

India crows over US support for its assault on Kashmir

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India's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government and corporate media are crowing about the full-throated support Washington has given New Delhi in its assault on Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

On August 5, the Narendra Modi-led BJP government illegally abrogated J&K's special, semi-autonomous status under Article 370 of the Indian constitution, and transformed what had hitherto been India's only Muslim-majority state into two Union Territories, thereby placing both parts of the now bifurcated J&K under permanent central government trusteeship.

New Delhi's constitutional coup was accompanied by an unprecedented security lockdown and information blackout across J&K. This was enforced by the tens of thousands of additional Indian Army troops and Central Reserve Police Force paramilitaries New Delhi had poured into what was already among the world's most heavily militarized regions in the preceding weeks.

Almost four weeks later, J&K is still under a state of siege. Cell phone and internet service remain suspended, thousands have been arrested without charge and are being held incommunicado, and security forces continue to terrorize the population by brutally repressing any signs of opposition and staging night raids to seize "potential stone-pelters."

With its repeated statements that J&K's fate is an "internal" Indian affair and its complicit silence on the repression in Indian-held Kashmir, Washington had already made manifestly clear that it stands with the BJP government and the Indian state in their assault on Kashmir. But this support was reinforced and highlighted by the praise US President Donald Trump lavished on India and Modi during the G7 summit in Biarritz, France, and by his endorsement of the longstanding Indian position that the Indo-Pakistani strategic rivalry and their competing claims to Kashmir are strictly a "bilateral" matter.

The Indian Prime Minister participated in some of the G7 leaders' three days of talks as a special guest of summit host French President Emmanuel Macron.

Prior to meeting one-on-one with Modi last Monday, Trump said it was "great to be here" with the Indian prime minister, and that he had "learned a lot about India" during a dinner discussion with Modi the previous evening.

"We spoke last night about Kashmir," said Trump. "The Prime Minister really feels he has it under control."

The US President went on to reject Pakistan's calls for Washington and other great powers to intervene and help defuse what Islamabad has warned is a mounting threat of all-out war between South Asia's nuclear-armed rivals. Referring to Modi and his Pakistani counterpart,

Imran Khan, Trump said, "I think they can do it (resolve the Indo-Pakistani conflict) themselves." Later, in what was an evident sop to New Delhi, Trump demonstratively walked back an offer he had first made in July and which had provoked much consternation in New Delhi, to facilitate talks between India and Pakistan.

While Trump and Macron have done so the most publicly, all of the Western imperialist leaders and their governments are backing Modi's actions in J&K.

This is because they are all anxious to expand economic and geostrategic ties with India, whose development they view as crucial to containing and thwarting China's rise, including if necessary militarily. J&K borders China's Xinjiang and Tibetan autonomous regions to the east.

The Modi government, building on the "global Indo-US strategic partnership" forged between New Delhi and Washington under the previous Congress Party-led government, has increasingly aligned India diplomatically and strategically with the US across the Indo-Pacific. This includes throwing open India's ports and military bases to US battleships and warplanes and participating in the "Quad," a de facto anti-China military-strategic alliance with the US and its closest regional allies, Japan and Australia.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously explained, another important factor in the Western powers' support for the unprecedented repression in J&K is that they themselves are making preparations to use similar measures—the severing of cellphone and internet service, mass "preventive" arrests, the deployment of troops armed to the teeth, etc.—to suppress mounting opposition from the working class. Indeed, the state of siege in J&K, a region with a population greater than Belgium or Sweden or the US' fifth largest state, Pennsylvania, is no doubt being closely studied by Western intelligence agencies (see: "State of siege in Kashmir: A warning to the international working class").

India-Pakistan tensions remain on the boil

The Indian government and media were quick to trumpet the effusive reception accorded Modi by the US President and the other G7 leaders. The *Financial Express* headlined its report on the Modi-Trump meeting, "Big diplomatic win for India."

"Pakistan's propaganda was dealt the final blow in the meeting between" Modi and Trump, claimed BJP spokesperson G.V.L. Narasimha Rao. "The meeting has categorically confirmed that any

issue between India and Pakistan has to be discussed (only) bilaterally.”

