

India becomes “frontline” state in US war plans against China

Deepal Jayasekera and Keith Jones
7 March 2017

India is to become a major service and repair hub for the US Seventh Fleet—the armada that is at the center of US war preparations against China.

Last month the Pentagon awarded a contract, said to be worth up to \$1.5 billion over the next five years, to a shipyard in Gujarat to maintain the Seventh Fleet’s warships and patrol and service vessels.

This is a strategic move aimed at giving flesh and blood to last August’s agreement opening India’s military bases and ports to routine use by the US military for the resupply and repair of its warplanes and warships.

The transformation of India into a hub for the Seventh Fleet marks a new stage in India’s integration into US imperialism’s military-strategic offensive against China.

The Seventh Fleet is at the very center of US plans to wage war on China. It has responsibility for the western Pacific and the eastern stretches of the Indian Ocean up to the India-Pakistan border. US strategy calls for the Seventh Fleet to impose an economic blockade on China by seizing control of the Straits of Malacca and other Indian Ocean/South China Sea chokepoints and to spearhead a massive bombardment of Chinese military installations, cities and infrastructure in what the Pentagon calls its “Air-Sea Battle” plan.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Washington has worked assiduously to harness New Delhi to its predatory agenda and to build up India as a counterweight to China. The Pentagon and US military-intelligence think tanks have long coveted India as a geopolitical prize because of its size, its large nuclear-armed military and its strategic location. India, or so the strategists of US imperialism calculate, can serve as China’s “soft southern underbelly.” It also provides the best vantage point from which to dominate the Indian Ocean, China’s and the world’s most important commercial waterway.

Under Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist BJP government, New Delhi has dramatically expanded its

already extensive military-strategic cooperation with Washington. In addition to the basing agreement, India has expanded bilateral and trilateral military-strategic ties with America’s principal Asian-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia. In January, the head of the US Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, revealed that the Pentagon and Indian military are sharing intelligence on Chinese submarine and ship movements in the Indian Ocean.

The grave threat the Indo-US alliance represents to the people of Asia and the world is underscored by the advent of the Trump administration. It has denounced China as a “currency manipulator,” dismissed the Obama administration’s anti-China “Pivot to Asia” as weak and ineffective, and threatened to deny Beijing access to Chinese-controlled islets in the South China Sea—an act that would be tantamount to a declaration of war.

Trump has criticized Obama’s foreign policy on many fronts. But when it comes to India, Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis has vowed that the Trump administration is determined to “build upon” the recent “tremendous progress” in Indo-US “defense cooperation.”

The Indian government, opposition and corporate media are all complicit in keeping India’s workers and toilers in the dark as to the extent to which India is being transformed into a frontline state in Washington’s drive to thwart China’s rise and assert US hegemony over Eurasia. This drive, if not stopped through the revolutionary mobilization of the international working class, leads inexorably to war between the world’s nuclear-armed great powers.

India’s emergence as a hub for the US Seventh Fleet is so striking a change, however, that even Indian media reports could not avoid mentioning that during the Cold War, the Seventh Fleet was used by Washington to bully and threaten New Delhi on several occasions. The *Times*

of India wrote, “The US Seventh Fleet, which was sent to the Bay of Bengal in December 1971 by then-American President Richard Nixon ... to pressure India during the Bangladesh liberation war, will now ironically be maintained by an Indian company.”

Because of New Delhi’s strategic and commercial ties with Moscow, Washington treated India as an adversary for most of the Cold War.

Newly independent India had been eager to establish warm relations with Washington. But New Delhi balked at US imperialism’s attempts to bully it into subordinating its foreign policy to Washington’s strategic offensive against the Soviet Union.

Washington responded by recruiting Pakistan, the rival state created through the communal partition of the subcontinent that had accompanied independence, to serve as a linchpin of its Cold War alliance system. With the US arming Pakistan, India turned to the Soviet Union for arms purchases and strategic support. It also became one of the founders and the principal leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Soviet support also helped New Delhi counter the economic pressure the US exerted on India because of its use of import substitution and state ownership to strengthen the Indian bourgeoisie’s position vis a vis international capital. Jawaharlal Nehru and his Congress Party government were also mindful of the assistance the Soviet Stalinist regime’s support could play in integrating the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI) into bourgeois politics so as to use it to contain working class opposition.

India’s non-alignment policy had nothing to do with genuine opposition to imperialism. It was a stratagem of the Indian bourgeoisie to strengthen its class rule. When the rug was pulled out from under its state-led capitalist development strategy by globalization and the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, it quickly junked its anti-imperialist rhetoric and began to fashion a more direct and slavish relationship with Washington.

This shift was spearheaded by Nehru’s Congress Party heirs. It was a Congress-led government that forged the “global Indo-US strategic partnership” that served as the antechamber for India’s transformation under Modi into a veritable frontline state in Washington’s anti-China offensive.

Yet the CPI, its Stalinist sister party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and their Left Front continue to promote “non-alignment” as “anti-imperialism” and

claim that the Indian bourgeoisie can play a progressive role in world politics.

The Stalinists maintain that the imperialist world order can be pacified and the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie best advanced if New Delhi curtails its strategic ties with Washington and opposes US “unilateralism” by advocating “multi-polarity”—i.e., a greater role in regulating world affairs for the other imperialist ruling elites, the Indian bourgeoisie and the oligarchs who now rule Russia and China.

That the Stalinists openly support the great power ambitions of the Indian bourgeoisie is underscored by their support for the expansion of India’s military and nuclear arsenal.

And for all their claims to oppose Modi’s embrace of Washington, they have failed to alert the working class to how the Indian bourgeoisie’s alliance with US imperialism is emboldening New Delhi in its drive to impose itself as South Asia’s regional hegemon.

The Stalinists applauded when India carried out illegal, cross-border military raids inside Pakistan last September, plunging South Asia’s nuclear-armed rivals into their most serious war crisis since at least 2003.

Pakistan’s reactionary elite has responded to India’s increasingly menacing posture by threatening to use tactical nuclear weapons in the event of a larger Indian attack and by deepening its longstanding strategic partnership with Beijing.

US imperialism’s reckless drive to harness India to its offensive against China has transformed South Asia into a geopolitical powder keg. The Indo-Pakistani and Sino-Indian conflicts have become enmeshed with the US-China confrontation, adding to each a massive new explosive charge, with potentially calamitous implications for the people of the region and the world.

South Asia is thus a pivotal front in the development of a working class-led global movement against imperialist war and the capitalist system out of which it arises. Such a movement, uniting workers and toilers in India, Pakistan and across the subcontinent with the Chinese, American and international working class, will emerge only through a merciless exposure of the criminal role being played by the Stalinist CPM and CPI.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact