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In a provocative move, India deploys 50,000 more troops to its disputed border with China

India has deployed 50,000 more troops to its disputed Himalayan border with China, action it claims is in response to a Chinese military buildup.

Last year the rival nuclear-armed powers came the closest to all-out war since they fought a month-long border war in 1962. This included a bloody pitched battle on a mountain ridge in the Galwan Valley on the night of June 15, 2020, in which 20 Indian and 4 Chinese soldiers died, and an Indian military operation in late August that saw thousands of Indian troops seize a series of mountain ridges near Pangong Tso lake, which forms part of the current de facto border between India and China. Indian officials subsequently admitted that this highly provocative action, reportedly facilitated by US satellite intelligence, could easily have resulted in a violent clash with Chinese troops spiralling into war.



Tanks on the banks of Pangong Tso lake region, in Ladakh along the India-China border on Wednesday, Feb. 10, 2021. (Indian Army via AP)

With its most recent troop deployments, India now has at least 200,000 and, according to some reports, as many as 250,000 troops arrayed along its northern border. According to a report published by Bloomberg last week, the additional troops have been deployed to at least five bases along the full breadth of India's more than 3,000-kilometre (2,000 mile) border with China. 20,000 of them have been deployed to Leh in Indian-held Ladakh. Along with the adjacent Chinese-held Aksai Chin, eastern Ladakh has been the focal point of the current flare-up in the Sino-Indian border dispute.

India is also in the midst of a crash infrastructure building campaign in its border regions, developing new fortifications, airstrips, and road and rail links to swiftly move troops and supplies. Late last summer, when it took possession of the first of the 35 Rafale fighter jets it has purchased from France, the Indian Air Force made a point of immediately deploying them over Indian-held Ladakh. India has also established a new 18 fighter-jet squadron aimed against China based in Ambala in the north Indian state of Haryana and intends to soon establish a similar squadron at its Hasimara air base in West Bengal to police the eastern section of its border with China.

Citing people "familiar with the matter," the Bloomberg report said the Indian military has positioned itself to assume a much more aggressive stance. "Whereas previously," the report explained, "India's military presence was aimed at blocking Chinese moves, the

redeployment will allow Indian commanders more options to attack and seize territory in China if necessary, in a strategy known as ‘offensive defense.’” The report added that Indian forces are now more mobile. This is due to recently acquired US-made helicopters, which can ferry soldiers and artillery including the British-made M777 howitzer from Himalayan “valley to valley.”

India’s officer corps and its government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his far-right Bharatiya Janata Party, have repeatedly boasted that India is ready to confront China. Last week, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pledged India would “give a befitting reply if provoked.” With the world’s fourth largest military budget, ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, India certainly possesses weapons of mass destruction, meaning that any Sino-Indian conflict, even if it erupts due to miscalculation and is initially confined to their respective border regions, threatens to rapidly spiral into an unparalleled catastrophe for the people of Asia and the world.

But while the two countries have roughly the same size population, China’s economy is more than four times bigger and in most technological domains China eclipses India. The deplorable state of Indian infrastructure has been highlighted by the catastrophic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that, according to the official gross undercount, has sickened more than 30 million people and killed more than 400,000. Although India does have significant vaccine-manufacturing capacity, to date just 5 percent of India’s population has been fully vaccinated.

New Delhi’s aggressive stance in the current border conflict with China is directly bound up with the support and encouragement it is receiving from Washington.

As per an agreement between Beijing and New Delhi, Indian Army and Chinese People’s Liberation Army officers held disengagement talks in the fall and early winter, and the two sides pulled back forward deployed troops near Pangong Tso lake. However, these talks stalled shortly after Joe Biden was sworn in as US president.

On taking office, Biden lost no time in making clear that under his Democratic administration Washington will intensify its economic, diplomatic, and military-strategic offensive against China, and that India and the Indian Ocean are central to US strategy to thwart China’s “rise,” if necessary, through war. In March, Biden convened the first-ever

heads of government meeting of the Quad, a “strategic dialogue” quasi-military alliance, led by the US and including India and its most important Asia-Pacific treaty allies, Japan and Australia. Soon after, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin became the first high-level Biden administration official to visit New Delhi. In a gesture meant to underline the importance India attaches to expanding military-strategic cooperation with Washington, Austin was accorded an audience with Modi.

