

AFGHANISTAN/IRAN/PAKISTAN CROSS-BORDER SECURITY SYMPOSIUM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations for Enhanced Cross-Border Security for Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan

On 24 and 25 March 2009, RUSI convened in partnership with the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) a closed-door meeting of senior Pakistani and Afghan defence and security experts and academics in Bahrain to discuss regional cross-border security concerns. This document encompasses the discourse that took place and is a record of the views shared and recommendations proposed by the participants.

Aims of the Initiative

Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Baluchistan and Southern Afghanistan are currently plagued by warfare and criminal activity. Transecting these regions are transit routes of considerable strategic importance. The migration of refugees, narcotics trafficking, weapons and human smuggling and cross-border infiltration by militants in these areas exerts considerable pressure on the governments of the region in securing their borders. This not only affects inter-governmental relations but also the safe and legal transit of energy, goods and people. Regional development initiatives and the ability of governments to control the vital arteries which feed their economies suffer as a result.

In early March the leaders of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan announced a new drive to seek solutions to mutual national security concerns affecting all three countries. In this context, the symposium aimed to provide an opportunity to explore shared unity of vision in tackling mutual threats to regional security, in particular focusing on regional trade, energy and migration issues. The ultimate goal of the discussion was to assist in forging a path ahead in order to support this trilateral initiative.

Findings and Recommendations

Political leaders must have the will, imagination and vigour to eliminate threats to cross-border security via a regional approach and need to think wider than the national interest. All states have made errors which have exacerbated this situation

but must now work together to combat these threats. Afghanistan is plagued by non-state actors and terror networks and the Taliban have gained strength because they have created a criminal market economy supported by a viable illicit network fuelled by a burgeoning narcotic trade.

Now is the time to strengthen and protect trade routes to allow Afghanistan to prosper. Lack of education and rudimentary public healthcare in the border areas fosters the kind of resentment within the younger generation that has resulted in radicalisation and militant recruitment. There must be a drive to bring education and public health care to acceptable standards. Because of geo-strategic precedents, Afghanistan's northern border and its small border with China are generally secure, however in the tri-border region government plans for effective management of the region have failed, with force and the military instrument employed to solve many problems. Furthermore, in the Pashtun tribal belt a lack of civil law means that tribal justice is more often than not employed to resolve disputes.

As a result of the discussions a number of recommendations for solutions to the problems above were proposed for the consideration of the governments in question. All parties agreed that a mutual respect for territorial integrity was a basic prerequisite for any progress but remarkably all agreed that the issue of the border dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan should be set aside for the purposes of the discussion. Another common request was for a deeper understanding of neighbouring countries concerns and a 'grassroots' instillation of trust. All agreed that it is fundamentally important to manage expectations from all sides in terms of capabilities, not simply to push expressions of intent with regard to border security. Remaining focused on realistic approaches and objectives was a core tenet of the deliberations as they evolved.

The recommendations of the dialogue encompassed three areas:

1. Dialogue
2. Deterrence
3. Development

Dialogue

All parties called for transparency in relations at all structural levels and to make interaction and discourse as open, frequent and accessible as possible. Built into this drive to improve relations must be incentives designed to foster trust. The foreign ministries of all three countries must be fully apprised of this initiative which ideally should have international support. The four core recommendations in support of enhanced dialogue are as follows:

- The establishment of a regular trilateral forum along the lines of the RUSI-IPRI inaugural border security forum. This forum could be supported by an online data and opinion sharing initiative.
- An evaluation of current cross-border security measures should be undertaken in order to make existing mechanisms more effective.
- A list of respective national priorities to be drawn up reflecting each country's national concerns and common security threats.
- Opportunities should be explored for a dialogue between religious scholars on all sides aimed at reining in militants in the border regions.

Non-state Actors and Tribal Engagement

Non-state actors are filling the vacuum of non-governance in the border regions and militants have infiltrated and subverted the tribal system. While there must be engagement with local tribal leaders, a distinction should be made between militant networks and tribal infrastructure, which must be understood by international actors. The Taliban is now stronger than it was due to policy failures in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is an argument from some quarters that the Taliban could be tolerated if its extremist elements were to be eliminated and focus shifted towards ideology

rather than affiliation. Some believe the Afghan government could strike a deal with the Taliban by enforcing strong patronage and resilient conditions in order that political power can be shared amongst all factions of the state.

