

India launches military attacks against Pakistan

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India carried out multiple “surgical” military strikes inside Pakistan over a five-hour period Wednesday night, bringing South Asia perilously close to an all-out war with potentially catastrophic consequences.

Not only would a war between India and Pakistan be the first-ever war between nuclear-armed states; it could rapidly draw in the United States and China on opposed sides.

In anticipation of a Pakistani counterstrike (or so as to provide cover for Indian war preparations), Indian authorities on Thursday ordered the evacuation of all those living within 10 kilometers of the Pakistani border in the Indian states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif denounced Wednesday’s night attack as “unprovoked and naked” Indian “aggression” and called an emergency meeting of his cabinet for today to discuss Islamabad’s response.

India says it attacked seven “terrorist launching pads” on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control that separates Indian- and Pakistani-held Kashmir; that its forces penetrated up to 3 kilometers inside Pakistani territory; and that they inflicted “significant casualties” on “terrorists and those trying to shield them.”

The military has been tight-lipped about the operation. But Indian media reports, based on official sources, said Indian commandos had crossed into Azad or Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir both on the ground and in helicopter gunships and that their “kills” were in the “double-digits.”

India and Pakistan have passed through repeated war crises over the past quarter-century and in 1999 fought an undeclared war in the remote Kargil region of Indian-held Kashmir. However, New Delhi has not publicly admitted to carrying out military action inside Pakistan for decades for fear that this could trigger a rapid escalation to war and even nuclear-war.

Yesterday’s attack came ten days after anti-Indian Islamist militants attacked the Indian military base at Uri, in the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir, killing eighteen Indian soldiers. Without so much as a cursory investigation, India’s Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government held Islamabad responsible for the attack and vowed it would punish Pakistan.

India’s media, opposition parties, and a long list of retired military officers all joined in the clamour for India to bloody Pakistan.

At a celebratory press conference yesterday, the Indian Army’s Director General of Military Operations, Lt. General Ranbir Singh, said the “surgical strikes” had been aimed at “terrorist teams” positioned across the Line of Control for “launch” into India.

India, Singh claimed, has no further plans for cross-border actions. “However,” he continued ominously, “the Indian Armed Forces are fully prepared to deal with any contingency which may arise.”

Pakistan’s military, meanwhile, is vehemently denying that India mounted any “surgical” cross-border attacks, calling the claim “an illusion” and “fabrication of truth” promoted by India “to create false effects.”

The Pakistani military does concede two of its soldiers were killed and nine others wounded Wednesday night, but is attributing the casualties to cross-border artillery and gunfire—a regular occurrence across the Line of Control (LoC). In its statement challenging India’s claims, the military said that “Pakistan has made it clear that if there is a surgical strike on Pakistani soil,” it “will be strongly responded” to.

Both sides are clearly spreading disinformation—a further sign of how dangerous the situation is.

Take New Delhi’s claim that yesterday’s attack was aimed at preventing the imminent dispersal of terrorist squads into India. It is a transparent, trumped-up pretext for a reckless act of aggression.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has no brief for Pakistan’s reactionary, communalist ruling elite and its military, which have time and time again trampled on the democratic rights of the Pakistani people and served as a satrap for US imperialism. Having been schooled in the stratagem by the CIA, which enlisted Islamabad as its junior partner in its covert war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Pakistan has used Islamist terrorists in pursuing its military-strategic rivalry against India, particularly so as to politically suppress and divert the popular opposition to Indian rule in Kashmir along communal lines

But why would Pakistan—which has repeatedly voiced alarm over the military-strategic gap between it and India, a country with a six times greater population and seven times bigger economy—mass terrorists to strike India when New Delhi is already on a war footing?

Rattled by the falling off of Indian’s growth rate after 2010, the India bourgeoisie brought Narendra Modi and his virulently right-wing BJP to power to intensify the exploitation of the working

class and assert its great-power ambitions on the world stage. In pursuit of the latter aim, India has integrated itself ever more completely into Washington's war drive against China and, bolstered by US support, sought to impose itself as the regional hegemon.

