

Indian government intensifies retaliatory threats against Pakistan

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The Indian government has intensified its threats of retaliatory strikes against Pakistan over last Thursday's terrorist attack in Kashmir. It immediately blamed Islamabad for the suicide bombing that killed more than 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel, after the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)'s claimed responsibility for the attack.

On Sunday, Home Minister Rajnath Singh told a public meeting in Odisha that the JeM had perpetrated the attack because of the "desperation" of "forces backed by Pakistan." He hailed the "free hand" given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to military forces to take action—a clear sign that India is preparing retaliatory attacks inside Pakistan.

Singh also applauded the support of virtually all establishment parties for a military move against Pakistan. He said that they had "condemned terrorist attacks with one voice and at the same time they censured neighbouring Pakistan," and declared that they stood united with the military forces.

Among the parties attending the meeting to give their support was the Communist Party of India (CPI), one of India's two main Stalinist parliamentary parties and an ally of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM. After endorsing the resolution of support at the all-party meeting, CPI national secretary D. Raja cynically sought to distance himself from the ruling Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) by opposing the BJP's whipping up of communalism in Jammu and Kashmir and raising "concerns" about the safety of Kashmiri students and citizens.

The Modi government is stirring up anti-Pakistan chauvinism and threatening retaliatory action in order to strengthen New Delhi's geo-political ambitions in the region and to divert popular opposition in India to its pro-market economic restructuring into reactionary

communal channels. It is desperately seeking to stem expected losses in general elections in April-May.

The BJP has boasted that the "surgical strike" ordered against Pakistan in response to the September 2016 terror attack on an Indian army camp in Kashmir represented a huge blow to Pakistan and an assertion of Indian strategic power in the region.

An Indian military strike, even if limited in size and duration, could easily lead to a tit-for-tat escalation and rapidly cascade into an all-out war between South Asia's rival nuclear-armed states. The two countries have fought three declared wars since their formation in 1947 and countless undeclared conflicts. All-out war between India and Pakistan would be a catastrophe for the people of South Asia and would rapidly run the risk of drawing in the US on the side of India and China on the side of Pakistan.

The Modi government has been particularly emboldened in its preparations for military action against Pakistan by support extended by the US and other world powers. On Friday, US National Security Adviser John Bolton telephoned his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval to convey US support for "India's right to self-defence against cross-border terrorism."

For the first time, the US has publicly given the green light in advance for any Indian military action against Pakistan in the name of "self-defence against cross-border terrorism." In September 2016, the US initially gave behind-the-scenes support for Indian retaliatory action over the attack on the Indian army camp. It only gave public support for the "surgical strike" several weeks later after it became apparent that Pakistan's reaction would be relatively subdued and confined to cross-border shelling.

The US response last week underscores just how far the Trump administration is ready to go in rallying

India in its diplomatic, economic and strategic confrontation with China. Under the Modi government, India has been transformed into a frontline state in US war preparations against Beijing. This deepening military-strategic partnership is a continuation and further development of the close ties begun under the previous BJP-led government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and continued during the successive Congress-led governments.

The near open US incitement for an Indian strike on Pakistan is all that more jarring, since Washington has been engaged in recent weeks in enlisting Pakistan's support and assistance for "peace talks" with the Taliban. The Indian ruling elite has expressed dismay over a possible US withdrawal from Afghanistan after any deal with Taliban, as it clearly sees this as an opportunity for its arch rival Pakistan to gain a major foothold there. India undoubtedly sees Thursday's terror attack as an opportunity to disrupt US-Pakistan ties.

The Modi government has also launched a "diplomatic war" to isolate Islamabad internationally, claiming that the attack demonstrated that Pakistan should be branded as a country "sponsoring terrorism." On Friday, the Indian Foreign Ministry called a meeting of New Delhi-based diplomats, including from the US and China, to step up its campaign.

Inside India, Hindu extremists allied with the BJP are actively encouraging attacks on Kashmiri students studying outside Kashmir. The stoning of Kashmir students, as well as other physical attacks and threats to force students to leave, have been reported in Jammu, New Delhi and Uttarakhand. In Jammu, the victims complained that the police stood by while mobs attacked them despite a curfew put in place supposedly to prevent such incidents.

Omar Abdulla, the leader of National Conference, a Kashmiri regional bourgeois party, suggested that the BJP government's actions would push these students back to Kashmir and encourage them to join separatist groups. He pointed out that they had left Kashmir to study precisely because they did not want to join these groups.

Pakistan has reacted to India's threats of retaliation by declaring that it had no hand in last week's terrorist attack. Pakistani Foreign Secretary Termina Janjua said on Saturday that New Delhi's campaign was part of its

"known rhetoric and tactics" to divert global attention from its human right violations in Kashmir. Fearing diplomatic isolation, Pakistan has not used the belligerent rhetoric of the past to reply to India.

India is certainly notorious for its military atrocities against Kashmiri Muslims. Moreover it blames any protests against its heavy-handed military occupation of Kashmir on the activities of separatist groups, but these organizations only emerged in response to New Delhi's abuse of the basic democratic rights of Kashmiris. Pakistan's criticisms, however, have nothing to do with defending democratic rights in Kashmir, but are to further its own geo-political interests. It has promoted and supported Islamist insurgent groups to the detriment of other anti-Indian political forces in Kashmir.

Any Indian retaliatory action against Pakistan threatens to provoke a major war between two nuclear-armed powers with deadly consequences for many millions of people in South Asia. To prevent such a conflict, it is necessary to build a unified socialist movement of the working class throughout the region. The reactionary nation-state system created by the 1947 partition of British India into a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu-dominated India must be overthrown and a union of socialist republics of South Asia established as a part of the broader struggle for socialism internationally.



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