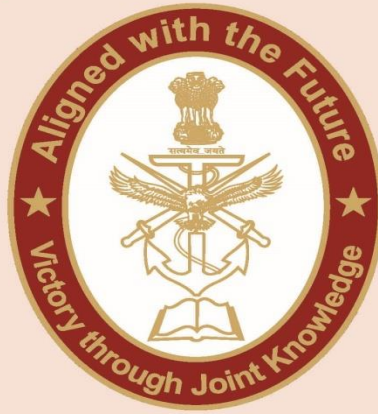


# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

### **MY LADAKH DIARY- 8** **PEACE RETURNS ON** **LAC AND LOC**



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During the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> rounds of Corps Commanders' level talks in February 2021, an agreement was reached between the Indian and the Chinese sides to de-escalate the tensions on LAC in Ladakh by agreeing to restoring status quo by pulling back forces by both sides to pre-April 2020 locations, which was the main demand of the Indian side in all previous negotiations. It is quite obvious that two key major tactical operations played the deciding role in India leveraging a position due to which the PLA conceded to the original Indian demands of establishing status quo ante, namely the Galwan clash of 15 June 2020 and the surprise Indian offensive to take control of the Kailash Ranges on 29/30 August 2020. Let us briefly analyse the impact of these operations on the recent disengagement.

Galwan action exhibited the strength and determination of the Indian military and the civil society led by a bold and fearless political leadership, which matched the Chinese show of force in every respect, and undertook punitive measures on the economic front. On the other hand, it exposed PLA's weaknesses in a kinetic tactical battlefield in the form of their soft soldiers against the battle and terrain hardened Indian troops. The myth of 1962 conflict was totally shattered and reversed. In 1962 the PLA comprised

mostly the hardy soldiers of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, who could withstand the harsh conditions of the operations in the High Altitude Areas of the Himalayas with minimum administrative requirements. PLA of 2020 comprised the products of the affluent Chinese one child policy, who are least likely to risk their lives in the distant lands of Tibet. In fact, this attitude of PLA has been noticed in various UN missions, where they have been seen to desert their designated posts when under threat, a most shameful act in the military parlance. On the other hand, the Indian soldiers are mostly from the hardy rural stock, welded into strong Regimental ethos and hardened as a result of frequent deployments in most inhospitable terrain along our Northern borders, including the Siachen Glaciers. Over the years, our administrative back up has also become very good, which was a serious handicap in 1962. However, our infrastructure development along the Northern borders has lagged far behind our adversary. Also, our capability development in the field of defence has not progressed as in the case with China. The recent face off with the PLA has come as a boon in drawing the attention of our policy makers towards strengthening our defence capabilities.

The daring offensives by the Indian troops and Commandos in August 2020 to secure the dominating Kailash Ranges on Southern banks of Pagong Tso indeed turned the tables in favour of India and was the decisive turning point in the year long face off. It demonstrated the resolve as well as the capability of the Indian security apparatus to take to offensives to achieve their aims, which was considered impossible against China hitherto-fore. The gain was so significant that its proposed vacation is being compared to Hajipir action of 1965 and the Siachen of 1984. But let us see it this way. In 1962 the PLA came quite deep into Arunachal, but withdrew from the captured areas, thereby exhibiting their superiority, and impacting the Indian mind for over half century thereafter. **Let us consider our pull back from Kailash Ranges as our military payback of 1962.** Most military tacticians will not agree with the large-hearted approach, especially in case of China, which just cannot be trusted at all. Deceit is in their blood and psyche. Notwithstanding above, we have to be realist. In all earlier negotiations, we had been demanding status quo ante, and when they have agreed for the same, we cannot turn back on our conditions. The negotiations would have

surely failed and taken more serious turn in case of our non-vacation of Kailash Ranges. Militarily I can say that Kailash Ranges were one set of our Quid Pro Quo (QPQ) options. That does not mean that either side is devoid of any other option. We have achieved our aim of making the PLA go back to the status quo, and making clear to the PLA our intent and capabilities in case they decide to breach the agreements. This was not the case till now. The mental makeup of the troops and the leadership on both sides should undergo a transformation, with likelihood of greater stability and peace on the LAC. Let us see how things turn out. The stock of our Armed Forces as well as our national leadership has indeed received a boost, both within as well as outside in the world.

Now let us weigh our losses, if some may term it that way, against the larger gains the peace is going to bring to the people of Ladakh, who stood with the soldiers and the nation through the period of crisis. Ladakh is a flourishing tourist economy. Tensions on LAC results in cancellation of all tourist bookings. **The recent peace agreements should be a boon for the tourism in Ladakh, which peaks between May to September, especially after a bad tourist season in 2020 due to Covid as well the tensions on the LAC.** It will also provide a break for our soldiers and airmen, who have been braving the hostile weather, terrain and the adversary continuously for a year now. We need to improve our defence works and habitat, make preparations for the future, based on the lessons learnt during the face off. We should not be under any illusion that Chinese intentions have changed and they would behave well in future as an expression of their goodwill. Their current behaviour is absolutely temporary for the scheduled important CCP meeting this year. The Chinese, or for that matter everyone in this world, only understands the language of strength. **China will only behave if they are sure that Indians would hit them even harder next time, if they cross their limit. Therefore, we must prepare for the next round with greater urgency and strength.**

Pakistan's conduct on LOC is a reflection of those by the Chinese at the LAC. When they saw the Chinese retreat on LAC, they were quick to sue for peace at the LOC. Having served for considerable time both on LOC and LAC, I would like to reiterate that the biggest sufferers of hostilities along the

borders are the locals living along LOC/LAC. They suffer maximum casualties, like the soldiers serving in these areas. Their houses and shelters get destroyed and they are not able to cultivate their fields, thus forced to migrate and live-in temporary shelters, under all sorts of uncertainties and difficulties. **Therefore, the return of peace on LOC is indeed a very welcome move for the benefit of the civil population of the border areas in J&K and Ladakh.** Here again a word of caution for the security forces that there should not be any let up on counter infiltration/ counter insurgency operation, as the militants would like to exploit every opportunity presented by normalisation on the LOC.

Our memories go back to 2003, when the Ceasefire Agreement between India and Pakistan came into effect after the 1999 Kargil Operations, followed by a period of warlike situation of prolonged deployment during OP PARAKRAM, wherein both sides threw maximum explosives on each other. The peace that followed on the LOC was best appreciated by the civil population on the borders as well as the soldiers on the Forward Defended Localities. The villagers got an opportunity to lead a peaceful life and till their fields. The soldiers got an opportunity to improve their habitat, defence works and infrastructure, based on lessons learnt during the periods of face off. I am sure the Indian Armed Forces will utilise the period of peace to prepare hard for the next round, whenever it may come. Government can look forward to strengthening the democratic process in the newly created Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh and implement economic and infrastructure development of the forward areas smoothly.

### **CERTIFICATE**

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