Indian military given green light to strike Pakistan

Keith Jones
3 May 2017

Relations between India and Pakistan are again on the boil, just months after South Asia's rival nuclear-armed powers came to the brink of war.

India is claiming that Pakistani troops snuck across the Line of Control in disputed Kashmir Monday, killed two Indian soldiers, and beheaded their corpses. The country's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has reportedly instructed the military to retaliate as it sees fit, suggesting an Indian cross-border attack on Pakistan or some other military action is imminent.

Indian Defence Minister Arun Jaitley vowed Monday that the "sacrifice" of the Border Security Force personnel "will not go in vain," adding India's armed forces "will respond appropriately." This language echoes that employed by Prime Minster Narendra Modi and other members of the BJP government last September in the days before Indian Special Forces struck "terrorist launch pads" in Pakistan-administered Kashmir—an illegal and highly provocative action that Modi, his BJP, and the Indian media celebrated as the end of Indian "strategic restraint" in its dealings with Pakistan.

Indian Vice Army Chief Sarath Chand denounced the Pakistani military for carrying out "extreme barbaric acts" not even seen "during war" at a press conference yesterday. He pledged Pakistan would suffer consequences, but said that rather than making threats, India's military "will focus on our action at a time and place of our choosing."

The principal opposition party, the Congress Party, has joined in the warmongering. "Give free hand to the army to act against those behind mutilation of two Indian soldiers," A.K. Antony, the Congress leader who served as India's defence minister for eight years ending in 2014, told a press conference. For his part, former Congress Minister Kapil Sibal chided the Modi government for being too conciliatory to Pakistan. He urged India's prime minister to "remove his bangles and show what you can do."

Pakistan has denied any of its military personnel entered Indian-held Kashmir or clashed with Indian Border Forces on Monday. Pakistan's Director General of Military Operations, Maj. Gen. Sahir Shamshad Mirza, said the Indian claims of a Pakistani incursion, ambush and desecration of dead Indian soldiers were an "attempt to divert the attention of the world" from the popular unrest in Jammu and Kashmir, India's only majority-Muslim state.

Responding to the Indian threats in kind, Mirza said "any misadventure," i.e. Indian attack, "shall be appropriately responded at a place and time of [our] own choosing."

The "surgical strikes" that India's Special Forces mounted inside Pakistan last fall were followed by two months of daily cross-border artillery shelling and gunfire in which scores of Indian and Pakistani villagers and military personnel died. While the clashes subsided in late November, there was no resumption of even the strained ties that for have decades characterized Indo-Pakistani relations. Moreover, both sides have continued to make bellicose threats, including about the possible use of nuclear weapons in an all-out war, and staged tit-for-tat tests of nuclear-capable missiles.

The Indian-Pakistani strategic rivalry is rooted in the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent, implemented by rival factions of the national bourgeoisie and the subcontinent's departing British colonial overlords. But since the beginning of this century it has become ever more enmeshed with the increasingly explosive cleavage between US

© World Socialist Web Site

imperialism and a rising China.

Washington has overturned the balance of power in South Asia, downgrading its ties with its longtime ally Pakistan so as to woo India. With the aim of harnessing New Delhi to US global strategy, above all its military-strategic offensive against China, Washington, under Democratic and Republican administrations alike, has showered strategic favours on India, including creating a special status for it in the world nuclear-regulatory regime and, more recently, giving it access equal to that of the most-trusted US allies to advanced Pentagon weapon systems.

Under the three-year-old Modi government, India has dramatically increased its integration into Washington's anti-China "Pivot to Asia." Last August it granted the US military routine access to Indian air bases and ports to refuel, resupply and repair its warplanes and battleships, and under a recently concluded agreement the ships of the US Seventh Fleet, the naval force at the center of war planning against China, will be serviced in India. India is also rapidly expanding bilateral and trilateral military and security ties with Washington's principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia.

Emboldened by its burgeoning partnership with the US and rattled by the size and tenacity of the anti-Indian protests in Kashmir, the BJP government is determined to change the "rules of the game" in its relations with Islamabad. It is adamant that as a precondition for any resumption of high-level ties, let alone "normalization" of relations, Islamabad must demonstrably prevent all logistical support from Pakistan for the anti-Indian insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir.

As the Indo-US alliance has strengthened and India has become more aggressive, Pakistan and China have responded by drawing closer together. This is exemplified by the $50 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor, which by linking Pakistan's Arabian seaport of Gwadar with western China will partially offset US plans to impose an economic blockade on China in the event of a war or war crisis.

India's elite, meanwhile, bitterly resents the economic and military support Beijing has provided Islamabad. The Indian press routinely rails against China and on assuming his new command in January, India's army head, Gen. Bipin Rawat, boasted about India's capacity to fight a "two-front" war against Pakistan and China simultaneously.

Last month tensions between New Delhi on the one hand and Islamabad and Beijing on the other continued to sharpen.

The Pakistani high command, apparently without even informing the civilian government, announced that a military court had sentenced to death an alleged Indian spy, Kulbushan Sudhir Jadhav, whom it claims was liaising with anti-Pakistan, Balochi separatist insurgents. India acknowledges that Jadhav is a former naval officer, but denies that he was engaged in spying and even in Pakistan. Rather it claims, he was kidnapped in the Iranian city of Chabahar and transported to Pakistan.

In any event, New Delhi has condemned Jadhav's conviction and sentencing in the strongest terms and cited it as further reason to freeze diplomatic relations with Islamabad.

China, meanwhile, denounced in very strong terms the BJP government's welcoming of the Dali Lama, who made a high-profile tour of Arunachal Pradesh, territory claimed by China as "southern Tibet." The BJP Chief Minister of Arunachal, Pema Khandu, responded to the Chinese criticism by provocatively declaring that India does not share a border with China, but with Tibet.

The Obama administration first implicitly and then explicitly supported India's "surgical strikes" inside Pakistan claiming that it was a legitimate response to terrorist incursions.

The Trump administration has made clear that it wants to deepen and expand the Indo-US alliance. It has yet to publicly state any position on the legitimacy of Indian retaliation for the alleged attack this Monday, but there is no question the Modi government is taking encouragement from US belligerence around the world, including last month's dropping of the largest non-nuclear bomb in the US arsenal on Afghanistan.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site