

India and China trade war threats amid border stand-off

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India and China have rushed troops to a remote, disputed border region, in what is widely being described as the worst border stand-off between the two countries since they fought a brief border war in 1962.

The current dispute focuses on the Doklam or Donglang Plateau, a ridge in the Himalayan hills where the borders of India, China, and Bhutan, a tiny kingdom long under New Delhi's thumb, meet.

India and China are both reported to have deployed some 3,000 troops to the area. They also have traded thinly veiled threats of military action, including through references to their 1962 war, which saw China bloody India's nose, then declare a ceasefire.

The crisis erupted last week as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was visiting Washington to meet US President Donald Trump and further expand the anti-China alliance between the Indian bourgeoisie and American imperialism.

On June 26, Indian troops intervened to stop Chinese workers from building a road on the Doklam plateau. Initial Indian media reports claimed that the Chinese workers had intruded into territory that rightfully belongs to India under a boundary British colonial authorities imposed in 1914, the so-called McMahon line. But later New Delhi said its troops had acted to prevent the Chinese carrying out illegal construction on Bhutan territory.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) responded to the Indian intervention by destroying two Indian bunkers in the area.

In a move meant to underline the gravity of the situation and India's determination to stand its ground, Indian Army chief General Bipin Rawat flew last Thursday to the northeast Indian state of Sikkim to meet with commanders of the 17 Mountain Division. It is tasked with guarding the China-India border in the

Doklam Plateau area.

Since assuming command of the Indian army last January, Rawat has raised Chinese hackles with bellicose remarks, including repeated vows that India is prepared to fight a two-front war against China and Pakistan simultaneously.

India is currently raising an 80,000-strong mountain strike corps and carrying out a massive infrastructure building plan along its nearly 3,500-kilometer border with China. It claims these actions are needed to counter a Chinese military build-up along the contested border.

The Chinese press has accused India of ratcheting up tensions over the disputed border in order to demonstrate to the Trump administration that it is ready to serve as Washington's cat's paw in its military-strategic offensive against China.

The government-controlled *Global Times* said Indian troops had crossed over from Sikkim into Chinese territory to show Washington that New Delhi can be counted on to "constrain China's rise."

The Indian media and government, meanwhile, are claiming that China is illegally trying to push the tri-junction of the Sino-Indian-Bhutanese border some 20 kilometers south, so as to place itself in an advantageous position to seize hold of the strategic Siliguri corridor in the event of a war. The corridor, sometime referred to as the "Chicken's Neck," is a narrow slice of Indian territory squeezed between Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and China. Just 17 kilometers wide at its narrowest point, the Siliguri corridor links West Bengal and the rest of India to the country's seven northeastern states.

Relations between India and China have deteriorated sharply over the past three years. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

government India has all but abandoned any pretense of “strategic autonomy” and transformed itself into a frontline state in the US drive against China.

New Delhi has agreed that the Pentagon can make routine use of Indian military bases and ports to refuel and resupply its warplanes and battleships. In return, the US has proclaimed India a Major Defense Partner giving its access to the advanced weapons Washington provides only to its most-trusted allies. India has also dramatically expanded bilateral and trilateral military-security ties with the US’s closest Pacific allies, that is the countries it will be principally relying on in a war with China—Australia and Japan. The head of the US Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris recently revealed that the US and Indian militaries are sharing intelligence on Chinese submarine and ship movements in the Indian Ocean.

China has responded by expanding its longstanding partnership with India’s arch-enemy, Pakistan. This is exemplified by China’s plans to invest more than \$50 billion in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). A key component of Beijing’s One Belt, One Road initiative, the CPEC will provide rail, road and pipeline links between western China and Pakistan’s Arabian Sea port, Gwadar, enabling China to partially circumvent the Pentagon’s plans to blockade China by seizing maritime chokepoints.

At the conclusion of their June 26 summit Modi and Trump vowed that they will further expand the Indo-US “global strategic partnership.” In a joint statement, India gave full-throated support to Washington’s provocative stances on the South China Sea dispute and North Korea, and the US signed on to unprecedentedly harsh language in demanding Pakistan prevent “terrorists” from using its territory. New Delhi touted the statement chastising Pakistan as an endorsement of its stance on Kashmir, that is, its claim that the mass opposition to Indian rule over disputed Jammu and Kashmir is entirely a result of Pakistani-exported terror.

Significantly, China sprang to Islamabad’s defense. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said Pakistan stands at the “frontline” in the global fight against terrorism and “the international community should give full recognition and affirmation” to Islamabad’s “efforts in this regard.”

Both New Delhi and Beijing are saying that it is up to the other to stand down in the current border dispute

and ruling out talks until the troops that have “illegally” occupied their territory are pulled back.

The Indian ruling elite has been tilting toward Washington since the beginning of the 21st century. Beijing long responded cautiously to the burgeoning Indo-US partnership, hoping to woo New Delhi through offers of economic collaboration and fearing a harsh response would only drive New Delhi into US imperialism’s eager embrace.

However, in response to Modi’s unstinting support for Washington’s campaign to strategically isolate and encircle China, Beijing has shifted course and is taking an increasingly aggressive line with New Delhi.

A June 27 *Global Times* op-ed, said China “must force the Indian troops to retreat to the Indian side by all means necessary.” It went on to warn New Delhi that it “cannot afford a showdown with China on border issues. ... India’s GDP is only one-quarter of China’s and its annual defense budget is just one third.”

Two days later, senior PLA spokesman Colonel Wu Quian denounced Rawat’s statement about India’s readiness to fight a two-front war as “extremely irresponsible.” Then in a reference to the 1962 war, he declared he hoped Rawat, “could learn historical lessons and stop such clamoring for war.”

India’s Defence Minister Arun Jaitley quickly took issue with Wu’s remarks, saying “the situation in 1962 was different and (the) India of 2017 is different.” Jaitley didn’t go onto explain how India is “different,” but he was clearly referring both to its nuclear-weapons capability and its strategic partnership with Washington.

The reality is, due to US imperialism’s reckless drive to make India a linchpin of its anti-China offensive, the Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistani conflicts have become inextricably entangled with the strategic confrontation between US imperialism and China. This has made them all even more volatile and incendiary, threatening the masses of South Asia and the world with a catastrophe.



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