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India/Pakistan

Is war imminent?

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The Bush war on terrorism has taken a new turn. It is possible that a real war could erupt between the two nuclear powers, Pakistan and India. It is not going to be one way traffic as was the case of the American Afghanistan war. It is going to be a war, full of blood, not seen for many years by the world, on both sides. Minor border clashes have already taken place and the air force of the both countries is on high alert. There have been reports of massive army presence on the borders on both sides.

The spokespersons of the governments of both countries are speaking war language. The Friendship bus service and four times weekly train between Delhi and Lahore have been suspended by the Indian government. The Vajpai and Nawaz Sharif governments during 1998 initiated the bus service as a token gesture of newly found friendship after they both met at Lahore. The bus service was not even suspended during the 28 days Kargil war between India and Pakistan during June 1998.

This is in response to a terrorist attack on Indian parliament on December 13 by armed men in which 14 were killed. The Indian government claimed that this was an attempt by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan to wipe out the whole political leadership of India. The Indian parliament was in session when the attack took place. Failed in its ambitions to enter the parliament building, the attackers were intercepted outside the building by the Indian guards. Six of them were killed on the spot plus the five terrorists.

The Pakistan government and media in their usual demagoguery tried to blame the Indian Intelligence service RAW that had engineered a plot against Pakistan. That, under the excuse of this attack, India will call on the international community to declare Pakistan as a state harbouring terrorism. The military spokesman of Pakistan warned India of dire consequences if Pakistan attacked militarily. India's government termed this attitude as non-serious. There were hysterical calls by the Indian mainstream media to take real actions against the Pakistani State.

The Pakistani newspapers have reported on December 23 that the Indian government is also calling for the scrapping of Indus Water Treaty and suspensions of over flight facilities to Pakistani civilian planes. The Indian home minister Advani has already spoken on crossing the border lines and the prime minister Vajpai has declared that all options are open to the Indian government. He spoke of taking the diplomatic efforts first and then discussed the possibilities of other options open to India. On the contrary general Musharaf, who was on a five days visit to China at this time, termed the Indian response as arrogant and knee-jerk.

The Indus Water Treaty of 1960 governs the distribution of water from the Indus River and its tributaries between India and Pakistan. If this treaty were scrapped, it would not only starve the Punjab and Sind Province of Pakistan but Pakistan as whole and Afghanistan. Both provinces are heavily dependent on canal irrigation systems coming out of these rivers. Because of the ongoing climate changes there has been a drought conditions for the last many years in arid areas of Punjab. The food requirements of Pakistan are mainly met out of the canal-irrigated areas of Punjab and Sind. The two provinces constitute over 80 percent of the total population of Pakistan.

Disaster

The governments of both India and Pakistan are on a road to disaster. It is likely that both governments will go further than economic and other sanctions against each other. These are the first steps on the road to a real war. Both

countries have gone to war against each other several times in the past. The last limited war was in 1998. The mad politicians of India and military regime of Pakistan were on the same side with the international community during the Afghan American war. Now they both blame each other of harbouring terrorism via armed religious fundamentalists on the question of Kashmir.

They want to take the American road to score their points. War is the only solution, that is the conclusion these mad rulers are drawing after the events of last three months. The American war on Afghanistan has brought no peace or relief from the so-called terrorists. On the contrary, it has increased the danger to world peace. The world is closer to a nuclear war than ever before in history.

With the threat of a new war between India and Pakistan, all the claims of US imperialism have been proved false. They claimed that bombing Afghanistan and taking the power out of the hands of the Taliban would help to curb the menace of terrorism. The attack on the Indian parliament, the killing of the brother of the Interior minister of Pakistan on December 22 at Karachi and the ongoing armed conflict in Palestine shows that terrorism will not stop by state sponsored terrorism.

The US may have won the war and may be very pleased by the Taliban departure from power but the dangers of terrorist attacks have not gone. In fact, it has promoted the philosophy of war and war politics. The departure of the Taliban is by no mean an end of religious fanaticism. According to one survey, published today by the Pakistani press, the Taliban still enjoy the support of 43 percent of the Pakistan population.

The other bitter reality is that none of the Taliban main leadership have been arrested or killed despite the rain of bombs on the main bases of the Taliban. It has emerged now that the Taliban left power with the full consent of the American supported Karazai on the promise that none of them will be arrested or killed. Karazai has so far lived unto his promise. The main reasons could be the ethnic conflict within Afghanistan and Hamid Karazai still wanted to use the support of the Pushtoon Taliban in case he has problems with the other Uzbek, Hazara and Tajik nationalist leaders.

