest since 1988. On September 24, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, while responding to a question about new border management protocols, laid the blame for [last year's border crisis](#) entirely on India's doorstep, [saying India's "illegal trespass" caused the dispute](#). The Foreign Ministry repeated this charge in even stronger language, describing, on September 29, India's actions last year as a "forward policy", implicitly invoking the 1962 war. New Delhi in turn reminded Beijing that it was its "provocative behaviour", and amassing of troops in April 2020 following annual military exercises, that led to the flashpoints. The envoys of both countries have also made statements, at a virtual dialogue, that suggest a gulf in the state of relations. The Chinese envoy to India, Sun Weidong, called on both countries to "place the border issue in an appropriate position" and said "it is not the whole story of bilateral relations". His Indian counterpart, Vikram Misri, [said the Chinese side was "shifting goalposts"](#) in how both countries have, for three decades, managed the border areas peacefully. This, he said, was predicated on "a well-understood distinction" between managing the border areas and resolving the boundary question.

It is clear that this understanding, along with the four border agreements, has now broken down on account of China's actions last year to unilaterally re-draw the LAC in Ladakh in the Western Sector. This week's military commanders talks will take up disputes in Hot Springs, while disputes in Demchok and Depsang remain unresolved. Since the crisis last year, both sides have set up buffer zones in Galwan Valley and on the north bank of Pangong Lake, and have disengaged on the south bank and in Gogra. This temporary arrangement has helped prevent the recurrence of clashes, but with past agreements in disarray, a longer term understanding to keep the peace still eludes both sides. Recent incidents in Uttarakhand, and a continued military build-up in the Eastern Sector, underline the pressing need for reaching one. Mr. Misri suggested a way out of this stalemate, saying "it cannot be that only one side's concerns are of relevance..." and acknowledging that "safeguarding territorial integrity and national security holds equal value for both sides." He maintained both sides still had the space to cooperate on issues including tackling the pandemic, concerns about terrorism in the region and the situation in Afghanistan. Doing so will certainly build trust. Finding that space, however, will hinge on first restoring normalcy along the border.

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