

# Pakistan warns Indian military strike “imminent,” as tensions between South Asia’s rival nuclear-armed powers flare

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Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif warned Monday that an Indian military strike on his country is “imminent,” adding that Islamabad would respond with tactical or strategic nuclear weapons only if “there is a direct threat to our existence.”

Asif’s claim of an imminent attack was amplified by Pakistan Information Minister Attaullah Tarar late Tuesday. He said there was “verified intelligence indicating that India intends to carry out a military operation against Pakistan” within the next 24-36 hours.

Tarar went on to vow that Pakistan would respond to any Indian attack in kind, raising the spectre of a rapid descent into all-out war between the two countries. “Any military adventurism from India will receive a certain and decisive response,” declared Tarar. “The international community must recognise that responsibility for any catastrophic escalation will rest solely with India. The people of Pakistan will defend their sovereignty and territorial integrity at all costs.”

Tensions between South Asia’s rival nuclear-armed powers have been aboil since India’s government, led by the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), blamed Pakistan for a brutal April 23 terrorist attack near Pahalgam in Indian-held Kashmir that killed 26 tourists.

New Delhi has offered no proof for its claim of Pakistani state involvement in the Pahalgam atrocity, and has rejected out of hand Islamabad’s calls for an international investigation into the attack.

Instead, the Indian government has taken a series of provocative “reprisals,” and given every indication that it is preparing a cross-border strike on Pakistan—potentially even larger than those it mounted in 2016 and 2019, after similarly holding Pakistan responsible for the actions of Islamist insurgents in Indian-held Kashmir.

In recent days, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior government leaders have made repeated threats against Pakistan, pledging to smite the “masters of terror”

and the “organizers,” not just perpetrators of terrorism, without directly naming the country.

Meanwhile, in the name of “hunting militants,” Indian security forces have launched a campaign of mass repression in Kashmir so harsh and indiscriminate that even pro-Indian politicians from the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) National Conference and the J&K People’s Democratic Party have been forced to criticize it.

On Tuesday, according to a Press Trust of India source, Modi gave India’s armed forces complete “operational freedom” to determine the “mode, targets, and timing” of India’s response to the April 22 attack, at a meeting with the heads of the country’s national-security establishment. Those said to have participated in the meeting include Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, and the heads of the army, navy and air force.

Pakistan is likewise preparing its military for combat. Speaking with Reuters on Monday, Defence Minister Asif said Islamabad had placed its forces on high alert and implemented measures to counter and respond to an Indian attack. “We have reinforced our forces because it is something which is imminent now. In that situation, some strategic decisions must be taken, so those decisions have been taken.” Indicating the state of tensions and the possibility of an Indian strike triggering a cascade of escalating tit-for-tat military reprisals, Asif went on to raise the issue of what threat level would trigger a Pakistani resort to its nuclear arsenal.

Every night since last Thursday has seen what is described as cross-border small arms fire along parts of the Line of Control (LOC). The LOC is the boundary that demarcates Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistan-occupied Azad Kashmir, pending final resolution of their competing claims to all the territories of the former British Indian princely state of Kashmir.

On Tuesday, Pakistan’s military boasted it had shot down

an Indian quadcopter surveillance drone along the LOC, “thwarting a violation of its airspace.” It has also seized an Indian Border Security Force soldier who reportedly strayed across the LOC while accompanying local farmers who were tending to their crops.

The dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and more broadly power and influence in South Asia is a reactionary conflict between rival capitalist powers. Its roots lie in the communal partition of South Asia into an avowedly Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India in 1947-48.

With the aim of securing geostrategic and economic advantages and as a means of directing class tensions outward and dividing the workers and toilers through the incitement of communalism, the capitalist elites of India and Pakistan have perpetuated the conflict over the past eight decades. Untold human and material resources have been squandered in multiple wars, declared and undeclared, and numerous border skirmishes and war crises, and in procuring and developing armaments, including, since the late 1990s, nuclear weapons.

The BJP government, aided and abetted by the corporate media and the opposition parties, is using the Pahalgam atrocity to whip up bellicose nationalism, stoke communal reaction and launch fresh attacks on democratic rights.

Right-wing Hindu organizations that enjoy the patronage of the governing BJP have launched attacks on Kashmiri students studying elsewhere in India, forcing hundreds to flee to their native region. On Tuesday Modi met with Mohan Bhagwat, the head of the Hindu supremacist RSS, reportedly to discuss India’s response to the Pahalgam attack. The BJP is an offshoot of the RSS, which has a long bloody record of communalist incitement.

When the head of a major Indian farmers’ organization voiced opposition to India’s provocative announcement that for the first time ever it is suspending its participation in the Indus Water Treaty, because it would harm Pakistani farmers, he was widely pilloried, with a BJP leader accusing him of “speaking the language of Pakistan.”

On Monday, the government cut off access to more than a dozen mainstream Pakistani YouTube media channels, including Dawn News and Geo News, on the grounds they were airing “provocative content” and “misinformation on India, its Army, and security agencies.”

Last Thursday, the leading Stalinist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, participated in an all-party meeting convened by the BJP to help stampede the population behind its exploitation of the terrorist attack to whip up reaction and launch military action against Pakistan. The CPM has criticized none of New Delhi’s “retaliatory” actions against Pakistan, including the expulsion of all Pakistani nationals in India save diplomatic personnel, and

the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty, which threatens, especially over the longer term, Pakistan’s access to water vital for its power grid and irrigation.

Over the past two decades, the India-Pakistan conflict has become ever more entwined with that between US imperialism and China, adding a massive new charge to both.

Washington’s drive to build up India as a counterweight to China, which has included granting India a raft of strategic favours, has upset the balance of power, or more appropriately balance of terror, between New Delhi and Islamabad.

This has emboldened India to try to effectively change the rules of the game in its relationship with Pakistan, with the aim of asserting itself as the regional hegemon. Like its US and Israeli allies, New Delhi has asserted the “right” to stage illegal cross-border attacks on Pakistan. When it did so in 2016 and 2019, it received Washington’s backing under Obama and then Trump.

Pakistan has responded by doubling down on its “all weather” strategic partnership with China, further straining relations with India and the US.

In 2019, the Modi government sought to strengthen its grip over Jammu and Kashmir and its hand against both China and Pakistan by illegally abolishing the Muslim-majority territory’s special autonomous constitutional status and reducing it from a state to a central government-controlled Union Territory. At the same time, it spun off Ladakh, which borders Chinese-controlled Aksai Chin, from Jammu and Kashmir, so as to facilitate the region’s militarization.

On Tuesday, China for the second straight day expressed alarm about the heightened tensions between India and Pakistan.

While Iran and Saudi Arabia have sought to engage both sides, and the United Nations and European Union have called for restraint and dialogue, Washington has said next to nothing, and is certainly not intervening to restrain its ally India.



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