

War tensions between India and Pakistan mount following terrorist attack in Indian-held Kashmir

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Relations between India and Pakistan, South Asia's rival nuclear-armed powers, are on a knife's edge after New Delhi rushed to declare Pakistan responsible for last Tuesday's terrorist attack in Indian-held Kashmir.

On Wednesday, India's Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government announced sweeping "retaliatory" measures targeting Pakistan, including the expulsion of all Pakistani nationals in India, with the exception of a small corps of diplomats, and the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty.

Using bellicose language akin to that of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Indian PM and would-be Hindu authoritarian strongman Narendra Modi has vowed that India will "break the backs of the masters of terror" and "render into dust the remaining land of terrorists." The Indian government has long denounced its arch-rival Pakistan as the world's chief "terrorist state."

In recent days, both sides have repeatedly exchanged gun and artillery fire across the Line of Control (LOC) that demarcates Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) from Pakistani-controlled Azad Kashmir. While no casualties have been reported as yet, local residents on both sides of the LOC are understandably fearful of what the coming days will bring. *The Hindu* reported "many residents in (J&K's) R.S. Pora, which is close to the International Border, were seen cleaning up underground bunkers" so they would be shelter-ready "in case of any exigency."

On April 22, twenty-six tourists, all but one of them an Indian citizen, were killed and dozens injured in a commando-type attack near Pahalgam in the scenic Baisaran Valley. Indian authorities have said that the Resistance Front, an Islamist group formed in response to the Modi government's 2019 abrogation of J&K's special autonomous status within India, claimed responsibility for the attack. The Indian government charges that the Resistance Front is an off-shoot of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), an Islamist terrorist organization that has previously received backing from sections of the Pakistani military-intelligence apparatus.

Using last Tuesday's terror attack as a pretext, the BJP government has launched a massive military crackdown with extensive day and night search operations across Jammu and Kashmir. As part of this crackdown, six houses of "suspected militants" were turned into rubble through controlled blasts by Indian military forces. More than 100 residences of alleged "militant supporters" have been searched, and hundreds detained.

The father of Zakir Ahmad Ganai, a 29-year-old from Kulgam District's Matalhama village, spoke with the *Hindu* after the family house was razed. "We are innocent," he declared. "It should not have happened to us." The father said his son went missing on September 27, 2023 and never returned home. The Ganai family subsequently filed a missing-person report with the police. "We don't know if he is alive or not."

Indian security forces are subjecting people in many parts of J&K—the only Muslim-majority state or Union Territory in mainland India—and

particularly villages or neighbourhoods where alleged suspects hail from to collective punishment. In Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian Kashmir, as per an unofficial estimate, around 1,500 local youth have been questioned or detained since the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam. The controlled-blast levelling of accused terrorists' homes has left adjacent dwellings with cracks in their walls and shattered windows. Mehbooba Mufti, a former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir and erstwhile BJP ally, has been forced to criticize the crackdown, saying security forces must distinguish between terrorists and civilians.

India's opposition parties and corporate media are assisting the BJP government in whipping up war fever, Indian chauvinism and anti-Muslim communalism.

An all-party meeting Thursday convened by Modi's chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and attended by representatives of virtually all the parties, agreed, according to Congress Party leader Rahul Gandhi, to fully support "any action" the government may take.

Many media voices are calling on the Modi government to launch a more "muscular" military action against Pakistan than the illegal cross-border strikes it mounted with Washington's support in 2016 and 2019. "If the Prime Minister declares war on Pakistan, he will have the whole country behind him," wrote long-time *Indian Express* columnist Tavleen Singh. "If he does nothing, he will lose everyone's support."

Hundreds of Kashmiri students who were pursuing university and college degrees in other states have been forced to return to Kashmir, due to a vicious campaign of harassment instigated by the BJP and its far-right Hindu supremacist allies.

The government has responded nervously to anyone who dares challenge its version of the attack. Aminul Islam, a member of the Assam state legislature from the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), is one of 19 people in India's north-eastern states arrested for making "seditious" remarks about the Pahalgam terror attack.

Islam suggested that both it and the 2019 Pulwama terror attack could have been facilitated by a "conspiracy" by the top BJP leadership, so as to use them to stampede public opinion behind the government. He noted that the authorities have still never explained the security lapses that allowed 42 Indian security personnel to be killed in the terror-attack at Pulwama, which he said was exploited by the BJP to "communally polarize" Hindu and Muslim voters to win the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

The most provocative public reprisal measure taken by New Delhi to date is its suspension of India's participation in the Indus Water Treaty (IWR). The treaty, which came into force in 1960, provided a legal framework for sharing the waters of the Indus River system, ensuring that both countries have clearly defined rights.