The strategy of the Americans in Afghanistan could be compared with its strategy just after their victory in the Gulf War. US Imperialism helped the defeated Saddam to remain in power and helped him to curb the popular uprising of Shia Muslims. At the time, they wanted to stop another Iran. Now they have bowed down to the internal conflicts and contradictions. But this strategy has not helped to curb the religious fundamentalists. Despite the fact that the Pakistan military regime has helped the Americans in their war efforts they still hold the Kashmir policy as earlier. The religious fundamentalist groups are openly organizing their activities in Pakistan. None of the camps of the religious fundamentalists have been closed. They have not been banned from recruiting the unemployed youth from working class backgrounds. It is business as usual. But it cannot go on very long.

The military regime has to change its policy towards these so-called Mujahidin organizations that are eager to go for an all out war with the Indian Government. The Indian government social basis rests on Hindu Chauvinism. It needs such excuses to whip up the Hindi nationalism. Now it precisely does that.

It is not a war against terrorism. If that is the case, it should not indulge in gross violation of human rights in Kashmir. The Kashmiries want independence. The religious fundamentalists want to turn this national struggle into a religious struggle. Part of the ISI of Pakistan is helping these religious fundamentalists to achieve this goal.

Difficult

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General Musharaf is particularly in a difficult position. He has publicly defended the Kashmir policy many times. He had to leave the much-publicized Agra Summit in August this year just for this very reason. The Indian Prime Minister Vajpai was not accepting the centrality of the Kashmir issue at the time. Vajpai offered to open the borders, more trade relations and other economic measures to bring the two countries closer to each other. But general Musharaf rejected all these offers and said point blank that until the Kashmir issue is not resolved, there will be no long lasting friendship.

The Indian ruling class under Vajpai would not accept any solution of Kashmir that will hurt their social basis. So they refused and the Agra Summit failed. Only a month later, after September 11, General Musharaf took a U turn about government policy to support the Taliban and decided to side with the Americans. It was a another contradiction by the Musharaf regime. On one side they were helping the Kashmir Mujahidin in their holy war against Indian occupation of Kashmir. On the other side, they were supporting the Americans against the Taliban.

Who has carried out the present attack on the Indian parliament? India says it is Muslim fundamentalists from Lashkar Tayaba (Holy Army) and Jaish Mohammed (Prophet Mohammed's Army). General Musharaf asks for the proof of that. It is just like the Taliban were asking the proof to hand Osama to Americans. After the war in Afghanistan, the morality of providing proofs of any incident has become irrelevant. It is more the interests and priorities of a certain country that guide their strategy and no need of any real proofs.

The Pakistan and Indian working class has to act and act decisively in the present situation. They have to act now. They have to reject the excuse of their rulers to go for war. There is no excuse to start a war. They have to say no to war, yes to peace. The need for a peace movement in the Indian subcontinent is far greater at present than any other time in the history. The real losers in the war between India and Pakistan will be the ordinary citizens of both countries. They have to pay the price of the war. The rich and the capitalists will make money out of war and the workers will pay not only dearly with cash but with their lives as well. They have no safe place or any money to leave the country.

The Indian and Pakistan economies are no more than \$400 Dollars per capita. They both have almost one fifth of the world population. They both have more than 70 percent of the world poor. The economic impact of this war will be disastrous for both. Pakistan's economy is already on the verge of economic collapse despite all the claims of international help. The Afghan war has already ruined the Pakistan economy. A war between India and Pakistan will roll back the standard of livings of the masses to an unprecedented level.

The war between India and Pakistan has become a real possibility. It can only be avoided if General Musharaf take another U turn on his policy towards Kashmir. If he does not, he may lose power and his life as well. No ruler of Pakistan has voluntarily left power. The Indian ruling class is all out for war. It can start from border clashes but can quickly spread all over the borders. American Imperialism may not be in favour of such a war. But the circumstances can be out of their control. They have created a mess by attacking Afghanistan. Every problem should be solved by waging a war, is the lesson America has taught.

A strong peace movement on both sides can have a decisive influence to change the war hysteria. Labour Party Pakistan will be in the forefront and will initiate this movement in Pakistan.