

Indian Stalinists support Modi government in military standoff with China

By Wasantha Rupasinghe and Keith Jones
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India's principal Stalinist party—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM—has pledged its support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the current India-China border crisis, even as it concedes that the crisis has been provoked by India's emergence as a “subordinate” ally of US imperialism, and even as India's belligerence threatens to spark war with both China and Pakistan.

Six weeks ago, Indian troops interceded on a ridge in the Himalayan foothills, the Doklam or Donglang Plateau, to prevent Chinese construction workers from expanding a road in territory that is claimed by both China and the Indian-dominated kingdom of Bhutan. Since then, hundreds of Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in a tense “eyeball-to-eyeball” standoff, separated by little more than a hundred metres. Both New Delhi and Beijing have rushed thousands of additional troops to the remote region and for weeks Indian and Chinese leaders have been trading threats of a military clash.

The border crisis both exemplifies and represents a new stage in the rapid deterioration of Sino-Indian relations. This deterioration is the inevitable consequence of India's transformation into a veritable frontline state in Washington's military-strategic offensive against China.

But rather than warning India's workers and toilers of the immense dangers the Indo-US alliance constitutes for the people of Asia and the world, the Stalinists are treating the Doklam border standoff as little more than a diplomatic flap.

Graver still, they are boosting the most fatal illusions in the Narendra Modi-led BJP government and the Indian bourgeoisie, vouching for their pacific character, and supporting their predatory great-power ambitions. Above all, they oppose the development of a global working class-led movement against imperialist war based on implacable opposition to the strivings of all the rival bourgeois powers—the Indian Republic included—for resources, markets and strategic advantage.

On July 14 CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury attended an “all-party” leaders' meeting summoned by the BJP government to “build a consensus” on the border standoff with China. According to External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Gopal Baglay, “all participants expressed strong support for India's approach and also for the need for national unity.”

Neither Yechury nor the CPM has contradicted or contested Baglay's remarks. Indeed, Yechury's participation in a meeting summoned by the government and with the aim of forging a

consensus among the parties of the Indian bourgeoisie speaks for itself. Rather than exposing and rallying the working class against the foreign policy machinations of the Indian bourgeoisie—machinations that are aimed at realizing its predatory, great-power ambitions—Yechury rushed to offer the Stalinists' help in cloaking them in “national,” supra-class colours.

Following the all-party meeting, Yechury declared on his Facebook page that the CPM “fully supports the government in” its efforts “to resolve [the stand-off with China] through diplomatic channels and talks.” The CPM leader coupled this with a call for Modi and the BJP to “reflect and introspect about why suddenly, neighbourly ties are deteriorating in the region.”

Yechury's comments are tantamount to a vote of confidence in the BJP government's and Indian bourgeoisie's peaceful intentions. Who are they trying to kid?

- With the enthusiastic backing of the corporate media, big business, and the country's military-strategic establishment, the BJP government has—according to the CPM Politburo's own statement on Modi latest White House visit—“cemented India as a subordinate junior ally of US imperialism.” And it has done so as the quarter-century of wars US imperialism has waged across the Middle East in a bid to stave off the consequences of the loss of its economic predominance have metastasized into reckless military-strategic confrontations with nuclear-armed China and Russia.

- Emboldened by Washington's embrace of New Delhi as its principal South Asian and Indian Ocean ally, the BJP government has aggressively sought to impose itself as the regional hegemon. Last September, it ordered illegal cross-border raids inside Pakistan, then boasted that India has thrown off the shackles of “strategic restraint” vis a vis Islamabad. Ten months later, and with the Hindu supremacist BJP adamantly insisting that “Pakistani terrorism” is the root cause of the mass disaffection from Indian rule in disputed Kashmir, the Indian and Pakistani militaries confront each other daggers drawn.

- And the Modi government, continuing the efforts of its predecessors, is doggedly pursuing the development of a nuclear triad, including, with the *Agni V* missile, the capacity to strike every major Chinese population centre with nuclear weapons.

As for Modi and his BJP “introspecting” and adopting a more “neighbourly” policy, this is patently absurd. It is akin to appealing to them (as the Stalinists frequently do) to adopt “pro-people” policies or to renounce communalism.

