

Indian air chief calls growing Chinese influence a strategic threat

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The Indian armed forces view China, Pakistan, and the Naxalite movement inside India as major threats, India's Chief of Air Staff Marshal Arup Raha declared at a high-level Indian armed forces seminar last week. This warning further demonstrates that India's ever-more pronounced alignment with Washington's "Pivot to Asia," a military-strategic offensive aimed at isolating and subjugating China, is inflaming military tensions across the region.

Raha said China's growing influence in the Indian subcontinent is a major security challenge for New Delhi and this is being factored into India's foreign and defence policies. He pointed to tensions along the Indian-Chinese border in the Himalayas and China's longstanding but fast-growing ties with India's main regional rival, Pakistan, as key concerns.

Raha said, "China has increased its economic and military ties with all our neighbours. Rapid infrastructure development is taking place in the TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region). The world's highest airfield at Daocheng Yading; the highest railway line from Xiniang, Qinghai province to the TAR capital; the development of the Gwadar port [in Pakistan] and the [Chinese] economic corridor through [Pakistani-held Kashmir] and Pakistan; the development of roads in TAR up to the Indian border; and increasing economic and military ties with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar are all strategic moves by China to contain India."

Of course, Raha's portrait of the strategic landscape ignored a long series of aggressive Indian moves. These include a massive expansion of both its nuclear and conventional military forces, the raising and deployment of a new mountain anti-China strike-force and, most importantly, India's emergence as a front-line state in the US drive to strategically isolate, encircle and potentially wage war against China.

During the past two years of BJP rule, India has repeatedly supported the US's stoking of the South China Sea conflict with Beijing, expanded bilateral and tri-lateral military-strategic cooperation with the US's most important allies in

the Asia-Pacific, Japan and Australia, and accelerated plans to co-produce and co-develop advanced weapons systems with the US.

Last week, New Delhi announced it will soon finalize an agreement allowing the US military to use its ports and air bases for resupply and recuperation—which, the government's claims notwithstanding, will invariably result in the stationing of US military personnel on Indian soil.

Buoyed by US arms and support, India is aggressively seeking to assert its interests across South Asia and in the Indian Ocean, bullying the region's smaller states, from Nepal to the Maldives, and stoking confrontation with China and nuclear-armed Pakistan.

On Pakistan, Raha said "support of the Pakistan Army to the militant organisations and continuous interference in the internal affairs of [Indian-held] Jammu and Kashmir will remain a source of friction ... Despite the grim internal situation, Pakistan has managed to strike a balance in its relations with China and USA. It has steadily built up its nuclear and ballistic missile capability with covert assistance from China and North Korea while continuing to receive monetary support and conventional weapons and aircraft from both USA as well as China."

While a military conflict between India and China could arise out of a fourth war between India and Pakistan, Raha also pointed to tensions between India and China along their common border. In 1962 the two countries fought a war over their border, which remains contested to this day.

"Incidents of border stand-off in the North, issuance of paper visa to the residents of Arunachal Pradesh (AP) and claiming of Aksai Chin and part of AP as part of China have diluted the (Sino-Indian) agreement of five principles, Panchsheel, signed way back in 1954," said the Indian air chief.

All but accusing China of supporting the Maoist Naxalite insurgency in India, Raha warned that external and internal threats to India are increasingly impossible to separate. Repeating a characterization popularized by the former Congress Party-led government, the Indian air marshal said,

“In the recent past Naxalism has emerged as the single biggest threat to India’s internal security and has assumed serious and threatening propositions.”

The international geo-strategic alignment in the Indian subcontinent that is emerging from the US “pivot to Asia” is explosive. Washington’s pressure on India to adopt an ever more strategically hostile posture to China’s economic penetration of the Indian subcontinent and its concerted campaign to implicate New Delhi in the South China Sea dispute are pushing India towards a conflict with China and Pakistan, which would likely draw in the United States, also.

It is also inflaming various regional and ethnic disputes that are rooted in the reactionary communal partition of the Indian subcontinent the rival factions of the colonial bourgeoisie implemented in 1947-48, as part of the deal under which South Asia became formally independent from the British Empire; chronic poverty and massive social inequality; and the incitement of ethnic and communal divisions by the various ruling elites as a means of dividing the working class.

Over the last several years, Indian security officials and geo-political analysts have repeatedly suggested that the Chinese government is supporting and aiding the Naxalites.

One Indian China analyst, D. S. Rajan, writes that Chinese web sites are very kind to Maoist rebels in India, publishing “reports with a bias in favour of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), which stands banned in India. Separately, papers from Chinese scholars analysing the implications of the growth of Indian Maoists, are also being brought out. Without the knowledge of the Chinese authorities, such assessments would not be coming.”

Indian media and officials have also accused China of arming ethno-separatist insurgents inside India, particularly groups along the China-India border. “The Chinese have promised to provide weapons and logistics to a new (alliance of nine ethno-secessionists groups) as they want to keep things boiling in the northeast in view of their claim on the state of Arunachal Pradesh,” a source told the *Hindustan Times* last year.

The paper alleged that Chinese intelligence was working with insurgent groups in the Manipur Valley in northeast India. It also charged that Beijing is supplying weapons to insurgent groups in the northeast via Myanmar so that they threaten Indian troops posted along the border with China.

These allegations show clearly that Sino-Indian tensions are becoming intertwined with the US-China conflict, adding to each an explosive new dimension.

Pakistan, meanwhile, is publicly charging that India is covertly supporting the longstanding nationalist-separatist insurgency in Balochistan—its impoverished, mineral-rich, western province—and is encouraging Balochi nationalists to

disrupt the building of the \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Announced last year during a visit of Chinese President Xi to Islamabad, the CPEC would link the Arabian Sea port of Gwadar and industrial parks across Pakistan with western China through a railroad, highway and pipeline network.

New Delhi bitterly resents the economic shot in the arm the CPEC represents for its arch-rival Pakistan. But the CPEC also has huge geo-strategic implications. Were it to be successfully completed, the corridor would provide Beijing with a means of partially offsetting US plans to impose an economic blockade on China by seizing control of maritime chokepoints in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea.

Last month, Pakistan reported that it had captured a RAW (Indian intelligence) agent, whom it has identified as Kulbhushan Yadhav, in Balochistan near the Afghan border. New Delhi has denied that Yadhav is a RAW agent, but concedes that he is a “former” Indian naval officer.

In an April 12 public address in Gwadar, the head of Pakistan’s military General Raheel Sharif publicly charged India with seeking to thwart the CPEC. “I would like,” said Sharif, “to make a special reference to Indian intelligence agency RAW that is blatantly involved in destabilizing Pakistan. Let me make it clear that we will not allow anyone to create impediments and turbulence in any part of Pakistan.”

Pakistan has already announced plans to raise a special Gwadar Security Force to protect the Chinese engineers who are supervising construction in Gwadar and the port installations as they come on line.

The Balochi insurgents, who seek to exploit grievances with the Pakistani state over mass poverty and ongoing repression, are meanwhile appealing for Washington’s support and offering themselves as proxies in US imperialism’s anti-China war drive.



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