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## Issue Brief

# Issues in Pak-Afghan Border Management

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September 26, 2016

The controversy surrounding the Pak-Afghan border and its mismanagement continues to be one of the most contentious bilateral issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the recent past, relations between the two neighbours have reached their lowest following a number of clashes along the Pak-Afghan border which have led to fatalities on both sides.

On June 1, 2016, Pakistan informed Afghan authorities about the installation of new border initiatives for 'facilitating cross-border movement,' and 'curbing unregulated and illegal cross-border movement'. These measures included the construction of a gate at the Torkham crossing, as well as valid and legal travel documents (passport and visa) for all Afghans entering Pakistan,<sup>1</sup> including those Afghan students (numbering 300) who enter Pakistan daily for studies.<sup>2</sup> The move is a part of the National Action Plan, initiated in 2015 to curb terrorism as well as a widespread effort to secure the Pak-Afghan border that continues to be a key irritant in Pak-Afghan ties. Prior to this, due to the unregulated border system all those entering Pakistan from Afghanistan would do so without legal travel documents.<sup>3</sup> As a result the Pak-Afghan border has been willingly and unwillingly outsourced to elements including militants whose activities have been detrimental to the interests of both Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

However, Afghan authorities expressed strong opposition and resorted to unprovoked firing which resulted in the death of Major Jawad Ali Changezi, as well as an Afghan soldier. It is pertinent to highlight that Afghan authorities had been intimidated about Pakistan's initiatives at Torkham well in advance as construction work had commenced in November 2014.<sup>5</sup> As a result, tensions were high in both countries. Public demonstrations were held in Afghanistan against Pakistan where Pakistani flags were burnt and slogans of 'death to Pakistan' were chanted. Similarly, in Pakistan, emotions ran high amongst the public who demanded the expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. Following clashes, on June 15, 2016, a ceasefire was agreed upon by the border authorities of both countries.<sup>6</sup> Prior to this, on May 10, 2016, the Torkham border had been closed for four days after Afghan security forces prevented the installation of a fence by Pakistan despite being 30 meters inside Pakistan's territory.<sup>7</sup> As a result, tensions escalated as the two countries deployed tanks and additional troops along the Torkham border.<sup>8</sup> In an effort to ease tensions and improve border management, on May 21, 2016, Pakistan's military constructed a gate for Afghanistan at Angoor Ada, (South Waziristan) in Afghan territory of the check post 'as a gift'.<sup>9</sup> However, Afghan authorities allegedly closed the Angoor Adda border hours, which left thousands, including women and children, stranded on the border.<sup>10</sup>

Following tensions, Prime Minister's foreign policy adviser, Sartaj Aziz, invited Afghan officials headed by Deputy Foreign Minister, Hikmat Khalil Karzai, to discuss efforts for border management and security in order to prevent recurrence of border skirmishes in the future. As a result, an agreement was reached on June 20, 2016 for 'a mechanism for discussions on border-related issues' however no headway was made on the new border plans Pakistan had initiated at the Torkham border crossing.<sup>11</sup>

Stringent security measures were also been implemented at the Pak- Afghan border crossing in Chaman, Baluchistan after Afghan nationals raised anti-Pakistan slogans, burnt Pakistan's flag and pelted stones at the Friendship gate. As a result, on August 18, Pakistan closed the Bab-e-Dosti (Friendship Gate).<sup>12</sup> On September 1, 2016, Pakistan agreed to reopen the gate after receiving after a written apology from Afghanistan. Prior to this, the 15th flagship meeting between Pakistan and Afghanistan took place on August 31, 2016, The Pakistani side was led by Lt-Col Muhammad Changaiz, while the Afghan contingent was headed by Col Muhammad Ali. During the meeting officials from both countries agreed to "pay due respect to each other's testimonials" and "hold a monthly flag meeting to address issues of mutual interest for ensuring a peaceful environment."<sup>13</sup> A similar flag meeting was also held in the Frontier Corps (FC) compound at Torkham between Col Taufeeq and Assistant Political Agent (APA) Landikotal, Rahim Mehsud who represented Pakistan while Afghanistan was represented by Col Nisar of Afghan border police, gate commander Amin Jan and Afghan customs collector Shoaib.<sup>14</sup>

