



Kashmir Violence a Manifestation of Underlying Instability

By [Catherine Cheney](#), on 10 Jan 2013, [Trend Lines](#)

A Pakistani soldier was killed earlier today near the Line of Control (LOC), the de facto border dividing the disputed Kashmir region between India and Pakistan. The incident follows the death of two Indian soldiers and another Pakistani soldier in the same area in the past week.

Over the past five days, a series of cease-fire violations and deadly border clashes [has led to rising tensions](#) between India and Pakistan, threatening to reverse a recent trend of cooperation between these two countries, which have fought over Kashmir since their partition.

“The incursion of troops across the LOC is an escalation,” [Cabeiri Robinson](#), assistant professor of international studies and South Asian studies at the University of Washington and author of “[Body of Victim, Body of Warrior: Refugee Families and the Making of Kashmiri Jihadists](#),” told Trend Lines in an email interview. “And the accusations of mutilation of the bodies and the counteraccusations of manufacturing a violation for propaganda purposes recall a pattern of accusation, denial and counteraccusation that was last evident in incidents that occurred in 2000.”

Robinson said that the area where this week’s violence occurred has seen numerous incidents of small arms and artillery fire across the LOC over the past eight months. But two aspects of these recent skirmishes set them apart from the usual cross-border exchanges.

“Soldiers of the Indian and Pakistani militaries appear to have crossed the LOC to directly attack soldiers manning posts on the opposite side,” she said. “While both sides officially deny the accusations, both tacitly acknowledge that it is possible that soldiers under fire may have crossed the LOC without direct orders.”

Further, she added, media descriptions of the incidents, especially in the Indian press, have led to protests as well as demands for retaliation.

“This is putting additional pressure on politicians in New Delhi and Islamabad, who are facing popular demands of retaliation even while they have to exert control over their militaries on the border,” Robinson said.

Although the current episode has captured international attention, Robinson said, “there have been many casualties of these exchanges during the past decade of the declared cease-fire,” explaining that the victims have been “Kashmiri civilians, living in border villages on both sides of the LOC.”

“While highly publicized incursions and attacks like the ones on Jan. 6 and 8 have captured the attention of international observers, cross-border firing remains a regular feature of life for people living in the disputed border,” she added.

Many civilians living in border villages along the LOC have been killed by mortar and sniper fire, Robinson said, explaining that the incidents were so common in the 1990s that “residents of border villages on the Pakistani side of the LOC left their homes to live in tented camps further from the Indian posts.” Since then, India and Pakistan have taken important diplomatic steps to improve relations, she said.

Neither New Delhi nor Islamabad wants these episodes to escalate, Robinson said.

Explaining that it is not in either side’s interest to derail the peace process, she noted there is political will to further normalize relations, with both countries expressing their objections through diplomatic channels.

“If India and Pakistan are each able to restrain their respective militaries, the diplomatic processes may be able to contain the situation,” she said, calling this an opportunity for both governments to show restraint and demonstrate the resilience of their peace initiatives, provided that they allow investigations.

“Incidents like these of the past week and the escalating tension of the past months emphasize the need to move beyond symbolic measures to take on some of the hard issues that impede a durable peace in the region,” she added.

For India, this will require establishing an internal accountability process and replacing the military units and officers involved in this week’s cross-border violence, Robinson said. Meanwhile, she said, Pakistan must end its policy of supporting militant groups organizing in Pakistani-administered Kashmir and prevent them from crossing into Indian-administered territory.

“Confidence-building steps are important, as are efforts to relax tensions, but the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir remains unstable in part because the practices that lead time and again to confrontation continue,” she said. “Peace in the region will ultimately be measured by the quality of a real and durable peace for the people who live there.”

Photo: An Indian soldier guards a roadside checkpoint in Jammu and Kashmir, India, January 2009 (Photo by Wikimedia user Jrapczak, licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)).