

# India's Defence Minister reaffirms vow to “punish” Pakistan

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23 September 2016

Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar has reiterated that New Delhi intends to demonstrably “punish” Pakistan for the attack mounted last Sunday by Islamist Kashmiri insurgents on the Uri military base in Indian-administered Kashmir.

Parrikar told a press conference Wednesday he is confident that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vow that “those responsible for this will not go unpunished” will not remain “a mere statement.”

“How to punish,” continued Parrikar, “we have to work out. We are quite serious about it.”

Parrikar was seeking to counteract Indian media reports that had suggested the Modi government is unlikely to order air or cruise missile strikes or cross-border raids because of concerns the military cannot guarantee their success and is insufficiently prepared to repel a Pakistani counterstrike.

In a statement that was meant to convey the government's resolve, but in fact revealed its colossal and criminal recklessness and stupidity, India's Defence Minister pooh-poohed Pakistan's oft-repeated threats to use its recently deployed tactical nuclear weapons should Indian “surgical strikes” or raids precipitate a rapid escalation to all-out war. “The person who has strength,” said Parrikar, “usually makes less noise. Empty vessels make more noise.”

Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—a virulently right-wing, Hindu supremacist party that prior to the 1990s was largely confined to the margins of Indian politics—were brought to power in 2014, by an Indian bourgeoisie rattled by the world economic crisis, in order to intensify the exploitation of the working class and more aggressively pursue its great-power ambitions.

According to reports in India's leading dailies, there is mounting pressure within the government to take military action against Pakistan.

The BJP “top leadership,” reported yesterday's *Indian Express*, “is of the view that on Uri, it needs to demonstrate that it can walk its tough talk on Pakistan and terror and show a ‘discernible difference’ vis a vis the UPA.”

During the 2014 election campaign, Modi and his BJP

denounced the Congress Party-led UPA government for “appeasing” Pakistan and failing to boldly respond to “Pakistan-backed terrorist attacks.”

The *Indian Express* report went on to say, “As the government weighs its options, there is also a realisation within that it needs to address the call for ‘action,’ especially from within its core constituency.”

By “core constituency” the *Express* means the hawkish anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim Hindu right, including the fascistic RSS, which supplies a large part of the BJP cadre. Modi is himself a life-long RSS member.

The *Express* report added that the government “will turn the heat on Pakistan” with a “mix of military, political and diplomatic responses.” Some of these will be covert, or to use the words of the *Express*, will “by their very nature...also need deniability.” In recent days, it has been reported that the government and national security apparatus are considering assassinations of Pakistani intelligence officials whom it believes liaise with Kashmiri insurgent groups and the provision of logistical support to ethno-separatist insurgents in Baluchistan, Pakistan's southwestern and by territory largest province.

Further evidence of the belligerent mood in BJP circles was provided by a comment written by Yashwant Sinha, a foreign and finance minister in the 1998-2004 BJP-led government. Under the title “The Limits of Restraint,” Sinha argued that the government must be ready to run the risk of war.

“Many Indians,” wrote Sinha, “including me, want an appropriate military response from India; not a rash, ill-considered or a hasty one but a cool, well-planned and well-timed response, which will fetch us the desired results.” Acknowledging that such action could lead to rapid escalation, Sinha urged the government to “anticipate the likely Pakistani reaction and prepare its response for the next ten steps...in case the situation deteriorates further and results in full-scale war with Pakistan.”

“We must remember,” he concluded, “that sometimes the road to peace passes through war”.

In a further sign of how close South Asia's rival nuclear-armed states are to war, Islamabad closed parts of Pakistan's airspace Wednesday, forcing Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to cancel all flights to northern Chitral, Gilgit and Skardu. Chitral is in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and the other two cities are in Gilgit-Baltistan, an area of historic Kashmir that India claims is rightfully hers and where anti-Indian Islamist Kashmiri separatists reportedly have bases.

The Pakistani government has refused to provide any explanation for the restrictions. But the Pakistan-based *Express Tribune* reported that the airspace over Gilgit-Baltistan was closed to enable Pakistani warplanes to engage in takeoff and landing rehearsals.

Also, Wednesday Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif addressed the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York and met with a host of world leaders including the prime ministers of Japan, Britain, Turkey and China in an attempt to counter the Indian government's campaign to have Pakistan labelled a "terrorist state."

In his speech to the UNGA, Sharif said Pakistan "wants peace with India." But, he claimed, "India has posed unacceptable preconditions to engage in a dialogue" and has rebuffed Islamabad's insistence that resolving their dispute over Kashmir is key to the "normalization" of relations.

Sharif, the scion of one of Pakistan's richest families and a former protégé of the dictator and avid proponent of Islamization General Zia-ul-Haq, sought to portray himself and the venal Pakistani bourgeoisie as advocates for the oppressed Kashmiris of India—"of the mothers, wives, sisters, and fathers of the innocent Kashmiri children, women and men who have been killed, blinded and injured . . ."

Referring to the mass protests that have convulsed Indian-held Kashmir since the July 8 killing of Burhan Wani, a young leader of a Pakistan-supported Islamist Kashmir insurgent group, Sharif declared, "A new generation of Kashmiris has risen spontaneously against India's illegal occupation—demanding freedom from occupation."

Sharif denounced the presence of more than a half-million Indian security forces in Kashmir and promised to submit to the UN a dossier cataloguing India's "gross and systematic violations of human rights."

Sharif's claim to speak on behalf of the Kashmiri people and attempt to exploit their legitimate grievances with the repressive state of the Indian bourgeoisie is both preposterous and utterly reactionary.

Terrified of social opposition from the impoverished workers and toilers of Pakistan, the Pakistani bourgeoisie has denied them their basic democratic rights, ruling the country for much of its existence as a military dictatorship.

Significantly, in an appeal to Washington, the traditional

patron of the Pakistani bourgeoisie and military, Sharif touted the brutal war the Pakistani Army has waged in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in support of the US occupation of Afghanistan as "the largest, most robust and most successful antiterrorism campaign anywhere in the world, deploying 200,000 of our security forces."

Islamabad oppresses the population of "Azad" or Pakistan Occupied Kashmir—the portion of the former British Indian Empire princely state of Jammu and Kashmir that it captured in the 1947-48 Indo-Pakistani War—and has systematically manipulated and sought to communalize the opposition in Indian-held Kashmir.

The Kashmir conflict is the outcome of the bloody 1947 communal Partition of South Asia, into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India, and the state has become a key "prize" in the reactionary strategic rivalry that the Indian and Pakistani bourgeoisie's have waged ever since.

This rivalry has led to three declared wars and numerous war crises, caused untold death and suffering, squandered resources, has been utilized by the ruling classes of both countries as a key mechanism for promoting communal reaction and dividing the working class, and today threatens the masses of South Asia with nuclear war,

Washington is calling for both India and Pakistan to step back from confrontation, fearing its impact on its drive to reassert its dominance over Eurasia, including the Afghan War and its military-strategic offensives against Russia and China.

Nonetheless, US imperialism bears enormous responsibility for the current war crisis in South Asia. During the Cold War when Pakistan was its principal ally in the region, it encouraged Islamabad in pursuing its rivalry with India. Since the beginning of this century, it has been working systematically to build up India as a counterweight to China. Toward that end, Washington has showered New Delhi with strategic "favours," including ending the embargo on India's nuclear program and giving it access to the Pentagon's most advanced weapons—all the while blithely ignoring Pakistan's warnings that the US has overturned the balance of power in the region, encouraging Indian belligerence and stoking an arms and nuclear arms race.



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