



India Building up Its Naval Fleet to Counter Chinese Encroachment?

OE Watch Commentary: China-India relations have been strained by border disputes and economic competition throughout the past few decades. While it seems that tensions have eased lately, there are still some signs of distrust, which seem to be prompting India to build up its naval fleet. In June 2017, both countries were locked in a tense standoff at Doklam, which lasted 73 days. Doklam is a disputed area between China and Bhutan, but in which India supports Bhutan's claim. Months later, China and India planned to embark on their 7th India-China joint military exercise. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from India's *Tribune* explains, the exercise was postponed after China, which was hosting the exercise, backed out due to the Doklam standoff still being fresh in everyone's minds. Most recently, according to media reports, the two-week exercise was supposed to kick off on 10 December in Kunming, in southeast China.

There have been other signs that tensions have eased. For example, according to the article from *India TV News Online*, since the standoff, China and India have held discussions about setting up a military hotline to avert a Doklam-like crisis in the future. Also, according to the article from *The New Indian Express*, India resumed an exchange program that allowed military personnel to participate in military courses. This program had been discontinued following the stand-off.

Despite these and other signs of tensions easing, the excerpted article from the Russia-based *Sputnik* reports how in October 2018 India spotted a Chinese submarine for the first time since the Doklam standoff, prompting the Indian government to question China's stated motive that the deployment of its warships in the Indian Ocean are primarily in support of anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. The submarine, which could have been a Type 039A Yuan-class submarine, is believed to have stayed in the area for one month. This has fueled India's desire to modernize its fleet and, according to the article, the government has approved 56 ships and submarines, on top of 32 ships and submarines that are currently under construction. It will be interesting to see how things progress and whether future signs of the thawing of tensions appear or if China's perceived encroachment on the Indian Ocean lights a new flame of concern. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: "First Drill with China Post Doklam," *The Tribune*, 23 November 2018. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/first-drill-with-china-post-doklam/687679.html>

India and China have finally firmed up dates for resumption of their bilateral military exercise 'Hand-in-hand', with the two-week drill set to kick off at Kunming in south-east China on December 10.

The Indian Army will be represented by the 11th battalion of the Sikh Light Infantry. The exercise was originally planned in October-November last year, but China backed out in May following the 73-day (June 16-August 28) Doklam standoff. China was to be the host, as per an arrangement to conduct it in each country by rotation. India had hosted it in 2016.

Source: IANS Beijing, "China, India to Hold Two-Week Military Drill From December 10," *India TV News Online*, 29 November 2018. <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/world-china-india-to-hold-two-week-military-drill-from-dec-10-487896>

...Both sides are in talks to set up a military hotline to avert Doklam-like crisis in the future...

Source: "In Sign of Thaw, Chinese Army Officer Trains at Indian Defence Institute," *The New Indian Express*, 5 December 2018. <http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/delhi/2018/dec/05/in-sign-of-thaw-chinese-army-officer-trains-at-indian-defence-institute-1907443.html>

In a sign of improved India-China ties, a senior Colonel of the Chinese People's Liberation Army is currently in India for a year-long course in military management... India and China have exchanged personnel for courses in their military establishments but it was discontinued after a trust deficit between the two countries, especially after the 73-day stand-off in Doklam, Bhutan, last year.

Source: "Chinese Submarine Tracked in the Indian Ocean in October – Indian Navy Chief," *Sputnik News*, 3 December 2018. <https://sputniknews.com/military/201812031070345367-india-china-indian-ocean/>

China has maintained that its deployment of warships in the Indian Ocean is primarily to support anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. However, ever since October, when a Chinese submarine was spotted for the first time since the Doklam stand-off last year, India has chosen to view its activity with caution.

Though the present number of Chinese warships in the region is about half of the 14 which were present during the Doklam stand-off last year, 50 Indian Navy ships have remained on alert to secure the safety of India's maritime domain, as part of the country's mission-based deployment. The Indian Navy has a dominant position in the Indian Ocean region...

"The government has approved 56 ships and submarines. Some of these will replace the existing fleet and include new ships like fleet ships, submarines, and mine sweepers," (Indian Navy Chief) Admiral (Sunil) Lanba stated.

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