

Tensions mount between India and Pakistan

Keith Jones
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Relations between India and Pakistan have rapidly degenerated in the two weeks since the Indian government detonated a nuclear device.

Government officials and political leaders from both countries have made numerous bellicose threats, while Indian and Pakistani troops have exchanged artillery, mortar and small arms fire along the "Line of Control" in Kashmir -- the Himalayan region that was at the center of two of the three Indo-Pak wars.

Speaking to reporters May 18, Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani warned that Pakistan will face "dire consequences" if it continues to support a separatist insurgency in Kashmir. Added Advani, India's "decisive step to become a nuclear state has brought about a qualitatively new stage in Indo-Pak relations, particularly in finding a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem." The Home Minister said the Indian government may soon give its troops a green light to engage in "hot pursuit" of the Kashmiri rebels, that is to cross into the Pakistani-held part of Kashmir.

Advani's remarks were subsequently echoed by Indian government officials and leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (the Indian People's Party), which dominates India's ruling coalition. On Friday, for example, BJP vice-president K.L. Sharma said Pakistan should be "prepared for India's wrath" if it persists with its current "anti-India policy". Meanwhile, India's Tourism and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Madan Lal Khurana issued a statement denying that he had mused about the possibility of a fourth Indo-Pak War in a speech in which he vowed that India was ready to pay "any cost" to end the "proxy war" in the Kashmir.

The week ended with the Indian Prime Minister's office announcing that control of the Department of Jammu and Kashmir Affairs has been transferred to Advani's Home Ministry. In explaining the decision, Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee's senior advisor, Pramod Mahajan, asserted that "the Prime Minister shares all

views expressed by Mr. Advani on all issues."

Significantly, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir and head of the oldest political formation in Kashmir, the Kashmir-based National Conference, accompanied Vajpayee on a tour of India's nuclear test site, Pokhran II, May 20. The National Conference has traditionally been a political adversary of the BJP, for it favors increased autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir while the BJP has long-agitated for the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which gives the state special status. Following the tour, Abdullah declared, "If you don't have the strength, you cannot speak of peace."

Pakistan has engaged in sabre-rattling and provocations of its own. Following Advani's remarks, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif promised his government "would not ignore these threats," then placed Pakistan's armed forces on red alert. Asked whether Pakistan would defy US pressure and stage its own nuclear test, Sharif said, "Had the world punished India, I would have told my people that now there is no justification to detonate our nuclear device ... but that is not happening."

Sharif's political opponents, both the Muslim fundamentalists and Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, have staged demonstrations demanding the immediate detonation of a Pakistani nuclear device. The military, which has directly ruled Pakistan for much of the past 50 years, is also believed to be exerting strong pressure on Sharif to proceed with a nuclear test.

Unquestionably, an important aspect of the BJP's aggressive stance against Pakistan is the calculation that Pakistan will find it much more difficult to sustain an arms race. Not only is Pakistan less self-sufficient and therefore less able to withstand international sanctions; it has a much weaker economy. About 80 percent of Pakistan's national budget is spent on the

military and on financing its \$43 billion foreign debt.



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