

Indian Stalinists abet US war plans against China

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Under Narendra Modi and his two-year-old Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, India is rapidly being transformed into a “frontline” state in US imperialism’s military-strategic offensive against China.

Building on the “global strategic partnership” that the previous Congress Party-led government forged with Washington, the BJP regime has integrated India ever more completely into the Obama administration’s “Pivot to Asia”—that is, its drive to strategically isolate, encircle and prepare to wage war on China. New Delhi regularly parrots Washington’s provocative stance on the South China Sea dispute; has dramatically expanded bi-lateral and tri-lateral military-strategic cooperation with the US’ principal imperialist allies in the Indo-Pacific, Japan and Australia; and is joining forces with the Pentagon to co-develop advanced weapons systems.

Until last month, India’s principal Stalinist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), had said little about the BJP government’s eager embrace of Washington and the grave danger it poses to the workers and toilers of South Asia and the world.

However, the April 12 announcement that the Modi government has agreed “in principle” to allowing the Pentagon to use Indian military bases and ports for refueling, rest, and resupply (including the forward positioning of materials), prompted the CPM Politburo to issue a statement, “No bases for US Armed Forces.” The statement denounced the soon to be finalized Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and two related agreements that Washington is pressing New Delhi to sign, saying they will “convert India into a full-fledged military ally of the United States” and urged “all political parties and patriotic citizens” to uphold “the strategic autonomy of the country.” Soon after, the CPM’s former general secretary, Prakash Karat, elaborated on the party’s stance in an article titled “Logistics Agreement: Surrender to US, Betrayal of Sovereignty.”

The CPM’s opposition to the LEMOA is a sham and a political trap that is being perpetrated by a party that for decades has functioned as an integral part of the Indian political establishment.

The CPM has itself supported and facilitated the Indian bourgeoisie’s pursuit of an ever closer partnership with US imperialism.

In so far as it opposes the LEMOA and a formal military-security alliance with Washington, it does so from the standpoint of the “national interests” of the Indian bourgeoisie, not the class interests of the Indian and international working class and the struggle against world imperialism.

As with the BJP’s promotion of communalism and imposition of socially incendiary pro-market reforms, the Stalinists are invoking the LEMOA as a pretext for advocating the ever more complete subordination of the working class to the Indian bourgeoisie, its parties, and state.

The CPM systematically covers up the immense dangers arising from US’s imperialism’s reckless drive for global hegemony. It claims that the US can be constrained and peace secured by promoting a “multi-polar world,” i.e. by workers placing their faith in the rival ruling elites of the

other imperialist and great powers, including the venal and rapacious Indian bourgeoisie.

The Stalinists’ role in facilitating an Indo-US “partnership”

Over the past quarter century, the CPM and its Left Front have played a pivotal role in suppressing working class opposition to the bourgeoisie’s drive to make India a cheap labor haven for world capital. They have sustained in office a succession of right-wing Indian governments, most of them Congress Party-led, while implementing what they themselves characterize as “pro-investor” policies in West Bengal and the other states where they have formed the government.

Similarly, they have aided and abetted the Indian bourgeoisie’s pursuit of ever closer ties with Washington. To mention only some of the most salient developments: The Stalinists propped up the Narasimha Rao Congress Party government of the early 1990s that initiated both the turn to neo-liberal restructuring and to Washington. In 2001 they joined with the rest of the Indian elite in welcoming the US invasion of Afghanistan and only withdrew their support for the US occupation years later, long after the US had gone on to rape Iraq.

For four years, from May 2004 through June 2008, the CPM and its Left Front were far and away the most important coalition partner of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, although the Stalinists declined an offer of cabinet positions, because they calculated that they could better contain working class opposition by supporting the government from the “outside.” When in quick succession in June-July 2005, India signed a 10-year Defense Framework Agreement with Washington that paved the way for a vast expansion of Indo-US military ties and Indian President Manmohan Singh and US President George W. Bush announced an Indo-US “global partnership,” the Stalinists uttered a few mealy-mouthed criticisms, but continued to prop up the government.

Only in July 2008, did they withdraw their support for the UPA government. Or, to put it more accurately, only in July 2008 did the Congress decide its alliance with the Stalinists had served its purpose and effectively kick them out of the government by concluding a nuclear accord with the US over their oft-repeated objections.

Much of the CPM leadership wanted to fudge their opposition to the nuclear accord—which was touted in both Washington and New Delhi as proof of the strength and viability of the burgeoning Indo-US strategic alliance—and continue to support the Congress-led government. Last year the current CPM General Secretary, Sitaram Yechury, recanted the CPM’s decision to withdraw support for the Congress-led UPA over the nuclear deal, claiming that the issue was too divorced from the life of ordinary Indians for the masses to understand. “This was not the issue (to

withdraw support),” Yechury told the Press Trust of India. “We could not make it a people’s issue ... like price rise.”