Whatever the approach to the Taliban, a common definition for extremism should be established by the international community and guidelines created on how to tackle it. Consequently, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan should pursue a joint strategy in combating the brand of extremism practised by the Taliban, Al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and the illicit activities that fuel the cross-border insurgency.

The contentious question of reversion of control to tribal elders in contrast to pushing the rule of law remains unresolved. The power of the elders and respect afforded to them in Pashtun tribal administration remains strong and many support the restoration of the British colonial Political Agent-Malik-elder system of governance. Despite the inherent corruption involved in this system, it has remained the most stable form of administration in the FATA, where political authority has changed numerous times.

From the perspective of the Afghan government, a core concern is whether or not any national interest exists within the border regions. Kabul insists on the creation of a link between the various societies in the regions and the state in a manner that gives transparency, fairness and legitimacy to decisions and policies. At the core of this need is respect for the UN Charter at all levels of interest from the individual upwards. Trust exists to some extent amongst the people of these regions but the major lack of trust is between the governments and their institutions. The problem with this idea is the presence of non-state actors and the immediate threat is the ideology of extremist groups who must be prevented from using religion as political and strategic instruments. The Kabul government insists on primacy of the nation state and centralisation of government control in the tribal areas and absolutely seeks to avoid empowerment of the tribes as in Pakistan's FATA.

The Trust Deficit between Governments of the Region

If the core of the cross-border problem is insecurity then a major source of the insecurity is the lack of trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The histories of the two states allude to this – the region was instable prior to operations by the USSR, NATO, the Mujahedeen and the Taliban. The history goes back over nearly three millennia. Afghanistan was created as a buffer state to create a physical space between two sides that did not trust one another.

Afghanistan is a very diverse country influenced by three major cultures: Indian, Turkic and Persian and distrust follows along these lines. If cross-border security is to be maintained it cannot be done solely on military terms since this is clearly ineffective. Afghanistan and Pakistan have to change their national interests in order to achieve the goal of regional stability. The regional trust deficit can be addressed by the creation of power sharing agreements, but it is questionable if there enough international will for this, particularly in the midst of a global financial crisis. Co-existence of the states is fundamental but it is impossible to simply fence off borders that will always remain porous. There is a historical precedent for regional co-existence but it eventually failed and focusing on the past will be extremely detrimental to forging any new cross-border initiatives. While there is a compelling need to rebuild inter and intra community trust, regional trust building is another dimension and confrontation between India and Pakistan has a direct effect on Afghanistan.

Deterrence

A shared and co-ordinated strategy is required to combat terrorists and violent extremists by matching and countering Al-Qa'ida's evolving strategy. This requires common definitions supporting a framework necessary for co-operation. This deterrence strategy will be designed to isolate the Taliban 'hardcore' and to bring the reconcilable into the political mainstream. The recommendations for deterrence in the border region were as follows:

- The establishment of joint border co-ordination centres supported by shared intelligence
- The introduction of new technologies for border control including biometrics
- The introduction of a viable immigration and visa system
- Co-operation between all sides aimed at stifling flow of funding to insurgents
- A trilateral de-radicalisation programme
- The establishment of a joint counter narcotics unit
- Shelve the Afghanistan-Pakistan border dispute for the foreseeable future.

The Narcotics Problem

Governments in the region are to blame for failing to curb the rapid expansion of the narcotics trade since 1979. Warlords in Afghanistan and Pakistan are responsible for the US\$ 80 million revenue in drug trafficking which supports the Taliban. There are around 65,000 drug cultivators in Helmand supplying 1,500 traffickers, creating a black market economy involving extremist organisations leading to criminal and corrupt control of a significant proportion of the regional economies in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. While the opium trade is the major source of funding for militants and criminal syndicates, all three countries are facing major problems associated with opiate addiction. Ninety-four per cent of world opium production transits the region, 55 per cent via Iran (2 million addicts), 30 per cent via Pakistan (3 million addicts) and the remaining 15 per cent via central Asia.

Narcotics revenue amounts to half of Afghanistan's GDP and 2.5 million people depend directly on the production of and trade in narcotics. Before poppy eradication takes place there must be a replacement programme established to create an attractive and viable alternative to poppy cultivation. Suggestions for replacement programmes include the introduction of biotechnologies. Another controversial proposal has been to preserve opium production in the border areas, replacing the illicit economy with a legitimate system whereby pharmaceutical companies would match or exceed black market prices, severing supply to criminal elements that support poppy cultivators. Whatever

solutions might be proposed, there is an immediate and urgent requirement to create a joint counter narcotics force in the border region.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Border

Pakistan has demonstrated a nascent ability in dealing with cross-border security issues and in protecting supply lines for the US-led operation in Afghanistan but is facing problems with co-operation between military and security forces for providing contract convoy protection. In addition payment structures need to be improved for the frontier corps to reduce risk of disaffection.

