



STABILIZING SINO-INDIAN SECURITY RELATIONS: MANAGING THE STRATEGIC RIVALRY AFTER DOKLAM

FRANK O'DONNELL

The Doklam standoff between Chinese and Indian troops in the summer of 2017 coincided with an ongoing deterioration in bilateral relations and accelerated preexisting security dilemma dynamics. China's and India's respective military postures, and the perceptions these developments engender on both sides, indicate a path forward. These nuclear rivals should take steps to stabilize their relationship and reduce the chances of conflict.

Old Territories, New Challenges

Perception-fueled military competition: Both capitals exhibit declining confidence in their mutual ability to peacefully settle their differences. Many Indian strategists believe China seeks to militarily dominate disputed border areas. Similarly, many Chinese analysts attribute India's bolder military posturing to a desire for great power status, rather than defensive responses to perceived Chinese aggression.

India's conventional military advantage: Once its conventional force modernization is complete, India will be able to position far more troops near border areas than China, whose forces are mostly located deeper inland. U.S. intelligence sharing will likely enable India to detect and counteract any Chinese mobilizations in case of a major attack. Contrary to Indian assumptions, these factors grant India key conventional advantages over China, despite the latter's superior mobilization logistics.

Differing views on nuclear deterrence: New Delhi assesses that Beijing will only view India's nuclear deterrent as credible once India can deploy missiles, such as the Agni-V, that can reach Beijing and Shanghai. Chinese strategists assert that such Indian targeting goals are unnecessary for stable bilateral deterrence, despite China's larger, superior nuclear arsenal. Yet some indications suggest that Agni-III missiles already have been deployed in northeastern India, which would mean these Chinese targets are already within range.

New Pathways Toward Stability

Enhanced military-to-military contact: India has proposed the establishment of a hotline between Indian Army Headquarters and People's Liberation Army Headquarters to allow the two sides to immediately clarify security concerns at a more senior directive level, as a complement to existing tactical-level contact. This headquarters-level hotline should be paired with a theater-level channel between relevant Chinese and Indian commanders. Such communication channels would help correct potential misinterpretations between Indian and Chinese defense policymakers.

A comprehensive strategic and nuclear dialogue: China and India should establish a process to explain their respective nuclear and conventional doctrinal policies and force posturing intentions, as well as to discuss topics such as establishing procedures for prenotification of missile tests and major military exercises.

Unilateral Chinese gestures: As the stronger power, China should recognize how its far-reaching border incursions and construction programs in disputed areas elevate Indian threat perceptions. Beijing should unilaterally cease such activities to help lower bilateral tensions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frank O'Donnell was a visiting fellow at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy in January and February 2018. He is a Stanton Nuclear Security Junior Faculty Fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University and a nonresident fellow in the Stimson Center South Asia Program.

CONTACT

Wanyi Du
Media and Chinese
Content Coordinator
+ 86 10 8215 9477
wdu@ceip.org

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, India, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

© 2018 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. All rights reserved.

The Carnegie Endowment does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Carnegie, its staff, or its trustees.

CarnegieTsinghua.org



@CarnegieBeijing



/CarnegieTsinghua