Yechury’s comments only underscore the hollow character of the Stalinists’ occasional rhetorical tirades against imperialism. For them, opposition to imperialism is not a bedrock principle, but a tactical pose.

The reality is in 2008, in India as around the world, there was mass opposition to the crimes of US imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq. An exposure of the US’ plans to harness India to its strategic agenda, pointing to both the immediate pressure it was exerting on New Delhi to support its bullying of Iran and its longer term plans to confront China, would have galvanized working people. But the Stalinists would not and could not mount such a political campaign. To do so would have required biting the hand that feeds them. It would have required exposing the great power ambitions of the Indian bourgeoisie and negated the efforts of the West Bengal and other CPM-led governments to woo US and other western investment.

Phony anti-imperialism and support for India’s great-power ambitions

Today, the CPM’s opposition to the LEMOA is no less two-faced. While they claim to oppose the basing agreement, the Stalinists are in electoral alliances with a host of parties that support it. Moreover, they have repeatedly made clear that their public pronouncements opposing a formal Indo-US military alliance will not stand in the way of their continuing to work with parties committed to India’s further integration into the US’ strategic agenda. So well known is the pro-Washington tilt of the cabal of regionalist and casteist parties with whom the Stalinists have allied time and again over the past three decades and whom they continue to promote as “democratic and secular” allies of the working class, Karat was obliged to make reference to it in his article. “It is an unfortunate fact,” writes Karat, these parties “have little awareness about the serious consequences of ... such (a) military and strategic alliance with the US.” They need “to wake up.”

In a country that was under British rule less than seven decades ago and where the struggle for self-rule has been incorporated into the ruling elite’s nationalist ideology, the Stalinists still find it useful to occasionally make references to imperialism. However, the term figures neither in the CPM Politburo statement nor in Karat’s article.

This omission only serves to underline that the Stalinists are addressing their appeals to oppose the LEMOA not to the working class, but to the bourgeois political establishment and especially its traditional party of government, the Congress Party.

For the Stalinists, every crime of the BJP government has become a fresh argument for chaining the working class to the Congress. In the name of “defending democracy,” the CPM forged its first-ever explicit electoral alliance with the Congress for the just concluded West Bengal state elections and there is now open discussion about the possibility of forming a national alliance with the party that did most of the heavy lifting in both implementing the Indian bourgeoisie’s neo-liberal agenda and forging its alliance with Washington.

As part of the preparation for still closer cooperation with the Congress, an article in the April 17 *People’s Democracy* praised the previous Congress-led government for “consciously following non-antagonism towards China”—this of a government that forged a “global strategic partnership” with US imperialism in 2005 knowing full well that Washington’s aim was to harness New Delhi to its drive to thwart China’s rise.

In calling on “all political parties and patriotic citizens” to uphold

India’s “national sovereignty” and “strategic autonomy” the CPM is advancing an alternate foreign policy strategy for the Indian bourgeoisie as it pursues its drive to make India a rival cheap labor supply-chain hub to China and a world power. By eschewing a formal military alliance with the US, the Indian bourgeoisie can preserve greater freedom of action on the world stage, or so goes the Stalinists’ argument.

The CPM, it must be emphasized, has supported the rapid expansion of India’s military initiated by the first BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition government and continued by every subsequent government. This expansion is critical to the ambitions of the Indian bourgeoisie to establish itself as the hegemon of South Asia, a dominant force in the Indian Ocean, and a world power. It has also been strongly supported by Washington, including through numerous weapons deals, as it corresponds with the Pentagon’s plans to build up India as a military-strategic counterweight and rival to China.

Since 2005, India’s military budget has tripled from US \$17 billion to US \$51 billion, even as governments have systematically slashed the country’s meager social expenditure. And all the while the CPM has demonstrated its consent, by voicing no opposition to India’s military buildup, let alone mounting any campaign to expose the predatory ambitions of the Indian bourgeoisie.

The Stalinists have a long history of supporting New Delhi’s foreign intrigues. In 1987, the CPM and its allies backed the Indian military intervention in the Sri Lankan civil war to disarm the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and uphold the crumbling Colombo government. More recently, the Stalinists welcomed the coming to power of Maithripala Sirisena as Sri Lanka’s president as the result of a US-led, Indian-supported regime-change operation against Mahinda Rajapakse, whom they deemed too close to Beijing.