The imperialist support will only further embolden India, which under Modi has repeatedly taken reckless, provocative steps aimed at fundamentally altering the military-strategic dynamic between India and Pakistan. In September 2016 and again this past February, it launched illegal military strikes inside Pakistan, in ostensible retaliation for terrorist attacks in J&K, sparking war crises. In the latter case, New Delhi and Islamabad pulled back only after their warplanes engaged in a dogfight over disputed Kashmir.

The change in J&K’s constitutional status and the accompanying mass repression are meant to initiate an Indian offensive aimed at forcing a quick and bloody end to the three decade-old Pakistan-backed anti-Indian insurgency in J&K, and at ending all further discussion of Islamabad’s claim to sovereignty over Indian-held J&K.

On Wednesday, Indian Vice-President M. Vankaiiah Naidu reiterated the post-Aug. 5 Indian government stance that insofar as Kashmir figures in future Indo-Pakistani talks it will only be to discuss New Delhi’s claim to all of Pakistan-held Kashmir. (As a byproduct of the reactionary 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India, the former British Indian princely state of Jammu & Kashmir was divided during the 1947–48 Indo-Pakistan war into Indian and Pakistan-held “Kashmirs.”)

Whilst exchanges of artillery fire between Indian and Pakistani forces across the Line of Control in disputed Kashmir appear to have subsided somewhat in recent days, relations between New Delhi and Islamabad remain on the boil, with both sides making bellicose threats.

Pakistan Railway Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told a meeting in Rawalpindi, home to Pakistan’s military, that a “full-blown war between Pakistan and India is likely to occur in October or the following month.” Ominously, he added this would be “the last time” the nuclear-armed rivals would fight.

In recent days, both countries have taken to making unannounced releases of water held in their respective Indus Valley dams and waterworks, leading to cross-border floods imperiling the lives of poor villagers.

Mass repression in Jammu and Kashmir

Meanwhile, the Indian government claims that “normalcy” is being gradually restored to J&K are belied by the extent of the continued repression.

New Delhi continues to refuse to say when cell phone, internet, or even postal service will be restored. Nor has it revealed the names and whereabouts of those detained as “public security threats,” let alone allowed them access to lawyers or visits by family members.

Not even the number of detainees is known. While the government has refused to provide any official figure, it has suggested, in a sharp upwards revisions from the original total it put out of about 500, that some 2,000 persons are in detention, most of them in jails outside the state.

According to police and other state personnel who have spoken confidentially to journalists, the true total is much higher, in the order of 4,000 to 6,000. The detainees include thousands of youth, as well as

academics, lawyers and others. So isolated is the Indian government and so fearful is it of any opening for popular opposition, it has even taken into custody hundreds of prominent leaders and cadres of the parties of the traditionally pro-Indian section of J&K’s Muslim political elite, including three former chief ministers and the current mayor and deputy-mayor of Srinagar, J&K’s largest city.

A youth in Arihala, a village in J&K’s Pulwama district, told the Scroll.in website: “The army comes at night, sometimes they don’t even have police with them. First they cover the mosques so that an alarm cannot be raised [from the loudspeakers] there, then they raid. They come to beat up people, (at) 12 a.m., 1 a.m. at night.”

The government has repeatedly been caught lying about the situation in J&K. It continues to insist there have been no fatalities. But there are at least three people known to have died as the result of police attacks on protesters.

The restrictions on people’s movements and the disruption of the internet, which has crippled the financial system, including ATM access, are causing increasing hardship, with people unable to get access to medicines and other vital supplies.

India’s ruling elite, while conceding that Modi’s assault on J&K is a high-risk gamble, is overwhelmingly supporting it. On Wednesday, India’s Supreme Court put off until next week even hearing arguments in a case brought by the executive editor of the *Kashmir Times* that argues the shutdown of most forms of communication in J&K makes it impossible for a free press to function. Previously, the Supreme Court had told the plaintiff, Anuradha Bhasin, to have more faith in government and security forces’ assurances the communications blackout is only temporary.

In a move that exemplifies the corporate media’s complicity in the state assault on Kashmir, the Press Council of India (PCI) has asked to intervene in the *Kashmir Times* case, so it can argue in support of the government’s claim that its actions are necessary to defend the country’s “security” and integrity.” Echoing the pronouncements of Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, the PCI claims media freedom must be balanced by “national interests.”



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