

Indian elite rails against China for its ties to Pakistan

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Relations between India and China are rapidly spiraling downwards, with potentially cataclysmic consequences for Asia and the world.

The root cause of the increasing acrimony between New Delhi and Beijing is the US drive to transform India into a frontline state in its diplomatic, economic, and, above all, military-strategic offensive against China.

India's two-and-a-half year-old Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has dramatically enhanced New Delhi's decade-old "global strategic partnership" with Washington. It has granted the Pentagon routine access to India's military bases, parroted Washington's provocative anti-China line on the South China Sea dispute, and begun trilateral military-strategic cooperation with the principal US allies in the Asia-Pacific, Japan and Australia.

Since Wednesday, Indian and Chinese troops have been in a "face-off" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), that is the de facto, disputed Sino-Indian border, between India's Ladakh region and Tibet. The confrontation began when some 50 Chinese troops intervened to prevent the construction of an irrigation canal on the Indian side of the LAC. They claimed India was violating an agreement that neither side would build infrastructure near the LAC without the approval of the other. India has responded by saying the agreement only holds for military infrastructure.

This is far from the first such border incident. But it takes on heightened significance under conditions where the Indian government and press have been railing against China for opposing Indian efforts to strategically isolate Pakistan in the midst of a mounting war crisis between South Asia's rival nuclear-armed states.

In the seven weeks since India labelled Islamabad responsible for an attack by Islamist militants on the army base at Uri in Indian-held Kashmir, Beijing has repeatedly called on both sides to back away from further escalation. But China has also made clear that it will not abandon its

decades-old alliance with Pakistan—an alliance that it has significantly expanded over the past two years in response to the Modi government's integration of India into Washington's anti-China "Pivot to Asia."

China pushed back when Modi sought to transform last month's BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) summit meeting in Goa into a platform to denounce Pakistan. During the weekend of the summit, Modi repeatedly described Pakistan as the "mothership" of international terrorism. But to the consternation of the Indian government and media, the communique issued at the end of the Goa conclave made no mention of Pakistan or the Uri attack, even though it went on at length about the need to defeat terrorism.

Soon after Chinese President Xi returned from Goa to Beijing, China announced a deal to sell Pakistan eight submarines.

Beijing's stance is impeding New Delhi's concerted campaign to change the "rules of the game" with Islamabad. Calculating that India's burgeoning alliance with the US has pushed Pakistan onto its back foot, the Modi government is seeking to compel Islamabad to cease any and all support for the anti-Indian insurgency in Kashmir.

In August it announced that New Delhi will trumpet Pakistani human rights abuses in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan and give "greater political space" to Balochi separatists living in India. This shift in policy constitutes a thinly veiled threat to use the Balochi separatist insurgency as a weapon against Pakistan and even press for its dismemberment.

Eleven days after the Uri attack, India publicly announced, for the first time in more than four decades, that it had carried out military action inside Pakistan and declared that henceforth any "Pakistan authored" terrorist strikes will be met by similar cross-border strikes.

Since then, India and Pakistan have continued to inch

ever-closer to war. The past 10 days have seen repeated cross-border artillery and machine gun barrages, resulting in the deaths of more than two dozen people, most of them civilians, and the injuring of scores of others.

Especially since the Goa BRICS summit, the Indian elite's anti-Pakistan campaign has been accompanied by broadsides against China. Most have been of a rhetorical character, such as the repeated denunciations of China in the Indian press for backing the world's principal "rogue states," Pakistan and North Korea.

But the Modi government has also hit back against Beijing with a series of provocative actions.

These include inviting the US Ambassador to India, Richard Verma, to be the guest of honor at the annual festival in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, Indian-held territory that is claimed by China. According to the Indian web site *Wire*, this is "the first time that a foreign diplomat, let alone the US ambassador," had been named "guest of honour" at the Tawang Festival.

New Delhi has also announced that it will allow the Dalai Lama, the public face of the campaign for Tibet's secession from China, to visit Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing calls southern Tibet, next March.

India is continuing its vocal campaign against the Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a series of rail, road and pipeline links that are to connect western China with Gwadar, Pakistan's newly-built Arabian Sea Port. Indian claims to oppose the CPEC because it will pass through parts of Pakistan that Indian claims are rightfully hers. But its real objections are that the \$50 billion project will give a much needed boost to the Pakistani economy and provide China with ready access to the Indian Ocean, which New Delhi covets as its area of strategic dominance.

Late last month India announced that Modi will travel to Japan on November 11-12, with the aim of further cementing military-strategic ties with Washington's most important Asian-Pacific ally and China's most powerful strategic rival in Asia.

With tacit and in some cases explicit support from BJP politicians, Hindu supremacist organizations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other extreme chauvinist elements are mounting a reactionary campaign for Indians to boycott Chinese goods.

Sarbananda Sonowal, the BJP chief minister of the northeastern Indian state of Assam, has urged the people of his state to support the anti-China boycott. Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar received wild applause when he told an audience in Mumbai of Indian

foreign policy experts and other members of the elite that while the government could not call for a boycott of Chinese without running afoul of World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, "Not to buy Chinese products can be taken at [the] individual level."

Washington for, its part, is seeking to exploit the mounting tensions between India and Pakistan and between India and China to further harness India to its predatory strategic agenda.

While urging "caution" and counseling restraint, the Obama administration has publicly endorsed India's illegal and highly provocative Sept. 28-29 cross-border Special Forces' "surgical strikes" inside Pakistan.

Verma's visit to Twang was also a highly calculated move, constituting as it did implicit backing for India's territorial claims. Washington was no doubt pleased when China reacted angrily, with a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman declaring that Verma's visit "will damage the hard-earned peace and tranquility of the China-India border region."

Beijing has generally responded in low-key fashion to Indian provocations, for fear that a harsh reaction will only push New Delhi deeper into the US's embrace, furthering China's own strategic encirclement. However in recent months the tone, at least in the Chinese media, has begun to change. The state-run *Global Times* has, for example, published a number of articles that bristled with hostility to India.

The enmeshing of the India-Pakistan and Sino-Indian strategic rivalries with the growing US-China divide, as a result of US imperialism's drive to contain and subjugate China and restore its global hegemony, has added new, explosive charges to all three, threatening absent the intervention of the international working class, to plunge humanity into a Third World War.



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