

Key Developments in the Sino–Indian CBM Process

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In October and November 1962, India and China fought a two-front war along the eastern and western sector of their Himalayan border. After pushing Indian forces back and occupying a large portion of disputed territory, China unilaterally called for a cease-fire and offered to withdraw its forces twenty kilometers from the Line of Actual Control (LAC), creating a demilitarized zone in the west. In the east the two countries were to respect a mutually acceptable “line of actual control” without a demilitarized zone. Both countries understood that these arrangements were not to prejudice any future settlement of the border dispute.

There was no improvement in bilateral relations until the re-establishment of full diplomatic ties in 1976. Between the spring of 1986 and the spring of 1987, another territorial misunderstanding in the east—followed by large Indian military exercises in the same area—increased tension over a period of twelve to eighteen months.

Relations between the two Asian giants began to improve after then-Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China in December 1988. The border question remains unresolved, however, and a point of contention. Even in the absence of a formal settlement, both countries have been willing to negotiate confidence-building measures to avoid unwanted conflict and to provide the basis for increased cooperation. In 1981, for example, China unilaterally allowed Indians access to pilgrimage sites in Tibet. Between 1981 and 1988 a series of eight official discussions of the border issues and Sino–Indian relations took place. Following the Rajiv Gandhi visit, an India–China Joint Working Group (JWG) on boundary issues was established. Relations improved markedly with the visit of then-Indian prime minister Narasimha Rao to Beijing in September 1993 and have continued to improve.

The mandate of the JWG is to settle the border issue and to promote peace and tranquillity along the frontier. Some of the measures negotiated by the JWG include:

- Military-to-military meetings are to be held twice a year, in June and October, along both the eastern and western sectors of the border at Bum La Pass and Spanggur Gap;
- Military-to-military communication links are being installed at key points along both the eastern and western sectors of the border;
- An agreement has been reached on the establishment of dedicated communication links, or “hotlines,” between military headquarters;
- Local commanders are encouraged to conduct meetings, as needed, using color-coded flags to initiate contact;
- Both sides have agreed that there should be mutual transparency on the location of military positions along the LAC;

- An agreement has been reached on the prior notification of military maneuvers and troop movements along the border;
- An agreement has been reached on the prevention of airspace violations;
- Exchanges between defense educational institutions and between strategic studies research institutes have been arranged;
- Exchanges between high-level defense officials have begun with then-Indian defense minister Sharad Pawar's visit to Beijing in July 1992; and,
- Another working group was established in 1988 to cover issues related to economic cooperation, trade, science, and technology.

In addition to progress on border issues through the JWG, India and China have begun to explore other areas of cooperation. In 1993, the two countries negotiated an agreement to avoid double taxation, prevent fiscal evasion of income taxes, and provide rates of taxation lower than domestic rates regarding income gained from transfers of technology and investment.

The Sino–Indian rapprochement that began with the Narasimha Rao–Li Peng summit in Beijing in September 1993 led to what has been called an “epoch making” agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity Along the Line of Control in the India–China Border Areas. This agreement begins by reiterating the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence mutually agreed upon by the two countries in the April 1954 Agreement on Trade between India and the Tibet Region of China. The main features of the September 1993 agreement include the following:

- The two countries will resolve the border question through peaceful and friendly consultations;
- Neither side will use or threaten to use force against the other by any means;
- Pending an ultimate solution to the border question, the two sides shall “strictly respect and observe the line of actual control between the two sides;”
- Where necessary, the two sides will jointly check the segments of the LAC where they have different views of its alignment;
- Each side will keep its military forces in the areas along the LAC to its minimum level compatible with the friendly relations between the two countries;
- The two sides agree to reduce their military forces along the LAC in conformity with the requirements of the principle of mutual and equal security ceilings to be mutually agreed;
- The two sides will work out effective confidence-building in the areas along the LAC. Neither side will undertake specified levels of military exercises in mutually identified zones without prior notification;

- In the case of problems arising in areas along the LAC, the two sides will deal with them through meetings and friendly consultations between the border personnel of the two countries;
- The two sides agree to take adequate measures to ensure that air intrusions along the LAC do not take place and that both sides agree to consult on possible restrictions on air exercises in areas to be mutually agreed upon near the LAC;
- References to the LAC in the Agreement do not prejudice their respective positions on the border question; and,
- The two sides will agree through consultations on the form, method, scale, and content of effective verification measures and supervision required for the reduction of military forces and the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the areas along the LAC.

High-level meetings continued after Narasimha Rao's trip to China. These included: Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen's visit to New Delhi, Indian army chief Gen. B.C. Joshi's trip to Beijing, and the Chinese deputy army chief Lieut. Gen. Xu Hui Zi's trip to New Delhi. In 1994 then-Indian vice president K.R. Narayan paid an official visit to China. This trip led to a memorandum of understanding between the People's Bank of China and the Reserve Bank of India on banking cooperation.

Contact between nongovernmental organizations in the two countries has also increased with regularized exchanges of security experts from prominent think tanks in the two countries and Chinese participation in many Track Two initiatives in South Asia, such as the "Shanghai Initiatives" to enhance global and regional security and the "Security, Technology, and Arms Control Workshop" for young Chinese, Indians, and Pakistanis with an interest in arms control issues.

Sino-Indian rapprochement culminated in a historic visit by Chinese president Jiang Zemin to New Delhi in December 1996. During his visit, the two countries signed The Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control in the China-India Border Areas. The agreement included the following measures:

Troop Reduction Measures

- The two sides reaffirmed that they would reduce or limit their respective military forces within a mutually agreed upon geographical area in the border areas to minimum levels;
- The two sides agreed to limits on the number of field army, border defense forces, paramilitary forces and major categories of armaments along the LAC; and,
- The two sides agreed to exchange data on military forces and armaments along the LAC;

Notification Measures

- The two sides agreed to avoid holding large scale military exercises near the LAC and to notify the other side of exercises involving one Brigade Group (5,000 troops);
- Both sides agreed to take adequate measures to ensure that air intrusions across the LAC do not take place, and to allow for proper investigation in the event that an intrusion does occur; and,
- Combat aircraft shall be prohibited from flying within ten kilometers of the LAC. In the event that such a flight becomes necessary, both sides will inform the other prior to such an occurrence.

Conflict Avoidance Measures

- Neither side shall open fire, cause bio-degradation, use hazardous chemicals, conduct blast operations, or hunt with guns or explosives within two kilometers of the LAC;
- In the event that blast operations become necessary within two kilometers of the LAC, the other side should be informed through diplomatic channels;
- Precautions shall be taken to prevent bullets from crossing the LAC during the course of exercises in proximity to the LAC; and,
- If border personnel from the two sides come in a face-to-face situation due to differences in alignment along the LAC, they shall exercise self-restraint and take all necessary steps to avoid escalation. Both sides shall also enter into immediate consultation with the other to avoid any escalation of tension.

Communications Measures

- The two sides will maintain and expand scheduled flag meetings between border representatives; and,
- The two sides will maintain and expand telecommunications links between their border meeting points at designated places along the LAC.

In addition to these measures, India and China signed three other agreements that implement nonmilitary confidence-building measures. They include: a pledge to cooperate on maritime issues, an agreement to allow for a Consulate General of India in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, and an agreement to cooperate on combating illicit drug trafficking. The two sides also discussed possibilities for enhanced technological and economic interaction and expressed interest in strengthened bilateral trade and investment.

