

US official stokes border tension between India and China in the Himalayas

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The US Consul General in Kolkata, Craig L. Hall, provocatively endorsed Indian territorial claims against China, while meeting April 28 with the Chief Minister of the northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, Kalikho Pul.

Referring to Chinese claims on parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Hall said that the US government considers Arunachal Pradesh to be an integral part of India. Arunachal Pradesh—located in a strategic position bordering Bhutan in the west, Burma in the east, and China in the north—includes several areas that are also claimed by China, such as Tawang, site of the famous Tawang Monastery.

Hall called for infrastructure development in this remote and strategic region, where the construction of roads and transport infrastructure are vital to deploying military power. He also called for US-Indian joint ventures and partnerships in trade and commerce that could be arranged through the Consulate in Kolkata. “The Consulate,” said Hall, “is aware of the US companies interested in contract works for infrastructure development in India and in the North-East, in particular with special focus on Arunachal Pradesh.”

Hall’s comments were a calculated attempt to stoke the border dispute between India and China and were made just days after India’s National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had visited Beijing for talks on resolving the border issue.

In 1962 India and China fought a month-long war over their disputed Himalayan border that claimed over 4,000 casualties. The war erupted following a series of violent border incidents in the aftermath of the 1959 CIA-backed Tibetan uprising against the Chinese regime. Following the uprising’s defeat, India had granted asylum to the Tibetan Buddhist leader, the

Dalai Lama, and to this day, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile is in Dharamsala in northwestern India.

India and China share a long border that passes through several disputed regions, including much of Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin. The latter is located between the Chinese autonomous regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, and is claimed by India as part of the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir. During the 1962 Sino-Indian War, Chinese forces overran Arunachal Pradesh, only later to pull back, and expanded their control over Aksai Chin.

Hall’s comments amounted to pouring fuel on the fire of the Sino-Indian border conflict. They make clear that as part of its “pivot to Asia,” which is aimed at isolating and preparing for war with China, Washington is willing to back Indian territorial claims that are viewed by Beijing as threats to China’s territorial integrity.

Hall’s remarks come as India, aligning increasingly with the US strategic offensive against China, seeks to leverage its relationship with Washington to attain the status of a global power. India is rapidly expanding its military and demanding that the states of South Asia recognize it as the regional hegemon.

The US is pushing for India to become a frontline state in its “pivot” against China. In April it got New Delhi’s agreement “in principle” to a bilateral Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) which will give the US military access to Indian military bases for resupply, repair and rest.

China strongly objected to Hall’s comments. On Wednesday, Beijing said that any “irresponsible” third party intervention in the Sino-Indian border dispute would “complicate” the issue.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said, “The

boundary question between China and India bears on China's territorial sovereignty and Chinese people's sentiment. All third parties must respect the history and reality concerning the boundary question, respect efforts by China and India to solve territorial disputes through negotiations, not get involved in the disputes or take sides on issues relating to the ownership of disputed territory."

The Ministry added: "Sound negotiations between China and India on the boundary question as well as peace and tranquility in the border areas over recent years have created favourable conditions for the growth of bilateral relations and their respective development."

Hall's remarks constitute yet another deliberate provocation against China by US imperialism as it stokes tensions across the region.

As part of its "pivot to Asia" against China, the US is fomenting separatism in China, particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang. US officials recently attended a conference of US-funded Chinese separatist organisations in Dharamsala, India. Washington is seeking to exploit bitter social and ethnic conflicts—rooted in the reactionary policies of the Chinese regime, which has increasingly fomented Han Chinese nationalism since restoring capitalism in China over the course of the 1980s—to threaten to break up China along ethnic lines.

As in the nearby Chinese region, where ethnic minorities suffer poverty and repression from Beijing, northeast India is the country's most impoverished and least developed region and is beset by ethnic tensions and insurgencies.

"It's the most complex place in Asia," says Sanjoy Hazarika, chairman and director of the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research in New Delhi. "You have 220 ethnic groups packed into a triangular shape of land linked to India by just a tiny corridor."

As in Jammu and Kashmir, New Delhi has for decades given the military sweeping draconian powers in Arunachal Pradesh and six other northeastern states, under the notorious Armed Forces Special Powers Act, so as to suppress numerous armed, anti-government ethno-national secessionist movements. As a result of rampant poverty and insecurity, hundreds of thousands of people from this impoverished region have migrated to India's main cities to seek employment. There they often face discrimination.

Washington fears that China could exploit the insurgencies in India's northeast, encouraging separatism in India to retaliate for Washington's promotion of separatism within China, and it is responding by recklessly inserting itself into the disputes between New Delhi and Beijing.

As Washington aggressively moves to integrate India into its strategic offensive against Beijing, the decades-long rivalry between India and China, including border disputes, is becoming intertwined with the even more explosive US-China strategic rivalry, pushing Asia, if not the entire world, towards a conflagration.



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