

China and Pakistan Military tests flank India, boost tensions in Asia

China and Pakistan this week each demonstrated their military might at a time of heightened tensions with neighboring India.

The Chinese and Pakistani governments have close military and economic ties, and both are involved in border disputes with India: The contested Kashmir region has been a flashpoint between India and Pakistan for decades, and claims over land on the Sino-Indian border have led to confrontation in recent weeks.

China's decision to carry out live-fire military drills near its border region of Tibet nearly coincided with Pakistan's test launch of a nuclear-capable missile this week.

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"We have repeatedly said the Indian troops...illegally crossed the delimited Sikkim section of the China-India boundary mutually recognized by the two sides," a spokesman for China's foreign ministry, Geng Shuang, said Thursday during a routine press briefing.

"That is essentially different from the previous border frictions and stand-offs between the two border troops in undefined areas," Shuang said. "India's trespass into China's territory has changed the status quo which can only be recovered when the Indian side withdraws."

Shuang's comments referred to an incident last month when China said Indian soldiers crossed the international boundary between the Indian state of Sikkim and the Chinese region of Tibet, sparking a verbal dispute. India has since accused China of compromising the security of nearby Bhutan, an ally of India's, by constructing roads close to the border region shared by the three nations. China has dismissed these claims and has, in turn, accused India of militarizing its side of the border, Reuters reported.

Amid the heightened tensions, The Global Times, a nationalist outlet aligned with

China's ruling Communist Party, urged Beijing to "reconsider its stance" over its recognition of Sikkim as an Indian state, which China only recognized in 2003, The Hindustan Times reported. Indian concerns were exacerbated by China's recent live-fire drills in the mountainous border region. The exercises were reportedly intended to test the high-altitude capabilities of its new Type 96B tank and assess "battlefield environment analysis, combat operations command, combat coordination and other real combat and live-fire shooting training," according to a report published by China's state-run Xinhua News Agency and translated by the Times of India.

While India deals with military tension on its far eastern border, it was called out by name by its northern rival, Pakistan, which has been independent from India since 1947 and since that time has fought four wars with its longtime foe. One of the most contentious disputes is over the territory of Kashmir, which lies on Pakistan and India's mutual border and has been the source of a number of violent and even fatal incidents over the decades.

Escalations between Pakistan and India risk far-reaching consequences, because both countries possess nuclear weapons and neither is a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Earlier this week, one of Pakistan's top generals flaunted his country's defense capabilities by testing an advanced version of its surface-to-surface, nuclear-capable NASR missile and dismissing India's so-called Cold Start doctrine of preventing a Pakistani nuclear attack through conventional preemptive strikes.

"NASR has put cold water on Cold Start," Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa told troops with the Army Strategic Force, according to a press release issued Wednesday. It added that Pakistan did not seek war but only to protect against "a highly militarized and increasingly belligerent neighbor."

Both China and Pakistan have called for peace in the region and displayed aversion to instigating a wider regional conflict. Since 2013, the two countries have embarked on creating the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a multibillion-dollar project designed to improve trade infrastructure between the nations. The project corresponds with China's greater Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to reestablish and expand historic land and sea trading routes through Asia to the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

China's decision to include Pakistan as a hub for this initiative has the potential to make the South Asian country a global economic leader, according to experts cited in The Express Tribune, a Pakistani outlet affiliated with The New York Times.

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