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India and China remain on knife edge as war tensions continue

Four days after Indian and Chinese troops fought a bloody battle on rugged Himalayan terrain that left dozens dead, tensions between New Delhi and Beijing remain acute.

Both governments and their militaries continue to insist that they want to de-escalate their most serious border crisis since they fought a limited, month-long war in 1962.

However, each has accused the other of provoking Monday night's clash, which saw Indian and Chinese troops attack each other with stones, knives, and iron rods laced with barbed wire at high altitude, near the "rooftop of the world." And each continues to insist that the other must stand down, by pulling back forces that have traversed at multiple places onto "their side" of the Line of Actual Control (LAC)—the un-demarcated, temporary border to which New Delhi and Beijing have agreed to adhere, pending final settlement of their rival territorial claims.



Indian army officers wearing masks as a precaution against the coronavirus walk past the funeral pyre of their colleague Colonel B. Santosh Babu, at Suryapet, about 140 kilometers (87.5 miles) from Hyderabad, India, Thursday, June 18, 2020. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

To back up their opposed demands, both India and China are pouring additional military personnel and war materiel into their border regions. India has placed all Army and Airforce units deployed to police its 3,500-kilometer (2,175 mile) border with China on “the highest alert.”

According to news reports, following consultations with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the Indian military’s high command has instructed its border forces to aggressively repel any Chinese “incursions” onto territory India claims falls on its side of the LAC. The “days of walk-in options for the (Chinese) People’s Liberation Army (PLA) are over,” official sources told the *Times of India*. “Our soldiers will not move back. There will be no compromise on our territorial integrity.” The PLA, the sources continued, will be forced to “bear losses” for “every attempt it makes to grab territory.”

New Delhi is also reportedly considering repudiating a decades-old agreement with Beijing that firearms shall not be used in the event of an encounter between their border forces. From all accounts, neither side breached this agreement during Monday’s six-hour skirmish, which left 20 Indian and an undetermined number of Chinese soldiers dead.

In what was clearly meant as a message for New Delhi, the PLA’s Tibet Military Command announced Tuesday that it had conducted a series of war drills near the border with India. Citing a PLA news release, chinanews.com reported that “live-fire drills recently took place” in the Tibetan Plateau, “featuring multiple types of combat forces including long-range artillery systems, ground-to-air missile systems, special operative forces, army aviation troops, electronic countermeasure forces and engineering and anti-chemical warfare troops in a joint operation group.”

“Western intelligence officials,” the *New York Times* reported Thursday, estimate that “the chances of more fighting” between Indian and Chinese forces “remained high, especially with thousands of opposing troops eyeball-to-eyeball along a remote front line that has erupted in violence several times.”

Yesterday evening, according to the *Hindu*, as per an agreement reached the day before at a meeting between Indian and Chinese military commanders in the Galwan Valley, site of

Monday's clash, China returned 10 Indian military personnel, including a Lieutenant Colonel and three Majors, who had been captured during the bloody skirmish.

India's and China's foreign ministers, who had a testy telephone exchange Wednesday, also announced yesterday that a previously-planned trilateral meeting with Russia's foreign minister will go ahead on June 23.

Beyond pro forma remarks about the desirability of de-escalation, Washington has been conspicuously silent about the eruption of fighting between India and China. In the weeks prior to Monday's clash in the Galwan Valley, however, Washington had visibly intruded into the border dispute, with both the Trump administration and leading Democrats publicly denouncing China for aggression.

While the Sino-Indian border dispute is decades old and tensions have waxed and waned, undoubtedly the principal factor driving the current crisis is India's integration over the past decade-and-a-half into US imperialism's incendiary and rapidly escalating military-strategic offensive against China. Building on the Indo-US "global strategic partnership" struck by the previous Congress Party-led government, Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime has enmeshed India in an ever-expanding web of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral military-strategic ties with the US and its principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia.

Moreover, in response to the global economic crisis triggered by the pandemic and the consequent surge in geopolitical tensions, above all between the US and China, the Modi government and the Indian bourgeoisie have made clear they intend to expand their anti-China alliance with US imperialism. Last month, as the border crisis with China was developing, Modi announced that a key element in his government's economic "revival plan" will be to work with the Trump administration to persuade US companies, under pressure from Washington, to "de-couple" from China and make India their alternate production chain hub. He also announced the scrapping of all limits on foreign investment in defence production, with the aim of attracting US arms manufacturers to use India as a cheap-labour platform.

Washington likely was taken aback by the speed with which events on the Sino-India border have spun out of control, raising the prospect of war between the world's two most populous countries and rival nuclear powers. Such a war, even were it to remain limited to border areas—far from a certainty—would have a momentous impact on world geopolitics.

But Washington also likely calculates that by remaining silent, at least for the present, it can reap dividends.

Powerful sections of India's military-security establishment and corporate elite have been pressing for New Delhi to abandon any pretense of "strategic autonomy" and formally align with Washington in an anti-China security grouping. These forces are now using the India-China border clash to seek to overcome widespread popular opposition, above all in the working class, to harnessing India to US imperialism.

The *Hindustan Times* urged New Delhi Wednesday to "double down on its partnership with the US," and make the Quad (a US-led security dialogue involving India, Japan, and Australia) "a more permanent arrangement, and be a part of any club that seeks to contain Chinese power."

One day after calling for India to hit back against China economically, diplomatically and militarily, including by responding "to Chinese encroachments with its own cross-LAC manoeuvres," the *Times of India* yesterday declared, "If India definitively joins the (US) camp, it will be Beijing's loss not New Delhi's."

The BJP government has already begun to draw up a list of economic reprisals against China. Meanwhile it is seeking to whip up a bellicose mood, organizing, along with its Hindu right allies and former military officers, anti-China protests, including boycotts of Chinese goods.

Due to the incompetence, negligence and class avarice of the BJP government and the Indian bourgeoisie, the country is facing a twin social catastrophe: a COVID-19 pandemic that is growing like wildfire, and more than 100 million unemployed. Modi is desperately seeking to use the war crisis to whip up chauvinism, so as to deflect social tensions outward, promote reaction, and confuse and divide the working class,

The Congress Party and other ostensible opposition forces are entirely complicit in this. The Congress has responded to the war crisis with vitriolic denunciations of China and accusations that the BJP government has failed to "defend" India and allowed "unarmed" troops to be killed by the PLA. Meanwhile, their close allies, the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India will demonstrate that they stand with the Indian state by participating in an all-party meeting today, convened by Modi and his BJP.

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