

India intensifies repression in Kashmir

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Indian authorities are intensifying their repression in disputed Kashmir, while ratcheting up tensions with Pakistan, which they hold wholly responsible for the mass opposition to Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), India's northernmost and only majority-Muslim state.

The Indian military has resumed large-scale sweeps of civilian areas in J&K in an attempt to terrorize villagers suspected of supporting anti-Indian, Pakistan-backed insurgents. Meanwhile, Indian and Pakistani troops stationed along the Line of Control (LoC) that separates Indian- and Pakistani-held Kashmir have resumed heavy cross-border firing, forcing thousands of civilians to flee.

A sense of imminent threat pervades disputed Kashmir and indeed South Asia as a whole, as the region's rival nuclear powers exchange bellicose threats.

India's government and military have repeatedly vowed that they will punish Pakistan for an alleged May 1 incursion by Pakistani troops inside Indian-held Kashmir and the killing and subsequent beheading of two Indian soldiers. On Saturday, after Pakistan Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa toured Pakistani "forward" positions along the LoC, its military press office issued a statement threatening that any incursion by the Indian Army across the LoC "will be a miscalculation," that shall be answered "with full force" and could "lead to unintended consequences."

Indian security forces mounted house-to-house searches May 4 across twenty villages in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian District, which lies near the state's summer capital Srinagar. Authorities called the operation, which involved helicopters, drones and more than four thousand soldiers, paramilitaries and police, "unprecedented."

Patterned after Israeli Army tactics, the raids were presented as a rapid response to intelligence reports of Islamist Kashmiri insurgents hiding in Shopian. However, an unnamed "senior Army official" was subsequently cited in the *Indian Express* as saying the operation was in fact long planned and "had little to do with any immediate provocation."

In the end, the Shopian raids only provided further evidence of Kashmiri Muslims' mass alienation from, and opposition to, the Indian state. Villagers spoke of a warlike atmosphere and bitterly complained that security forces had ransacked houses and vandalized property. In several villages, the residents were all ordered to congregate in a central area, where they were

detained by gun-toting security forces, as others searched their homes.

In some places villagers fought back, with hundreds pelting security forces with stones.

After ten hours, the military called off the operation, having failed to ferret out even a single insurgent. However, as they withdrew, an army convoy came under brief gun attack, resulting in the death of one of the military's civilian drivers and the wounding of two soldiers.

Antigovernment protests have convulsed Jammu and Kashmir, especially the northern parts of the Kashmir Valley, for the better part of a year.

There is a decades-long history of mass protests against Indian authorities in J&K. But India's ruling elite has been rattled by the intensity of the wave of opposition that erupted last July after security forces killed—likely via summary execution—Burhan Muzaffar Wani, the 22-year-old commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen, a Kashmiri separatist Islamist insurgent group.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government have pressed security forces to resort to ever-harsher measures to suppress the protests, while lashing out at Pakistan, including with scarcely veiled threats to support the separatist insurgency in Pakistan's southwestern province, Balochistan.

Last summer and fall, scores of young people were killed and thousands wounded as security forces systematically sprayed protests with pellet-gun fire. Nevertheless, youth, including teenagers and in at least one case a school of girls, continue to risk their lives by coming onto the streets to impede security operations.

In an incident that underscores both the extent to which the half-million Indian security forces deployed in J&K are a law unto themselves and their difficulty in cowing the protests, Indian army troops charged with providing security for an April 12 parliamentary by-election tied a 26-year-old Kashmiri youth, Farooq Dar, to the jeep heading their convoy, so as to dissuade protesters from pelting them with stones.

After video and photos of Indian troops using Dar as a "human shield" appeared on Twitter, BJP General Secretary Ram Madhav complimented the officer who had ordered him seized and tied to the jeep, declaring, "Everything is fair in love and war."

As for the by-election, it proved a fiasco. Only 7.5 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. Consequently, India's Election Commission cancelled the by-election in J&K's Anantnag constituency and ordered that a second vote be held May 25.

