



INDIA CHALLENGES CHINA IN LAC

*By E. Dilipraj
Research Associate, CAPS*

‘Pangong Tso’ lake - the scenically beautiful blue lake has become the current contested ground for the two Asian giants – India and China. It is a well known fact that both India and China have border disputes and it was for the same reason that they have gone to war in 1962. Although there have been no more wars between these two countries after 1962, tensions have often been high along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) especially during the incursions from the Chinese Army.

All along the 4250 Kmⁱ (including the 482 Km long Bhutan – Tibet section) long border between India and China, the latter has strengthened their military infrastructure in such a manner that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) can operate with much ease than its counterparts across the border. Due to a late start, Indian army lacks the advantage of a superior infrastructure but they are catching up fast with their Chinese counterparts. The latest advancement in this is the procurement and deployment of high speed boats from America in the high altitude Pangong Tso lake.

Pangong Tso Lake is situated in a strategic location between India and China’s Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), at a height of 14,270 ft (4350 m) above sea level.ⁱⁱ The 135 Km long lake is being shared between the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and the China’s TAR province of Xizang with an approximate ratio of 40 to 60 respectively while the LAC passes through it. The maximum breadth of the lake is 5 Km and the maximum depth reaches up to 210 ms at some point.ⁱⁱⁱ Both India and China have their respective armies stationed at the lake to monitor each others’ incursion in the water body. Earlier in 1999, potential crisis points arouse

between India and China when Beijing built a five-km permanent track in the Indian Territory along the lake, while India was engaged with Pakistan in the Kargil conflict.^{iv}



Source: *Mail Online India*^v

Although there were no other reported instances on the region, there is always a sense of uneasiness among the armies of both the countries' which patrols the waters. At times, the situations become so worse, that there are unofficial standoffs between the army personnels' of both the countries. For instance, in 2011, three Chinese naval crafts surrounded an Indian motorboat which was on a regular patrolling duty along the perceived borders of the lake. The situation became tense as the sufficiently armed Chinese crafts with two machine guns and a 20 member contingent approached the Indian boat. The timely action of the Indian boat operator saved a confrontation when he quickly moved his larger boat in circles to disperse the Chinese crafts.^{vi}

Nevertheless, holding up of flags saying "*Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai*," when soldiers of both the armies face each other during patrols, subdued aggression sometimes surfaces like the one narrated above. The Chinese intimidation was higher due to the fact that they had small but hi speed boats in the waters when compared to their Indian counterparts. The Indian boats, however, were large but with a much lesser speed which had the disadvantage of not being able to catch up with the Chinese boats when they made their incursions.

It is reported that the Chinese operate nearly 22 armed patrol vessels; each armed with two machine guns and a contingent of 5 to 7 people whereas the Indians had two big patrol boats

with the capacity to carry 21 personnel each. The numerical superiority that the Chinese have is undeniable. Realizing their disadvantage, India made a purchase of 17 Quick Reaction Team (QRT) boats from USA in 2012 and inducted them into service in the Pangong Lake.^{vii}

The newly acquired Indian boats are 37 ft long and 10 ft wide with a maximum speed of 40 knots. Fitted with GPS, night vision devices and equipped with machine guns, the new QRT boats can carry 10- 12 Indian soldiers at a time.^{viii}

The operation of these QRT boats by the Indian army in the Pangong Tso Lake has reduced the tactical advantage of the Chinese army on the strategic lake. After experiencing the heat of the aggressive patrols by the Indian army with their QRT boats since their induction, the Chinese started protesting by handing over protest notes at the border personnel meeting and also at diplomatic level. Beijing has complained that the Indian Army was resorting to aggressive patrols by coming too close to the Chinese boats and engaging them.^{ix}

While there is a general complaint that Indian side of the LAC lacks the advanced infrastructural developments, it is to be observed that the Indian military is outshining their Chinese counterparts in pockets. While the Chinese go to the extent of clearing the forest cover to obtain land in the border areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Indian mission lacks a clear agenda and a futuristic vision to tackle Chinese incursions as well to manage the border dispute. However, in a recent development, New Delhi's nod for creating a separate offensive corps for the Sino-Indian border with the cost of Rs. 65,000 Cr and with the strength of 50,000 personnel denotes the realization that the Indian side has learnt after years of being bullied by Chinese incursions.^x

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)

-----XXXXXXXX-----

End Notes

ⁱ "1962 war history"; Chapter 1; Pg 1. [URL]: <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/LAND-FORCES/Army/History/1962War/PDF/1962Chapter01.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Pubby, Manu. "At 14,500 feet, Pangong lake is border flashpoint between India and China", The Indian Express, Oct 6, 2008. URL Accessed on 20/11/2013.

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/at-14500-feet-pangong-lake-is-border-flashpoint-between-india-and-china/370053/>

iii URL accessed on 20/11/2013. <http://defenceforumindia.com/forum/china/23251-pangong-tso-india-s-weak-frontier.html>

iv “India steps up boat patrols on Ladakh lake after Chinese intrusions”, *Mail online India* Accessed on 20/11/2013. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2510142/India-steps-boat-patrols-Ladakh-lake-Chinese-intrusions.html#ixzz2lBK3NzWt>

v Source: URL: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2510142/India-steps-boat-patrols-Ladakh-lake-Chinese-intrusions.html#ixzz2lBK3NzWt>

vi URL Accessed on 20/11/2013. <http://defenceforumindia.com/forum/china/23251-pangong-tso-india-s-weak-frontier.html>

vii “India steps up boat patrols on Ladakh lake after Chinese intrusions”, *Mail online India* Accessed on 20/11/2013. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2510142/India-steps-boat-patrols-Ladakh-lake-Chinese-intrusions.html#ixzz2lBK3NzWt>

viii Shukla, Saurabh. “India Gives China taste of its own medicine by resorting to aggressive patrols”, *India Today*, November 20, 2013. URL Accessed on 20/11/2013. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-china-new-delhi-pangong-tso-lake-ladakh-chinese-troops-indian-troops/1/325603.html>

ix “India steps up boat patrols on Ladakh lake after Chinese intrusions”, *Mail online India* Accessed on 20/11/2013. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2510142/India-steps-boat-patrols-Ladakh-lake-Chinese-intrusions.html#ixzz2lBK3NzWt>

x “China fazed by regular Indian patrols of high-end American boats at LAC, new corps to be sent to Chinese border”. URL Accessed on 20/11/2013. <http://daily.bhaskar.com/article/NAT-TOP-india-retaliates-china-with-high-end-american-patrol-boats-at-lac-new-corps-to-b-4439840-NOR.html>