Doklam Face-off

What is the issue?

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- Earlier in June, Indian troops intervened to block the path of Chinese People's Liberation Army soldiers engaged in building road-works on the **Doklam plateau** of Bhutan's territory that Beijing laid claim.
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- Beijing responded by closing access to Indian pilgrims seeking to proceed through the Nathu La pass on to Kailash-Mansarovar.
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What is the history of standoff?

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- Bhutan shares a 470 km border with China in the north.
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- Since 1984, it has been in talks with the Chinese and has succeeded in reducing its disputed territory from 1128 sq kms to just 269 sq kms.
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- This, however, was done by Bhutan voluntarily ceding territory. But **China continues to maintain its claims over seven areas** and is pushing the hardest in the Doka La area.
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- In 1998, the two sides signed an Agreement for the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity in the Bhutan-China Border Area.
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- The treaty explicitly says that prior to the final solution of the problem, the two countries should maintain "the status quo of the boundary prior to March 1959."
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- This, is what the Bhutanese say is being violated in China's action in constructing a road in the Doklam region.
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What must be the Chinese motives?

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- First, it would like to promote the development of the Yadong region, which is connected to Lhasa with a highway.
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- This is linked to China's **aim of re-establishing Tibet's geopolitical centrality** in the trans-Himalayan region.
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- Second, China would like to **establish formal ties with Bhutan,** set up an embassy in Thimphu and develop direct trade connections with it.
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- Third, it would like to **adopt a military posture in the area** which will ensure that it can defeat India in any military contest.
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- Given the strong Indian positions in Sikkim and adjacent areas, **control of the Doklam plateau** would allow China's military to cut through Bhutan to the Siliguri corridor, thus, to cut off India's North-eastern states from the rest of the mainland.
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- So, China is mixing military coercion with diplomatic and economic inducements and at the same time it is seeking to check India's efforts to help Bhutan.
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For India, how this issue assumes importance?

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- **Opening up Nathu La to traffic** in 2006 was an important part of the effort to normalise Sino-Indian relations since this old route offers Lhasa the closest access to a port.
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- By blocking the pilgrims, the Chinese are slowly turning the clock back on Sino-Indian relations.
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- India's military presence in Doklam gives it the **ability to snap vital road links between Lhasa and the Nathu-La region** in the event of war.
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- For a China wary of India's growing military infrastructure on the LAC, this is a substantial concern. Because, **Sikkim is the only part of the where**

India has a tactical advantage.
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- Equally, New Delhi has reasons to assert a muscular presence, as it seeks to reassure the kingdom that it will not allow Chinese encroachment.
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Source: The Indian Express

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