



## India-China Disengagement along the LAC

**For Prelims:** [Line of Actual Control \(LAC\)](#), [Depsang Plains](#), [Galwan Valley](#), [Pangong Tso](#), [BRICS](#), [Siachen Glacier](#), [Aksai Chin](#), [Darbuk-Shyok-DBO Road](#), [G20](#).

**For Mains:** Managing India-China border dispute, Roadmap for border dispute resolution.

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

Recently, India's External Affairs Minister said that about **75%** of the “**disengagement problems**” with China have been “**sorted out**” along the [Line of Actual Control \(LAC\)](#) in Ladakh.

- However, **Demchok** and [Depsang plains](#) have seen **no progress** towards their resolution in the past two years.

### What are the Recent Developments on India-China Disengagement along the LAC?

- **Verified Disengagement:** Both India and China have **mutually agreed** on and verified disengagement from **five friction points**, including [Galwan Valley](#), [Pangong Tso](#), and [Gogra-Hot Springs](#).
  - However, **Demchok** and **Depsang** remain unresolved.
- **Reasons for Disengagement:** Recent high level diplomatic interactions has led to the disengagement along the **LAC**.
  - India's [National Security Advisor](#) Ajit Doval met **Chinese Foreign Minister** Wang Yi on the sidelines of the meeting of **BRICS NSAs** in St Petersburg, Russia.
  - The recent optimism for further disengagement is linked to the upcoming **BRICS Summit** in October in **Kazan, Russia**, where leaders from both nations will meet.
- **Significance of Disengagement:** The 31st meeting of **Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC)** was described as “**frank, constructive, and forward-looking**,” and urged parties to “**narrow down the differences**” and “**find early resolution of the outstanding issues**”.
  - The expression “narrow down the differences” had been **used for the first time** in the bilateral talks on the border standoff and indicated hope for further disengagement.
- **Challenges in Disengagement:**
  - **Stalled Negotiations:** Despite multiple rounds of talks, agreements on Demchok and Depsang have not materialised.
  - **Military Build-Up:** Both India and China have continued significant **infrastructure development** and **troop deployments** along the **3,488 km-long LAC**.
    - Both nations have approximately **50,000-60,000 troops** stationed along the LAC.
  - **Vulnerable to Escalation:** China's massive build-up of infrastructure and **new**

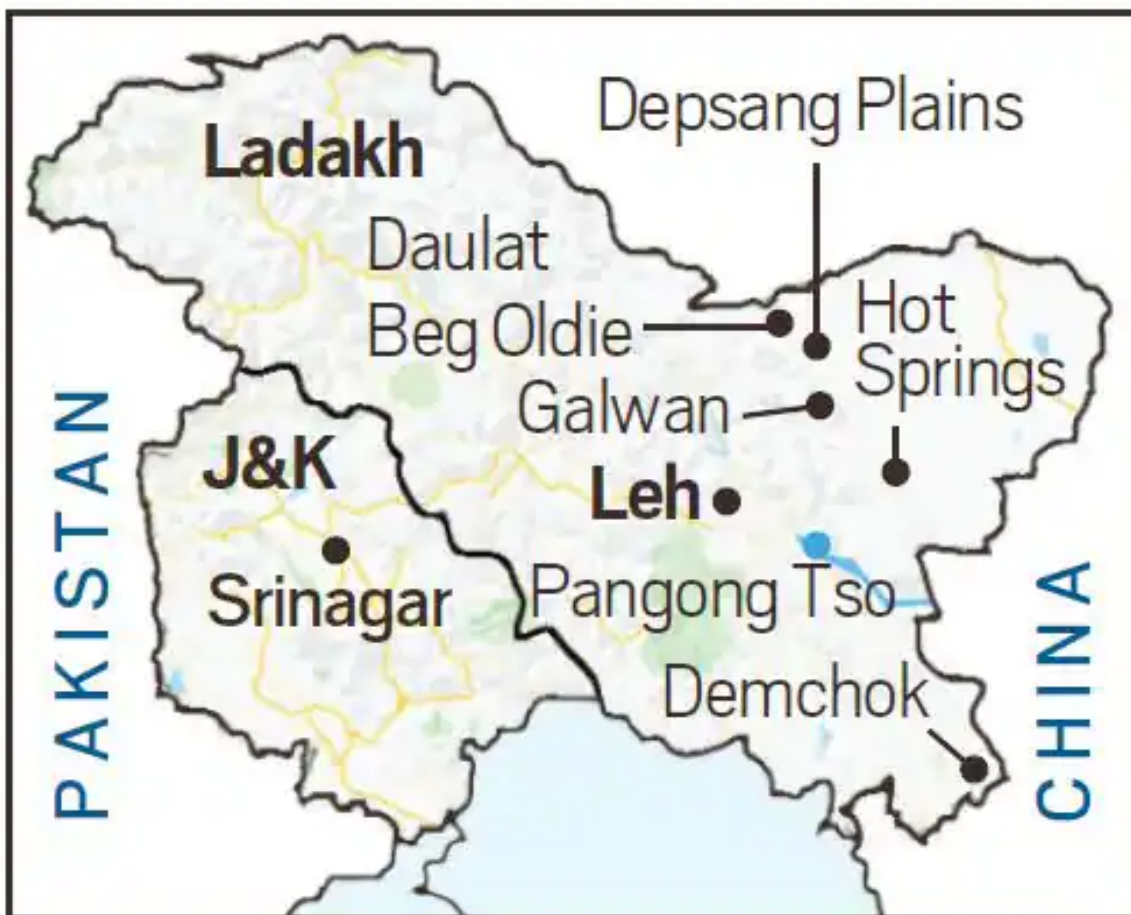
**weaponry** has fundamentally altered the status quo. India has responded with similar infrastructure and capability enhancements.

