

The India-China border clash and the inflammable state of world geopolitics

Keith Jones**18 June 2020**

A clash Monday night that left dozens of Indian Army and Chinese People's Liberation Army personnel dead has raised the prospect of an all-out war between the world's two most populous countries and rival nuclear-armed powers.

Since the clash, both Beijing and New Delhi have committed to disengaging the military forces now deployed in close quarters along their disputed border, and to a peaceful diplomatic solution to their rival territorial claims. But each is adamant that the other provoked the clash—the first fatal encounter between Indian and Chinese troops in 45 years—and must stand down.

Following a telephone conversation Wednesday between Indian foreign minister S. Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, New Delhi issued a statement that accused Beijing of responsibility for "the violence and casualties," and said "the need of hour" is for "the Chinese side to reassess its actions and take corrective steps."

Beijing countered with a statement that said Wang had demanded India "severely punish those responsible" for the Indian military's "violent" and "adventurous" conduct, "strictly control" its "frontline troops and immediately cease all provocative actions." The statement added that India "must not underestimate China's firm will to safeguard its territorial sovereignty."

Following a meeting yesterday between India's Defence Minister and the military high command, India raised the alert level of the tens of thousands of Army and Air Force personnel it has deployed along its disputed border with China to the highest level. The Indian Navy, meanwhile, has been instructed to prepare for possible encounters with Chinese warships and submarines.

Also Wednesday, Narendra Modi, India's ultra-right Hindu supremacist prime minister, gave a televised address in which he vowed that "the sacrifice of our soldiers will not be in vain ... India wants peace, but if provoked India is capable of giving a befitting reply."

India and China's disputed 3,500-kilometer (2,175 mile) border cuts through inhospitable Himalayan terrain. Monday night's fighting took place along a narrow ridge more than 4,260 meters (14,000 feet) above sea level.

However, under conditions of a systemic breakdown of world capitalism and a consequent surge in inter-imperialist and great-power conflict, the Sino-Indian border dispute has become enmeshed with the US-Chinese strategic rivalry, enormously adding to its explosive character, and investing it with huge global

geo-political significance.

India's venal capitalist ruling elite has integrated India into the US military-strategic offensive against China over the past decade-and-a-half. Under Modi, New Delhi has thrown open its military bases to US warships and warplanes and developed an ever-expanding web of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral military-security ties with Washington and its principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia.

Beijing has responded by seeking to leverage its close security partnership with India's historic arch rival Pakistan, including through the building of pipeline, rail, and road links from western China to Pakistan's Arabian Sea port of Gwadar, with the aim of counteracting US plans to economically strangle China by seizing Indian Ocean and South China Sea chokepoints. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor passes through China's Aksai Chin region, near to where Monday's fighting occurred and on territory that Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government pointedly and provocatively reasserted India's historic claim to last August.

To date, the Trump administration's response to Monday's border clash has been limited to anodyne statements expressing support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. But over the previous month, Washington publicly egged New Delhi on with denunciations of Chinese "aggression" against India.

Moreover, it did so as part of a massive escalation of US imperialism's all-sided economic, diplomatic, and military-strategic offensive against China, whose logic ends in war. This includes:

- * Blaming Beijing for the massive loss of life in the US from COVID-19 due to its own negligence and incompetence in a transparent attempt to deflect public anger, but also with a view to justifying aggression against Beijing;

- * Dispatching three aircraft carrier strike groups last week to the western Pacific where they will operate in waters just off of mainland China;

- * Launching a drive to "decouple" the US economy from China, by pressuring American companies to move operations from China. With a view to further harnessing India to US strategic objectives, Trump and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have very publicly promoted India as an alternate global manufacturing production-chain hub to China;

- * Intensifying its campaign to pressure countries to bar Huawei, China's flagship high tech company, from their 5G networks, and to otherwise thwart China's emergence as a competitor in high-

tech industries.

* Providing advanced-weaponry to Taiwan and implicitly threatening to repudiate its support for the “one China policy.”

