

New Indian army chief threatens Pakistan and China

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India's new Army Chief of Staff, General Bipin Rawat, has made a series of belligerent remarks since assuming his new command on Jan. 1. Most ominously, in an exclusive interview with the *Times of India* published Wednesday, Rawat boasted about the Indian military's preparations to fight a simultaneous or "two-front war" against its main, nuclear-armed, strategic rivals: China and Pakistan.

Rawat has also issued repeated warnings to Islamabad that, if "provoked," India can and will strike inside Pakistan to suppress anti-Indian Kashmiri insurgents.

Only such action, vows the Indian Army Chief, will not simply be a repeat of the cross-border raids that Indian Special Forces carried out inside Pakistan-held Kashmir in late September—the first attack New Delhi has publicly admitted mounting inside Pakistan in more than four decades. Any further military strikes against Pakistan will be of a "different manner and different style" said Rawat, when embarking Thursday on a three-day tour of the Indian Army's Jammu and Kashmir-based Northern Command. "We will surprise the enemy."

"The two-front (war) is a real scenario," Rawat told the *Times of India*. "The Army, Navy and IAF (Indian Air Force) are now jointly very much prepared for such an eventuality."

Rawat claimed that India has been able to significantly strengthen its military posture against China in recent years, transforming it from simple "dissuasion" into "deterrence." Moreover, as the result of changes now underway, including the development of India's nuclear arsenal and the strengthening of its military might along the Chinese border, New Delhi will soon achieve "credible deterrence" vis-a-vis Beijing.

Rawat was particularly enthused about the progress the Indian Army has made in creating a new 90,000-strong Mountain Strike Corps to be deployed on India's disputed border with China. He said the corps will give India

"quick-reaction ground offensive capabilities" on its northern borders for the first time. "All adversaries," said Rawat, "respect strength, which comes from having the ability to strike across the border."

According to India's Army Chief, the raising, arming and equipping of the new mountain corps is well "underway." The government has also given its "full support" to a massive strategic infrastructure program. This involves building facilities to house the new border force and strengthen fortifications near India's disputed, 4,000 kilometer-long, border with China. However, far and away the biggest part of the strategic infrastructure program is the building of 73 all-weather roads and 14 "strategic" railway lines for ferrying troops and materiel to the Himalayan border regions in India's northwest and northeast.

Rawat reportedly owes his appointment over more senior officers to his willingness to use force and countenance "strategic risk." Senior figures in India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, beginning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, are said to have been impressed by Rawat's role in overseeing both last September's Special Forces attack on Pakistan and a May 2015 cross-border raid directed against anti-Indian insurgents in Myanmar (Burma).

Scroll.In reporter Saikat Datta says a "senior insider" told him that Modi wanted an Army Chief "in line with his aggressive Pakistan policy—" an officer steeped in the art of counter insurgency, and also with considerable experience on the Line of Control (that divides Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir)."

Under the two-and-a-half year-old government of Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP, tensions between India and both Pakistan and China have surged.

This is inextricably linked with the Modi government's push to integrate India ever more fully into US imperialism's anti-China "Pivot to Asia" and

Washington's reciprocal showering of strategic favours on New Delhi.

Emboldened by Washington's embrace of New Delhi as a "global strategic" partner and "Major Defense Partner," Modi has aggressively asserted India's claim to be South Asia's dominant power, demanding Pakistan "change its behaviour" and pushing back against China's growing regional economic influence.

In response, Beijing and Islamabad have enhanced their own longstanding military-strategic ties, including through the joint development of the Arabian Sea port Gwadar and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Relations between India and its principal rivals have grown even more fractious over the past four months,

Following India's much trumpeted "surgical" military strikes inside Pakistan, their armies bombarded each other across the Line of Control in disputed Kashmir almost every day for close to ten weeks. This resulted in scores of fatalities on both sides.

The cross-border artillery and gun-fire exchanges have now abated, but not the threat of war.

The Modi government is continuing to ratchet up pressure on Pakistan, including by announcing emergency purchases of munitions and armaments to improve its war-readiness and by instructing Indian authorities to maximize India's water usage under the terms of the increasingly contested Indus Water Treaty.

Even more significantly, Indian government and military leaders from Modi on down have proclaimed their determination to enforce their demand that Pakistan prevent its territory from being used to provide logistical support to the anti-Indian insurgency in Kashmir even if this results in all-out war.

India-China relations have also become increasingly embittered. The Indian elite is angered and frustrated that during the recent war crisis with Pakistan, Beijing has repeatedly come to Islamabad's aid. According to all reports, China has counseled Pakistan to work to restore the truce along the Line of Control and otherwise dampen down tensions with India. But under conditions where New Delhi has thrown open its military bases to US warplanes and battleships, consistently parroted Washington's provocative stance on the South China Sea dispute, and expanded strategic ties with America's chief Pacific allies, Japan and Australia, China calculates it has no choice but to stand by its traditional regional ally, Pakistan.

In a show of strength directed against both Beijing and Islamabad, but particularly the former, India has staged

tests of ballistic missiles capable of striking targets throughout China in the past two weeks. On Dec. 26, India tested its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile, the Agni-V, which can strike a target up to 5,000 kilometers away with a 1,500 kilogram nuclear warhead. This week it was the turn of the Agni-IV, which has a 4,000 kilometer range.

Explaining to *Defense News* the significance of the Agni-V, retired Indian Army Brigadier and military analyst Rahul Bhonsle boasted that it will give India the means to threaten "major Chinese counter value targets such as large cities." "This," he continued, "will certainly place the country at par with the Chinese as well as other major missile powers such as the United States and Russia."

China has responded angrily to the missile tests, charging that India is violating a UN resolution passed after New Delhi carried out nuclear tests in May 1998. It forbids India from developing nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles.

But Washington, determined to build up India as a strategic counterweight to China, long ago voided in practice the limits the UN sought to place on India's nuclear program. In 2008, the US created a unique status for India in the world nuclear regime, giving it access to advanced civilian nuclear technology and fuel, even though it has refused to sign the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty. Now the US is similarly trying to gain India admittance to the Nuclear Suppliers Group by bending the rules.

Following this week's Agni-IV test, the Chinese state-run *Global Times* ran a column accusing India of "missile fever" and suggesting that if the UN fails to act China could help Pakistan expand its missile program.



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