

Nuclear-armed India, Pakistan on brink of all-out war

By K. Ratnayake
28 February 2019

The danger of all-out war in Asia continued to rise yesterday, after the Indian air force bombed targets deep inside Pakistan on Tuesday. Yesterday, as fighting mounted, Pakistan announced that it had carried out a strike in India.

Amid heavy shelling across the Line of Control (LoC) between Pakistani- and Indian-administered Kashmir, the two countries' air forces clashed and lost several fighter jets. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry released a statement claiming that its jets had struck "nonmilitary targets" in India from within Pakistani airspace. It added that the strike was "not a retaliation" for the Indian strike, though Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has pledged that Pakistan will retaliate, and that Pakistan is "fully prepared" for further escalation.

Pakistan's military spokesman Major General Asif Ghafoor claimed two Indian MiG-21 fighters "crossed into Pakistani territory and were shot down," and that the two pilots were captured.

Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar claimed India shot down one F-16 jet belonging to the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), after Pakistan targeted military installations on the Indian side of Kashmir with airstrikes. The airman was identified as wing commander Abhinandan Varthaman, and Pakistani authorities released a picture of him in detention.

In a sign that they expect the conflict to continue to escalate, both countries announced the closure of airspace and the suspension of commercial flights. Pakistan reportedly closed its airspace altogether and indefinitely closed three airports in cities near the Indian border. All flights from major airports, including Karachi, Peshawar and Lahore are suspended indefinitely. India has suspended flights from airports in Kashmir and the state of Punjab until further notice.

Washington, which has sought for over a decade to develop India as a diplomatic and military ally against China, is pouring fuel on the fire, tacitly backing the Indian attack. This poses immense dangers to humanity. Should fighting continue to escalate to a nuclear exchange between

India and Pakistan, hundreds of millions would die, and such a conflict could easily draw the two countries' main allies, the United States and China, into a global conflagration.

Yesterday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement legitimizing the Tuesday bombing, which was a clear violation of international law. Pompeo did not criticize the Indian attack. Instead, he said he had spoken to Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj "following Indian counter-terrorism actions on February 26," to "emphasize our close security partnership and shared goal of maintaining peace and security in the region."

With Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, on the other hand, Pompeo underscored "the priority of de-escalating current tensions by avoiding military action, and the urgency of Pakistan taking meaningful action against terrorist groups operating on its soil."

While all the governments make empty statements opposing escalation, Washington, New Delhi and Islamabad are ratcheting up the conflict. Pompeo said he had told "both Ministers that we encourage India and Pakistan to exercise restraint, and avoid escalation at any cost."

In Wuzhen, China, where she was meeting with Chinese and Russian officials, Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj said India wants to avoid "further escalation of the situation." Nonetheless, Beijing and Moscow bowed to Indian officials' demands and endorsed moves to "eradicate the breeding grounds of terrorism"—the pretext New Delhi gave for bombing Pakistan, after blaming Pakistan for a deadly February 14 bombing of Indian forces at Pulwama, in Kashmir.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said: "China's position is clear. We hope the two countries can exercise restraint, engage in dialogue and take action to ensure peace and stability in the region."

The most direct warning came from the Pakistani prime minister, who addressed the nation warning of the danger of miscalculation and of world war. He declared, "All wars are miscalculated, and no one knows where they lead to. And World War I was supposed to end in weeks, it took six years

[sic] ... The US never expected the war on terrorism to last 17 years.” Alluding to the nuclear weapons held by the armed forces of both countries, Khan said: “If this escalates, things will no longer be in my control or in Modi’s.”

Nonetheless, the US and Indian governments and Khan himself continue to escalate the fighting, even as they make veiled references to the danger of nuclear war.

The immense danger in this situation is that working people in Asia, in the United States and around the world are not fully aware of the imminent danger of a nuclear holocaust provoked by the policies of American imperialism and the bourgeoisies of South Asia. The decades-long war drive by US imperialism to dominate Eurasia, now targeting China, is coming together with the historic bankruptcy of the capitalist classes of the Indian subcontinent.

India is spiraling towards a catastrophic war with Pakistan rooted in the 1947 communal partition of the Indian sub-continent by British colonialism, with the connivance of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, between Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. Partition served to drown revolution against British colonialism in blood, divide workers along national lines and defend capitalist rule. Over 70 years later, these conflicts, which three times exploded into Indo-Pakistani wars costing millions of lives, threaten to unleash a world war.

Both the Indian and the Pakistani regimes are deeply unpopular among workers and the rural poor and, particularly in the run-up to the April–May 2019 Indian general elections, they are stoking war hysteria to press the population to rally behind them in war.

After the Pakistani strikes Wednesday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held an emergency meeting with top security officials. There were no reports on the contents of their discussions. According to PTI, Modi had been up all night Tuesday monitoring the Indian Air Force operation to attack an alleged terrorist camp at Balakot, and relaxed after the bombing raid was over. Then he was “busy with the next day’s schedule,” meeting with defence officials and ministers to plan the next moves.

Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its Hindu extremist allies have organised rallies across the country since the attack Tuesday on Pakistan.

They are no doubt encouraged by US National Security Advisor John Bolton’s statement after the Pulwama attack that Washington recognizes “India’s right to self defence against cross-border terrorism.”

War fever is also spreading in Pakistan, as well. Pakistan’s *Dawn* newspaper reported yesterday that after the downing of Indian fighters, a “mood of belligerent triumph spread across Pakistani news stations and online.”

The enormous war danger vindicates the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) advanced in its statement, *Socialism and the Fight Against War*. The only way out is developing an international socialist movement of the working class against war and building the ICFI across South Asia and the world.

The political establishments of both India and Pakistan are all entirely implicated in this conflict. While Pakistan’s political parties are rallying around Khan and the army, a group of 21 opposition parties in India including two Stalinist parties issued a statement supporting the war drive.

In a statement yesterday hailing the army’s “valour and bravery,” they regretted that Modi had not called an all-party meeting “as per established practice in our democracy.” They complained of Modi’s “politicisation” of the war and asked Modi to include them as he whips up war fever. They “condemned Pakistani misadventure and expressed deep concerns for the safety of our missing pilot,” asking “the government to take the nation into confidence on all measures to protect India’s sovereignty, unity and integrity.”

The only way forward for workers is a break from all factions of the capitalist ruling elites and, rallying support from workers around the world, develop their independent political struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia at the head of the toiling masses. Only the ICFI fights for this program, and it urges workers and youth to turn to this struggle and fight to build sections of the ICFI in India, Pakistan and around the world.

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