

India's China relationship is going through one of the rigid phases in the last four months. The typical military standoff that started on May 5, 2020, near Pangong Tso, is now heading toward disaster. This article will focus on all the events in the last four months and determine the possible outcome.



On May 5, 2020, the Indian and China got engaged in a skirmish near Pangong Tso Lake and Naku La in North Sikkim. Pangong Tso is 134 km long and 5 km wide lake situated at Ladakh, India. Approximately 60% of the length of the lake lies within the Tibetan Autonomous Region. India's border with Tibet is not defined, and troops of both nations often unintentionally cross each other territory. The Indian army accused the People Liberation Army (PLA) of trespassing LAC up to finger 2. The fingers are nothing but the continuous barren mountains on the northern bank of the lake. The Chinese border posts are at finger eight, and India physically controls area only up to finger 4. The Chinese side patrols the vehicle, whereas Indian troop has to go on foot. The Indian intention to build roads and patrol by vehicle is taken as the challenge to Chinese dominance, which they enjoyed since the early '90s, thanks to the successive Indian government for ignoring border infrastructure projects. The boost in the Indian capability along the LAC has created panic in the People Liberation Army and Communist Party of China's rank and files. Further, various defense and international relations experts argue that the Communist Party of China is under pressure, especially the leadership of Xi Jinping, because of the mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and slowing economy. So it is just a way to divert attention from the general public to create a wave of nationalism.



Both sides' military assures that the situation is under control and their lies a proper mechanism to handle such a situation. We need to understand that there are five treaties between the countries to maintain peace, tranquility, and working tools for consultation and coordination along the LAC. However, the ground situation was different as PLA opened another front near Galwan valley, claiming the whole valley itself. Point to note is that the valley that the Chinese claim is named after Ghulam Rasool Galwan, a Ladakhi explorer of Kashmiri descent, first explored the river in 1899. The situation gets worse on 15/16 June, when PLA Clandestinely attacks an unarmed Indian troop and tries to intrude further into it. The Indian army lost 20 of its brave soldiers along with the commanding officer in the incident. This whole incident took place when both the nations were involved in disengagement talks. The Indian army accused PLA of violating the laid mechanism and claims that the clash was a planned preemptive attack on unarmed Indian troops engaged in the disengagement process (point to note that no armed personnel on the field is ever unarmed, but armed forces along the LAC is bound by defense protocol. Thus, in this sense we can consider them unarmed). The PLA used iron rods with the nail to attack Indian troops. Though surprised by the attack, Indian troops fought extensively and infused

enormous PLA damage besides all odds. Indian government saw the incident as the double standard of the Chinese army and terms it a stab in the back. After this incident, the soldier was giving full freedom to deal with the situation. Further, the government retaliated by banning various Chinese apps, including the famous short video app TikTok and canceled many contracts amid the Indian campaign of boycotting Chinese products.

This incident at Galwan valley completely changed the perception of Indian leadership. The Indian side now started doubting the very intent of PLA to disengage at Pangong Tso Lake and Galwan valley. Many experts argue that it is quite common to have skirmishes along the LAC, and there are many incidents prior, which were resolved peacefully, but the brawl in 2020 is not regular due to various reasons. First, the troop buildup along the LAC is unprecedented. Further, the state media has reported quoting Chinese premier 'Xi Jinping' as saying that it was essential to "comprehensively strengthen the training of troops and prepare for war." Second, the intention of the PLA is not of disengagement but encroachment.



Image source: Stockphotos

Also, the Chinese media coverage and provocative instances throughout the incident are deplorable. Various military-level talks happen to disengage, but all remain futile. The military build had increased many folds since the first incident of the skirmish. PLA was continuously involved in the various army exercises all along the LAC from the last two

years. Various military Sources and satellite images pointing out the massive deployment of troops, tanks, armored vehicles, front line fighter aircraft along the LAC. More than 40,000 PLA Troops are now deployed in the aggressive posture. Indian armed forces are signaling for the peaceful restoration of the Eastern Ladakh status quo but are also prepared for the worst-case scenario. The Indian army has deployed six T-90 missile-firing tanks, and top of the line shoulder-fired anti-tank and anti-aircraft Igla-S missile system. Infantry combat vehicles and 155 mm howitzers have been deployed all along 1597 km long LAC in the East Ladakh with two tank regiments deployed in the Chushul sector to repel any aggressive plans. The introduction of Rafale fighter aircraft might have created the necessary hype, but proper deployment and induction as a frontline fighter along LAC are far from reality.

