

US moves to harness India to anti-China “pivot”

Keith Jones
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The head of the US Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, gave a highly provocative speech in New Delhi last week in which he laid out the “next steps” in Washington’s strategic agenda for India. Claiming to be “a bit moonstruck...by the opportunities a strategic partnership with India” provide, Harris said he envisioned the US and Indian navies jointly patrolling the Indian and Pacific Oceans in “the not too distant future.”

He also urged India to form a quadrilateral security “dialogue” with the US and its closest military allies in the Asian-Pacific region, Japan and Australia.

Later the same day, Admiral Harris proposed that the recently established annual trilateral Indo-US-Japanese naval exercise take place off the northeast shore of the Philippines, just outside the South China Sea—a contested region where the US has been encouraging its allies to press their territorial claims against China.

In sum, Harris urged India to become a “frontline state” in the US drive to strategically isolate, encircle and potentially wage war against China.

By virtually any measure, India is a poor country. But US imperialist strategists, including the Pentagon war planners, have been touting it as a “strategic prize” since the beginning of the 21st century. The efforts to harness India to US imperialism’s predatory global agenda, through a combination of threats and poison-chalice inducements, have greatly intensified since the Obama administration announced its anti-China “pivot” in 2011.

US strategists covet India for multiple reasons. It is the second largest of the world’s “emerging economies.” It has a huge military, armed with nuclear weapons and a rapidly expanding blue-water navy. From a geostrategic standpoint, it dominates South Asia (the Indian subcontinent), providing a potential base of operations for projecting US power across much of Eurasia, including towards neighbouring China and the energy-rich Middle East and Central Asia.

Last but not least, India protrudes far into the Indian Ocean, providing easy access to the entire northern half of that ocean, which, as a recent US Naval War College-sponsored study notes, “has replaced the North Atlantic as the central artery of world commerce.”

The strategists of US imperialism view dominance of the

Indian Ocean as essential to US global hegemony. First and foremost, because it is at the heart of US plans to impose an economic blockade on China through strategic maritime “chokepoints” in the event of war or war crisis. But also because the Indian Ocean is a key staging ground for US military operations in the Middle East and East Africa.

In pursuit of its own great-power ambitions, the Indian bourgeoisie has tilted ever more decisively toward Washington, even as the US has emerged as an incendiary power that wages illegal wars and otherwise violates national sovereignty and precepts of international law at will.

The Congress Party-led government that ruled India from 2004 to 2014 entered into a “global strategic partnership” with Washington, helped legitimize its efforts to isolate and bully Iran, and rapidly expanded ties between the Indian military and the Pentagon, including weapons purchases.

In the 22 months during which Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have formed India’s government, New Delhi has integrated itself ever more fully into Washington’s strategic offensive against China.

This has included:

- Joining Washington in painting China as the aggressor in the South China Sea, although it is the US that, in the name of “freedom of navigation,” is arrogating to itself the right to patrol China’s shores and to have in place the naval might to quickly seize the Straits of Malacca and other strategic chokepoints;

- Expanding bilateral and trilateral military-security cooperation, including military exercises and strategic planning, with the US, Japan and Australia;

- Collaborating across South Asia in countering Chinese influence, including in the January 2015 regime-change operation in Sri Lanka that saw Mahinda Rajapaksa replaced by a president ready to degrade Colombo’s ties with Beijing and launch a security “dialogue” with Washington.

Harris’s New Delhi speech was aimed at stoking suspicions and inflaming tensions between India and China, the better to

bind New Delhi to America's strategic agenda. It is part of an unrelenting campaign to force China to forgo any challenge to US global hegemony.

Earlier last week, Harris ordered an aircraft carrier-led US Navy strike force to enter the South China Sea. This week, the US and South Korea launched their largest ever Korean Peninsula war game, and did so on the basis of a new operational plan that provides for pre-emptive strikes on North Korea and the occupation of the North up to the Chinese border.

It took Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar a full two days to respond to Harris's speech, indicating that the BJP government was taken aback by the admiral's public airing of Washington's "asks" of India. Parrikar rebuffed the suggestion that India will mount joint navy patrols with the US, but in a manner that very much left the door open to such a possibility in the future.

The BJP has already reversed the decision taken by the previous government and supported by India's military-security establishment to reject three agreements the Pentagon considers "foundational" for joint action with foreign militaries. The agreements had been rejected on the grounds that they threatened Indian sovereignty and security.

According to press reports, when US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter travels to India next month he will sign at least one of these—a Logistics Support Agreement (LSA) giving the US military routine access to Indian ports and naval bases, including for refuelling. The LSA's importance is underlined by the comment of a high-level Indian official who last December said that the only remaining hitch in giving the US military access to Indian bases was, "What happens in the case of war?"

The burgeoning military-strategic alliance between US imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie constitutes a huge threat to the masses of South Asia and the world.

Washington is drawing on the political and military support given it by New Delhi to recklessly pursue a confrontation with nuclear-armed China, a course which, whether deliberately or through miscalculation, threatens to ignite a world war.

The Indian bourgeoisie, for its part, is using the enhanced diplomatic, military and geopolitical power it derives from its junior partnership with Washington to pursue its longstanding goal of imposing itself as the regional hegemon of South Asia. Under the BJP, India has aggressively asserted its interests with all its neighbours, including building new military installations along the disputed border with Pakistan and instructing army commanders in the disputed Kashmir region to be more militarily assertive. Last year saw the worst border clashes between India and its nuclear-armed rival, Pakistan, in more than a decade.

Pakistan has repeatedly warned that Washington's strategic embrace of India has overturned the balance of power in South Asia, fuelling an arms race—warnings the US has cavalierly

ignored. These warnings have become shriller in the past year due to the strengthening of the Indo-US alliance and Modi's efforts to bully Pakistan. Militarily, Pakistan has responded by announcing the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons, and politically, by seeking closer ties to China.

Aware that the US was intent on harnessing India against it, Beijing long sought to avoid antagonizing India and attempted to enlist it as a partner in its land and sea Eurasian transport initiatives. But with Modi integrating India into Washington's anti-China "pivot," Beijing has moved to place Pakistan at the center of its plans to circumvent America's "chokehold" strategy, announcing that it will invest \$46 billion in a Pakistan Economic Corridor linking western China with the Pakistani Arabian Sea port Gwadar.

The US, which has used the Pakistani elite and Pakistani military as satraps in its geopolitical machinations for the past six decades, is not about to cede Pakistan to China. The axis between the Pentagon and Pakistan's military is a source of continuing mistrust and friction between New Delhi and Washington.

Nevertheless, Washington's strategic offensive against China and its drive to make India the south-western pillar of its anti-China "pivot" have an incendiary geopolitical logic: the US-China conflict is becoming ever more entwined with the reactionary geopolitical conflict between India and Pakistan, adding to each a highly explosive new dimension.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International explained in its statement "Socialism and the Fight Against War," published last month, the only progressive basis on which to oppose Washington's insane attempt to uphold US global hegemony through aggression and war is to counterpoise to the imperialists' war map the map of the class struggle—that is, the building of a global working-class movement against war on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.



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