

# India and Pakistan clash again in disputed Kashmir area

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On Tuesday, India accused the Pakistani army of killing two Indian soldiers on the Line of Control (LoC) between the two countries, in disputed northern Kashmir. India claims the attack took place in Mendhar sector in Poonch on the LoC, 220 kilometers to the west of Jammu city.

This is the second report of skirmishes in two days between India and Pakistan in Kashmir. On Sunday, Pakistan accused the Indian military of raiding its army outpost in the Bagh district of Pakistani-held Azad Kashmir. The Pakistani military claimed one soldier was killed and another wounded. India denied that it crossed the LoC but said it was only retaliating for an artillery attack from the Pakistan side.

Speaking about the Tuesday clash, Indian army spokesman Rajesh Kaila said: “There was a fire fight with Pakistani troops. We lost two soldiers, and one of them has been badly mutilated. The intruders were regular [Pakistan] soldiers and they were 400-500 metres inside our territory.” Kaila said the “intrusion” was “a significant escalation,” and that Pakistani troops took advantage of thick fog.

Speaking on television, Indian Foreign Minister Salman Kurshid condemned the “mutilation” of the dead soldier’s body as an “absolutely unacceptable, ghastly” act. He said there will be a “proportionate response” and will discuss with the defence ministry “after careful consideration of all the details in consultation with the defence ministry.”

Similarly, Indian Defence Minister A.K. Anthony said that the killing of the two soldiers by Pakistani troops was “highly provocative.” He added: “The way in which the Indian soldiers’ bodies were treated is inhuman.” He claimed that there was substantial evidence proving that Pakistani troops were involved. He cut short a meeting in Kolkata and returned to New

Delhi.

Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai summoned Pakistan High Commissioner Salman Bashir to lodge a “strong” protest and demand investigations.

The Pakistani military totally denied India’s claims, however. Its statement noted: “It looks like Indian propaganda to divert world attention from the raid conducted by Indian troops on one of our posts on Sunday, in which one of our soldiers was killed.” In a phone conversation between top military officials on both sides, Pakistan said it “carried out ground verification and checked and found nothing of this sort happened, as is being alleged by India.”

As the two countries trade charges against one other, independent verification of the developments remains difficult. While intermittent border fire has been frequent over the past fifty-five years since the subcontinent was communally partitioned into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan, charges of killing soldiers and of mounting incursions into each other’s territory are rare.

While condemning the attack, Kurshid said: “This [Tuesday clash] seems like a clear attempt to derail the dialogue [between two countries]. We have to find ways in which the dialogue is not sabotaged or destroyed.”

He was referring to the fragile “comprehensive dialogue” between two countries that restarted last February. These talks began in 2003, after both countries were in a brink of war for nearly a year after a terrorist attack on Indian parliament in 2002. The talks were frozen in 2008, when another terror attack launched on Mumbai in 2008.

Over the past few years, and particularly since February after restarting talks, Islamabad and New Delhi have claimed progress in talks on trade,

economic relations, and confidence-building measures on nuclear armaments. There has been, however, no tangible outcome.

Underlying the clashes is the long-standing rivalry between two countries since the communal partition of Indian subcontinent creating Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. Increasing dangerous communal tensions have been used to divert the popular resentment against capitalist rule.

Reacting to the alleged Tuesday clash, Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Arun Jaitley requested that India should deal with Pakistan by drawing red lines. He added: “The gruesome way in which the Pakistani Army killed the two Indian soldiers is a warning to India.”

Since the 1947 war, during which Kashmir was divided between the two countries, two more wars have been fought by India and Pakistan, in 1965 over Kashmir and in 1971 over eastern Pakistan, which became Bangladesh.

The BBC reported that Indian TV channels and press outlets repeatedly likened the Tuesday incident to a “Kargil-type stunt.” This comparison is significant: in 1999, Pakistani army troops and Kashmir secessionists, using severe winter weather conditions entered Kargil Heights, surprising the Indian military. Fighting erupted between the Pakistani and Indian armies as the two countries came to the brink of another major war.

The Pakistani army’s adventure began without the knowledge of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad. As part of its policy shift under President Bill Clinton towards Asia and particularly towards India, however, Washington pressured Pakistan to withdraw its armies from Kargil heights, despite the anger of the Pakistani military.

Kashmir is located in a highly geopolitically sensitive area; it also borders China and Afghanistan. The US “pivot” to Asia and military build-up in the Indo-Pacific region aimed at encircling China has inflamed tensions in the region. The US is seeking to strengthen its strategic partnership with India, while it uses Pakistan for its war in Afghanistan as part of its strategic drive towards Central Asia.

These clashes point to the explosive situation in the region. A conflict would not be limited to South Asia, but could involve all the major powers in the region, with international ramifications.

The US immediately issued a statement on the latest clashes in Kashmir. Pentagon press secretary George Little told reporters that the US hoped “our Pakistani and Indian partners ... can maintain peace and stability in the region.” He added that Washington wants a united struggle against terrorist groups.

Earlier, State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland had urged “both sides to take steps to end exchanges of fire and to resume normal trade and travel across the line of control.”

The so-called partnership against terrorism is nothing but a military and political intervention by Washington to advance its interests. It has destabilised the region, including South Asia, producing not “peace and stability” but disastrous conflicts.

There are other developments in the background. The Indian press regularly reports news of China’s military personnel’s alleged presence in Pakistani-held Kashmir. A top general in India’s northern command is on record saying that the Chinese military is constructing infrastructure in this area, raising concerns over what could happen if a war erupted between India and Pakistan.

China has denied having any military presence in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir.



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