

# Tensions between India and Pakistan surge after last week's explosions in Delhi and Islamabad

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Tensions have surged between India and Pakistan, which fought a four-day war last May, following deadly explosions on consecutive days last week in their respective capitals, New Delhi and Islamabad.

Pakistan has blamed India for the November 11 suicide bombing outside the Islamabad District Judicial Court complex, which killed 12 people, in addition to the bomber, and injured dozens more.

Almost immediately after the attack, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that it had been carried out by “Indian terrorist proxies” and called on foreign governments to condemn “Indian state terrorism.” Defence Minister Khawaja Asif was even more explicit. He claimed the bombing in Pakistan’s capital and a November 11 assault by five gunmen on a Pakistan army cadet school in South Waziristan “were orchestrated from Afghanistan, at the behest of India.”

A faction of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan has claimed responsibility for the Islamabad suicide bombing, which occurred in a high-security zone.

In recent months, Islamabad has become ever more strident in charging that both India and Afghanistan’s Taliban regime are providing material support to the Pakistan Taliban—an Islamist insurgent group that arose at the beginning of the Afghan War in response to the scorched-earth military campaign and collective punishments Islamabad and Washington used to suppress Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan’s tribal areas.

Fighting erupted between Pakistan and Afghanistan along their disputed border last month after Islamabad mounted airstrikes deep inside Afghanistan, targeting what it called Pakistan Taliban bases. Only after a week and a half of border clashes and Pakistani drone and fighter-jet missile strikes across southern and central Afghanistan did the two sides reach a shaky truce with the help of Qatar and Turkey.

Not coincidentally, Pakistan launched its illegal campaign of air strikes inside Afghanistan on October 9, just as Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi was beginning a week-long trip to New Delhi. There he met his Indian counterpart, S. Jaishnakar, and India’s National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, and signed an “India–Afghanistan Joint Statement” that outlines a framework for increased trade, humanitarian and military-security cooperation.

In addition to ratcheting up tensions with India, Pakistan has also made new bellicose threats against Kabul in the wake of the Islamabad bomb attack. Defence Minister Asif said the attack shows Pakistan is in a “state of war,” adding that “in this environment, it would be futile to hold out greater hope for successful negotiations with the rulers of Kabul.”

Pakistan’s relations with both India and Afghanistan are now highly fraught, with a growing danger that renewed border clashes or even a full-scale war could erupt at any time.

Last May, South Asia’s two nuclear-armed powers came to the brink of an all-out confrontation after India, in defiance of international law,

launched multiple air strikes across Pakistan after blaming Islamabad, without providing a shred of evidence, for a terrorist attack in Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir. Events quickly spiraled out of control, as both sides engaged in combat outside of the disputed Kashmir regime for the first time in decades and made widespread use of drone strikes and sophisticated air defence systems.

With losses of sophisticated aircraft mounting and both India and Pakistan implementing war-mobilization plans, the two sides pulled back on the fourth day of fighting and hastily agreed to a truce. However, there has been no return to even the frigid relations that previously prevailed.

India’s Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has rejected Islamabad’s calls for negotiations; demonstratively declared that its military action against Pakistan (Operation Sindoor) is merely “suspended”; and withdrawn from the Indus Valley Water Treaty, threatening to disrupt Pakistan’s water and electricity supply.

Both countries have launched crash drives to purchase new armaments, replenish ammunition stocks, and rework their war plans based on the “lessons” of May’s last clash.

Meanwhile, the BJP, with the support of much of the corporate media, has boasted that India redefined its relations with Pakistan in last May’s war. By crossing multiple Pakistani “red lines,” India, they assert, has demonstrated that it will not be cowed by Islamabad’s “nuclear blackmail”—that is, the possibility an Indo-Pakistani war could rapidly result in the use of tactical and ultimately strategic nuclear weapons. India, or so the argument goes, has now positioned itself to make use of its large preponderance in conventional forces to put its arch-rival Pakistan in its place.

In the BJP narrative, credit for India’s supposed new prowess lies with the “Hindu strongman” Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During the recently concluded Bihar state election campaign, Modi and his BJP repeatedly boasted that they had led India to victory last May and in so doing decisively altered the Indo-Pakistani dynamic in New Delhi’s favour.

## The Delhi explosion

It is within this context that events have played out after a car exploded on the evening of Monday, November 10, near the Red Fort, in old Delhi.

The powerful explosion killed 13 people and left more than a dozen injured, with several nearby vehicles and rickshaws reduced to twisted debris. A nearby resident, Om Prakash, told AP he was at home when he heard a deafening blast. “I rushed out with my children and saw several

vehicles on fire, body parts all over.”

The explosion, of a car stopped at a traffic light in what is meant to be a high-security zone, stunned the authorities, with Delhi police and National Investigation Agency officials groping to understand what had happened. That did not stop Modi's chief henchman, Home Minister Amit Shah, leading India's political establishment and media in immediately labelling the explosion a terrorist attack and using it to whip up hostility against Muslims and escalate repression in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

No sooner did police announce that they suspected the driver of the vehicle that exploded was a Kashmir doctor by the name of Umar Un Nabi, than authorities demolished his family home.

With the authorities carrying out widespread raids and arrests across Jammu and Kashmir, the territory's Chief Minister was forced to caution the BJP and the Indian political elite more generally. “We must remember one thing,” said Omar Abdullah, “not every resident of Jammu and Kashmir is a terrorist, or associated with the terrorists ... [W]hen we look at every resident of J&K and every Kashmiri Muslim with a single lens that each one of them is a terrorist, it is difficult to keep the people on the right track.”

