

South Asian confrontation escalates as Indian airstrikes hit inside Pakistan

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The Indian government has provocatively escalated tensions with Pakistan after the Indian military struck targets inside Pakistani-controlled Kashmir and deep inside Pakistan itself shortly after midnight on Wednesday.

The Indian defence ministry announced that nine targets had been struck but provided no details. It claimed that the attacks were “focused, measured and non-escalatory in nature,” targeting “terrorist infrastructure” and avoiding Pakistani military bases and facilities.

Without providing evidence, India has accused Pakistan of being behind the April 22 terrorist attack near Pahalgam in Indian-controlled Kashmir that killed 26 people and vowed retaliation.

The Pakistani government has flatly denied any involvement for the attack and offered a neutral investigation of the incident.

The airstrikes have deliberately inflamed one of the world’s most dangerous flashpoints for war. The two nuclear-armed countries have already fought three wars over Kashmir which both claim. Now the conflict is intertwined with the US-led preparations for war with China, which has strong ties to Pakistan. As it has escalated its confrontation with Beijing, Washington has strengthened its military ties with New Delhi as its major strategic partner in South Asia.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has condemned the airstrikes as “cowardly attacks” by a “deceitful enemy” and vowed retaliation for carrying out “cowardly attacks.” “Pakistan has every right to give a robust response to this act of war imposed by India, and a strong response is indeed being given,” he said.

Pakistan claimed to have shot down at least five Indian air force jets. Its foreign affairs ministry said that

the Indian aircraft had remained in Indian airspace and used “stand-off weapons” to carry out the attacks. According to *Al Jazeera*, the Pakistani military has already commenced heavy artillery fire along the Line of Control (LoC) separating Pakistan-held Azad Kashmir and Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir. It claims to have destroyed an Indian infantry brigade headquarters.

Armed forces spokesman Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said India’s air force had “martyred innocent civilians, which includes women and children” in missile strikes near the cities of Muridke and Bahawalpur inside Pakistan, as well as in Bagh, Kotli and Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-held Kashmir. Eight people were killed, another 35 injured and two people are reported missing.

Among the dead were a child and two others who were killed in a strike on a mosque in Punjab.

The airstrikes followed nightly exchanges of small arms fire by Indian and Pakistani troops across the LoC over the past fortnight. Last night’s airstrikes are the first time since 2019 that India has attacked targets inside Pakistani territory, when its warplanes hit multiple locations after blaming Islamabad for a suicide car bombing that killed at least 40 Indian paramilitary troops. Moreover, the latest attacks on Ahmadpur East and Muridke in Pakistan’s Punjab province are the deepest inside Pakistan since the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war.

The attempts by New Delhi to downplay the severity of today’s strikes are belied by the bellicose response of India’s rightwing Hindu supremacist government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the April 22 terrorist attack. Since then, Modi and top government leaders have repeatedly threatened not just the perpetrators, but to smite the “masters of terror” and the “organizers”—a barely veiled threat against the

Pakistani government and armed forces.

The Modi government has for the first time suspended its participation in the Indus Water Treaty threatening to cut off water for Pakistani towns and cities as well as agriculture. The Indus River Treaty signed in 1960 involved a complex sharing of water resources from the river system, on which Pakistan is heavily dependent, that has its ultimate source in China but flows through India.

In offhand remarks at the White House, US President Trump declared that the dangerous military escalation by India against Pakistan was “a shame.” He claimed to have just heard about the Indian airstrikes, adding: “They’ve been fighting for a long time. I just hope it ends very quickly.”

In reality, the Trump administration’s close relations and strategic partnership with India has only encouraged Modi to respond aggressively against Pakistan, exploiting the April 22 terrorist attack as the pretext. According to Indian officials, national security adviser, Ajit Doval, briefed Secretary of State Marco Rubio on the airstrikes immediately after they had taken place, but the Trump administration undoubtedly knew in advance that Indian retaliation was imminent.

On April 30, Rubio met with India’s External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and denounced the “horrific terrorist attack” inside Indian-controlled Kashmir. While appealing to “de-escalate tensions,” Rubio nevertheless “reaffirmed the United States’ commitment to cooperation with India against terrorism”—remarks that only encouraged, not restrained, aggressive Indian retaliation.

The decades-long rivalry between India and Pakistan is a reactionary conflict that is rooted in the catastrophic 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent into a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India. Military conflict over Muslim-majority Kashmir erupted very rapidly after the Hindu ruler of the princely state opted, under pressure from New Delhi, to join with India.

Successive governments in India and Pakistan have relied on whipping up communal politics, in which the control of all Kashmir has been a key feature, as the means of dividing the working class and shoring up bourgeois rule. The ruling classes in both countries have trampled on the basic democratic rights of the Kashmiri people. India’s anti-democratic policies in Jammu and Kashmir only fuelled the eruption of an

armed insurgency from 1989, that has been manipulated by Pakistan, and resulted in India’s imposition of draconian police-state measures.

Tensions have only sharpened under Modi’s Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which in 2019 abolished the special, autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir and placed it more directly under the control of India’s central government.

Far from the latest airstrikes being “measured and non-escalatory,” the Indian government has embarked on a reckless military campaign aimed at undermining its longstanding regional rival, Pakistan. It was summed up in a jubilant post last night on X by Rajnath Singh, India’s defence minister, “Victory to Mother India.”

The great danger facing the working class, not only in South Asia but internationally, is that the escalating military confrontation between the two nuclear-armed states can draw in the US and China, along with other major powers, and become the flashpoint for a catastrophic global conflict.



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