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Border on the boil

India's threat matrix now includes the possibility of a two-front situation

With a series of ceasefire violations by the Pakistan Army that targeted civilians, and heavy artillery fire by the Indian Army, the LoC is once again on the boil. Six civilians, four Indian Army personnel and a BSF jawan were killed in the firing from Pakistan across three sectors, and official Pakistani media said one Pakistani soldier and five civilians were killed by Indian cross-border shelling. The government accused Pakistan of firing as a way of providing cover for terrorists infiltrating into India before the winter snow closes the passes and underground routes, and issued a *démarche* to Pakistan's top diplomat in New Delhi on Saturday decrying the "coordinated firing along the length of the LoC using heavy caliber weapons, including artillery and mortar, on Indian civilians" by the Pakistan Army. The temperature has been further raised by political words from the highest level. Prime Minister Modi's speech, as he stood atop a tank during a Deepavali visit to the Longewala post, warned of a "*prachand jawab*" (fierce reply) to Pakistan, and criticised China's "expansionist mindset", albeit without naming either neighbour. Hours later, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeted that there should be "no doubt" of Pakistan's ability and "national resolve" to defend its borders. Pakistan's assault at the LoC was followed by allegations against India on terror. In a new diplomatic tactic, its Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi appeared at a press conference along with Pakistan's military spokesperson, claiming to have a "dossier" on Indian involvement in terror attacks inside Pakistan that he said primarily targeted China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure projects. India termed the press conference a "futile anti-India propagandistic exercise" and said the charges were fabricated.

The present situation at the LoC cannot be normalised and must be taken seriously. Army officials now say 2020 has seen the highest levels of firing since the 2003 India-Pakistan ceasefire agreement, with a record number of 4,052 ceasefire violations by Pakistan since January. Pakistan's intentions are to provoke India ahead of its two-year term at the UN Security Council from January 2021, as well as to rake up trouble before the Financial Action Task Force review in February. By naming the CPEC, Pakistan also appears to want to further strain India-China relations that have undergone what Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla called their "worst crisis" since 1962, as a result of PLA aggression at the LAC in Ladakh and the stand-off. Studied with the escalation by Pakistan at this time, it should be evident that India's threat matrix includes the very real possibility of a two-front situation where the Army will be engaged at the LoC and the LAC simultaneously, along with a possible spike in terrorist activity in Jammu and Kashmir.