Today more than 80 percent of Pakistan's agriculture and around a third

of its hydropower generation depend on the waters of the Indus basin. Because of its importance, New Delhi has never previously suspended the treaty, despite having fought two declared wars, several undeclared wars, and countless border skirmishes with Pakistan over the past 65 years.

Even if India does not at this time have the capacity to cut off large volumes of water from eventually reaching Pakistan, with the suspension of the treaty it has arrogated the power to disrupt water-flows, including during the current planting season, and to withhold vital information about them.

Pakistan has responded to New Delhi's provocative actions with its own. These include closing its airspace to Indian airlines, halting all trade with India, ordering all Indian nationals out of the country and suspending the 1972 Simla Agreement. Signed in the aftermath of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war, the Simla Agreement established the LOC as the boundary between the J&K and Azad Kashmir, pending resolution of the two countries' rival claims to all of Kashmir.

Following a National Security Council meeting last week, Pakistan vowed that its armed forces are "fully capable and prepared to defend [Pakistan's] sovereignty and territorial integrity against any misadventure," in a reference to its response to the Indian Air Force's strikes on Balakot in February 2019, which took the two countries to the brink of all-out war.

Responding to this announcement, Pakistan People's Party Chairman and ex-Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told a public rally, "The Indus is ours and will remain ours. Either our water will flow through it, or their blood."

As the WSWS has previously explained, "The Indo-Pakistani conflict is a reactionary conflict between rival capitalist states, rooted in the 1947 communal partition of South Asia into an avowedly Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India. ... Both the Indian and Pakistani bourgeoisies have run roughshod over the democratic rights of the Kashmiri people. New Delhi brutally suppressed mass protests that erupted in 1989 in response to its rigging of elections in Jammu and Kashmir, India's lone Muslim-majority state. This triggered an insurgency, which Pakistan manipulated to further its own reactionary interests, by redeploying and expanding the network of Islamist militia it had developed at American imperialism's behest to fight the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan."

Since the turn of the century, the India-Pakistan conflict has become increasingly enmeshed with that between US imperialism and China, adding a new and highly explosive dimension to both. Washington has showered New Delhi with strategic favours, including advanced weaponry, access to civilian nuclear technology, and real-time military intelligence-sharing, in exchange for India integrating itself ever-more fully into its military-strategic offensive against China. With this backing, India under Modi has moved aggressively to redefine its relationship with Pakistan, so as to assert itself as the regional hegemon. Pakistan, meanwhile, has doubled down on its "all-weather" partnership with Beijing, further antagonizing both New Delhi and Washington.

In response to the war-threats coming from India and with keen awareness that Washington has repeatedly encouraged New Delhi to take a more bellicose stance in its dealings with both China and Pakistan, Beijing has reasserted its alliance with Islamabad.

Following a conversation Sunday with Pakistan's foreign minister, China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, issued a statement urging restraint and calling for an impartial international investigation into the April 22 Pahalgram attack. "China," said Wang, "has always supported Pakistan in its resolute anti-terrorism actions. As a staunch friend and all-weather strategic partner, China fully understands Pakistan's reasonable security concerns and supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests."

US Vice President J.D. Vance was in India when the Pahalgram attack occurred, as part of the Trump administration's efforts to further

strengthen what successive administrations dating back to that of George W. Bush have called America's "global strategic partnership" with India. The next heads of government meeting of the QUAD, the quasi-military-security alliance between New Delhi, Washington, and its principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia, is to take place in India later this year.

Publicly, Washington has said next to nothing about the threat of an impending clash between India and Pakistan—one that could quickly cascade into an all-out conflict between nuclear-armed states and draw in other world powers. Behind the scenes, India will certainly demand that Washington support its "right" to "retaliatory anti-terrorist strikes," as Obama provided in 2016 and Trump during his first term in 2019.

Friday, en route to Rome for the Pope's funeral, Trump made ignorant and reactionary remarks on the Indo-Pakistani conflict, while claiming they will "figure (it) out one way or another." "I am very close to India and I'm very close to Pakistan," said the US president. "And they've had that fight for 1,000 years in Kashmir. Kashmir has been going on for 1,000 years, probably longer than that."

This is a gross distortion, one that is imbued with the British colonialist and Hindu supremacist construction of history. Not surprisingly, it was immediately hailed by the Hindu far-right, with the United Hindu Council applauding the know-nothing, fascist US president for "hinting at a much deeper history... the centuries-old religious fault lines caused due to Islamist extremism."

The growing war danger in South Asia is a devastating exposure of the venal character of the national bourgeoisie in the countries of belated capitalist development and the reactionary nature of the post-colonial nation-state system, created through "decolonization."

Above all, it underscores the urgency of workers in India and Pakistan opposing their own governments, forging their class unity in opposition to social inequality, communalism and war, and joining with workers in North America, China and around the world in an international anti-war movement based on eradicating capitalism—the root cause of war—through socialist revolution.



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