The authorities are now linking the November 10 explosion to the October 30 arrest of Dr. Muzammil Shakeel Ganaie, who was employed at a college and teaching hospital in Faridabad, a city located in the Delhi National Capital region, and their subsequent recovery of a large cache of explosives. According to this account, the car driver was, like Dr. Ganaie, a member of an anti-Indian Kashmiri Islamist group, and was probably trying to move explosives, fearing that they too would soon be seized, when they detonated.

Nothing that the Indian authorities—or for that matter the Pakistani—say about terrorist attacks should be taken at face value. Both are up to their necks in reactionary intrigues, including in India's case mounting a campaign of assassinations against Sikh separatists in North America and Europe. New Delhi denies any ties to the Pakistan Taliban or to Baluchistan ethno-nationalist insurgents battling the Pakistani state; yet shortly prior to his nomination as India's National Security Adviser, Doval boasted about India's ability to use Baluchi separatists to neutralize Pakistan.

At Washington's behest under Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Pakistan armed, trained and organized the Mujahedin to fight Afghanistan's pro-Soviet government. Later, Pakistan's military-intelligence apparatus used the connections and spycraft it had developed in conjunction with the CIA to further its own strategic conflict with India in Kashmir.

The dispute over Kashmir, like the broader India-Pakistan strategic conflict of which it is part, is a product of the reactionary 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India. Partition was carried out by South Asia's departing British colonial overlords in connivance with rival factions of the national bourgeoisie led by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League.

Both India and Pakistan have run roughshod over the democratic rights of the Kashmiri people. In 2019, to fulfill a long-time goal of the Hindu supremacist right and strengthen India's hand against China and Pakistan, the Modi government stripped Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir of its special autonomous constitutional status and reduced it to a central government-dominated Union territory. At the same time, it spun off the strategic Ladakh region into a separate Union territory to facilitate its transformation into a forward base of military operations against Beijing.

Across India, the BJP government and its close ally RSS are in the midst of a new anti-Muslim agitation focused on the so-called “demographic threat” that Muslims constitute to the “Hindu Indian nation.” This delusional communalist boogeyman ties together the Hindu right's agitations against an alleged higher Muslim birth rate and Bangladeshi

migrants (many of whom have lived most, if not, all their lives in India.)

Thus far, the BJP government has not alleged Pakistani involvement in the Delhi blast, preferring to focus on its internal agenda, in which diverting social anger against India's 200 million Muslims plays a critical role.

This, however, could soon change. The Congress and other opposition parties are criticizing the government for not having officially declared the Delhi explosion a terrorist strike sooner. For their party, some press commentators are criticizing Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh for “boxing India into a corner,” by being so categorical in their vows that any future terrorist attack linked to Pakistan would be met with military action.

## US imperialism and South Asia's knife-edge

The predatory actions and ambitions of US imperialism are a critical factor in the heightening geopolitical tensions in South Asia and the danger of a catastrophic war. Under successive presidents, Republican and Democratic alike, Washington has worked to transform India into a frontline state in its military-strategic confrontation with China. This has included giving New Delhi special status in the world nuclear regulatory regime, access to high-tech US weapons and real-time intelligence during its ongoing border conflict with China.

Faced with an increasingly aggressive India, Pakistan has doubled down over on its “all weather” military-strategic alliance with Beijing. This has only heightened tensions with New Delhi and Washington and further enmeshed the Indo-Pakistani and US-China conflicts.

American imperialist support has emboldened New Delhi to take an ever more provocative stance against Pakistan. Last May's military clash with Pakistan was the largest in decades and saw India for the third time since 2016 demonstratively mount a cross-border attack on its western neighbour, even at the risk of provoking a broader war.

However, to New Delhi's shock, Washington has in recent months taken steps to significantly improve relations with Pakistan, on the calculation that it can induce it to downgrade ties with Beijing. Even as it has done so, it has taken aggressive steps to punish India for its large-scale imports of Russian oil and continued close strategic ties with Moscow.

Currently, most Indian exports to the US face a Trump “reciprocal tariff” of 50 percent, even higher than the blanket charge on Chinese goods. Pakistan's exports to the US, meanwhile, face the lowest tariff of any South Asian country, 19 percent.

Further fueling indignation within the Indian elite is the close relationship Pakistan's army chief and newly-decorated Field Marshal, Syed Asim Munir, appears to have established with Trump. Since June, Munir has twice met with America's would-be dictator president in the White House.

Trump flails about for a means, whether through trade war, massive military spending increases and preparations for war around the globe from Venezuela and the Middle East to Russia and China, to extricate US imperialism from an ever accelerating decline. The sudden turns in US foreign policy under Trump are only fueling tensions in South Asia, making war more likely, whether by design or miscalculation.

Meanwhile, Munir and the Pakistani military, encouraged by Trump's support and the apparent restoration of relations with the Pentagon, have moved to tighten their grip over Pakistan's civilian government. Last week, in the immediate aftermath of the Islamabad suicide bombing, Pakistan's parliament bowed to pressure from Munir and adopted a series of laws and a sweeping constitutional amendment that constitute nothing less than a “soft” coup.

As a result of these changes, even nominal civilian control over the armed forces has been abolished, and Munir has been given a five-year appointment to the newly created position of Chief of Military Defence Forces (CMDf). Under the 27th amendment to Pakistan's constitution, the CMDf has full authority over all three branches of Pakistan's military and its nuclear arsenal. He is also guaranteed immunity for life from criminal prosecution.



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