The Kashmir crisis is rooted in the reactionary 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India. The Congress Party of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi presented itself as the victim of Partition. In reality, the Congress leaders readily accepted and enforced it, so as to get their hands on the capitalist state machine erected by South Asia's departing British colonial overlords, secure the privileges of the native bourgeoisie, and defuse the threat that the mass anti-imperialist movement could come under the leadership of an increasingly rebellious working class.

In the ensuing seven decades, both the Indian and Pakistani bourgeoisies have manipulated and abused the Kashmiri people, while placing their rival claims to control all the territory of the former British Indian princely state of Jammu and Kashmir at the center of their reactionary military-strategic rivalry.

In the late 1980s, when mass opposition erupted in J&K to the rigging of the 1987 state elections by Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party government, Pakistan intervened to turn it in a communalist direction and advance its own interests against India by organizing and arming Islamist insurgents, including former Afghan mujahedeen.

The Indian elite, for its part, has increasingly fanned Hindu communalism. This process finds its apogee in India's current government, which is formed by the Hindu supremacist BJP and led by Narendra Modi, who presided over the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat.

Since coming to power in May 2014, Modi and his BJP have taken numerous actions that could only antagonize and frighten India's Muslim minority. They have promoted legislation criminalizing beef consumption and encouraged Hindu chauvinist vigilante groups that have lynched Muslims under the guise of cow protection. In March, Modi appointed a Hindu priest and arch-Hindu chauvinist, Yogi Adityanath, as chief minister of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh. Adityanath, who personally commands a vigilante Hindu youth group, the Yuva Vahini (Youth Battalion), has sent a spasm of fear through Muslims and Dalits (the former Untouchables) by targeting the buffalo-meat business, a major source of employment and income for both groups.

Whatever legitimacy the Indian state had in Jammu and Kashmir is rapidly being eroded as the result of the never-ending repression, New Delhi's open promotion of Hindu communalism, and its eagerness to pursue confrontation with Pakistan, even at the risk of a war—a war whose first battleground would likely be Kashmir and that could potentially have catastrophic consequences for all South Asia, if not the world.

Modi and his government have rejected out of hand any discussion about the grievances of the people of J&K until the “violence” stops, just as it is refusing any serious high-level contact with Islamabad until Pakistan demonstrably halts all logistical support to the anti-Indian insurgency in Kashmir from its territory.

In pursuing this hard line, Modi and the Indian elite are seeking to leverage New Delhi's new status as a prized strategic ally of Washington in its military-strategic offensive against China. With the aim of integrating India into its anti-China “Pivot to Asia,” the US has showered strategic favors on New Delhi for the past decade, while downgrading relations with Pakistan.

In 2016 this reached a qualitatively new level, with the Modi government signing an agreement giving the Pentagon routine access to Indian air bases and ports and the US supporting India's provocative and illegal late September cross-border strike inside Pakistan.

Some sections of Indian's ruling elite are becoming concerned that Modi's Kashmir policy is untenable.

In a May 3 column in the *Hindu*, M.K. Narayanan, who served as India's National Security Adviser for six years ending in 2011, warned that India has effectively lost control of the situation in J&K and argued that to avert a disaster, in the form of an “intifada,” New Delhi should abandon its “muscular policy” and even reach out to Islamabad.

Narayanan, who for years helped oversee the repression in Kashmir, makes a number of damning admissions. These include that Pakistani interference and “terrorism” are not the main cause of the current wave of popular protest in J&K and that the Pakistan-supported insurgent and separatist political groups have little control over it.

There is little chance, however, that the Modi government will heed Narayanan's counsel, nor does he have anything new to propose when it comes to reconciling the people of Kashmir to the Indian state.

The reality is that the intractable dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has now become enmeshed with the US drive to contain and thwart China, adding a massive new explosive charge to each.

A progressive solution to the grievances of the Kashmiri people can only be realized through the united struggle of the working class of India and Pakistan against imperialism, imperialist war and South Asia's reactionary, communal-laced nation-state system, and for the Socialist United States of South Asia.



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