Since last July, impromptu military exercises between the Indian navy and US aircraft task forces passing near to India have become virtually routine, in what is an unmistakable message to China, whose economy is highly dependent on Mideast oil and Indian Ocean-borne exports to Europe, Africa and much of Asia. The most recent such exercise was on June 23-24, when the USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group, which is based in Japan, passed by India en route to the North Arabian Sea, where it is supporting the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. According to an Indian Navy press release, the exercise was aimed at honing the two militaries’ “war-fighting skills” and enhancing “their interoperability as an integrated force,” and involved practicing antisubmarine warfare.

Washington has played an intrusive role in the current Indo-China border dispute almost from its outset in May of last year. In a marked contrast with the 2017 Doklam standoff, when Indian and Chinese troops confronted each other on a Himalayan plateau claimed by both China and Bhutan, the US made no pretence to neutrality, quickly labelling China the “aggressor.” Moreover, it has further upped the ante by linking the Indo-China border dispute to its accusations of “illegal” Chinese actions in the South China Sea. Opposing Chinese “expansionism” in the South China Sea is one of the principal pretexts the US has advanced for its massive buildup of military capabilities in the Indo-Pacific and for its provocative “freedom of navigation” exercises off China’s shores.

With strong support from India’s venal capitalist elite, the Modi-led BJP government has followed the path blazed by its Congress Party-led predecessors and integrated India ever more completely into the US offensive against China, on the gamble that by allying with a crisis-ridden American imperialism it can advance New Delhi’s great-power ambitions. Toward this end, during its first six years in power, it threw open India’s ports and airbases for use by US military forces for “rest and resupply,” signed other agreements that the Pentagon insists are necessary for joint military operations, and adopted Washington’s provocative stance on the South China Sea.

But over the past 14 months, roiled by the pandemic and an unprecedented contraction of India's already troubled economy, the Modi government has taken all of this to a new level. The border dispute with China has been invoked to justify a massive expansion of India's bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral ties with the US, and its closest regional allies, Japan and Australia. India has also intensified its collaboration with the US in countering Chinese influence across South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, including by dropping its opposition to Washington signing a defence cooperation with the Maldives, an Indian Ocean archipelago New Delhi hitherto sought to keep firmly under its thumb.

In a further indication of the extent to which India has been incorporated into the US strategic offensive against China, intelligence officials from India and Japan joined a meeting of the US-led Five Eyes global spying operation last fall focused on countering China.

For offering the Indian people up as satraps for US imperialism, the Modi government and Indian bourgeoisie hope to receive their reward in the form of greater international prominence, as in the recent invitation to Modi to attend last month's G-7 summit in England, assistance in making India a rival production-chain hub to China, and major investments by US arms manufacturers.

Like Washington and other governments and ruling elites, India's are also whipping up animosity against China as a means of deflecting anger over their disastrous mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent weeks, the Indian media has given prominence to the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory of the origins of COVID-19 first promoted by the fascist Trump and recently revived by the Biden administration.

Beijing's official response to India's aggressive new border deployments has been relatively muted. Its official representatives have insisted that the situation remains stable and repeated calls for the two countries to resolve the current dispute through talks. "The words and deeds of the two countries should be aiming at cooling the situation and promoting mutual trust, not the reverse," said Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin. However, the Beijing regime, which represents the oligarchy created by the Stalinist Communist Party's restoration of capitalism, has no solution to the US-led imperialist offensive. It oscillates between whipping up Chinese national chauvinism and

pursuing its own military buildup and desperately trying to appease Washington through concessions.

Over the past two decades, the reactionary strategic conflict between India and Pakistan, for decades one of Beijing's closest allies, and the Sino-Indian border dispute have become inextricably enmeshed with the ever-deepening US-Chinese geostrategic rivalry, enormously adding to the explosive character of all three. To prevent decrepit capitalism from plunging humanity into a global conflagration, the international working class must be politically mobilized to disarm the rival nationally based bourgeois cliques through socialist revolution.

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