At times the Stalinists have themselves played an active role in these intrigues. In 2008 CPM General Secretary Yechury served as a quasi-official emissary of the Indian government, repeatedly meeting with Maoist leaders in Nepal in an ultimately successful bid to convince them to abandon their insurgency and help stabilize capitalist rule in the Himalayan state.

In “theoretical” terms the CPM Stalinists seek to justify their support for the Indian state by claiming that it is “progressive” as it is the incarnation of the mass anti-imperialist struggle that convulsed South Asia in the first half of the 20th century.

This is a travesty. The Indian state and the nation-state system in South Asia as a whole are the product of the suppression of the anti-imperialist upsurge. Fearing the emergence of the working class as an independent force, Gandhi, Nehru and the bourgeois Congress made a deal with the British to take over the colonial state apparatus and partition the subcontinent into a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan.

The reactionary, communalized geopolitical conflict between India and Pakistan to which Partition gave rise has served as a means for imperialism to continue to dominate the region. Today, as a result of the US drive to harness India to its anti-China strategy and the Indian bourgeoisie’s reckless attempt to get a leg up by serving as Washington’s satraps, the Indo-Pakistan conflict is becoming increasingly entangled with the conflict between US imperialism and China adding to each an explosive new dimension.

“Updating” Lenin and downplaying the war danger

Rather than alerting the working class and toilers to the acute dangers arising from the US war drive and the Indian bourgeoisie’s strategic partnership with Washington, the Stalinists systematically downplay them.

Under conditions where the US is courting confrontation in the South China Sea and has publicly revealed plans for a massive bombardment of China from the sea and sky (Air-Sea Battle) and to blockade China by seizing Indian Ocean choke-points, Karat in his article studiously avoids any mention of imperialism or of war. According to this CPM Politburo member and former party general secretary, the US' aim, including in pressing India to join it, Japan and Australia in a NATO-style alliance, is to "contain" China. The LEMOA, declares Karat, "is a security and military alliance which serves the US goal to contain China."

In reality, Washington's goal is to subjugate China, which it considers an unacceptable threat to its global dominance, through a reckless strategy of escalating diplomatic, economic, and military pressure. This includes patronizing ethnic-nationalist separatist movements within China, as underscored by the "democracy in China" conference held in Dharmasala in late April at which US government representatives rubbed shoulders with Tibetan and Uighur separatists. The logic of this offensive, as the Pentagon's own war plans frankly state, is all-out war on China, including with nuclear weapons.

US imperialism's turn to militarism is an attempt to offset the dramatic erosion of its economic dominance, which had underpinned the post-World War II restabilization of world capitalism.

Even as it has pursued confrontation with China, the Obama administration has made Russia the target of a similar campaign of military pressure and threats, and expanded the US war in the Middle East, the world's most important oil exporting region.

The other imperialist powers are following suit. Japan and Germany are rapidly rearming and have moved to eliminate all remaining political and constitutional restrictions on their waging overseas wars.

The CPM is almost completely silent on these developments, which demonstrate the criminality of its claims that imperialism can be constrained through the promotion of a "multi-polar" order, including supporting the Indian bourgeoisie's push for a larger role in international institutions like the UN.

In a 2011 lecture, "Marxism in the 21st Century: Alternative to Neoliberal Capitalism and Imperialism," Karat rejected Lenin's analysis that, absent socialist revolution, world war is the inevitable consequence of imperialism, of the struggle of rival nationally-based capitalist cliques for markets and resources. Claiming Lenin needs to be updated, Karat said, "The way things have changed since Lenin's time can be seen in the development of international finance capital, which, while originating in the advanced capitalist nations is no longer national in its form. ...Rivalries between imperialist nation states have subdued under the hegemony of international finance capital."

In fact, the qualitative deepening of the integration of the world economy over the past four decades has enormously intensified the fundamental contradictions of world capitalism—between the nation-state system and global economy and between private ownership and socialized production.

Far from globalization attenuating inter-imperialist and great-power rivalry, it is giving rise to a resurgence of imperialist violence that threatens humanity with an even more horrific conflagration than the two imperialist world wars of the last century.

Speaking at the International Committee of the Fourth International's online rally on the occasion of May Day 2016, Wije Dias, general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka, urged "the workers and toilers of the Indian subcontinent" to "assume, alongside their class brethren around the world, a frontline role in the struggle against imperialist war."

A key element in the struggle to develop a revolutionary opposition to imperialist war is the exposure of the Stalinist CPM as a prop of the Indian bourgeoisie, which is itself an agency of world imperialism, and the most vociferous opponent of the independent political mobilization of



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