



South Asian Weekly Watch

NEWSLETTER
January 21, 2015

Afghanistan

January 20: Pakistan, Afghanistan deepening military ties

In a move towards improving border coordination and deepening military-to-military ties, Pakistan and Afghanistan over the weekend opened a series of meetings of commanders.

Peshawar Corps Commander Lt Gen Hidayat ur Rehman travelled to Afghanistan on Sunday for the first meeting. Commander of Southern Command Lt General Nasir Khan Janjua would visit Afghanistan for another meeting on Wednesday.

Military's public affairs division ISPR in a statement on Lt Gen Rehman's meeting in Afghanistan said: "Matters related to border security came under discussion. During the meeting ways and means were also discussed to further enhance the existing border coordination mechanism." Gen Rehman during the visit met the military commander of Afghanistan's eastern Nangrahar province that borders Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The meeting was also attended by representatives of Afghan Border Police and International Security Assistance Force (Isaf).

[DAWN](#)

January 19: Rehabilitating Afghan refugees

The situation for Afghan refugees remains precarious and insecure, as it usually is, with countless questions for many on what the future holds. While Pakistani authorities and the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, have decided to [extend repatriation of all Afghan refugees by December 2015](#), a majority are said to be unwilling to voluntarily return because of the unstable law and order conditions they fear in Afghanistan. What remains for hundreds of thousands of Afghans then is a constant state of insecurity, worries of unforeseen consequences of starting life again in Afghanistan and living as unwanted and

frequently harassed members of society in Pakistan.

The narrative of Afghan refugees should also be included in the public narrative, for many in Pakistan equate the deteriorating law and order problem to the presence of refugees in the country. This is not only a very simplistic explanation but ignores the complex situation that Pakistan is faced with and avoids looking at the problem within. Even if all refugees are sent back by the end of the year, it is safe to say that Pakistan's law and order problems will not end overnight.

The provincial governments concerned must ensure that there are no forced evacuations from Afghan settlements or arbitrary repatriations. All such moves must be planned, systematic and done through the UNHCR. At the same time, the international community must also support Pakistan as it still hosts the largest refugee population in the world and has done so for the longest period of time. Pakistan's role as a host must be recognised and all assistance given to ensure a timely, safe and compassionate return for all.

[Express Tribune](#)

January 19: IS recruiting members in Pakistan, Afghanistan, says US general

The commander of US forces in Afghanistan has warned that the Islamic State (IS) terror group is making recruitment in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

“We are seeing reports of some recruiting,” said Gen John Campbell, commander of the Resolute Support mission, during an interview with the US Army Times newspaper. “There have been some night letter drops, there have been reports of people trying to recruit both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, quite frankly.”

The Resolute Support is the name given to the new mission of US and Nato forces in Afghanistan who are now assisting Afghan security forces. The change, however, does not prevent them from engaging those who attack them or target major Afghan defence installations.

[DAWN](#)

January 18: Ashraf Ghani and the Pashtun Dilemma by Ali Reza Sarwar

With his impressive background, which includes a stint as a senior official at the World Bank and a ministerial post, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani would not appear to be short of qualifications for leadership. Yet, the president appears on course to be just another Afghan leader who is unable to rule the troubled country. When Ghani delivered his lofty [inaugural speech](#) on September 29, 2014, following a disputed election and power-sharing deal, expectations were high. The president made a strong argument in support of what he called the “triangle of stability” – economy, security and human resources – promising to restore Afghanistan's valuable ancient geopolitical and economic position as the “crossroads of Asia.”

More than 100 days after taking the office, however, and Ghani is bogged down in a serious political crisis, one that draws a gloomy picture of the fragile unity government. He has only in the last few days been able to form a cabinet, leaving Afghanistan's major public institutions, including ministries, independent departments, and commissions without leaders for months. A recent [survey](#) conducted by Afghanistan's popular private TOLO TV and an independent civil society, shows that Ghani's popularity has fallen dramatically, with only 27.5 percent of respondents satisfied with his leadership. With insecurity and political uncertainty looming, a number of parliamentarians have [asked](#) for Ghani's impeachment for "treason," blaming him for Afghanistan's current state of disarray.

What has gone wrong? Why is this impressively credentialed leader unable to fix Afghanistan? Traditionally, Afghanistan's woes have been blamed on crippling corruption, weak governance, dismal economic conditions, and worsening security coupled with foreign intervention. While these are certainly painful realities, the root cause of political crisis lies in ethnic politics and the breakdown of consensus among diverse ethnicities in regard to the persistent Pashtun dilemma.

[Diplomatic Magazine](#)

January 18: US urges Islamabad, Kabul to help each other seize terrorists

The US has urged Pakistan and Afghanistan to work with each other to bring terrorists to justice. The statement came on Saturday after news reports said the Afghan authorities had arrested five men for their involvement in the Dec 16 attack on a school in Peshawar, claimed by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

"We want to see these kinds of people who have plotted and planned terrorist attacks brought to justice and held accountable," US State Department's deputy spokesperson Marie Harf told reporters in Washington.

"How that happens, we'll see. But certainly, we believe it's important." According to a report by the Associated Press news agency, Afghan officials said the arrested men had helped the TTP carry out the attack and were arrested recently near Afghanistan's border with Pakistan.

[DAWN](#)

January 17: Afghan leader seeks to sideline powerful bloc in break with past

The Afghan cabinet, finalised this week after months of haggling, leaves a powerful faction that helped oust the Taliban in 2001 significantly weakened, in a bold but risky break from the past by President Ashraf Ghani.

Known as “Mujahideen” because many also fought the Soviets in the 1980s, the group is angry at being overlooked for key security posts and is threatening to block nominees when they are presented to parliament in the coming days.

