

JOINT ANTI-TERRORIST EXERCISE 2021 BETWEEN CHINA AND PAKISTAN

By
Muhammad Iqbal
Research Assistant

&
Muhammad Asim
Intern

China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC), ISSI

Edited by
Dr Talat Shabbir

December 16, 2021

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The Joint Anti-Terrorist Exercise (JATE) 2021 between People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China and Pakistan army began in September 21, at the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) in Pabbi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The two weeks long training ended on October 4.¹ The main agenda of the JATE training was to build up capacities for collectively combating international terrorism, militancy, extremism, share innovative approaches and practice decisive rapid response in a crisis situation.²

This was the first military exercise conducted in Pakistan under the ambit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)- Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS). The main focus of the RATS is on maintaining a working relationship with relevant institutions of the member states of SCO in order to tackle counter terrorism and extremism.³ The members are also striving to assist each other in planning and preparation of counter terrorism exercises.⁴

The exercises were conducted in two different stages: Stage I was held from July 23 to August 3 in respective SCO member countries while stage II was conducted in Pakistan where Pakistan Army and

¹ "Anti-terrorist Exercise with Chinese Troops Concludes," *DAWN*, October 5, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1650190>.

² "Anti-terrorist exercise with Chinese troops begins." *DAWN*, September 24, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1648056>.

³ "Structure | SCO." Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Accessed November 2, 2021. <https://eng.sectsc.org/structure/#6>.

⁴ SCO. n.d. Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. <http://eng.sectsc.org/structure/>.

PLA participated to share experience in order to tackle the emerging threats.⁵ According to a press release issued by Inter-Service-Public-Relations (ISPR), “Pak-China Joint Anti-Terrorist Exercise is aimed at enhancing synergy and interoperability among Special Services and Law Enforcement Agencies of SCO member countries for combating international terrorism.”⁶

This exercise was conducted to practice and master military drills and warfare procedures that are needed in counterterrorism operations which includes cordon off and search operations, close quarter battle, compound clearance operations, explosive handling, rappelling from a helicopter, and medical evacuation. Both countries’ Special Forces shared their experiences of innovative approaches and different methods and techniques in which technologies are being used to counter modern threats.

There is seen a rapid increase of cooperation in the field of defense between Pakistan and China. Both the states are important member states of the SCO. The two countries have huge stakes in strengthening regional security and counter-terrorism measures in the region. In the past, both sides have conducted joint military exercises and drills such as joint air exercise “Shaheen IX” which was held back in December 2020 between Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAF). Another joint military air-defense exercise was conducted in Tibet between the two countries in June 2021.⁷ In recent years, Pakistan has also conducted multiple joint military drills with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Russia, Druzhba 5 (Friend-ship 5) was among the most notable one with Russian Special Forces (Spetsnaz) back in November 2020.⁸

Pakistan has been remained one of the most affected country from terrorism and extremism. Since the turn of 21st century, Pakistan has been fighting to eliminate terrorism and extremism from its mainland. After the episode of 9/11, Pakistan was the front line state with the US leading international efforts combating terrorism. Pakistan has achieved many successes to root out terrorist elements from its main land. Besides, Islamabad’s support for the US and its coalition partners was proved pivotal to brought the perpetrators of 9/11 to justice and eradicate Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan. Still, there are many banned outfits operate from Afghan soil included: Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashker-e-Ahrar, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).

⁵ "Pakistan, China Joint Anti-Terrorist Exercise Concludes." The Express Tribune. Last modified October 4, 2021. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2323273/pakistan-china-joint-anti-terrorist-exercise-concludes>.

⁶ “Pak-China joint anti-terrorist exercise begins at NCTC Pabbi.” *RADIO PAKISTAN*, September 23, 2021. <https://www.radio.gov.pk/23-09-2021/pak-china-joint-anti-terrorist-exercise-begins-at-nctc-pabbi>

⁷ “LAC: China’s air defence at play, joint drill with Pak.” *Tribune India*, June 2, 2021. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/lac-chinas-air-defence-at-play-joint-drill-with-pak-261828>.

⁸ “Russian troops arrive for drill with Pakistan military.” *Dawn*, November 6, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1588880>.

The presence of these transnational terrorist groups poses greater threat not only to immediate neighbors of Afghanistan but jeopardizes the peace, stability and security of the entire region. The hasty and unprofessional withdrawal of the US and its allies from Afghanistan has provided opportunity to those outfits regrouping and revive its structure in order to unleash new layer of instability across the region. The US and western world's disengagement with the new regime established in Kabul and Taliban's inability to take concrete measures against those terrorist groups has further provided leverage to the transnational terrorist networks once again flourish on Afghan soil.

The fragile and deteriorating situation of Afghanistan has mounted security concerns among its neighboring countries. Greater responsibility lies on the regional states to cooperate through a regional mechanism and tackle the threat emanating from Afghanistan. In this backdrop, the joint anti-terrorist exercises under the auspices of SCO security apparatus essential for maintaining regional order and stability. Hence, these types of regional military cooperation with friendly countries is a core element in coping up with the regional changes that are occurring in a fast pace.