

# Opposition grows in Indo-Pakistan borderlands to India's warmongering

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10 October 2016

Popular opposition is growing in India-Pakistan border areas to the warmongering campaign of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government against Pakistan. War tensions between the two nuclear-armed rivals dramatically increased after the Indian military's "surgical strike" in Azad (Pakistan-administered) Kashmir on September 28-29.

The multiple strikes came after several provocative actions, including India's threat to cancel the Indus Valley Treaty, and the frenzied media campaign blaming Islamabad for the September 18 separatist attack on the Indian military base at Uri, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

After Indian Lt. General Ranbir Singh announced the "surgical strikes" inside Pakistan, the entire media and political establishment—from the ruling BJP to the Congress and Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist, CPM)—joined the pro-war chorus. It praised the army and the Modi government and blamed Pakistan for "cross border terrorism," i.e., the activities of Pakistan-based separatist groups in Jammu and Kashmir.

Modi and the BJP are exploiting the "surgical strike" as the BJP government's unpopularity mounts due to its austerity measures against workers and rural toilers. BJP President Amit Shah said the strikes would figure prominently in his party's upcoming election campaign in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, and Modi tried to favorably contrast his hardline stance with the previous Congress Party government's so-called "strategic restraint."

On September 29, Indian authorities ordered the evacuation of all those living within 10 kilometers of Pakistan's border in the Indian states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. There are nearly 1,000 villages in the six border districts of Punjab, and overall some 1.5

million people were told to evacuate. This measure in reality aimed mainly to facilitate future Indian military action and stoke a panic atmosphere.

The evacuation encountered strong popular opposition. On October 1, *The Hindu* reported that while thousands living near the border with Pakistan in Punjab had obeyed orders to leave, about 40 percent had remained, reluctant to leave their farms as their paddy crops were ready to be harvested. "During the [1999] Kargil War we had to evacuate as the army laid mines all around our village. But when we left, our cattle and belongings were looted. So many people are scared to leave their homes this time," Sandhu Singh of Dhanoa Kalam village told the paper.

According to the British *Daily Telegraph*, whose reporter visited border villages on October 4, India has begun constructing bunkers along its border with Pakistan in Kashmir, and there is strong popular opposition to a new Indo-Pakistani war.

"People will die here. If war starts, the army will give us no shelter. We will have nothing to eat," said 80-year-old Haji Abulla Lone, chairman of Uri town's market traders. "I remember the 1947 war. About 200 people died here in Uri. The 1965 war destroyed many houses too. We had to leave for 10 days, when we came back many houses were burning. But this time we will have nowhere to go. Everywhere there is curfew, everywhere is closed. Even if we will die, it's better to stay in our homes."

An October 4 report in *The Asian Age* quoted enraged villagers who denounced the bellicose media campaign. "Now, don't trigger a war!" one villager shouted at reporters. "The media are concerned about TRPs [Television Rating Points], nobody thinks of us border villagers!"

The report detailed the hardships facing border

villagers: “All private and government educational institutions within 10km of the international border remain shut. Those living near the border have been asked to switch off lights at night. Many of the villagers have witnessed three wars, including 1965, 1971, Kargil in 1999, and the army stand-off in the aftermath of the parliament attack in 2001-02.”

Raja Nazir, 37, a shopkeeper in Silikote, an Indian Kashmir village near the Uri base, told the *New York Times*, “Those who shout on TV for war should come and live here with their children. Then they will understand the cost of war.”

In stark contrast to the bellicose propaganda of the government and the corporate media, there is deep popular hostility to a new Indo-Pakistani war. On October 8, the Punjab state government was forced to allow people to return to their homes in all six border districts.

The ruling elite works relentlessly to suppress any expression of opposition to war. Day by day, the ongoing anti-Pakistan campaign has intensified. On October 8, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, addressing Border Security Force (BSF) officers, told BSF personnel to be ready for “any eventuality.” A day earlier, he had announced that the India-Pakistan border would be “completely sealed” by the end of 2018.

On Friday, he ordered political leaders to exercise “restraint” in their comments, demanding that all should “stand by the Armed Forces at this crucial juncture.” He added, “We will take all steps to ensure that the nation’s security is not risked. Just as a farmer protects his crops, our soldiers will protect the country.”

The debate within the Indian ruling elite over the “surgical strike” underscores the reactionary, chauvinist character of all the establishment parties. Opposition parties, including the Congress and Arvind Kejriwal’s Aam Admi Party (AAP), which rules the National Capital Territory of Delhi, demanded the release of videos of the September 28-29 attack to refute Pakistani denials that an attack took place. They said they aimed to defend the Indian military’s “credibility.” That is, they are pressing the BJP to take an even more belligerent attitude toward Pakistan.

After echoing BJP warmongering for nearly three weeks, Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi on October 6 accused Modi of exploiting “surgical

strikes” for political advantage. “Our soldiers conducted surgical strikes and gave their blood. Modi is just hiding behind their sacrifices,” he said. At the same time, Gandhi stressed the Congress’ full support for the Indian military, including for attacks inside Pakistan.

The Congress is no less jingoistic or anti-Pakistan than the BJP, however. Gandhi was among the first to congratulate Modi and “salute” the Indian Army after the government revealed that a “surgical” attack in Pakistan had taken place.

Not to be outdone by the BJP’s bellicose campaign, Congress leaders boasted that they ordered similar attacks when in power. Congress’ senior spokesman Anand Sharma declared, “The Indian Army carried out ‘such strikes’ in 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2013. The only difference this time was that the government of the day has taken ‘political ownership’.”

Nonetheless, the BJP government denounced all opposition to its war preparations. Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar equated criticism of the army with treason, declaring that those making such comments were “not loyal to our nation.” At an October 7 press conference, the BJP denounced Gandhi’s criticism as “an insult to the bravery of the Indian Army.”

The attempt to brand any questioning of the Indian government’s war drive as treasonous has ominous implications, and constitutes a clear warning to workers and rural poor opposed to the Indian government’s war planning. It is laying the ground for attempts to clamp down on popular opposition to the Indian bourgeoisie’s reactionary war plans.



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