India’s military calls for more strikes on Pakistan

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Large sections of India’s elite are urging the country’s virulently rightwing, Hindu communalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government to further escalate military pressure on Pakistan in the wake of last week’s Special Forces’ “strikes” inside Azad or Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

The “surgical strikes” were the first military attacks inside Pakistan that India has publicly admitted to carrying out in more than four decades.

They have pushed South Asia’s rival nuclear-armed states perilously close to the precipice of war. But India’s political establishment and corporate media have hailed them as proof of India’s growing economic and military prowess and its ability to successfully leverage the shifts in world geo-politics, above all India’s burgeoning military-security partnership with Washington.

According to Tuesday’s *Economic Times*, senior military officers have told the government that the strikes need to be followed up with concerted military action, so as to neutralize—i.e. degrade and destroy—the Pakistan-based Islamist insurgent groups that oppose Indian rule over the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley.

“We have to look at a sustained campaign,” said an unnamed “top officer.” “The terror network is on the backfoot, but to really achieve something, we have to look at a medium-term plan, a six-month campaign. A one-off event will not deter them.”

Another officer told the *Times*, “We have the opportunity right now. Everyone is geared up and we have a much stronger hold on the Line of Control that divides Indian and Pakistan-held Kashmir) than the other side.”

Parallel to the Indian military’s behind the scenes push for escalation, the corporate media has churned out an avalanche of editorials and commentary celebrating the end of India’s so-called “strategic restraint.” Under this policy New Delhi refrained from publicizing Special Forces’ operations inside Pakistan for fear of triggering a dynamic of strike and counter-strike that could quickly spiral into all-out war.

The most bellicose factions of the Indian ruling elite, including the BJP when it was in opposition, long contended that “strategic restraint” made India look “weak” and left the initiative with its arch-rival Pakistan.

Like India’s top brass, much of the media is now arguing that India must continue to strike out at Pakistan militarily.

C. Raja Mohan, one of India’s best-known geopolitical strategists, has called for cross-border strikes to be “institutionalized.” In an article titled “Breaking Out of the Box” and published in Monday’s *Indian Express*, Mohan wrote, “After discarding India’s ‘do nothing’ strategy, Modi must now retain strong control over the inevitable escalation that will unfold, ensure that cross-border military attacks become a regular response to terror attacks from across the LoC (Line of Control), and sustain relentless pressure on (the Pakistani’s military’s) political vulnerabilities.”

In a column that welcomed the attack across the LoC, Ashok Malik of the Observer Foundation, one of India’s leading think-tanks, argued India must be ready to go further in its “long war” with Pakistan. “The genie is out of the bottle,” declared Malik. “It will not go back. In fact, sooner or later, that genie will seek to travel even further.”

The *Hindustan Times* has published an editorial, “India can no longer have a defence policy of passivity,” calling for major hikes in military spending. The editorial argues that if India is to pursue an aggressive policy against Pakistan, stand up to China, and pursue its ambitions to be an Indian Ocean power, it needs to acquire even more lethal weaponry. This, it argues, will require that India raise its military spending significantly above the current 2.5 percent of GDP.

In a particularly bellicose op-ed, Sanjaya Baru, a former press secretary of India’s previous Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, also raised the issue of China, lashing out at Beijing for its close relations with Pakistan. Baju equated Pakistan to North Korea, noting that China is an ally of both Islamabad and Pyongyang, and called for India to treat Pakistan akin to the way Japan and South Korea treats North Korea, i.e. as a belligerent state. Unstated but implicit in Baru’s argument was that India should become a formal military ally of the US, as are Japan and South Korea.

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Business leaders have been conspicuously vocal in their support of the government's aggressive stance against Pakistan. Under the heading "With Strikes, Modi Sets New Precedent For India In Dealing With Pakistan," Mohandas Pai, a fund manager and former top executive at the IT consulting firm Infosys, has urged the government to be ready for rapid escalation of the conflict with Pakistan. "This strike," wrote Pai in a column for NDTV, "changes the balance of power as far as the border is concerned. … if tension increases and if Pakistan resorts to its usual tactic of firing across the border, India should retaliate 10 times more and demonstrate that it will not accept any of these usual tactics and will give it back because the only way to handle a bully is to stand up and hit back very strongly."

Unquestionably, India's elite is being encouraged in its aggressive stance by the signals coming from Washington.

Although last week's attack was a flagrant violation of Pakistani sovereignty, Obama administration officials have studiously refused all comment on it. Instead they have urged both governments to eschew escalation, while echoing New Delhi's demands that Islamabad prevent terrorist attacks from its territory.

Meanwhile, a host of former officials in the Obama and George W. Bush administrations have unequivocally supported the Indian military strikes and the reactionary "war on terror" narrative New Delhi has used to justify them.

The Indian ruling elite paints India as the innocent victim of Pakistan and its stratagem of using Islamist groups to advance its military-strategic interests, particularly in Kashmir.

New Delhi points to the September 18 attack on the Uri military based in India-held Kashmir as the justification for its attack on Pakistan, even though it declared Islamabad responsible for the attack prior to any investigation. More fundamentally, the Indian elite's self-serving narrative ignores the long series of provocative actions New Delhi has taken against Pakistan under the BJP government, including vehemently opposing the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and, through its promotion of the Baluchistan secessionist insurgency, threatening Pakistan with dismemberment.

The conflict between India and Pakistan is rooted in the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent, into an explicitly Muslim Pakistan and a mainly Hindu India—a crime carried out by the nascent Indian and Pakistani bourgeoisies, and their principal parties, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, in conjunction with British imperialism.

Partition defied economic logic, enshrined communalism in the state structures of South Asia, has facilitated imperialist domination of the region, and gave rise to a reactionary geo-political rivalry that has led to four declared wars and countless war crises that have squandered vast resources.

A huge factor in the heightening of tensions between India and Pakistan is the US drive to make New Delhi a "frontline state" in its military-strategic offensive against China. For well over a decade, Washington has been showering strategic favours on India, including giving it access to the most advanced US weaponry, all the while ignoring Islamabad's increasingly shrill warnings that it is overturning the balance of power, thereby encouraging Indian aggression and fueling a South Asian arms race.

Under Narendra Modi's two-and-a-half year-old BJP government, India has dramatically expanded its integration into the US's anti-China "Pivot," calculating that it can draw on US support to pursue its own ambitions to be the regional hegemon of South Asia and an Indian Ocean power.

Thus India is denouncing Pakistan as a "state sponsor of terror" at the same time that in pursuit of its own mercenary interests it cements a military-strategic alliance with the world's most incendiary power, one that trashes international law at will—US imperialism. Over the past quarter-century Washington has waged one illegal war after another, blowing up whole societies in the Middle East and Africa, and has repeatedly enlisted Islamist terrorists as it proxies in its "regime change" wars, including in Kosovo, Libya and Syria.

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