Pakistan asserts that it has established numerous border posts, in the process capturing and neutralising significant numbers of Al Qa'ida and Taliban militants and interdicting a large amount of narcotics. The Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police however remain incapable of cross-border reciprocity. The Pakistan-Afghan border is for the most part non-demarcated which means it is extremely porous. There are only twenty border crossing points which are used frequently, yet Pakistan is responsible for 98 per cent of all intra-regional exports.

The Durand line is still as contentious as it has ever been and there is an urgent requirement for both military and political measures to ameliorate the situation. There is a compelling argument to shelve the border dispute for an agreed period of time in order to bring much more pressing issues of cross-border security to the table.

Development

The countries in question must explore joint initiatives to bring economic development to the border region and in particular to focus on infrastructure and education. Of key concern was Afghanistan's economic dependency and reliance on external aid. Consequently, all parties agreed that priority must be given to domestic labour forces in infrastructure projects and that security should be the responsibility of local inhabitants.

- Local inhabitants must become stakeholders in development projects
- All countries must explore initiatives for post-conflict rehabilitation in the border regions
- Educational exchanges between all three countries should be encouraged to stimulate education in the border regions
- The creation of secure and legal trade zones and the closure of illicit transit points.

Cross-Border Tax and Customs Infrastructure

It is through economic integration and growth that stability will be achieved in the border regions. The international community must invest and support these regional economies especially along lines of energy transit and in transport infrastructure. Private investment must also be supported.

The illegal transit of goods through Afghanistan is a principal source of conflict and mistrust. With the lack of imposition of customs duties, criminal gangs flourish. All regional players must examine what kind of cross-border structures would garner the support of local leaders to enforce customs duties and border security. The extent to which over-reliance on revenues from customs duties exacerbates the problem should also be considered. The security of trade routes transecting border areas should be the responsibility of local inhabitants with the support of the international community. There is growing scorn that the majority of development aid provided by foreign governments returns into the hands of the donor's economies through sub-contracting.

Energy Security

Pakistan has sizeable reserves of gas and coal in Baluchistan. Natural gas represents 50 per cent of Pakistan's energy consumption. In recent years there have been over 800 attacks and incidents of violence in Baluchistan and Pakistan is very sensitive to the effect of these attacks on its energy security.

The Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and other projects all transect this very unstable area and will incur very high costs for Iran, requiring considerable security measures. The secure transit of energy through these areas must be linked to the regional

economies so as to support the Afghanistan government which could stand to benefit from royalties and pipeline revenue. Pipeline security should be the responsibility of the local inhabitants of the region through which the pipelines cross, providing jobs and a legitimate economy.

The Effect of Migration on Baluchistan

The influx of refugees from Afghanistan into Baluchistan has brought a great number of problems to the area. Three million refugees crossed the open border to Baluchistan in the post-war era and accompanying migration into the region came militancy and 'Kalashnikov culture'. More recently the prevalence of small arms throughout society and the penetration of the region by militants have resulted in rapidly deteriorating or a complete lack of security.

The environmental impact of the refugee camps is enormous. Camp areas have become desolate creating a knock-on effect to local farmers due to loss of livestock and arable land. The famed jungles in the area have disappeared. Disease has increased due to migration into Baluchistan and

highly endemic diseases have spread due to the influx of Afghan refugees.

There are inherent cultural similarities between refugees from Afghanistan and with the indigenous population, therefore the migrants settled with ease and ad hoc permanent settlements have been established. Pakistan argues that if it were to answer calls from Afghanistan to repatriate the Afghan migrants of Baluchistan a 're-migration' instead of repatriation would occur. The return of these migrants would result in sudden and damaging demographic pressures.

In the February 2008 elections, ethnic Hazaras originating from the refugee community from Afghanistan won three seats in Baluchistan; many districts of this area are governed by councillors originating from Afghanistan. There has been an upsurge in sectarian killings in the area due to friction between Shia Hazaras and the local Sunni majority. Drug trafficking has increased exponentially and trade remains unregulated. There remains a desperate need for education for the Afghan refugee community.

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