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Indian Army 'Fire Assault' Hits Pakistan Military Outposts

Tensions between India and Pakistan in Kashmir continue to intensify.

By Ankit Panda
October 31, 2016

On Saturday evening, the Indian Army's Northern Command stated that it carried out a "massive fire assault" against Pakistani outposts across the Line of Control, the de facto border separating India-occupied and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

"Four Pak posts destroyed in massive fire assault in Keran Sector. Heavy casualties inflicted," the Indian Army's Northern Command noted on its official Twitter account, providing little other information.

The move was ostensibly retaliation for the killing and mutilation of an Indian soldier by unknown militants, who reportedly received support from the Pakistan military.

The Pakistani side has not commented on the Indian Army's claimed "fire assault" across the Line of Control, as of this report.

Both events underline the ongoing tensions along the Line of Control, which grew out of a volatile summer in the Kashmir Valley following the killing of Burhan Wani, a Hizbul

Mujahideen leader, and exploded following a September assault by Pakistan-based militants on an Indian Army outpost in Uri. With 19 soldiers killed in that attack, the Uri attacks represented the single deadliest strike on the Indian Army in well over a decade, sparking public outcry in India and calls for retaliation.

Shortly after the Uri attacks, India staged retaliatory “surgical strikes” across the Line of Control, raising concerns of potential Pakistani retaliation or escalation. Since then, tensions have remained high, with additional militant attacks in India-occupied Kashmir, including a prolonged stand-off near Indian Army 46 Rashtriya Rifles and Border Security Force camps in Baramulla.

Saturday’s “fire assaults” on Pakistani military outposts are particularly concerning for the fragile cease-fire along the Line of Control. The *Times of India* reported last week, citing anonymous source, that India believes Pakistan may have activated a “Border Action Team” (BAT) to facilitate the encounter that led to the mutilation of an Indian soldier last week.

BAT infiltration across the LoC and support for militant infiltrators makes it considerably likelier that Indian retaliatory actions will begin more explicitly targeting Pakistani military outposts. India’s official statement after its “surgical strikes” sought to make it clear that the retaliation was targeted at militant “launch pads” across the LoC, but clarified that the action was not directed at the Pakistan military. The statement noted, however, that India sought to target “those who are trying to support them.”

While nothing India has done so far suggests a complete shift away from its longer term posture of “strategic restraint” vis-a-vis Pakistan, recent events along the LoC suggest that destabilizing exchanges are likely to continue, straining the ever-more-fragile cease-fire.