

Danger of India-China border war grows

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The standoff between Indian and Chinese troops on the Doklam Plateau, a remote ridge in the Himalayan foothills, is continuing, amid growing warnings and threats of an impending military clash.

Indian Defence Minister Arun Jaitley told the country's parliament Wednesday that its military is ready to meet any challenge and has already demonstrated with its victories over Pakistan in wars in 1965 and 1971 that it has learned the "lessons" of 1962. This was a reference to the month-long 1962 Sino-Indian border in which Beijing gave New Delhi a bloody nose, then ordered its troops to withdraw.

In an even more significant and troubling sign of the escalation of tensions, the Indian Ministry of Defense (MOD) has urgently requested additional funds of Rs. 200 billion (\$3.1 billion) from the finance ministry to speed up the procurement of munitions, armaments and other war materiel. This follows on last month's announcement that the MOD had given Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Sarath Chand special powers to speed up emergency purchases of the ammunition and spare parts needed to wage war.

New Delhi has repeatedly suggested that the Doklam border crisis could be defused by both sides withdrawing their troops from the disputed ridge.

But China is adamant that it is up to India to take the first step, by recalling its forces unilaterally.

Beijing has repeatedly termed India's actions unprecedentedly provocative. Unlike previous border disputes, the Indian Army is confronting Chinese troops on territory to which New Delhi itself has no claim, but is rather the subject of a dispute between China and the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

Moreover, Beijing disputes India's claim that it interceded at the request of Bhutan to stop Chinese construction workers from expanding a road on the disputed plateau. Beijing contends that New Delhi acted unilaterally, then leaned on Bhutan, which India

has long treated like a protectorate, to join it in protesting the alleged Chinese incursion on its territory. To date, Bhutan's government has issued only one statement on the almost two month-old Doklam standoff, and did so close to two weeks after the alleged Chinese incursion began.

Beijing has repeatedly served notice that its patience is wearing thin and that it will not allow the standoff to continue indefinitely.

On Tuesday, a Chinese diplomat Wang Wenli told a delegation of Indian journalists, "If India continues going down the wrong path, we have the right to use any action under international law to protect the lives of our troops. New Delhi should stop sending signals that everything is under control."

The previous day the delegation had visited a People's Liberation Army garrison on the outskirts of Beijing where they were treated to a demonstration of Chinese marksmanship. Addressing the journalists, PLA Senior Colonel Li declared, "What the Indian troops have done is an invasion of Chinese territory." He added, "You can report about what the Chinese soldiers are thinking about. I am a soldier, I will try my best to protect (China's) territorial integrity. We have the resolve and determination."

Yesterday, an editorial in the government-owned *China Daily*, titled "New Delhi should come to its senses while it has time," warned that the "window for a peaceful solution" of the border dispute is "closing." "The countdown to a clash between the two forces has begun," affirmed China's largest English-language newspaper, "and the clock is ticking away the time to what seems to be an inevitable conclusion."

The principal cause of the rapid deterioration in Sino-Indian relations, of which the current border confrontation is only the latest and most explosive example, is India's ever deeper integration into Washington's military-strategic offensive against

China. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, India has opened its military bases and ports to routine use by the Pentagon; greatly expanded bilateral and trilateral military-strategic ties with Japan and Australia, US imperialism's principal Asia-Pacific allies; and parroted Washington's aggressive stances on both the South China Sea dispute and North Korea.

The Chinese Communist Party regime, which speaks for the capitalist oligarchy that has arisen from the Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism, has no progressive answer to the US drive to encircle and subjugate China. Organically incapable of making any appeal to the antiwar sentiment of working people around the world, it oscillates between seeking an accommodation with Washington and pursuing its own increasingly aggressive militarist policy, while whipping up bellicose nationalism.

In a further sign of the mounting war danger, the Indian media has given prominence to an interview in which the Indian-born economist and British Labour Peer Meghnad Desai warned of the imminence of a Sino-Indian war, while voicing his hope and expectation that American imperialism would come to India's support.

"I think at this time it is very likely that we will be in a state of full-scale war with China very soon, Desai told the *India Asia News Agency* (IANS)."

Willfully ignoring India's emergence as a "frontline state" in the US offensive against China, Desai sought to paint China as an aggressor in both the Himalayas and the South China Sea.

Desai, who has long traveled in Indian government and ruling class circles, said that a war would not be restricted to the Doklam Plateau, but "will start from all places, across the northern Himalayas." Such a war, he warned, "will not be controllable," but India's "defence co-operation" with the US and its allies "will bear fruit."

"India," he continued, "cannot stand up to China without American help and support. America cannot stand up to China without Indian help. That is the symmetry in this relationship."

On June 18, the very day Indian troops interceded on the Doklam and forced the Chinese construction workers to cease their road-building, Modi was meeting with Trump at the White House. At the conclusion of

that meeting they pledged to further expand the Indo-US "global strategic partnership."

As Desai's remarks underscore, even a war that begins as a border skirmish could rapidly escalate and quickly draw in the US and other powers. Indeed, the BJP government and the Indian elite are banking on drawing on US support, raising the prospect of a conflict that quickly escalates into a global conflict among nuclear powers.

Even if such a catastrophe were averted and a war between India and China limited to a border war, it would have calamitous consequences for working people around the world.

Such a war, whatever its outcome, would only strengthen imperialism.

A Chinese "victory" would only cause the Indian bourgeoisie to cement its place in a US-led NATO-type alliance against China. Moreover, Germany, Japan and the other imperialist wars would use the events in the Himalayas as a pretext to accelerate their plans for rearmament and war.

In the event China suffered a defeat, US imperialism would seize on the opportunity to intensify its reckless military-strategic offensive against China. Meanwhile, the Modi government, flush from reversing the "humiliation" of 1962, would step up its efforts to bully India's neighbours into recognizing it as the hegemon of South Asia and whip up a climate of bellicose nationalist euphoria to intensify the assault on the working class and drive Indian politics still further right.



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