* And in a move directed against both China and Russia, pressing forward with a massive nuclear weapons build-up.

Alongside this, amid the pandemic, the Trump administration has intensified sanctions and military pressure on Iran and Venezuela, and greenlighted Israel’s plans to outright annex the West Bank.

The Indo-China border dispute is only one of numerous global flashpoints where US aggression has incited or aggravated interstate conflicts and transformed them into potential catalysts of a global conflagration.

Angered by the US refusal to enter into meaningful negotiations or relax in any way its punishing economic sanctions, North Korea on Monday blew up its joint liaison office with South Korea.

The imperialist rivals of the US, for their part, have likewise responded to the pandemic and the greatest economic seizure of world capitalism since the Depression of the 1930s by intensifying their own preparations for war. In the case of Germany and France, this means accelerating the drive to develop a European military that can assert their claims to markets, natural resources and strategic territories independent of and when needed against the United States.

Writing in *Die Welt* last week, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borell and EU Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton declared the “mounting tensions between the United States and China” demonstrate the need for European “hard power,” so it can “bring its influence to bear, impose its worldview, and uphold its own interests.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as an accelerant for all the malignancies that have spread throughout global capitalism over the past four decades and especially since 2008—the rapacious growth of social inequality, militarism and war, the putrefaction of democratic forms of rule, and the capitalist elite’s promotion of reaction and rehabilitation of the far right.

It is also acting as the accelerant of global class struggle. In the initial stages of the pandemic, and under conditions where after weeks of doing nothing to stop the spread of COVID-19 and when governments then imposed hastily improvised lockdowns, there was a seeming diminishing of social protest. However, the mass multi-racial and multi-ethnic demonstrations that erupted in the US in response to the police murder of George Floyd and subsequently spread around the world underscore that the wave of strikes and mass anti-government protests that gathered pace in 2018 and 2019 were but the initial stages of a mass and incipiently revolutionary counteroffensive of the global working class.

The response of the capitalist elite to the pandemic, particularly in the imperialist countries of North America and Europe—its criminal negligence, massive theft of public assets, and now its campaign to force workers to return to work even as COVID-19 continues to spread—have produced a social catastrophe. They have also laid bare the brutality, political-ideological bankruptcy and immorality of a moribund capitalist order.

Under these conditions there is a real and growing danger that

the capitalist ruling elites, beset by intractable economic and political problems and facing mounting social opposition, will see in military conflict a way out—a means of suppressing the class struggle and promoting “national unity,” through a combination of frenzied chauvinist patriotism and state repression, legitimized as a “necessity of war.”

India is a case in point. The Indian elite’s calamitous response to the pandemic—an ill-prepared lockdown; a refusal to take rudimentary health measures, such as mass testing; and now a “reopening of the economy”—has resulted in 120 million jobless and a COVID-19 infections growth-rate that is among the highest in the world. Yesterday, while India’s media was eulogizing the 20 dead Indian soldiers, the official tally of COVID-19 deaths rose by 2,003 or more than 20 percent.

Taking advantage of a discredited and complicit opposition, Modi and his BJP have time and again used rabid communalism, bellicose nationalism, and reckless “surgical strikes” on Pakistan to deflect social opposition, stoke reaction, and divide the working class.

But nowhere is the threat of a crisis-ridden government and ruling class being “tempted” by war more palpable than in America. US imperialism is today led by a fascist-minded oligarch and would-be tin-pot dictator, its political elite is at war with itself, its massive military remains its one residual strength over its rivals, and last and most importantly it faces increasingly militant opposition from the working class.

The intensification of the global capitalist crisis and the class struggle lend still greater urgency to the struggle against war. The only social force that can stop war is the international working class. But this requires that the increasingly global character of its struggles become a conscious strategy, and its mobilization as an independent political force in the struggle for workers’ power and socialism. We urge all WSWS readers to join us in the fight to arm the working class with this understanding.



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