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India/Pakistan

Sub-continent on the brink

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British Home Secretary Jack Straw did not make the impact he hoped on his visit to the sub-continent at the end of May. One million Indian and Pakistani troops continue to face each other across the 700 mile long "line of control" on Kashmir's disputed border as they have done since last December's attack on the Indian Parliament in which 14 died. Cross border skirmishes are being stepped up - skirmishes in which dozens are killed, hundreds of homes are destroyed and thousands made homeless. Meanwhile politicians on both sides mix more placatory words with out and out war mongering.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/11miss.jpg]

Most worryingly Pakistan has carried out several nuclear tests of Ghaznavi and Ghauri missiles in recent days. India says it is not worried by these, the first tests by Pakistan for three years, but Indian Defence Minister George Fernades coupled this statement with one that "war is now almost inevitable".

George Bush and his allies do not want all out war between Pakistan and India. They want both these states and their reactionary governments on side in a war against Iraq. But this is not easy for them to achieve - any more than silencing the revolt of the Palestinian people will win support from the Arab states for the drive to attack Iraq.

Despite their opposition to an all-out war between Pakistan and India, the US and its allies have made no more than demagogic noises about the situation. In Britain for example, while there has been much noise about an arms embargo against India export licences continue to be granted for weapons that will clearly be used in the dispute over Kashmir.

The situation doesn't even make front-page headlines in many places outside the countries involved. Bush's talks with Russia have had far more prominence in the Western media than this calamity waiting to happen.

One problem with the so-called arms reduction agreement between the US and Russia is that it will not lead to the destruction of missiles or warheads - only limit their deployment. And even then we can be sceptical as to whether its provisions will be carried through. This treaty looks remarkably similar to the Start 2 treaty signed by Bush Senior in 1992 - and never implemented. At the same time, Bush gained the agreement of Russia to go ahead with the Star Wars project.

The conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir did not start on September 11: it began with the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 that created the states of Pakistan and India. The last Dogra (Hindu) ruler of Kashmir agreed that Kashmir should become part of India. The majority of Kashmiris are Muslims, but the elite was Hindu.

Ever since, rivalry between India and Pakistan has been fought out over the corpses of the Kashmiris - many of whom reject both states and want self-determination for Kashmir (see <u>IV 338</u>).

Pakistan and India have fought three fully-fledged wars over Kashmir since 1947 and a mini-war in 1999 at Kargil. Even outside times of war the carnage in Kashmir itself is horrific. Killings by the military are estimated at over 40,000 and more than 700 have died in custody. In addition between 1988 and 1998, militants killed 29,151 civilians and 5,101 security men.

The development of nuclear weapons by both Pakistan and India obviously increased tension. American intelligence

sources predict that a full-scale nuclear conflict between the two would leave 12 million dead and 7 million seriously injured - the greatest loss of life the world has ever known.

The post -September 11 situation has raised tensions even further between Pakistan and India. The war drive of American imperialism has given license to state terrorism across the globe, from Colombia to the Philippines as well as obviously against the Palestinian people. In the sub-continent, sanctions that had been imposed on India and Pakistan after they embarked on their nuclear weapons programme were lifted to get them on side in the so-called "war on terrorism".

The Pakistani state and its military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf became important allies for George W Bush in the war in Afghanistan. Initially this seemed to strengthen the General's hand against those - including sections of the military and the intelligence services - who wanted to step up fighting in Kashmir even if this alienated the US.

But when it became clear that the supposed easy victory of American troops against Al-Qaida was not as complete as it first seemed, the more overt fundamentalists in Pakistani society were strengthened.

For the Hindu fundamentalist government of India, the dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, along with the horrendous anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujerat, are a useful diversion from, and riposte to, the poor election results earlier this year in a number of their heartland states.

Both governments and leading politicians within them play with chauvinist and war mongering rhetoric on a daily basis. While Musharraf does not want to jeopardise his alliance with the all-powerful US, he fully supports the idea that the jihadis are freedom fighters. On the other hand while the Indian government also value their relationship with George Bush, they will also not give up their claim to Kashmir and not only because of its geo-political importance. Being on a war-footing against Pakistan is a very useful way for the Hindu chauvinists to maintain their domestic support.

It is unlikely that either side intends that there should be a nuclear conflict - they know the stakes are too high. However, it would be all too easy in this situation for things to get out of hand, and for a war to start without anyone actually intending that it should.

In the meantime the peace movement has been mobilising on both sides of the border to oppose the policies of both governments.

In Pakistan, political parties and organisations from civil society who oppose both the war drive and the concomitant crack down on civil liberties within Pakistan, have been coming together. The former chair person of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said at a rally in Lahore on May 27 that she would soon be "leading a large rally to lodge the people's protest and anger against the possible use of nuclear weapons". She asked the army to return to their barracks and the religious leaders to go back to the mosques and leave the nation to live in peace.

Meanwhile in India the peace movement issued the following statement:

The Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) is deeply concerned at the campaign unleashed in India for a 'full-scale war' with Pakistan and the attempts at projecting a 'national consensus' in favour of such a war.

Sub-continent on the brink

Resort to such a war to settle disputes between two nuclear-weapons states is a far from readily acceptable option. It is all the more so in view of the nuclear-weapon capability acquired by both India and Pakistan in the last four years and the fact that neither has ruled out the use of nuclear weapons against the other. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by them has only been followed by the deterioration of both internal and external security in both countries. The government of no nuclear-weapon state can be given a carte blanche in this regard and authorised to take "any action" in the name of fighting terrorism.

While condemning strongly the latest terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, the CNDP appeals to all political leaders, policy-makers and legislators of India and Pakistan to ensure immediate pull-back of troops from their common border and to launch a dialogue to resolve all outstanding issues.

On Behalf of CNDP: Admiral R. Ramdas, J. Sri Raman and others.