While the Indian elite paints the country as an innocent victim of Pakistani "terrorism", the BJP government has pursued confrontation with Pakistan. Soon after taking office it instructed the military to adopt a more aggressive posture on the LoC, resulting in 2015 in the most prolonged cross-border shelling in a decade. More than a month before the Uri attack, Modi announced that India would leverage the ethno-nationalist insurgency in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan against Islamabad, effectively threatening Pakistan with dismemberment.

Yesterday's attack was meant to show that New Delhi is ready to take greater risks in advancing its strategic interests and that vis à vis Pakistan it will no longer be bound by the so-called policy of "strategic restraint."

As for Pakistan's claims that there were no cross-border strikes, they are simply not credible. Various Pakistani government officials and political leaders have made statements that implicitly or explicitly contradict the military's version of events. Among these is Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, who declared, "If India tries to do this again, we will respond forcefully."

By denying that India has carried out a military raid inside Pakistan, Islamabad is seeking to avoid further escalation, without having to make a public and, from the reactionary standpoint of capitalist geopolitics, humiliating admission that it won't make good on its repeated threats to answer any Indian cross-border thrust with a military strike of its own.

This stance however is likely only to encourage the Modi government and the most bellicose sections of the Indian elite who will hold it up as proof of how weakened Pakistan is. Yesterday, the entire political establishment, including the Congress Party and the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) joined forces, including at an all-party meeting convened by the BJP, to celebrate the aggression against Pakistan. The media, meanwhile, went into overdrive to hail the military strikes, amplifying the government's claims that they were proof of a bolder, more powerful India, and trumpeting the military as veritable heroes.

The strategic rivalry between India and Pakistan, which today threatens the people of South Asia with a nuclear holocaust, is testament to the failure of bourgeois rule. It is rooted in the 1947 communal partition of South Asia into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India, which was implemented by the Congress Party and the Muslim League, the rival parties of the South Asian bourgeoisie, in conjunction with the subcontinent's departing British colonial overlords.

That said, a huge factor stoking the war danger is Washington's more than decade-long drive to transform India into a frontline state in its strategic offensive to isolate, encircle and prepare for war with China. Under Modi, India has lined up with the US in the South China Sea dispute and developed closer strategic bilateral and trilateral ties with the US's key Asian-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia. Last month, Modi agreed to allow US warplanes and battleships to make routine use of Indian military bases.

Under George W. Bush and Obama, the US has lavished "strategic gifts" on India, giving it access to its most advanced weaponry and creating a special status for it in the world nuclear regulatory regime that has the effect of allowing New Delhi to concentrate the resources of its indigenous nuclear program on nuclear weapons development.

Invariably the strengthening of the Indo-US alliance has been associated with the downgrading of Washington's ties with Pakistan, which throughout the Cold War was the principal US ally in South Asia.

Islamabad has warned that Washington has overturned the balance of power in South Asia, and that its ever-closer strategic partnership with New Delhi is emboldening India, and fuelling an arms and nuclear arms race, but all to no effect.

Fearing strategic isolation, Pakistan has drawn closer to its long-time ally China. But that has only increased its estrangement from Washington and fuelled its rivalry with India.

Eager to placate New Delhi, Washington likely gave it the green light to "punish" Pakistan, although the Obama administration, which still relies on Pakistan to provide crucial logistical support to the US occupation forces in Afghanistan, has denied it.

Obama's National Security Adviser Susan Rice called her Indian counterpart, Ajit Doval, Wednesday evening just hours before the Indian "surgical strike," purportedly to give condolences for the Uri attack and express support for India's fight against terrorism. Press reports suggest Rice's call was precipitated by concerns over growing complaints in India that Washington has been insufficiently supportive, including for failing to label Pakistan as responsible for the Uri attack.

What is incontrovertible is that US government officials have refused to condemn yesterday's "surgical strikes" on Pakistan, although they were patently illegal and highly provocative. Instead they have issued ritualistic calls for both sides to show restraint and move toward dialogue.

The US is playing a most dangerous and incendiary game. In pursuit of its anti-China alliance with New Delhi, it is encouraging India's government, now led by the communally toxic BJP, to pursue an aggressive, but supposedly "calibrated," policy of diplomatic, economic and military action against Pakistan—a country with which it has fought four wars and that has threatened to meet any large scale Indian attack with the speedy use of its recently deployed "battlefield" or tactical nuclear weapons.



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