

Uri Base Attack

India and Pakistan, entangled in a decade's long conflict over Kashmir, were involved in a crisis surrounding an attack on an Indian army base in the town of Uri from 18 September to 20 September 2016. Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), a Sunni extremist organization operating out of Pakistan, was blamed by India as the culprit of the Uri attack and was also significantly involved in the crisis.

Background:

In the 20 years prior to the crisis, militant activity in Indian-controlled Kashmir had continued to grow. Many terrorist organizations conducted attacks throughout the border region, primarily on Indian locations. JeM is one of these militant organizations, and India had blamed it for attacks linked to crises with Pakistan in both 2001 and 2002 (see Cases #435 and #436). JeM's primary objective is irredentist: the removal of India from the Indian-administered Kashmir region and placing it under Pakistani control. JeM has ties to both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

India accused Pakistan of providing military assistance to the militants, which Pakistan consistently denied. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that Pakistan regularly supported separatist organizations operating within the Kashmir region. JeM and other organizations had been used by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as proxies in order to achieve its goals within Kashmir. Pakistan provided JeM with training, arms, and funding, as well as a base from which to launch attacks into India. Pakistan insisted that it only provided moral and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri people.

While both countries engaged in peace talks, frequent attacks on Indian civilian populations repeatedly stalled peace efforts between the countries. Attacks in the years leading up to the crisis also escalated tensions along the Line of Control (LoC) which separates the Indian- and Pakistani-controlled parts of Jammu and Kashmir, leading to an increasing number of skirmishes between Indian and Pakistani military forces. The death toll from LoC skirmishes rose in the years leading up to the 2016 crisis. Recurrent denouncements of these skirmishes from both actors further hindered productive peace talks.

Clashes between Pakistan and India along the LoC resulted in a crisis in 2014. Intense fighting occurred on 6 October 2014, during the first night of the Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha. The crisis faded shortly afterwards, though violence continued within the area.

PRE-CRISIS:

On 2 January 2016, several JeM members assaulted an Indian air force base in Pathankot, Punjab, killing several Indian military personnel. On 8 July 2016, Indian forces killed a top separatist militant, Burhan Wani, in Kashmir. Wani had gained prominence through his use of social media. Mass protests broke out on 9 July in response to Wani's killing, and the protests were met with force by Indian police forces. Reports indicated that ten civilians were killed, and 30 civilians and 96 security officers injured on 9 July. Indian police imposed a curfew, which was violated by protestors. The protests received a great deal of media coverage and continued for months. Leading up to the crisis, at least 78 civilians and two police officers were killed and thousands injured in the protests. According to multiple sources, the unrest in Kashmir was the worst in six years. The events also created a tense atmosphere in the region in the lead-up to the crisis.

Summary:

In the early-morning hours of 18 September 2016, four Kashmiri militants attacked an Indian army base in Uri, a town within the Indian administered Jammu-Kashmir region, triggering a crisis for India. Using grenades and assault weapons, the militants killed 18 Indian soldiers during the raid which reportedly lasted for three hours. Initially, no group came forward to claim responsibility for the attack. Following an investigation of the incident, Lieutenant General Ranbir Singh from the Indian Army claimed on the same day (18 September) that the Pakistani-based militant organization Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) was behind the attack, adding that the equipment they carried had Pakistani markings. Lt. Gen. Singh indicated the military's readiness to respond to the incident and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemned the attack and promised to punish those who were responsible for the attack. These verbal accusations and threats from India triggered a crisis for Pakistan.

The following day, Pakistan conducted its major response to the crisis, a two-pronged verbal reaction. Pakistan first denied any involvement in the attacks, accusing India of attempting to divert attention away from the deteriorating situation within Indian-administered Kashmir by blaming Pakistan through unsubstantiated accusations. Pakistan also stated that it (Pakistan) would bring the Kashmir issue to the United Nations and to the international community. Toward that end, Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif wrote a letter to the UN Security Council. The letter stressed the need for the permanent-five members of the UNSC (P5) countries to address the human rights violations that Pakistan stated were occurring within Kashmir and bring about a resolution to the dispute in general. The intent of the letter was to get the P5 to put pressure on India.

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi faced increasing pressure to retaliate militarily against Pakistan, though many analysts warned India against using the military option. On 19 September, Modi chaired a high-level meeting to discuss responses to the attack. Home Minister Rajnath Singh, Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, the head of the army chief, and heads of several Indian intelligence agencies were present at this meeting. At this meeting, the Indian government decided to pursue a policy of diplomatically isolating Pakistan from international forums and to refrain from military retaliation. These decisions constituted India's major response to the crisis. India also sent additional forces to the region to patrol and perform operations to secure the region.

Each side took further steps to pressure one another during the crisis. In response to the veiled Indian threats to use force against those it found responsible for the attack, the Pakistani Army chief, General Raheel Sharif, stated that his forces were prepared to respond to any direct or indirect military threat. India on the other hand went to the various members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to gather support for its cause, in an attempt to accomplish its political objective of isolating Pakistan. India was successful in obtaining statements from various countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, which supported India in its fight against terrorism and condemned the attack. However, the OIC as a whole sided with Pakistan, calling for an end to Indian atrocities occurring within Kashmir and not commenting on the Uri base attack.

On 20 September, the Indian Federal Law Minister announced the decision made a day prior, that India would not pursue a military option against Pakistan. India stated that it would pursue an approach of strategic restraint against its adversary instead. This announcement terminated the crisis for both countries.

The United States and Russia condemned the Uri base attack and supported India's counter-terrorism operation, but neither country criticized Pakistan directly. UN involvement was limited to condemnation of the Uri base attack from Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

In a speech on 25 September, Modi claimed that India achieved its objective of diplomatically isolating Pakistan. Contradicting India's claim of success, Sartaj Aziz, the advisor to the Pakistani Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, announced the failure of India's attempt to isolate Pakistan the following day. According to Aziz, 56 countries from the OIC, the UN Human Rights Council, and other organizations supported Pakistan and rejected what it referred to as India's baseless accusations. Once again, Pakistan accused India of attempting to mislead the international community and draw attention away from the Kashmir crisis.

Sources:

Australian National Security (Australian Department of Home Affairs); BBC; Chicago Tribune; Daily Pakistan; Dawn; Foreign Affairs; Fox News; Hindustan Times; Indian Express; Indian Journal of Political Science; Reuters; Sputnik; TIME; Times of India; United Nations Security Council; Washington Post