

Mounting tensions between India and its nuclear-armed neighbors, China and Pakistan

By Wasantha Rupasinghe and Keith Jones
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As India integrates itself ever more fully into Washington's military-strategic offensive against China, relations between New Delhi and Beijing and between India and its other nuclear-armed neighbor, Pakistan, continue to deteriorate.

For the past month, Indian and Chinese troops have been arrayed against each other on a Himalayan ridge, the Doklam or Donglang Plateau, that is claimed by both China and Bhutan.

The confrontation is being widely described as the most serious since India and China fought a month-long border war in 1962. Both Indian and Chinese officials have repeatedly made thinly veiled threats of an impending military clash.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan continue to regularly exchange artillery barrages across the Line of Control (LoC) in disputed Kashmir. In the past week, New Delhi and Islamabad have both condemned one another for killing poor villagers with indiscriminate shelling across the LoC, while boasting about killing enemy soldiers.

Further enflaming the situation, Islamist anti-Indian Kashmiri insurgents reputedly attacked a busload of Hindu pilgrims returning from the remote Amarnath cave shrine Monday night. The attack left seven people dead and 19 injured.

India's government immediately seized on Monday night's atrocity to intensify repression of the mass protests that have convulsed Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim-majority state, for the past year.

Kashmir has been at the center of the reactionary strategic rivalry between India and Pakistan from its very outset—the bloody 1947 communal partition of South Asia into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India. Over the course of the subsequent seven decades, the Indian and Pakistani bourgeoisie have both shamelessly abused and manipulated the Kashmiri people. Today India is led by the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), while Pakistan's rulers seek to advance their own mercenary interests by using Islamist organizations to channel the

opposition to the Indian state in a reactionary, communalist direction.

Emboldened by the strategic support and new weapons it has received from the US, India's BJP government has pursued an increasingly hardline policy against Pakistan. For most of the past three years it has been insisting that it will keep even the most rudimentary ties with Pakistan in the deep freeze until Islamabad demonstrably halts all logistical support from Pakistani territory for the anti-Indian insurgency in Kashmir.

Last September Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered Indian Special Forces to mount illegal cross-border raids inside Pakistan, and then proclaimed that India would no longer adhere to "strategic restraint" in its relations with Pakistan.

During the ensuing months-long war crisis, China came to Pakistan's support.

Beijing and Islamabad have a decades-long "all weather" military-strategic partnership. But as the Indo-US "global strategic partnership" has become stronger over the past decade and especially since 2015, China and Pakistan have responded by forging still closer ties.

Whilst Indian military strategy has long envisaged the possibility of having to fight Pakistan and China simultaneously, India's new Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat, has himself repeatedly portrayed this as a live threat by boasting that India is ready to fight a "two-front war."

Tensions between China and India over their long, disputed border are nothing new. India's corporate media regularly publishes inflammatory articles alleging Chinese incursions across the Line of Actual Control that delimits current Indian- and Chinese-controlled territory.

What is different in the current dispute is the aggressive stance being taken by Beijing, the attention it is being given by China's state-run newspapers, and New Delhi's insistence that control over the Doklam Plateau affects its core strategic interests.

On Wednesday Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang dismissed the claim of Indian Foreign

Secretary S. Jaishankar that just as the two countries have managed their border differences in the past, so the current standoff can be “handled” even if it persists for months, even years.

Geng took issue with Jaishankar’s description of the border standoff as a “difference,” saying that it is an outright “dispute.” Moreover, he emphasized that Beijing does not consider this to be similar to previous border spats. “China,” he said, “has explicitly pointed out that the illegal trespass of Indian border troops into China’s territory this time took place at the defined Sikkim section of the China-India boundary, which is utterly different in nature from the previous frictions between the two sides at the undefined sections of the China-India boundary.”

The Foreign Ministry spokesman went on to reiterate Beijing’s demand that India unilaterally withdraw its troops from the disputed Doklam Plateau area as the precondition for any talks.

India, however, is adamant; it and the tiny kingdom of Bhutan, which does not even have diplomatic relations with China, will not permit Beijing to gain the upper hand in the Doklam. To do so, India claims, would place China in a position where, in the event of a war, it could seize the strategic Siliguri Corridor. A narrow slice of territory some 50 kilometers from the Doklam Plateau, the Siliguri Corridor connects India’s seven northeastern provinces with the rest of the country.

Until very recently, Beijing generally “turned the other cheek” in the face of Indian actions it considered hostile or threatening. This was because it was painfully aware that a key US strategic aim is to harness India to its anti-China offensive and feared an aggressive response would only drive New Delhi into Washington’s welcoming embrace.

However, China is now quite prepared to push back forcefully, including by threatening India with military action.

Beijing has clearly concluded that its previous policy failed. Under Modi, India has been transformed into a veritable frontline state in the US drive to thwart China’s rise and force it to forgo any challenge to US hegemony in Asia. India has opened its military bases and ports to routine use by US warplanes and battleships; forged bilateral and trilateral military-strategic ties with American imperialism’s principal military-strategic allies in the Asia-Pacific, Japan and Australia; and routinely parrots Washington’s provocative stance on the South China Sea dispute.

Moreover, India is openly challenging China on multiple fronts. To Beijing’s dismay, it recently tested a ballistic missile, the *Agni V*, that is said to be capable of raining multiple nuclear warheads on any major Chinese population center from anywhere in India. New Delhi has intensified its

support for the Tibetan government-in-exile and recently organized for the Dali Lama to tour Arunachal Pradesh, a northeastern Indian state that Beijing calls southern Tibet and says rightfully belongs to China.

The Indian press is full of alarmist articles about the military-strategic threat from China, including claims that large numbers of Chinese submarines are plying the Indian Ocean and that Beijing is plotting to transform various Indian Ocean ports whose construction it sponsored into Chinese naval bases.

Pointing to the massive joint Indo-US-Japanese naval exercise that is now being held in the Bay of Bengal and the recent US deal to sell India naval surveillance drones, the Chinese media counters that it is China that is threatened with encirclement. “Given the importance of the Indian Ocean for its trade and oil imports,” declared an editorial in Monday’s *China Daily*, it is “China that should feel ‘security concerns’.”

Amid the current Indo-China border dispute, there are increasing calls from the Indian media and various military-security think tanks for New Delhi to further expand and formalize its military-security alliance with Washington.

Yesterday, the *Indian Express* published an op-ed column by former Indian Navy Chief Arun Prakash that calls for the “India-Japan-US triad” on display during the current Bay of Bengal war games to “be elevated to strategic status.” Pointing to China’s “hostility and aggressive posturing ... both on our land borders and sea,” Prakash says, “realpolitik demands India” ensure “a favourable regional balance-of-power through cooperation and partnerships; striking short-term alliances if necessary.”

Thus far, Washington has said nothing about the Doklam Plateau standoff. But when Modi visited the White House last month, Trump touted the “strategic convergence” between the US and India and vowed to “expand and deepen” the Indo-US military-strategic alliance.

Recent events underscore the extent to which US imperialism’s reckless drive to employ India as a satrap in its confrontation with China has transformed all of South Asia into a geopolitical powder keg—one that threatens to plunge the region and even the world into catastrophic conflict.

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