- It may lead to a **military escalation** in case of any miscalculation.

## What is the Strategic Significance of Depsang Plains and Demchok?

- **Depsang Plains:** The Depsang Plains is a **strategically important** territory, because the PLA's control threatens India's control over the **Siachen Glacier**, encircling the Indian Army from both **China and Pakistan**.
  - A **two-pronged attack** by China and Pakistan will leave **India's military position** on the Siachen Glacier **highly vulnerable**.
  - It is identified as the **most vulnerable region** in Ladakh by the Indian Army due to its **flat terrain**, which is suitable for **mechanised warfare** and provides direct access to **Aksai Chin**.
- **Demchok:** Demchok allows for **effective surveillance** of Chinese movements and activities in the **Aksai Chin region**.
  - It supports **road and communication links** that are essential for **rapid military mobilisation** and logistical support.

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## What are the Key Areas in the India-China Standoff?

- **Pangong Lake Region:** This region frequently witnesses **cross-paths between patrols** of India and China.
  - The north bank of the lake is divided into **8 fingers**. **India** has claimed its territory **till Finger 8** and **China** disputes its claims till **Finger 4**.
    - The mountain spurs jutting into the lake are referred to as 'Fingers' in military parlance.

- **Demchok Region:** It reported Chinese activity and **heavy equipment movement** in the region.
- **Galwan River Basin:** Satellite images showed **Chinese tents** near the road close to the Galwan River basin, indicating **Chinese incursions** into areas traditionally held by Indian forces.
- **Gogra Post:** Chinese military build-up near the **Gogra post** heightened the tensions.
- **Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO):** Chinese encroached in the **Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) sector** lying on the Indian side.
  - The **DBO airstrip**, crucial for winter operations and reinforcements, is accessible by the 255 km-long [Darbuk-Shyok-DBO road](#) for India.



### What triggered China's Aggression Along LAC?

- **Infrastructure Sensitivity:** China's aggressive stance might be driven by **India's recent infrastructure developments**, which could be perceived as a threat or a move to **pre-emptively counter** India's strategic improvements.
- **Element of Coercion:** China's actions might be intended to **exert pressure** on India.
  - Historically, the red lines for both nations were well-defined, but current **multiple intrusions** suggest a strategy to test and pressurise India.
- **Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy:** China's aggressive diplomatic stance, known as "**wolf-warrior diplomacy**," might be mirrored in their **military approach** along the LAC.
  - It is a **confrontational form of public diplomacy** adopted by Chinese diplomats.
- **Leverage Tactics:** The activation of border areas might be part of China's broader strategy to **gain leverage** over India in bilateral relations and other issues like **G20 and BRICS**.
- **Economic and Diplomatic Pressures:** China's actions could be influenced by the need to **demonstrate strength** amid economic difficulties and strained international relations due to the [Covid-19 pandemic](#) and its origin in Wuhan.

### What can be done to manage the China-India Border Dispute?

- **Clarification of LAC:** Efforts should resume to **clarify the LAC**. It will **avoid potential clashes** in overlapping claim areas.
- **Buffer Zones:** Consider making existing **buffer zones permanent and creating new ones** in areas with frequent standoffs. Both sides should be willing to **defend** these buffer zones to their **domestic audiences**.
- **Abiding by Agreements:** Continue to adhere to existing **bilateral agreements**, including bans on firearms, and make joint public statements to reaffirm commitments.
- **No-Patrol Zones:** Establish **no-patrol zones** in frequently contested areas.
- **Drones Usage:** Agree on parameters for the **use of drones** for intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

- **Mutual Security Agreement:** Attempt to reach an understanding on **acceptable levels of forces, arms, and facilities** near the border based on the “principle of mutual and equal security.”
- **Impact of Third-Party Relations:** Both sides should be sensitive to how their relations with **third parties (e.g., US for India, Pakistan for China)** might influence the other’s perceptions and actions.

## Conclusion

The China-India border dispute, rooted in **colonial-era decisions**, has intensified due to rising **nationalism and state assertiveness**. The 2020 Ladakh clashes worsened relations, leading to a state of “**armed coexistence**” marked by **mutual distrust and military buildup**. To maintain peace, India and China must enhance engagement rules, establish **stronger buffer zones**, and improve communication between top brass. **Strategic competition** complicates a comprehensive border agreement, making high-level dialogue essential.

### Drishti Mains Question:

Q. How can India and China improve their approach to conflict management to prevent future standoffs?

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q. ‘Hand-in-Hand 2007’ a joint anti-terrorism military training was held by the officers of the Indian Army and officers of the Army of which one of the following countries? (2008)**

- (a) China
- (b) Japan
- (c) Russia
- (d) USA

**Ans: (a)**

### Mains

**Q. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is viewed as a cardinal subset of China’s larger ‘One Belt One Road’ initiative. Give a brief description of CPEC and enumerate the reasons why India has distanced itself from the same. (2018)**