

Pakistan and India's call to arms

Hassan Raza Tue, 18/10/2016 - 19:01

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Since the killing of Burhan Wani (see: <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/kashmir-killing-sparks-mass-op...> [1]) there has been a severe crack down by the Indian state on the whole of Jammu and Kashmir, including censorship, martial law and many more deaths. That, in turn, has generated a wave of justified resistance. Now, the Pakistani state, not generally known for its recognition of the right of nations to self-determination, at least when it comes to national minorities within Pakistan itself, has tried to use that movement for its own purposes by declaring its support for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. This has included political and diplomatic support at the United Nations from Pakistan's prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, himself.

Events further escalated on September 18 when a group of four heavily armed militants attacked an Indian military post near the town of Uri in Jammu and Kashmir, killing 19 soldiers before being killed themselves by the military. Shortly after, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, said, "the people of Pakistan should question their leadership on why, when both countries gained freedom together, while India exports software, Pakistan exports terrorists". His clear implication being that Pakistan was directly or indirectly responsible for the Uri attack.

While this marked the beginning of a renewed diplomatic and media campaign to isolate Pakistan, India did not only respond verbally to the attack. It also launched what it called "surgical strikes" on the Pakistani side of the "Line of Control" which was established in Kashmir after past wars over the territory between Pakistan and India.

Since then, both sides have set in motion a wave of war mongering that is sweeping over both countries, even including threats to use nuclear weapons. This is not just a matter of speechifying, there have also been practical implications like the evacuation of civilians on both sides of parts of the Indian-Pakistani border and the Line of Control.

While Pakistan clearly is trying to use the unrest in Kashmir to organise a campaign against India on the international arena, and to renew its claims on the territory, India itself is trying to use the resulting conflict with Pakistan to divert attention from its own crimes in Jammu and Kashmir by fuelling nationalism against "the main enemy", Pakistan. The trick of justifying national oppression by pointing to the support of resistance movements by "foreign powers and alien terrorists" is a tool both sides have been using for decades; Pakistan especially in Baluchistan, India in Jammu and Kashmir.

But such "tricks" have to be taken seriously. While neither Pakistan's nor India's decision makers might have a real interest in engaging in a full scale war right now, it should not be forgotten that events develop their own dynamics. In this part of the world, those dynamics have already led to a series of wars which brought destruction, death and suffering on both sides of the border for the majority of peasants, the urban poor and working class people.

Right now, the situation is worsening day by day and several soldiers and civilians on both sides have been killed. The people of the border areas on both sides are clearly suffering under the situation, those who have been evacuated face the question of how they can make a living under the current circumstances, while those left behind live in fear of firing on the border and the danger of full scale war.

At the same time, the ruling classes on both sides are talking about the use of atomic bombs as if that was like playing with a child's toy. The media are doing their own part in encouraging the warmongering and creating a new wave of nationalism and hate. They are proudly presenting their armies as more capable of destruction and war. For them, the most important task is the defeat of the enemy, thereby concealing the level of destruction and suffering the working class and ordinary people would face in the case of war.

In today's world, all wars, and the conflicts behind them, can draw in the Great Powers. The results of that, in terms of destruction, thousands and thousands of dead and millions of displaced people, can be seen all too clearly in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. A full scale war between countries like India and Pakistan would certainly have a huge global effect. With Syria and Ukraine already the proxy battlefields of the big imperialist powers, what chance is there that those same powers would not try to take advantage of any conflict on the Indian sub-continent?

Old alliances are dying and new ones are born, no big power might actively want or expect to be drawn into such a conflict at the moment. Nevertheless, South Asia is not just a serious market, but an important fault line in the capitalist world. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC, and the Chabahar projects are just the two most known economic expressions of this.

Under these circumstances, the Independence movement in Kashmir is actually not only a headache for the Indian ruling class. Pakistan also has good reason to fear its growth. Firstly, it is fuelling and encouraging the nationalist movement in Baluchistan and, secondly, it could spark an independence movement in Azad Kashmir, the part which is currently occupied by Pakistan.

The ruling classes of both India and Pakistan are playing with fire when they use the Uri conflict to distract attention from the inner contradictions of their respective countries. In the aftermath of huge workers' strikes, Modi is trying to take advantage of the situation to divert attention from domestic politics. In Pakistan, internal wars used to reflect government implementation of US interests, but they are now becoming wars to complete the CPEC project and Sharif is trying to use the Kashmir issue to gather more support and create national unity for this purpose.

In this situation, a strong and powerful movement of working classes, the poor and the oppressed is needed to block the plans of the war mongers on both sides of the border. At the same time, the nationalist campaigns by Pakistan and India, should not blind progressive and socialist currents to the legitimate right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/kashmir-killing-sparks-mass-opposition-indian-occupation>