



India Adding Battalions, Not Divisions, to the Army amid De-escalation Efforts

OE Watch Commentary: In late 2020, Indian officials announced that the Mountain Strike Corps (XVII Corps) will not be filled to its previously planned strength of three infantry divisions. Instead it will consist of one division plus an artillery brigade for the foreseeable future. While officials stated that this was partly due to funding, the accompanying excerpted articles provide an update on other developments within the Indian Army as well as separate negotiations with the governments of Pakistan and China to reduce tension on the border and avoid a conflict.

The article from *The Print*, an independent English-language news website from India, reports that the Indian Army will raise three additional battalions. It appears that the three battalions are a substitute for the two divisions meant for the Mountain Strike Corps as the article notes that “defence sources told *The Print* the sanction for the move was accorded around 2013, when the raising of the 17 mountain corps was granted” and that “the final nod to raise the battalions was received a few weeks ago.” The article goes on to note how “the additional three battalions will be raised as part of the Sikh, Kumaon, and Jammu and Kashmir Rifles regiments,” so the increase in units is not just for one region, as each of the regiments mentioned are located in different areas in northern India. Indian officials also mentioned that additional units may be raised in the future “depending on operational requirements.”

The announcement on the establishment of the new units comes as the Indian government has negotiated for a disengagement with China at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). An article from *The Hindu*, an independent English-language newspaper in India, reports that on 11 February “India and China announced an agreement for disengagement on the north and south bank of Pangong Tso to cease their forward deployments in a ‘phased, coordinated and verified manner’.” The article references some requirements stated in the agreement, including how “any structures that had been built by both sides since April 2020 in both north and south bank area will be removed and the landforms will be restored” and that “there is also a moratorium on patrolling in this area until a resumption is discussed by both sides through diplomatic and military talks.” It also notes that “once complete disengagement is achieved at all friction areas, both sides will undertake de-escalation along the LAC.”

An article from *Dawn*, an independent English-language newspaper from Pakistan, reports that at the end of February the governments of India and Pakistan “had recommitted themselves to the 2003 ceasefire arrangement at the Line of Control (LoC) and agreed to address the ‘core issues’ that could undermine peace and stability.” The article provides some background to the initial ceasefire agreement dating back to November 2003, when the two sides “agreed to cease fire along the LoC and the Working Boundary.” It also notes that “the agreement held for a few years, but regular violations have occurred since 2008.” The joint statement says “the two sides had concurred on reviving the existing mechanisms—hotline contact and flag meetings—for dealing with “any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding.” Ultimately, India is not filling its Mountain Strike Corps to full strength while it carries out diplomatic efforts with China and Pakistan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The additional three battalions will be raised as part of the Sikh, Kumaon, and Jammu and Kashmir Rifles regiments”



The Sikh Regiment marching contingent passes through the Rajpath during the 66th Republic Day Parade, 2015.

Source: Government Open Data License - India (GODL), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikh_Regiment#/media/File:Sikh_marching_contingent_jointly_won_award_for_the_best_marching_contingent_among_the_two_services_in_Republic_Day_Parade-2015.jpg



Continued: India Adding Battalions, Not Divisions, to the Army amid De-escalation Efforts

Source: Amrita Nayak Dutta, “Army to raise 3 new battalions with 3,000 troops, under Sikh, Kumaon, J&K regiments,” *The Print* (an independent English-language news website from India), 19 February 2021. <https://theprint.in/defence/army-to-raise-3-new-battalions-with-3000-troops-under-sikh-kumaon-jk-regiments/606831/>

The Indian Army will be raising three additional battalions — with a total of about 3,000 troops — to add to its manpower as part of its larger reorganisation plan and options to raise more are open...

Defence sources told The Print the sanction for the move was accorded around 2013, when the raising of the 17 mountain corps was granted. However, the final nod to raise the battalions was received a few weeks ago...The additional three battalions will be raised as part of the Sikh, Kumaon, and Jammu and Kashmir Rifles regiments.

...India's defence establishment had time and again said a collusive threat of a two-front conflict with China and Pakistan cannot be ruled out in the future.

...While the raising of the three battalions are to be done now, sources said options are open for more raisings in future depending on operational requirements. Currently, there are over 400 infantry battalions in the Army...

Source: Dinakar Peri, “The disengagement plan between India and China along the LAC,” *The Hindu* (an independent English-language newspaper in India), 15 February 2021. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/explained-the-disengagement-plan-between-india-and-china-along-the-lac/article33841285.ece>

...Starting in April 2020, China amassed a large number of troops and armaments along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh and other areas along the 3,488 km LAC, leading to stand-offs and skirmishes at Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso (lake), Gogra-Hot Springs and other areas...

India and China on February 11 announced an agreement for disengagement on the north and south bank of Pangong Tso to cease their forward deployments in a “phased, coordinated and verified manner”, which according to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will “substantially” restore the situation to that existing prior to commencement of the stand-off last year.

...The agreement also entails that any structures that had been built by both sides since April 2020 in both north and south bank area will be removed and the landforms will be restored. There is also a moratorium on patrolling in this area until a resumption is discussed by both sides through diplomatic and military talks.

...Once complete disengagement is achieved at all friction areas, both sides will undertake de-escalation along the LAC.

Source: Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan, India agree on LoC ceasefire,” *Dawn* (an independent English-language newspaper from Pakistan), 26 February 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1609468>

Pakistan and India on Thursday said that they had recommitted themselves to the 2003 ceasefire arrangement at the Line of Control and agreed to address the ‘core issues’ that could undermine peace and stability.

The surprise announcement was made in a joint statement by the militaries of the two countries on a ‘hotline contact’ between their directors general military operations (DGMOs)...“Both sides agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the LoC and all other sectors, with effect from midnight 24/25 February 2021,” said a statement.

Pakistan and India had in November 2003 agreed to cease fire along the LoC and the Working Boundary. The agreement held for a few years, but regular violations have occurred since 2008. A sharp spike in the truce breaches has, meanwhile, been witnessed since 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in India...

The statement said the two sides had concurred on reviving the existing mechanisms — hotline contact and flag meetings — for dealing with “any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding”.

Hotline contact is one of the oldest military confidence-building measures between Pakistan and India. The hotline contact was originally established in 1971, but its use followed ups and downs in the relations. The two sides had in their secretary-level talks in August 1992 agreed to resume DGMOs’ communication via the hotline on a weekly basis. The practice, however, could not become a permanent feature and remained dependent on the state of bilateral relations.

...Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi welcomed the agreement saying it was a positive development. “It could be a good start for the future. India will have to abide by this ceasefire agreement with sincerity. How can we make progress on the issue of occupied Kashmir unless the environment is conducive,” he said.

...Indian Ministry of External Affairs, in its reaction, said: “India desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan. We have always maintained that we are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner.”