

US provided India real-time military intelligence in China border clash

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In what represents a new stage in US-Indian collaboration in preparing for war with China, the Pentagon supplied India with real-time military intelligence, enabling it to repel People's Liberation Army forces in a December 2022 border clash, claims the *US News & World Report*.

Last Dec. 9, hundreds of Indian and Chinese troops clashed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the largely undemarcated 3,400 km border that separates the world's two most populous countries. While there were no fatalities, the confrontation reportedly lasted for several hours, with the two sides engaging in hand-to-hand combat and attacking each other with batons and canes.

Soon after, New Delhi boasted it had repelled a Chinese incursion into the Twang sector of the northeast Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Beijing, meanwhile, accused Indian troops of blocking the PLA from reconnoitering territory on its side of the LAC.

According to a March 20 *US News* report, Indian forces had been forewarned of the impending PLA incursion by "actionable" US satellite intelligence supplied in "real-time," and were consequently ready to repel it. The intelligence was reportedly more detailed—providing information about Chinese positions, movements and force strength—and delivered faster than anything the US had previously shared with India's military.

Indian troops "were waiting," a US government source told *US News*. "And that's because the US had given India everything to be fully prepared for this. It demonstrates a test case of the success of how the two militaries are now cooperating and sharing intelligence."

US News said multiple government sources familiar with a secret US intelligence review of the Dec. 9 Himalayan border clash had confirmed this account, and viewed it as marking a new stage in Indo-US military cooperation. "This will definitely rattle the Chinese because they will have not experienced this before," a high-placed source told the *US News*. "This time they did not hold the advantage like they did before."

The framework for "real-time" intelligence sharing between the US and Indian government and militaries was established under the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), which New Delhi and Washington signed in the fall of 2020. Washington had long pressed India to do so, over the objections of sections of India's military establishment who feared the agreement could compromise the security of India's own intelligence and military operations.

The BECA enables the transfer of real-time geospatial intelligence, as well as the supply of high-end surveillance and communications technology and weapons that make use of them. Its adoption by India means New Delhi has signed all three of the agreements the Pentagon considers "foundational" in developing interoperability for joint

operations with foreign militaries. The agreements cover access to Indian ports and military bases for resupply and repair, communications and other compatibility, and intelligence-sharing.

The White House refused to confirm the March 20 *US News and World Report* article, which asserted that the Dec. 9 events were the first confirmation that the real-time sharing of geospatial intelligence provided for under the BECA is now operational. However, John Kirby, the National Security Council coordinator for Strategic Communications, did not refute it. He simply said, "I can't confirm that."

The "leak" was clearly aimed at demonstrating that the Indo-US military-strategic alliance is providing New Delhi with tangible benefits in the border dispute and India's strategic conflict with China more broadly and was quickly promoted by India's corporate media as such.

As part of its ever escalating all-sided economic, diplomatic, and military-strategic offensive against China, Washington—first under the Republican would-be-dictator Trump, and now the Democrat Joe Biden—is playing an ever more conspicuous and provocative role in the India-China border dispute.

When the dispute flared up in May 2020, the US encouraged New Delhi to take a hard line and make it a major international issue. A month later, a clash in the Galwan Valley, which transects Indian-held Ladakh and Chinese-held Aksai Chin, resulted in the deaths of at least 20 Indian troops and four PLA personnel and brought the two nuclear-armed states closer to all-out war than at any time since they fought a short border war in 1962.

Nearly three years on, each side has well over 50,000 troops forward deployed along the LAC, as well as artillery, tanks and fighter jets. Both sides have also embarked on massive military infrastructure building campaigns, erecting new fortifications, and airstrips and road and rail links to move troops and supplies swiftly.

Washington, in marked contrast with the attitude it took in 2017 when Indian and Chinese troops faced off for 10 weeks over the Doklam Plateau, a Himalayan ridge claimed by both China and Bhutan, has abandoned any pretense of neutrality. It has labelled Beijing the "aggressor" and in international forums and statements repeatedly sought to tie the Indo-China border dispute with the South China Sea, where Washington has incited various states to aggressively pursue their respective territorial claims against Beijing as examples of Chinese "aggression."

The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee is currently considering a bipartisan motion that affirms America's support for India's claim that the McMahon Line, the border the British Empire imposed on Tibet without any consultation with China in 1914,

constitutes the rightful border between India and China. In addition, it calls for closer cooperation between India and the US, including through “enhanced defense interoperability and information-sharing,” the United States-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology” and the Quad—the quasi-strategic alliance between Washington, its closest Asia Pacific allies, Japan and Australia, and New Delhi.

