

After Kashmir attack, US media threaten to support India in war with Pakistan

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With India pledging to “punish” Pakistan for the attack Islamist militants mounted on an Indian army base at Uri in the disputed Kashmir region, a concerted campaign has begun in the US media indicating support for aggressive Indian action against Pakistan. Given that India and Pakistan are nuclear-armed states that have fought four bloody wars against each other, this campaign is extraordinarily reckless.

On Wednesday, the *Wall Street Journal* carried a column on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s policy titled “Modi’s Restraint Toward Pakistan.” It wrote, “Modi is practicing restraint for now, but Islamabad can’t rely on that continuing. Modi’s offer of cooperation, if rejected, will become part of a case for making Pakistan even more of a pariah nation than it already is.”

The *Journal* warned, “If the [Pakistani] military continues to send arms and fighters across the border, the Indian Prime Minister will have a strong justification to take action.”

Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* carried an article titled “India has one of the world’s biggest armies, why doesn’t it use it?” The article noted there are “growing calls inside India—now the world’s fastest-growing large economy, with world-power aspirations—to flex its might,” adding: “Pakistan’s international standing is fraying, as is its longstanding alliance with the United States.”

The *Times* also cited former Indian intelligence official Vikram Sood’s criticisms of the current policy of “restraint” towards Pakistan: “What have we got out of this policy, besides more death and more killing? ... We Indians continually say war is not an option. We have to say war is an option, however ugly it is.”

These articles amount to an endorsement of the increasingly bellicose, even hysterical atmosphere that India’s politicians, national-security establishment and media have whipped up in the aftermath of the September 18 Uri attack, which killed 18 Indian soldiers.

On Tuesday, India announced that Modi will not attend the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, a regional meeting of eight South Asian countries, due to be held in Pakistan in November. India also

announced it will maximize its water withdrawals under the 1960 Indus Water Treaty to the legal limit, thereby squeezing Pakistan, which has been plagued by drought and electricity shortages. It also signaled it could abrogate the treaty entirely. Pakistan subsequently warned it would view the water treaty’s abrogation as an “act of war.”

On Sunday, Modi compared the Uri attack to the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war and hailed the nationalist war fever he said was building in India. “There is a lot of value to the anger that people of the country have. This is a symbol of the country’s awakening,” he said. “This anger is of the kind of ‘do something’... When the 1965 war [with Pakistan] broke out and Lal Bahadur Shastri was leading the country, similar was the feeling, anger in the country. There was fever of nationalism. Everybody was keen to do something.”

Similarly, retired Indian Major General G. D. Bakshi issued a hysterical outburst, calling for India to destroy the Pakistani Punjab, apparently with nuclear weapons. “Pakistan is one-fifth the size of India,” Bakshi told an Indian television broadcast. “If we fire even a part of our arsenal, most of it will be on the Pakistani Punjab, from where the Pakistani army comes: Not a crop will grow there for 800 years! ... Let’s stop self-detering ourselves!”

The American media coverage of the latest Indo-Pakistani war crisis indicates that there is a growing faction in Washington, including in the military-security establishment, willing to give India a free hand in dealing with Pakistan.

This has ominous implications for the Indo-Pakistani conflict and represents a very dangerous escalation of the imperialist war drive in Asia.

For well over a decade, Washington has been working to build up India as a counterweight to China, and since the launching of its anti-China “pivot to Asia” in 2011 to make it a “frontline state” in its drive to strategically isolate, encircle and prepare for war with China.

This is stoking not only tensions between Beijing and New Delhi, but also the strategic rivalry between India and

China's main South Asian ally, Pakistan. This rivalry is historically rooted in the reactionary partition of British India at formal independence, in 1947-48, between an explicitly Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu-majority India. Seven decades on, this rivalry threatens to provoke an all-out war, including potentially nuclear war, between India and Pakistan that could rapidly drag in the US and China.

Since the turn of the century, Washington has sought to boost its military-strategic ties with India against China. In 2005, New Delhi and Washington signed a Defence Framework Agreement and under the 2008 Indo-US nuclear accord, India received access to advanced civilian nuclear technology and fuel, enabling it to concentrate its indigenous nuclear program on weapons development. India is purchasing advanced US weapons systems, and last month Washington and New Delhi signed a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) giving the US military routine access to Indian bases and to "forward position" material on them.

One of the principal targets of the fast-developing US-Indian alliance is to the expanding Chinese-Pakistani strategic ties.

China sees Pakistan as a key partner as it steps up its ambitious "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) project aimed at connecting China to Central Asia, the Middle East and in the long run Europe, challenging US hegemony over the Eurasian landmass. Beijing announced the OBOR project in 2013, shortly after Washington announced that it was drawing down its Afghan occupation force.

A key component of OBOR is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The CPEC consists of various oil, road and rail infrastructure projects linking the city of Gwadar in Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan region to China's northwestern region of Xinjiang. In February 2013, Pakistan awarded the operational contract for the Gwadar port to China. The CPEC has major strategic significance for China as it would enable Beijing to partially circumvent the Pentagon's plans to impose an economic blockade on China by seizing Indian Ocean and South China Sea "chokepoints."

Like Washington, New Delhi views the OBOR and CPEC as major threats, undermining its strategic influence in Asia. *The Diplomat* wrote, "India greatly opposes the proposed CPEC route and development at Gwadar port mainly for two reasons. First, the planned route passes through the controversial territories of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir between India-China and India-Pakistan respectively. Second, India fears that Gwadar will double as a Chinese naval base."

With more or less explicit US backing, India is adopting a reckless policy of fomenting ethnic separatism in both China

and Pakistan. In April, US officials attended a conference of US-funded Chinese separatist organisations in Dharamsala, India—signaling US and Indian support for separatism in both Tibet and Xinjiang.

While India has accused Islamabad of backing Pakistani militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in Kashmir, Pakistan has publicly charged India with backing insurgency and terrorism in Balochistan through its consulates in Afghanistan.

Since mid-August, in what the Indian press has hailed as a strategic coup, the Modi government has been mounting an international campaign denouncing Pakistan human rights violations in Balochistan, and—in a move meant to signal its readiness to work for Pakistan's dismemberment—it has said that it will provide Balochi separatists greater "political space" to operate in India.

Traditional alliance structures in Asia are rapidly breaking down. Relations between Washington and Islamabad have drastically weakened since the US decided to withdraw the bulk of US troops from Afghanistan, leaving some 10,000 US occupation troops until January 2017.

Washington continues to exert diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to break Islamabad's military relations with sections of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network, which are fighting US-led NATO occupation forces and Afghanistan's puppet government. Last week, two Republican lawmakers introduced legislation in the US Congress aimed at designating Pakistan as a state-sponsor of terrorism, though it is currently not expected to pass.

As relations between Washington and Islamabad deteriorate, Pakistan is also considering taking the historically unprecedented step of developing strategic ties with Russia. During the Cold War, Pakistan was traditionally backed by Washington while its rival India was allied with the Soviet Union.

On Saturday, however, Russia launched a two-week military drill with Pakistan in a mountainous area in the eastern Punjab province of Pakistan. It involved 200 troops, 70 from Russian and 130 from Pakistan. It was the first time the two countries had ever participated in a joint military exercise and follows on from Moscow's recent sale of military helicopters to Islamabad.



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