

No to war between India and Pakistan!

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Tensions between India and Pakistan reached a dramatic high-point at the end of February this year.

On February 26, the Indian air force claimed that it had attacked a training camp in Balakot, in Pakistan. These strikes were the first launched across the Line of Control since the war between the two countries in 1971. At a news conference, the Indian Foreign Secretary, Vijay, claimed that the strikes had killed a "large number" of "terrorist militants", including commanders, and had avoided civilian casualties.

Pakistan denied this claim and the Director General of the "Inter Services Public-Relations" (ISPR) of the country's military institutions announced that, "Indian aircraft intruded from Muzafarabad sector. Facing timely and effective response from the Pakistan Air Force, while escaping they released payloads in haste which fell near Balakot. No casualties or damage."

In response, Pakistan's airforce shot down two Indian aircraft inside Pakistan air space. One of the aircraft fell in Azad Kashmir and one pilot was arrested, the other on the Indian-held side of Kashmir.

Both sides put their military forces on alert. Clearly, a further escalation between the two nuclear armed regional powers, was a real threat. Even if the governments and ruling classes may not have wanted, or even aimed to avoid, a war, the rise of nationalist rhetoric on both sides, the mutual threats of retaliation and the inner contradictions, which haunt both countries, could have led to a further escalation and to a spread of war well beyond Kashmir. Military clashes in the border region continue. The airspace over Pakistan and Northern India has been closed for civilian flights.

The increased tensions between the two countries are themselves clearly an expression of the current international situation and the struggle for a re-division of the world. For the time being, all the global imperialist players; the US, China, the EU as well as Russia "want to avoid a further escalation in that region, which would clearly have dramatic global consequences. Russia offered mediation to the Indian government. Clearly, China and Russia want to prevent a further escalation between the two states for economic and geo-strategic reasons. Likewise, the US and the European powers want to avoid the tensions getting out of hand.

These factors have a major impact on the political, economic and military forces in India and Pakistan but, as the recent clash has shown, they are prepared to play with fire. This is not least because the inner contradictions in both countries, make nationalism and thereby nationalist threats an almost classical means to rally popular support and to divert attention away from the inner social, political and economic crisis and resistance. Thus, while the immediate threat of a war between India and Pakistan may be offset for the movement, the roots of the crisis will not wither away at all.

The real victims - the Kashmiri people

The real victims of the historic conflict between Pakistan and India and the rising tensions clearly are the

Kashmiri people.

The Indian state deceives the world (and its own population) by presenting the roots of the conflict as one between a 'democratic state' and 'terrorists', as if the suicide bombing attack by Islamist forces on February 14 were an isolated incident, which could be understood without reference to the occupation of Kashmir by India since Partition.

The Indian army imposed the war on Kashmir, thousands of Kashmiri people have been killed, injured, disappeared and arrested, women and men raped and sexually assaulted. Pellet guns were used on protestors injuring and blinding children, women and young people. For decades, the people have faced the intimidating and terrorising presence of the military's guns all around their homes and the daily humiliations of assault, abuse and harassment by the military. None of this, however, demobilised the student and youth political movement whose resistance to the Indian occupation even generated sympathy in India and internationally.

The Indian army became frustrated and demoralised by the continued resistance and the Palwama attack in February, in which an Islamist suicide attack on an army convoy in Kashmir killed more than 40 members of the special police force, has been used as a pretext to spread the war and demonstrate military might by bombing Balakot in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Pakistan shot down Indian aircraft in retaliation and captured a pilot and the country's prime minister, Imran Khan, then offered talks and peace. The pilot was released and handed over to India on March 1 as a goodwill gesture. On the one hand, this shows the weakness and isolation of the Pakistani state but, on the other, it hopes through this manoeuvre to benefit both regionally and globally. Many on the Pakistani left praised this and supported the tactical move of the government, giving it a left cover. This is not only dishonest, it is self-defeating as well. Failing to expose the whole hypocrisy of the Pakistan state, failing to point to the violation and denial of democratic rights of the Baloch, Pashtun, Sindhi and Mohajar peoples within Pakistan plays into the hands of the cynics of the government who present themselves as rational 'defenders of the nation' or the Kashmiri people.

In reality, not only India, but also Pakistan has denied the Kashmiri people the right to decide the fate of their own country. No wonder either that the Kashmiris are not happy with the Pakistani way of controlling and looting their resources. Indeed, Pakistan actually aims to divide the Kashmiri national struggle along religious lines, thereby harming it with the intention to make it just a tool in the struggle for regional power.

We socialists oppose the war. The workers, the youth, the popular masses of India and Pakistan must not allow themselves to become tools in the clashes between the nationalist bourgeois leaders. A war would only serve the capitalists and the ruling elites. At the same time, as much as we oppose such a war, we must not give any credit to the so-called 'peace' politics of those governments; they are only a means to present their class interests as forms of 'national defence'.

In order to bring real peace to the region, we, Pakistani and Indian leftists, workers, youth and all the oppressed, must solidarise with the Kashmiri people. It is they who have faced the effects of occupation and power clashes between India and Pakistan for decades. The recent intensification of tensions and the situation, which the ordinary Kashmiri face on both sides of the Line of Control, demonstrate this. A military escalation between India and Pakistan could devastate their whole country, making it a bloody battle ground.

Without the withdrawal of the Indian and Pakistani armies from Kashmir, there will be no peace on the subcontinent. Without this, the Kashmiri cannot decide their own fate freely, cannot exercise their right of

self-determination.

While we recognise and defend the right of the guerillas to resist the occupation forces, we propose a different political strategy; a strategy of class solidarity and common struggle to win the Indian and Pakistan working classes to fight for the right of self determination and independence. We advocate a mass working class and popular struggle of the Kashmiri workers, peasants and poor, linking the struggle for self-determination to the struggle for a socialist future. It is the duty of every socialist in India and Pakistan to support the Kashmiri struggle for their independence and to link it to the struggle against imperialist exploitation and for a Socialist Confederation of South Asia.

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