

Amid India-China war crisis, Washington boosts strategic ties with New Delhi

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The Trump administration and Pentagon have taken multiple steps in recent days to strengthen Washington's military-strategic alliance with India.

These moves are manifestly aimed at encouraging India to hold fast to its hardline stance in the current dispute with China over control of the Doklam Plateau—a ridge in the Himalayan foothills that both China and Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan kingdom that New Delhi treats like a protectorate, claim as their sovereign territory.

For the past two months Indian and Chinese troops have been arrayed against each other “eyeball-to-eyeball” on the Doklam Plateau, while New Delhi and Beijing have exchanged bellicose threats and taunts, and ordered their militaries to ready for war.

India has moved thousands of troops to forward positions along its northeastern border with China, placing them on a high-alert “No War, No Peace” status, and undertaken emergency purchases of munitions, spare parts and other war materiel.

China has reportedly deployed fighter jets to Tibet and surface-to-air missile batteries near its border with the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and sent additional blood stocks to Tibet, in anticipation of casualties.

Washington's intervention in the conflict, even if at present only indirect, greatly heightens the danger that a border clash between India and China, themselves both nuclear powers, could rapidly escalate and draw in the US and other regional and imperialist powers with catastrophic consequences for the people of Asia and all humanity.

On Tuesday, the White House announced that, during an Indian Independence Day telephone conversation between President Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the US and India agreed to enhance their military-security cooperation “across the Indo-Pacific region.”

As a first step, the two countries will “elevate their strategic consultations” by establishing a “2-by-2 ministerial dialogue,” involving their foreign and defense ministers. This set-up is akin to that which the US has with its principal treaty allies in the region, Japan, Australia and the Philippines.

The next day, Washington announced it has designated Hizbul Mujahideen, an Islamist militia opposed to India's rule over disputed Kashmir as a “foreign terrorist organization.” Not surprisingly, this move was warmly welcomed by India—which claims Pakistan government-backed terrorism is the principal, if not sole, reason for the mass alienation and opposition to New Delhi in the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley—and condemned no

less sharply by Islamabad.

Yesterday, a “2-by-2” meeting between US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defense Secretary James Mattis and their Japanese counterparts, respectively Taro Kono and Itsunori Onodera, decided that the US and Japan will work together “to advance trilateral and multilateral security and defence cooperation with other partners in the region, notably the Republic of Korea, Australia (and) India.”

This was presented as a response to North Korea's refusal to cede to US demands that it unilaterally cease nuclear-weapon and ballistic-missile tests. However, the North Korean crisis, which the Trump administration has systematically enflamed since coming to office eight months ago, is above all driven by American imperialism's drive to strategically isolate, encircle, and bully China, Pyongyang's northern neighbor and principal ally.

As part of its ever-deeper integration into Washington's military-strategic offensive against China, India has taken to parroting the US line on North Korea, depicting this small, impoverished country as a unique threat to world peace, when it is Washington that over the past quarter-century has illegally invaded one country after another.

Ominously, Modi has aligned India with Trump's reckless threats to rain unprecedented “fire and fury” on North Korea. According to the readout of their August 15 conversation, “Prime Minister Modi thanked President Trump for his strong leadership uniting the world against the North Korean menace.”

For the past decade-and-a-half, a central strategic goal of Washington, whether under a Democratic or Republican administration, has been to build up India as a counterweight to China and harness it to US strategic aims. Not only does India share a nearly 3,500 kilometre-long border with China and possess one of the world's largest armies. It also geographically dominates the Indian Ocean, whose sea-lanes bear most of the oil and many of the other resources that fuel China's economy.

During the three-year rule of Modi and his Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India has been transformed into a veritable frontline state in the US offensive against China. India now allows US warplanes and battleships to make routine use of its military bases and ports, shares intelligence with the Pentagon on Chinese ship and submarine movements in the Indian Ocean, and has dramatically expanded bi-lateral and tri-lateral military-strategic ties with Japan and Australia.

