

Face Off !

Indian and Chinese forces in Eastern Ladakh

According to various sources, both open and assessed from analyses done by international military observers, the Indian and Chinese Armies facing each other in Eastern Ladakh have been identified:

People Liberation Army (PLA's) Western Theatre Command (WTC)

This largest of China's Theatre Commands, the WTC is responsible for the entire Tibet and Xinjiang regions which have varied and challenging geographical terrain including vast deserts and high mountains. The WTC's responsibility includes internal security in the restive regions of western China and the southern borders with India. In 2017, the WTC was commanded by General Zhao Zongqi a veteran of the war against Vietnam, commander of the 14th Group Army, having earlier commanded the 52nd Mountain Brigade in Tibet.



Headquartered at Chengdu, the WTC also includes a Joint Operational Command with headquarters at Lanzhou, with the Strategic Logistics Support Force having subordinate centres in each theatre including one at Xining. The WTC can deploy subordinate PLA and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) units, and request additional forces from the CMC if required. Each theatre will require time to fully transition from the Army dominated MR headquarters to establish joint commands, gain familiarity between the services, as well as train personnel in their new joint positions.

Units identified in the WTC include

- 1st Technical Reconnaissance Bureau at Chengdu, Sichuan
- 15th Engineer Brigade at Dazi, Lhasa.
- 52nd Mountain Infantry Brigade at Nyingchi, Tibet
- 53rd Mountain Infantry Brigade at Nyingchi, Tibet
- 54th Mechanised Infantry Brigade, at Lhasa, Tibet
- 308th Independent Artillery Brigade at Linzhi
- 6th Mechanised Infantry Division, at Hotan, Xinjiang
- 8th Motorised Infantry Division, at Wusu, Xinjiang
- 11th Motorised Infantry Division at Urumqi, Xinjiang
- 'Red Army' Division, Kuqa County at Xinjiang
- An Artillery Brigade at Urumqi, Xinjiang
- An Army Aviation Brigade at Korla, Xinjiang
- 651st Independent AAA Brigade at Bayi Nyingchi

Supplementing these formations are Border Defence Regiments including the 1st and 2nd at Shannan City on the India-China LAC and China-Bhutan Border, 3rd at Shigatse, 4th at Chayu, Linzhi, 5th on the China-Nepal border, 6th at Shigatse (and Nathu La), 1st and 2nd Independent Battalions at Shigatse, 3rd at Beibeng, 4th at Nanyi, 5th at Shannan and the 6th along the China-India LAC.

Indian Army's Northern Command

The Northern Command, raised in June 1972 with its headquarters at Udhampur, is arguably the most operationally active of all the Indian Army's operational commands, with three Corps, the XIV, XV and XVI.



The Srinagar-headquartered XV Corps is the oldest and has been involved in continuous action since 1948 both on the line of actual control (LOC) along Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) from the foothills of Jammu to the north western periphery and has three Infantry Divisions plus Independent Brigades in its order of battle.



XVI Corps, with headquarters at Nagrota, is perhaps the largest Army Corps in the world, with five Infantry Divisions, guarding the LoC in Kashmir as also the sensitive borders on the south west Jammu-border with north western Punjab.



XIV Corps 'Fire & Fury' was raised after the 1999 war in Kargil and is headquartered at Leh with responsibility for the frontiers not only with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir but the Ladakh sector where borders with China are live. XIV Corps has 3rd Infantry Division for the defence of north east Ladakh, 8th Mountain Division for guarding the Kargil sector while the independent 102nd Mountain Brigade is responsible for the ultra -high altitude Siachen glacier area.



Uniquely XIV Corps has an Independent Armoured Brigade (254) headquartered at Leh as also an Independent Infantry Brigade as reserve. During May-June 2020, in a massive reinforcement move, two Mountain Divisions, one from Northern Command reserve and the other as Army Headquarters reserve, were steadfastly moved to Eastern Ladakh, reinforcing XIV Corps with major accretment of artillery, air defence and armoured assets. Amongst these are advanced surface-to-air-missiles and T-90 main battle tanks.

