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Executive Summary

Impact of India-China Border Dispute on the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy



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*This article is written based on the author's personal opinions
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Executive Summary

This article specifically uses an expression of “India-China” instead of “Sino-Indian,” because the author focuses on changes in India’s China policy.

Issue of India-China Border Dispute

- Since the 19th century, the United Kingdom, a former colonial power, endeavored to confirm the border between India and China that runs 3,488km across the subcontinent. Since the independence, India and China (both the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party regime) also attempted to finalize their border, but their efforts have proved futile.
- Multiple military clashes between India and China continuously occurred near border areas for more than a century due to the ambiguous lines, and the two countries repeated negotiations to amend conflicts until a recent date.

Clash in Ladakh

- On June 15, 2020, a deadly clash between the Indian and Chinese armies occurred along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which plays India’s de facto border with China. The incident took place in Ladakh’s Galwan River Valley, the northeastern area of India that is located in the middle of the LAC, and resulted in over 90 casualties on both sides.
- After the clash in Ladakh, the two countries are attempting to control their own sides and to amend the situation as they did in the past.
- However, a tension between India and China has heightened as both countries assert that the other side crossed the LAC first and continue to strengthen their military powers in border areas.

□ Policy Changes of India and China After the Clash in Ladakh

- India: Changes in India's China policy is apparent. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed tough remarks against China and has ordered to speed up India's arms buildup in attempt to hold China in check. Furthermore, anti-Chinese sentiment seems to be spreading throughout the society in general.
- China: China is showing relatively calm responses. Nevertheless, China has set India as a competing rival rather than a cooperative partner, and it has repeatedly exposed its territorial ambitions.

□ Prospect: Strengthening of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

- Changes in India's China policy are in line with the U.S. China policy that intends to contain and pressure China. And thus, such change in position highly suggests India's active participation in the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy and may initiate formal activation of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), a central security forum for the Indo-Pacific strategy among 4 countries—the U.S., Japan, Australia and India, and a possible extension to QUAD PLUS.
- Nonetheless, the activation of QUAD directly clashes with China's One Belt One Road (一帶一路) Initiative and may result in the escalation of military tension in the area.
- Current situation demands South Korea's decision on its position to the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. In the end, the ROK government would have to re-arrange its relations with the U.S. and China with the decision to support or participate in the Indo-Pacific strategy. ❖

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.