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By Keith Jones
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India and China rush troops, weaponry to disputed border region

India and China are continuing to rush troops and weaponry to their common border region, where a bloody clash on the night of Monday, June 15 left dozens of Indian Army and Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) personnel dead.

In a development fraught with global geopolitical consequences, Washington has very publicly intervened in the dispute, accusing China of "aggression" and tying it to the US-fomented South China Sea conflict.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denounced China as a "rogue actor" in an online speech Friday to the so-called Copenhagen Democracy Summit. "The PLA," said Pompeo, "has escalated border tensions with India, the world's most populous democracy. It's militarizing the South China Sea and illegally claiming more territory there, threatening vital sea lanes."

In the six days since their first lethal border clash in 45 years, both New Delhi and Beijing have repeatedly avowed their commitment to a peaceful resolution of the current dispute, which involves tense eye-ball to eye-ball stand-offs at four or more places along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). By mutual agreement, the un-demarcated LAC is supposed to serve as the de facto India-China border, pending final resolution of their competing territorial claims.

However, New Delhi and Beijing's avowals of peaceful intentions have invariably been tied to accusations that the other was responsible for the bloody border clash. Moreover,

each has warned their nuclear-armed neighbor and rival not to underestimate their determination to defend their “sovereignty” and “territorial integrity.”

To underscore this latter point, both governments and their militaries have taken steps to demonstrate that they are preparing in earnest for future clashes and the possibility of an all-out war.

On Sunday, following a meeting of Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, and the heads of the army, air force and navy, government sources revealed those commanding troops along the LAC have been given a “free hand” in responding to Chinese “aggression.”

A “defence source,” told the *Hindu*, “Forces have a free hand to assess the situation and to take action required. While we don’t want escalation but if it happens by the other side, appropriate action will be taken. Clear cut instructions to this effect were given.”

Even prior to yesterday’s meeting, India let it be known that it is changing its rules of engagement and repudiating a decades-long agreement with China that their forces not resort to gun-fire in the event of a border encounter. Last Monday night’s six-hour clash, described in some news reports as a “medieval battle,” was fought with stones, knives, and iron rods studded with barbed-wire

India has placed on the “highest alert” the 300,000 troops it has arrayed along the 3,500-kilometer (2,175-mile) LAC, which traverses sparsely populated, desolate Himalayan terrain. It has also moved fighter jets, Boeing CH-47 Chinook heavy lift helicopters, and newly acquired, US-made AH-64E Apache attack helicopters to forward bases near its northern border

India’s navy has been placed on alert for encounters with Chinese ships and submarines in the Indian Ocean. Underscoring the extent to which the Indian military has been integrated into US imperialism’s military-strategic offensive against China, a second government source told the *Hindu*, “We are already present near (the) Malacca (Straits) and we can operate with the US and other Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Navies if required.”

Also on Sunday, the Indian government announced that all three branches of the India’s military have been authorized to make emergency purchases of weaponry and ammunition.

These official steps to ready India for war have been accompanied by a torrent of denunciations of Chinese “aggression” and “treachery” from political leaders and the

corporate media. The Indian press is full of bellicose commentary much of it from former Indian military personnel. “We can easily fight the war at two fronts,” asserted former Indian Army Chief V.P. Malik, referring to the possibility that Pakistan could be drawn into a Sino-Indian war on Beijing’s side. “We should not worry too much, our forces have the capability.”

Beijing has been more circumspect about its military response to the border crisis. But it has left no doubt that it is strengthening its military capabilities near the border.

“The adventurous acts of the Indian army,” declared China in a statement issued by its Indian embassy Saturday, “have seriously undermined the stability of the border areas, threatened the lives of Chinese personnel, violated the agreements reached between the two countries on the border issue and breached the basic norms governing international relations.”

While focusing its fire on the spate of recent Trump administration provocations against China, the government-aligned, Chinese Communist Party-owned *Global Times* has also published a series of bellicose, nationalist tirades against India, highlighting China’s much larger economy and military prowess.

“The gap between China’s and India’s strength is clear,” declared the first of several *Global Times* editorials on the last Monday’s clash. China, it continued, “does not and will not create conflicts, but it fears no conflicts either. ... We will not trade our bottom line with anyone.”

In a further indication of how intractable the conflict is, the *Global Times* has counselled Chinese companies active in India not only to place their investment and production plans “on hold,” but “to start thinking about diversifying their investments” and seeking “alternate markets.”

India and China compete for markets, resources and strategic advantage across Asia, the Middle East and Africa. But if their strategic rivalry has become so explosive, it is because over the past two decades it has become ever more deeply entwined with the conflict between the US and China. Successive US administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, have sought to build up India as a counterweight to China; and the craven Indian bourgeoisie has been more than ready to aid and abet Washington in its anti-China offensive in exchange for “strategic favours.”

Powerful sections of India’s ruling elite have been pressing for India to abandon any pretense of “strategic autonomy” and formally join a US-led anti-China alliance along

with Washington's principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia. They are now seeking to exploit the border crisis to overcome popular opposition, above all from the working class, to harnessing India to US imperialism.

"This is an opportunity for India," wrote former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao last week, "to align its interests much more strongly and unequivocally with the US as a principal strategic partner and infuse more energy into relations with Japan, Australia, and ASEAN."

India's far-right Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government sees in the border crisis a means to deflect massive social tensions outward and whip up bellicose nationalism, so as to push forward with its reactionary plans to "revive" India's economy. The principal elements of this plan are what Modi has called a "quantum jump" in pro-investor "reforms," and, working with the Trump administration, to lure US companies under pressure from Washington to decamp from China to make India their alternate production-chain hub.

As around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the incompetence and criminal negligence of the ruling elite. The BJP government's ill-prepared 10-week lockdown resulted in tens of millions of impoverished workers losing their jobs and all income, while failing to halt the spread of the virus. Indeed, this month, as India "reopens" its economy, the number of COVID-19 cases has risen by more than 235,000 to 425,000, while deaths have increased by more than two-and-a-half times to 13,700.

In pursuing its reactionary border conflict with China and using the war crisis as an instrument of class war, the BJP government can count on the cowardice and complicity of the so-called opposition parties. On Friday, Modi convened a virtual all-party leaders' conference where all the parties—including the Congress Party and the two Stalinist parliamentary parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India—pledged their support for the Modi government in the confrontation with China.

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