The outcome of that process is difficult to predict, but Ghani, faced with the daunting task of dragging Afghanistan out of war and poverty, appeared to believe his predecessor Hamid Karzai had been held back by factional rivalries. “President Ghani didn’t want to repeat past mistakes during Karzai’s time,” said a close aide to the leader, who, like his top security choices, is from the country’s largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns.

[The News](#)

India

January 21: POTUS to visit India

Speculations are rife as US President Barrack Obama is scheduled to visit India as chief guest at India’s Republic Day parade. The four-day visit will be President Obama’s second – the first coming in 2010 – and comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s well-publicised visit to the US, where he was previously persona non grata for a good part of the last decade. Some in the Indian media view it as an exceptional development, a sign of the US warming up to the idea of enhancing cooperation with strongman Modi, to keep China’s influence in the region under check.

Others believe that this visit, like others before it, will be high on rhetoric and low on substance. They feel that India has always been treated unfairly by the US, by refusing to acknowledge India’s importance in the region, bullying it into making compromises against its interests, partially due to India’s own inability to understand its role, and it’s “non-alignment” foreign policy.

No country would be watching more closely than Pakistan because if the US and India are talking, Pakistan is bound to come up in the conversation. What would that conversation entail? Recently, when Secretary of State John Kerry visited Pakistan, Advisor to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz, made statements accusing India of supporting terrorist activities in the country, especially in Balochistan by using Afghan territory. However, he was unable to get any solid, meaningful words on the subject from Mr Kerry.

[Nation](#)

January 20: Challenges for Modi Part 1 by Javed Jabbar

Challenge 1: To live with the sobering effect of wielding state power when in the mind and body there linger the addictive effects of the intoxicant stimulants of pre-poll rhetoric. This task is made harder by

the fact that the Pakistan-bashing jibes, threats and slogans were more than mere transient rhetoric. They sprang from a long-held, deep-rooted conviction that the very formation of Pakistan was the outcome of a conspiracy to prevent the emergence of the mythical Mahabharat.

Challenge 2: To prevent the recurrence of elections in Indian states over five intervening years between one Lok Sabha polls and the next one from compounding the previous challenge. Or, how to keep stoking anti-Pakistan sentiments as an additional vote-getting factor, without upsetting the apple cart at the central, union, and state level.

The absence of accurate knowledge about Pakistan becomes an impenetrable wall. There may be accuracy in pin-pointing targets for military action, if decided upon. There may be effective intelligence-gathering of some aspects. Yet, despite the fact that there are probably more centres and scholars in India doing Pakistan-specific research than, correspondingly, in Pakistan conducting detailed analysis of India's vast complexity, the quality and depth of understanding about contemporary Pakistan that one comes across in general among opinion-makers, political leaders and media figures in India is below par for so vital a course. India is in good company, though: the same is true for the US, UK and Europe.

[The News](#)

January 20: Pakistan denies reports of US 'warning' against attacks during Obama's India visit

Pakistan Ambassador to the United States Jalil Abbas Jilani on Tuesday denied reports of a warning issued to Pakistan by the United States ahead of President Barack Obama's India visit.

"The Indian media has a tendency to invent and exaggerate things," Jilani said, according to [IBN Live](#).

An Indian news agency earlier reported Pakistan had been warned of the 'consequences' of any terrorist attack during Obama's trip to India. The media reports further said the US had asked Pakistan to ensure there are no border violations either during the visit. Defending the government's stand on terrorism the diplomat said, "As a matter of fact US Secretary of State John Kerry, who visited Islamabad last week, had deeply appreciated the steps taken by Pakistan against terrorism and extremism."

[Express Tribune](#)

January 19: Designing demography in Kashmir by Asif Ezdi

It is no secret that Indian authorities and many of the country's politicians have long harboured secret and not-so-secret designs of converting the Muslim majority of occupied Jammu and Kashmir into a minority and eroding the state's Muslim character. For decades, plans to change Kashmir's demography and its religious and ethnic identity have gone hand in hand with the use of brute force to stamp out the

Kashmir freedom movement and are seen by many Indians as the ‘final solution’ of the Kashmir problem.

These plans, which were previously kept under wraps, have come into the open under the BJP government which swept into power in India last May. A partial glimpse into the party’s intentions was given in its election manifesto. Besides reiterating its commitment to abrogate Article 370 of the Indian constitution, the BJP also promised the return of the Kashmiri Pandits to the valley and steps to “address long-pending problems and demands of [Hindu] refugees from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir”.

Abhorrent as India’s designs are, what is even more shocking is that the Nawaz government has been completely passive in the face of India’s actions. It has been almost a month since the recommendations of the Indian Parliamentary Committee became public knowledge, and for about ten days now, the Valley has been seething with anger over the Indian machinations.

Pakistan must take a clear position on current events in the occupied state in the context of UNSC resolutions. But a mere statement will not be enough. The government must also take up this matter bilaterally with India and raise it forcefully in the UN and other international forums.

[The News](#)

January 16: Indian truce violations threatening peace, says ISPR DG

India is trying to torpedo Pakistan’s efforts against terrorism through its recurrent ceasefire violations on the border, Inter-Services Public Relations Director General Maj-Gen Asim Saleem Bajwa said on Thursday.

Speaking to the British think-tank Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), he said that India was fanning war hysteria although Pakistan has always taken the lead in offering peace. “India’s violent overtures have disappointed our peace initiatives,” Bajwa said.

The ISPR head said that indiscriminate action was launched against terrorists after the [attack on Karachi airport](#). He recalled that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Foreign Office had tried everything possible to normalise ties between the two countries, but India always showed stubbornness. “Resolution of Kashmir issue is necessary to develop trust between Pakistan and India,” he said.

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