Ever since the standoff People's Liberation Army was trying to gain the height all along the LAC to dominate and watch the Indian troops movement and further achieve the ability to misadventure as per their needs. However, on August 29 Indian army preempts the Chinese intention and preoccupies the critical heights in the Pangong Tso Lake's southern part. The Indian military had succeeded in capturing Rechin La and Rezang La on August 29-30. India did not use the Indian army to gain the height, but troops from the Special Frontier Force (SFF), an elite special force under the command of RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), were used. The SFF reports directly to the Prime Minister Office known as 'Establishment 22', India's special force created on November 14, 1962. Its main goal is to conduct covert operations behind the Chinese line in the event of another Sino-India Conflict, and during the initial year of establishment, it was funded and armed by the American Intelligence agency CIA. Earlier, the soldiers in the SFF are from Tibet origin only, but now Nepali 'gorkhas' and others are also recruited. India now stands erect and holds the dominating position against the People Liberation army in the Pangong Tso area. The use of SFF to carry out the operation and bluntly exposing the so-called secret force was well-thought action by the Indian government.



Armed Chinese troops at LAC/ Image source: WION

However, for the first time since the violent standoff, the defense minister of both nations held a meeting on the sideline of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Both the leaders met in the Russian capital Moscow on September 5, 2020. They vowed to peacefully resolve and disengage front line forces as soon as possible. However, the statement made by the Chinese counterpart does not reflect the action on the field. Army chief General MM Naravane, who visited Ladakh to review the military situation, indicated the tense situation and assured that Indian armed forces are fully prepared to foil any misadventure along the LAC. There was news that the people liberation army had abducted 5 Indian citizens from Arunachal Pradesh when they unintentionally crossed LAC. Initially, PLA denied any such incident but later confirmed five youths on the Chinese side.

Further, just three days after the defense ministers meeting, there is news of bullet firing along the LAC. Both sides are pointing against each other, firing a warning shot. This incident is the first since 1975 when bullets have been fired along the LAC. Forty-five years ago, an Assam rifle patrol was ambushed by Chinese in Tulung La in Arunachal Pradesh. Further, Chinese troops along LAC are carrying stick-machetes along with the service rifle. Though India has formally objected to PLA about this, PLA is known for its deception and warmongering tactics; it hardly makes any difference to their way of thinking. Later on

September 10, the foreign minister of both the nations met at Moscow and agreed on a 5 point agenda similar to the 1956 Panchsheel agreement. Both sides agreed that the current situation in the border is not in either side's interest, and both sides should continue their dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain peace, and ease tensions. The five-point plan is on the line of consensus between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to "not allow difference to become a dispute." However, the calmness is seen over the region after the agreement, none of the sides de-escalated.

Further, China's philosophy of fighting is not winning war decisively but is of stretching the conflict. The Chinese play with patience and perseverance; for them, conventional war holds less relevance. They are an astute player of 'Hybrid warfare,' which uses non-conventional means to attain the objective. The recent investigation by the Indian Express had revealed that a Shenzhen-based technology company Zhebhua Data Information Technology Co., while working closely for the Chinese communist party, is monitoring over 10,000 Indian individuals and organizations in its global database. From President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to congress interim president Sonia Gandhi and their families and not just influential individuals in the political and official establishment, Indians being monitored cut across the discipline. The data is compiled to influence the vital position holder's decisions, according to the People Liberation Army and the Chinese Communist Party. It is the tactic of "hybrid warfare"- using non-military means like scraping information from the web and social media platform and tracking research papers, articles, patents, recruitment positions to achieve dominance or influence the decisions. Indians Express defines this form of warfare in their word as "information pollution, perception management, and propaganda.



Following the events, as they happened in the last four to five months, we can clearly understand the People's Liberation Army's intention. Some experts also argue that PLA's provocative instance is due to New Delhi's increasing military ties with the USA. Even if the said argument is valid, isn't it that China's provocation and bullying will push India closer with much intensity? With Chinese aggression in mind, India is now planning to formalize the 'Quad grouping' and planning to invite Australia for the multilateral 'Malabar' naval exercise. Interestingly, China's relationship with countries like the USA, Japan, and Australia are also sliding downward. Fortunately, none of the above countries shares a land boundary with China, but unfortunately, India does. India shares a 3488 km long border with Tibet controlled by China. It is now seeing itself as a global power and wants to assert its dominance by all means possible. It has already started challenging the western world order, and many countries in Indian proximity are under its political and economic control.

It is hard to predict the future, but looking at the current situation, the war between the two nuclear power neighbours seems unavoidable. The reason is vast distrust among the leaders of both nations. Foreign minister S Jaishankar once argued that "there is enough space for both giants to grow together," but China under Xi Jinping is encroaching that space unilaterally. The coming winter will determine LAC's future and there will be few options left with both the nations to manoeuvre upon before any grave incident. However, thinking

of war between two nuclear power nations is even horrible, thinking not to talk about the real battle. This war will bring hell out of everything and will permanently change the landscape of the region. Hopefully, both the nation carryout restrains and talks on the table to negotiate the issue peacefully. Further, this long standoff has shifted the policy perception of Indian defence policymakers from Pakistan to China. The leaders are now thinking about tackling the two-front war because it is apparent that if the action happens, it will be on two sides, and India had to live with this reality to the point it happened.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team

Facebook Comments