

US amplifies its support for India's military strikes on Pakistan

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The Obama administration has now given explicit and emphatic support for India's highly provocative and illegal September 28-29 military strikes inside Pakistan.

The strikes, which New Delhi claims inflicted "heavy casualties" on anti-Indian Islamist terrorists and their "protectors," have been celebrated by India's Hindu supremacist BJP government and corporate media as marking the end of India's policy of "strategic restraint" *vis a vis* its arch nuclear-armed rival.

Prior to September 29 India had not publicly admitted to carrying out military action inside Pakistan for more than four decades, due to concern that this would trigger a dynamic of strike and counter-strike that could rapidly escalate into all-out war.

"Every country has a right to self-defence," Peter Lavoy, the senior director for South Asia on Obama's National Security Council (NSC), told an audience at the Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) last Wednesday, when questioned about India's "surgical strikes" inside Pakistan.

In justifying the Indian strikes, Lavoy cited the attack Islamist militants had mounted on the Indian military base at Uri in disputed Kashmir on September 18—one of New Delhi's pretexts for its multi-pronged, Special Forces raid on Pakistan. The Uri attack, said Lavoy, "was a clear case of cross-border terrorism. We condemn this act of terrorism. It was a horrific attack."

"We share with India," continued the NSC official, "the concern for preventing any future attack. We empathize with the Indian position that it needs to respond militarily to the cross-border threat of terrorism. But we also advise caution."

Noting that the there is "a heavily militarized relationship" between India and Pakistan and that they have "experienced three wars," Lavoy recommended

"caution and restraint" going forward.

But far from showing "caution and restraint," Washington is itself playing an incendiary role in world affairs. Over the past quarter-century, it has waged one illegal war after another and is currently pursuing military-strategic offensives against nuclear-armed Russia and China.

In the case of South Asia, its drive to build up India as a counterweight to China and transform it into a "frontline" state in its anti-China "Pivot to Asia" has overturned the balance of power in the region, encouraging India to pursue a hardline, belligerent stance against Pakistan, while greatly exacerbating tensions between New Delhi and Beijing.

The Indian media was quick to trumpet Lavoy's remarks, citing them as proof of Pakistan's "strategic isolation" and India's ability to aggressively assert its interests. "White House backs India's right to self-defense," proclaimed the title of what was the lead article on the *Indian Express* web site for much of October 13.

From the get-go, the Obama administration signaled its support for the Indian "surgical strikes." However, till Lavoy's remarks of last week that support was only implicit. State Department representatives repeatedly evaded questions about whether the US approved of the strikes or viewed them as cutting across its attempt to defuse tensions in the region. Yet in so doing, they made certain to echo Indian demands that Pakistan must do more to prevent its territory from being used by terrorists. Meanwhile, a chorus of former officials in the Obama and George W. Bush administrations went on record as supporting the Indian strikes, many comparing them with the US's own repeated violations of Pakistani sovereignty, in killing Osama Bin Laden and summarily executing alleged Taliban terrorists via

drone strikes.

With Lavoy's remarks, the Obama administration's implicit support for India's strikes and, no less importantly, its jettisoning of "strategic restraint" has been made explicit.

Coming under conditions where New Delhi was already crowing about Islamabad's "strategic isolation," the Obama administration's endorsement will only encourage India to act still more aggressively and recklessly.

Last week the *Indian Express* reported, "The government, at its highest levels, is convinced that Pakistan is demoralised by the global reaction." The article went on to cite senior government sources as saying: "The world has accepted that India was justified in responding to cross-border terror in this manner. This acceptance makes it easier for us to take action the second time. But the option chosen the second time could be totally different. It will depend on calculating the counter costs of any action. But any action from our side will always have three characteristics: speed, skill and surprise."

The same report cited senior government sources as saying that India isn't seeking war, but "that does not ... mean that we won't fight and win a war if it is forced upon us."

In his appearance at the CSIS function, Lavoy also pointedly rejected a claim that had been made by two envoys of the Pakistan government to US audiences the previous week. The envoys, who were tasked with highlighting the Indian government's repression in Indian-held Kashmir and appealing to Washington to help resolve the seven-decade old Kashmir dispute, had said that it would be impossible to end the war in Afghanistan without resolving the Kashmir issue.

"We certainly do not believe," said Lavoy, "that the situation in Afghanistan is linked with Kashmir." The NSC official then went on to boast about the increasing collaboration between the US and India in Afghanistan, saying it had "significantly increased" in recent years. Lavoy noted that the US "commander in Afghanistan travels to New Delhi regularly for consultations" and the US, India and Afghanistan are now holding trilateral consultations.

Afghanistan has long been an arena of intense strategic competition between India and Pakistan. Because of the Pentagon's dependence on Pakistan's

logistical support to wage war in Afghanistan, Washington has long placed limits on India's involvement in Afghanistan. But in a further sign of the extent to which the US is now allied with India and how frayed relations are between Washington and Islamabad, those limits are increasingly being tested, if not set aside.

Significantly, the amplification of the US's support for India's new aggressive anti-Pakistan stance was made at a public event organized by CSIS, a think-tank closely tied to the Pentagon, to promote a report calling for a further strengthening of Indo-US military-strategic ties.

Titled "US-India Security Cooperation: Progress and Promise for the Next Administration," the

CSIS report lavishes praise on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP government for integrating India much more fully into Washington's anti-China pivot since coming to power in May 2014.

It urges Obama's successor to "prioritize establishing a strong relationship" with Modi and expanding the Indo-US "global strategic partnership." Specific recommendations include: pressing New Delhi to sign agreements facilitating interoperability between the US and Indian militaries; assisting India in enhancing its naval capabilities "within and beyond that Indian Ocean"; and drawing India into a US-led quadrilateral alliance, embracing Washington's two principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia.



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