In an interview with the Press Trust of India last weekend, the

head of the US Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, reiterated the importance the Pentagon accords to India, declaring the US “is ready to help India modernise its military.” The admiral lauded the recent joint US-Indian-Japanese naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal, adding that if Australia were added to the annual Malabar exercise—making it a quadrilateral exercise of the US and the states that are the pivot of the Pentagon’s strategy to militarily confront and defeat China—it would be even better.

Washington’s moves to bolster ties with India come in the wake of calls from various strategists of US imperialism for the Trump administration to make clear that it stands with India in the current border crisis with China, even if for diplomatic reasons it continues to publicly maintain that the US has no position on who is the rightful owner of the Doklam Plateau.

Particularly significant in this regard was an article penned by the longtime CIA operative and Obama administration official Bruce Reidel titled, “JFK stopped a China-India War. Can Trump? The nuclear stakes are much higher now.” The article argues that it was President John Kennedy’s dispatching of “the US Air Force to resupply the Indians” and an aircraft “carrier battle group to the Bay of Bengal” that caused China to unilaterally end the 1962 Sino-Indian border war and withdraw from its “conquests” in northeast India.

While Reidel urges the Trump administration to be ready to mount a diplomatic offensive to prevent the outbreak of a conflict that could have “potentially enormous consequences for the world,” his implicit argument is that Washington must come to India’s military support so as to help it stare down Beijing and, if need be, bloody it on the battlefield.

For his part, Richard M. Rossow of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a major US think-tank, is urging the Trump administration to recognize that in “sending its troops into foreign territory to stand up to China,” New Delhi is realizing the hopes that American imperialist strategists have long placed in it.

War, Rossow concedes, may not be desirable, but “Washington must recognize—we just received a loud, clear signal that India is ready to take important steps to contribute to the” US-led “global order, and it should strengthen our resolve to further deepen our emerging security partnership.”

Japan, American imperialism’s most important Asian ally, has gone even further than the US in backing India’s stance on the Doklam Plateau dispute. Thursday, Japan’s ambassador to India, Kenji Hiramatsu, defended the intervention of Indian troops on territory to which it has no legal claim, saying India has a “treaty understanding with Bhutan.” He also suggested, without naming Beijing, that its attempt to expand a road on the disputed plateau was tantamount to “unilaterally” trying to “change the status quo by force.”

In the hope of supplanting China as the principal cheap-labour supply-chain hub for Western capital and advancing its own great power ambitions, the venal Indian bourgeoisie is serving as a satrap for American and Japanese imperialism in their drive to re-subjugate China.

The Chinese regime, which represents the oligarchs that emerged from the restoration of capitalism in the People’s Republic, has no progressive answer to the relentless offensive being mounted

against it.

Organically incapable of making any appeal to the anti-war sentiment of the people of Asia and the world, it oscillates between seeking an accommodation with Washington and whipping up bellicose nationalism and engaging in its own militarist actions.

A recent article in the *South China Morning Post* cited People’s Liberation Army sources as saying war was increasingly likely, but that the Chinese military believes the conflict can be limited to the eastern sector of the Indo-Chinese border and last no more than a week or two.

But as the developments of recent days have underscored, a border war could rapidly involve other powers, starting with US. Even if such a catastrophe were averted and a clash between India and China limited to a border war, it would have calamitous consequences for working people around the world.

Whatever its outcome, such a war 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 neighbors 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.

There is, however, an antipode to the war drive of the bourgeoisie. Recent decades have seen the growth of a massive working class in India and China. It is this mighty social force, which has no interest in the capitalist struggle for profits, resources and strategic advantage, which must be mobilized along with workers in the US, Japan, and around the world in an anti-war movement aimed at liquidating the source of war—capitalism and the outmoded nation-state system in which it is historically rooted.



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