Pakistan has long been calling for stronger border management and has made several attempts to explore workable and practical options to improve border control and address it through formal negotiations. The Afghan State's non-acceptance of the border and increase in militancy in Pakistan, cross-border attacks and movement of militants has led to a stronger resolve within Pakistan to advocate effective management and regulation of the Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan has 535 border posts on the Durand Line, while Afghanistan has 145.<sup>15</sup> For Pakistan, border management has become even more pivotal after the success it has achieved as a result of Operation Zarb-e-Azb, which is in its final stage currently been fought in the Khyber agency.

Although internationally the Durand Line is accepted as a recognised border, all successive Afghan governments, including the Taliban have refused to accept the legality of the border. Pakistan has made several attempts to explore options for border management, however successive Afghan governments have been less forthcoming. Hence, there appears to be a contradiction in the Afghan position: on the one hand, Afghan authorities claim that the Durand Line divides families living on both sides of the

border, yet at the same time they continue to accuse Pakistan of interference, supporting the Afghan Taliban, cross border terrorism, considering Afghanistan its 'backyard', and 'fifth province'<sup>16</sup>. In short, they allege that Pakistan does not respect Afghanistan's sovereignty. Yet every time Pakistan has raised the issue of border recognition, management or regulation, there has been stern opposition from Afghanistan. For example, in 2006, in an effort to prevent illegal crossing of militants and also to put an end to the continuous accusations levelled against Pakistan for supporting Taliban attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan decided to fence parts of the 2,640 km (1,610 miles) border. However, this initiative was met with strong opposition from the Afghan side, which noted that the line would only lead to dividing and separating the ethnic tribes on both sides of the border. Similarly, in another effort to monitor the border and influx of militants, the Pakistani authorities installed a biometric system at the Chaman border crossing 'Bab-e-Dosti' (Friendship Gate) in Baluchistan, in January 2007. However, that too was opposed as angry protestors attacked the border gate and the system had to be done away with. Although the biometric system was installed on an experimental basis, its purpose was to replace the previous permit system by issuing border passes on the basis of computerized national identity cards issued by the National Database Registration Authority. Similarly, in May 2013, clashes erupted between Pak-Afghan forces when Pakistani forces tried to repair a gate at Pakistan's Gursal military post (near the Afghan district of Goshtain the Nangarhar province). Subsequently, it is imperative to highlight that since the Afghan Security Forces (ANSF) assumed greater responsibility for security (including areas that border Pakistan), there has been a sharp rise in cross-border shelling, and attacks emanating from Afghanistan, between the ANSF and the Pakistani military as is being witnessed to date with the recent clashes at Torkham.

Despite several recent interactions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Afghan government has not responded positively to Pakistan's border management proposals. Apart from Torkham, the construction of similar installations are also planned for the other seven entry points along the Pak-Afghan border at Arandu in Chitral, in FATA which include Ghulam Khan in North Waziristan, Angoor Adda in South Waziristan, Newa Pass in Mohmand, Gursal in Bajaur, Kharlachi in Khurram,<sup>17</sup> as well as at Chaman in Baluchistan.<sup>18</sup> So, while relations continue to be at an all time low, Pakistan has expressed that it will go ahead with its proposed border initiatives. Therefore, both Afghanistan and Pakistan should cooperate and find a workable mechanism to manage and regulate their common border and transform it into a conduit for cooperation rather than confrontation. In addition to the two currently recognised and functional check posts at Torkham and Chaman, both countries should strive to

make the numerous border check posts which are estimated to be around 700<sup>19</sup> into legal and recognised entry and exit points, which would be an important step towards reducing tensions. This will assist legal movement of humans, goods and services and prevent the illegal movement of militant groups, as well as smuggling, illicit drugs and arms trafficking. Insurgent groups, after such measures, would not be able to take advantage of the crossing point that escape surveillance. Sovereign states are defined by borders, and Afghanistan, being a sovereign and independent state should accept its defined border to uphold its sovereignty and prevent 'interference'.

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