Building on the global strategic Indo-US partnership forged by the previous Congress Party-led government, the BJP has made the Indo-US alliance the cornerstone of its global strategy. More fundamentally, the Indian bourgeoisie, like its rivals round the world, has responded to the deepest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression by embracing austerity, war and reaction. It brought Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP to power to intensify pro-market “reform” and more aggressively assert its interests on the world stage.

That Yechury should address such stupid and reactionary appeals to India’s BJP-led government is of course no accident. Decades ago, the CPM and its sister party, the Communist Party of India (CPI), were integrated into the bourgeois political establishment. Their function is to contain and suppress social opposition and to counsel and alert the ruling class.

This is clearly illustrated in recent postings on the CPM’s *People’s Democracy* web site.

On July 12, *People’s Democracy* published an editorial titled “India-China: No Other Way, But Talks.” By then, the Indian population had been inundated for almost a month with government and media reports painting China as a violator of Bhutan’s sovereign rights, equating the Doklam dispute with the China’s purportedly “aggressive” actions in the South China Sea, and vaunting India’s ability, if needed, to avenge its defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian border war.

Yet this editorial was the very first time the border stand-off had been mentioned by either *People’s Democracy* or the CPM party web site.

The editorial notes that the “prime factor contributing” to the growing “divergence” between India and China “is India’s strategic alliance with the United States.” “India,” it continues, “has joined the United States on its strategic designs in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region which is aimed at containing China.”

But it does not do so not from the standpoint of summoning the Indian working class to join with its class brothers and sisters in the US, China, Pakistan and around the world, in building a global movement against war and imperialism based on a revolutionary socialist program.

No, its argument—expounded in much greater length elsewhere—is a plea for the Modi government and the political establishment as a whole to recognize that the Indo-US alliance does not serve the “national interests” of the Indian bourgeoisie. India, argues the CPM, would do far better to maintain its “strategic autonomy”—i.e., its room to maneuver between the US, the other western imperialist powers, Russia, and China.

“The predominance of defence factor in the bilateral relationship is making India more and more dependent on the US and bringing it under their security umbrella,” complained a lengthy article in *People’s Democracy* July 16 edition. The article goes on to lament that the Indian bourgeoisie is losing the ability to use its military to pursue its own interests, including through waging war, due its subordination to Washington: “We are ... mortgaging our military to US imperial interests ... giving India very little autonomy to decide its war and peace.”

While occasionally garbed in anti-imperialist rhetoric, the

Stalinists’ opposition to the Indo-US alliance has nothing to do with genuine opposition to imperialist war, which must be based on the mobilization of the international working class against all the rival bourgeoisies and the decrepit capitalist order.

The CPM unabashedly supports the great ambitions of the Indian ruling class, including the rapid expansion of India’s military. It has voiced no criticism as India’s military budget has risen almost five-fold from \$11.8 billion in 2001 to some \$56 billion today.

In respect to the Doklam border dispute, it does not denounce it as a reactionary struggle for strategic advantage between rival capitalist states. Rather it advises the BJP government to advance “India’s interests” through diplomatic horse-trading and by letting “Bhutan take the lead in negotiating with China.”

In respect to India’s relations with Pakistan, the CPM counsels “restraint” just as it does in the current border dispute with China. But that did not stop the CPM joining with the rest of the Indian establishment last September in lauding the illegal and highly provocative Special Forces’ raids Modi ordered the Indian army mount inside Pakistan. At the initiative of Kerala Chief Minister and CPM Politburo member Pinarayi Vijayan the state legislature passed a resolution hailing the Indian military.

Nor does the Indian Stalinists’ ostensible opposition to US imperialism and the Indo-US alliance stand in the way of their allying, in the name of opposing the BJP, with the Congress Party and a host of right-wing regional and caste-ist parties that have all supported India’s integration into the US strategic agenda.

The China-India border standoff is only the latest warning that South Asia and the Indian Ocean are being sucked into the maelstrom of great-power conflict. The exposure of the CPM as a political agent of the Indian bourgeoisie, which uses phony socialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric to politically smother the working class, is imperative for the mobilization of the masses of South Asia against war.

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