

Bellicose campaign in India against Pakistan after attack on Kashmiri base

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Tensions between South Asia's rival nuclear-armed states, India and Pakistan, are continuing to surge in the wake of the attack that anti-Indian Islamist militants mounted Sunday morning on an Indian military base at Uri, near the Line of Control—the de facto border between India and Pakistan in the disputed Kashmir region.

The attack claimed the lives of 18 Indian soldiers and all four assailants. Some 20 other Indian soldiers remain in critical condition as the result of the most deadly attack on Indian troops in Kashmir in more than two decades.

Before even so much as a cursory investigation, India's government blamed Pakistan, whose military-intelligence apparatus has a long history of supporting armed Islamist Kashmiri groups, for the attack.

This has precipitated a clamour from India's political establishment, led by senior figures in the ruling Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), from current and retired military commanders, and from the corporate media for military action against Pakistan.

BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav has called on India to abandon "strategic restraint" and exact retribution: "For one tooth, the complete jaw." The opposition Congress Party has joined in, with Congress President Sonia Gandhi declaring, "The perpetrators must be severely dealt with along with the forces behind them."

According to press reports, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the senior-most members of his government, and the heads of the military and intelligence agencies are now plotting how to "punish" Pakistan. Cross-border strikes and a cruise missile attack are among the options said to be under consideration.

"We will avenge the killings of our soldiers," an unnamed top military commander told the *Indian Express*. "But we will do so based on cold-blooded professional military assessment, and a timeline of our own choosing, not one dictated by political imperative or the prime-time news cycle."

Pakistan, which has fought three major wars with India since 1947, has long warned that it would view any Indian

incursion into Pakistan as tantamount to a declaration of all-out war.

Predictably, the Pakistani elite has responded to the war cries emanating from New Delhi with its own barrage of bellicose threats. On Monday, according to a Pakistan military press release, Army Chief General Raheel Sharif pointed to the "hostile narrative being propagated by India" in a speech to a corps commanders' conference and vowed that that Pakistan's military is "fully prepared to respond to the entire spectrum of direct and indirect threats."

Yesterday, the Modi government announced it intends to bring the evidence of Pakistani complicity in the Uri attack before the world's governments, as part of a push to isolate and sanction Pakistan as a "terrorist state."

According to reports in the *Times of India*, *Indian Express* and other leading dailies, the government and military are deliberating on whether to conduct "surgical strikes" on the Pakistani bases of anti-Indian Kashmiri groups and on Pakistani army positions used to support the infiltration of insurgents into Indian-administered Kashmir.

These reports add that it is a virtual certainty that Indian troops along the Line of Control (LOC) will mount a lengthy campaign of artillery assaults on Pakistani troops positioned near the (LOC) so as to make the adversary "bleed."

It is also a foregone conclusion that India will intensify its efforts to use the anti-Pakistan insurgency in Balochistan to threaten Pakistan.

Last month, Modi launched a diplomatic offensive targeting Pakistan's human rights violations in Balochistan, while his government signaled that it wants to give greater "political space" to Balochi separatists in India.

Only a few months before his appointment, India's National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, publicly called for India to work for Pakistan's dismemberment, declaring in a February 2014 speech, "You do one more Mumbai [a reference to the 2008 Mumbai terror attack], and you lose Balochistan."

Not mentioned in the press coverage, but undoubtedly a key element in the India government's plan of attack is that

it intends to exploit the Uri assault to politically legitimise even more brutal repression of the mass protests in Indian-administered Kashmir. Since early July, the Kashmir Valley has been convulsed by demonstrations protesting Indian rule and in particular the massive presence of security forces who act with impunity. In the past 10 weeks, security forces have killed more than 80 people, most of them youth, and injured thousands more.

In discussing the options now being considered by Modi and his government, the *Indian Express* reported that in 2008 following the Mumbai terror attack, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan considered air and missile strikes on Lashkar-e-Taibi camps in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. However, ultimately the military concluded that they couldn't be certain the strikes would be successful, nor was the army "prepared for a brief surgical war."

Eight years on, circumstances are different. Rattled by the world economic crisis and the dramatic slowing of India's growth rate, the Indian bourgeoisie brought Modi and his BJP to power to pursue a more aggressive policy against the working class and more aggressively assert India's great-power ambitions.

The 28-month-old BJP government has integrated India ever-more completely into the US's strategic offensive against China and mounted a drive to assert itself as South Asia's regional hegemon.

Adding to the explosiveness of the situation is Pakistan's sense of its strategic vulnerability. In pursuit of an Indo-US "global strategic partnership," Washington has lavished strategic favours on India, including advanced military equipment and negotiating for it a unique status in the world nuclear regulatory regime, enabling it to trade for advanced civilian nuclear equipment and thus concentrate the resources of its indigenous nuclear programme on developing its nuclear arsenal.

Pakistan, meanwhile, has been deprived of its Cold War status as the US's principal South Asia ally and has found itself pressured to do even more to support the American occupation of Afghanistan.

Islamabad has issued increasingly shrill warnings that the US has overturned the balance of power in South Asia, fueling an arms and nuclear arms race and emboldening India. But all to no avail. Washington's priority is harnessing India to its drive to isolate, encircle, and prepare for war against China.

In response to this fundamental shift in South Asian geopolitics, Islamabad has adopted a military strategy that privileges early use of tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons to offset India's advantages in conventional forces.

It has also sought to strengthen its longstanding strategic alliance with China.

From its very origins, Kashmir has been at the center of the reactionary military-strategic conflict between India and Pakistan—a conflict that has resulted in devastating wars and the massive squandering of resources and that has been used to whip up communalism so as to divide and suppress the working class.

The rival states first clashed over Kashmir in 1947-1948 in the immediate aftermath of the communal Partition of the former British Indian Empire into a Muslim-majority Pakistan and a Hindu-majority India. Kashmir was also the principal issue in the 1965 India-Pakistan war and in their 1999 undeclared Kargil war.

However the dangers this conflict poses to the working people of South Asia in the twenty-first century are of a qualitatively new character.

A war between India and Pakistan would be the first-ever direct conflict between rival nuclear-armed states.

Moreover, as the result of the US drive to transform India into a frontline state in its confrontation with China, South Asia has been swept into the maelstrom of great-power conflict.

The toxic strategic rivalry between India and Pakistan has become enmeshed with the US-China conflict, meaning that a major clash between South Asia's principal powers could rapidly draw Washington and Beijing into the conflict on opposite sides with incalculable consequences for the entire world. As it is, Indian military strategy is premised on the possibility it could have to fight a two-front war, against Pakistan and China simultaneously.



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