

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین یوم ویر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<https://journal-neo.org/2017/09/02/upon-evading-a-major-conflict-with-china-india-gets-back-to-political-games/>

Upon Evading a Major Conflict with China, India Gets Back to its Political Games

Vladimir Terehov

9/2/2017



The face-off between India and China had global implications, but even now tensions have not gone anywhere.

The possibility of a direct military confrontation between China and India on the Doklam plateau now seems to have faded.

This became clear once the leading Indian newspaper Times of India reported that according to India's Foreign Ministry, Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded positively to the invitation presented by China's leader Xi Jinping to attend the next summit of the BRICS member states, which would start at the beginning of September.

Secondly, which is even more important to emphasize, is that the same article announced the withdrawal of Indian troops from around the Doklam plateau, effectively ending the 73-day confrontation between the two Asian giants over the tiny stretch of land.

It can be asserted quite confidently that the invitation wasn't issued until the very moment that President Xi received reliable guarantees of the forthcoming withdrawal of the Indian troops.

Since mid-August, the majority of media sources weren't discussing Modi's participation in the BRICS summit, focusing on the very real prospects of an armed conflict between the two major nuclear powers instead. Such a prospect loomed once allegations about a possible ultimatum being drafted by Beijing began circulating in the international press.

The standoff was particularly dangerous, since unlike ongoing tensions on the Korean peninsula, which however dangerous are still tightly controlled by major players on both sides of the conflict – the US and China – similar tensions between India and China can lead to graver consequences.

Both Chinese and Indian comments regarding the Times of India report are noteworthy. The first statements by the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China fully corresponded to the initial position of the country's leadership in resolving this conflict: India must withdraw its combat units "from our territory" without expecting any expressions of gratitude for this.

In a press release presented to the general public by Beijing it was announced Chinese border guards would continue patrolling the Doklam plateau to ensure the completion of ongoing road construction in the area. It was also emphasized that in the process of resolving the conflict there was no backroom discussions held and any repeat of the incident would inevitably lead to a war.

However, further statements were softened noticeably, and aspects of opening favorable prospects to the economic cooperation between the Asian giants have been finally taken front stage.

This aspect of Chinese-Indian relations was presented by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi as the right way of disarming a dangerous conflict between China and India in the Himalayas. The very fact that this standoff has been put behind by both states was presented by the Chinese Global Times as "a victory for Asia".

As an example of the very real possibility of coordinating within the world economy, a joint Sino-Indian initiative was put forward within the WTO framework regarding possible support toward the agriculture industry. The initiative provided a direct alternative to proposals tabled by leading Western countries.

The softening of Chinese rhetoric should be attributed to the obvious desire of Beijing to both maintain at least some level of bilateral ties with India established before the conflict in the Himalayas, and, secondly, not to aggravate New Delhi's possible drift towards China's geopolitical opponents.

Judging by the comments that Indian readers would provide to the articles regarding the Doklam plateau incident, they perceive New Delhi's steps as a defeat of their country. As for Modi's trip to China it was portrayed as a move "into the teeth of a Chinese dragon." For sure, India's Prime Minister could not ignore such sentiments and until the very last moment the prospect of his meeting with the Chinese leader within the BRICS framework remained unclear.

But the understandable negative emotions of ordinary Indian citizens are a direct result of the extreme simplification of the motivation that governed New Delhi in its decisions. It seems more likely that, after sacrificing a pawn upon finding itself in a tight corner, it continues the struggle to improve its strategic positions versus China.

By finding itself in a face-off on the Doklam plateau with Beijing, New Delhi faced a prospect of real war with China, the outcome of which would hardly differ much from the conflict of 1962, but also a dilemma of a long-term strategic scale: finally throwing back the rhetoric about an independent foreign policy and fully integrating itself in what is still referred to as "the West"; or maintain a certain freedom of maneuver in relations with alternative global forces, for example, playing an active part in BRICS.

However, in India one cannot fail to take into account the diminishing role of the West. It is unlikely that aggravating tensions between leading Asian states will make the so-called West any stronger, even though such tensions are being eagerly pursued by political forces in America.

The fact that the government of Narendra Modi has chosen the path of a complex strategic game with China is evidenced by the trip of the Indian Prime Minister to Myanmar, undertaken immediately after the end of the BRICS summit. Previously, various aspects of the US-China struggle for influence over this strategically important country has been discussed and in recent years, India has itself become actively involved in this struggle.

The next notable event will be connected with the next visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to India, which will be held in mid-September. Against the backdrop of a continuing "political trace" left behind by the incident on the plateau, the reports in China saw this trip as evidence of Japan's support of India, as well as the further strengthening of Japan-India relations with obvious anti-Chinese implications.

It's a given that India's leaders need no advice, but it seems that the appeal of China's proposal to transform the competition into a win-win partnership is pretty obvious.

However, one can also say the same about China's relations with Japan and US foreign policy. There's obviously no state that can find friends without improving its economic ties with other players.