The Dec. 9 clash took place just days after Indian and US troops had concluded a provocative two-week-long military exercise, Yudh Abhyas, in “high altitude warfare” in the Himalayas, just 100 km from the disputed Indo-China border.

The *US New and World Report*’s claim the Dec. 2022 border encounter was the first time that US-supplied real-time geospatial military intelligence had a material impact on an India-China border clash may well be true. However, Indian reports at the time suggested US-supplied intelligence played a role in the success of an August 2020 Galwan Valley operation in which thousands of Indian troops seized a series of hilltops uncontested. Indian officials subsequently admitted that the operation was high-risk and could easily have led to armed clashes between Indian and Chinese forces, if not the eruption of a full-scale border war. That is, it was undertaken with the knowledge it could trigger a war which, whatever the initial intentions of the belligerents, risked spinning into a broader conflict, involving other regional powers, like Pakistan and the US and its allies.

By stoking tensions between New Delhi and Beijing, Washington is seeking to harness India still more tightly to its drive to destabilize, encircle, and prepare for war against China. It views India as a means to threaten China along its southern and western borders, but also as central to its plans to economically strangle China in the event of a crisis by denying it access to the Indian Ocean.

Washington’s war preparations are already far advanced, with Taiwan, which the US is now rapidly arming and seeking to transform into a “giant weapons depot,” only the most prominent in a long series of potential flashpoints. US military and political leaders openly speak about the inevitability of a military showdown, with some saying it could break out by 2025.

The Indian bourgeoisie, for its part, is doubling down on its anti-China strategic partnership with US imperialism, even as Washington’s instigation and escalation of the war with Russia over Ukraine demonstrates that it is ready to risk nuclear conflict to advance its predatory global ambitions.

With the support of the entire political establishment, India’s Narendra Modi-led far-right BJP government has used the flaring up of border tensions with China in 2020 to massively expand India’s bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral military-strategic ties with the US, Japan and Australia. This includes the signing of reciprocal logistical supply agreements with Tokyo and Canberra and the expansion of India’s annual Malabar naval exercise to include the navies of all four Quad partners. It has also intensified its collaboration with the US to counter Chinese influence across South Asia, from tiny Maldives to Nepal and Bangladesh.

With an economy one-fifth the size of China’s, the Indian ruling class is also desperately hoping to profit from the plans of the US, Japan and other western imperialist powers to weaken China by pressing their domestically based transnational corporations to relocate production facilities and develop India as an alternative cheap-labour production chain hub.

US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, accompanied by a high-powered delegation of global CEOs, visited India from March 7 to 10

to discuss supply chain “resiliency” and diversification, and press India to remove remaining barriers to foreign investment and profit repatriation in key economic sectors.

Earlier, in January, Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his American counterpart, Jake Sullivan, held the first high-level dialogue on the Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) that Biden and Modi announced when they met in Tokyo in May 2022 on the sidelines of the first-ever face-to-face summit of Quad government leaders. The ICET aims to promote Indo-US cooperation in the development of new technologies deemed crucial in securing US military and economic supremacy and global hegemony, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, 6G, biotechnology, space and semiconductors.

Underscoring the breadth of Washington’s ambitions, the US Ambassador to NATO, Julianne Smith, told an April 1 news conference that Washington would welcome India’s entry to NATO. “[T]he message that has already been sent back to India,” said Smith, “is that NATO alliance is certainly open to more engagement with India, should that country take interest in pursuing that.”

India’s participation in NATO is not currently in the cards. New Delhi has resisted pressure from Washington that it line up full-square behind the NATO war on Russia, with which it has longstanding close ties dating back to the Cold War, for both political and strategic reasons, including continuing dependence on Moscow for arms supplies and support for its nuclear industry.

But the Indian ruling class, through the “global strategic alliance” it struck with Washington under George W. Bush and has since massively expanded on the full understanding that it was transforming India into a frontline state in Washington’s war preparations against China, has provided American imperialism with pivotal support, thereby emboldening it in its reckless aggression around the world, including against Russia. At the same time, New Delhi has used US strategic favours and support to pursue its own predatory great-power ambitions, including in its reactionary strategic conflicts with Pakistan and China, which could themselves spiral into nuclear conflict.

The mobilization of the Indian working class against the Indo-US alliance is a pivotal element in the building of a global working class anti-war movement to disarm the world’s rival bourgeoisies—who have plunged the world into an ever widening and explosive maelstrom of war and aggression—through socialist revolution.



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