



ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION: LESSONS FROM EUROPE AND SOUTH ASIA

3-4 October 2023



Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA)
National Defence University, Islamabad - Pakistan

Authors:

Mr Jens Vesterlund Mathiesen, RDDC, Denmark

Dr Abdul Rauf Iqbal, NDU, Pakistan

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Introduction

In recent years, major geopolitical events have propelled the world into an era of strategic change. For decision-makers globally this presents an age of uncertainty. Increasing levels of great power competition and shifts in major power centres risk heightened global fragmentation and a widening gap between states, continents, regions, and geopolitical blocs. As such, honest dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and institutional cooperation are essential in preparing for the future and in maintaining and promoting stability and security. In the spirit of such mutual cooperation, the National Defence University (NDU) of Pakistan and the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) collaborated on a joint two-day roundtable conference at the RDDC in Copenhagen. The conference, spanning two days, focused on pathways towards regional security cooperation, drawing lessons from Europe and South Asia. It included an introductory session and three working sessions covering various topics:

1. The (Re) emerging Challenge of Transnational Terrorism.
2. Transforming Security Order and Regional Security Cooperation.
3. Regional Integration through Sustainable Cooperation.

Each session featured presentations from both the NDU and the RDDC, followed by plenary debates. This joint conference was part of a series of long-standing RDDC and NDU collaborative research activities, including numerous joint ventures since 2014. The constructive relationship between the two institutions provides an excellent platform for sharing experiences and deliberating upon ideas with an academic approach, enabling unique and candid discussions on otherwise sensitive topics of international security and strategic importance. The RDDC-NDU cooperation was formalized in 2017 with an Academic Cooperation Agreement (ACA).

The following report summarizes the findings from the discussions at the conference across the sessions. As the topics discussed were of strategic importance to both countries and institutions, the authors have strived to balance perspectives, include nuances, and highlight points of disagreement – all while respecting the mutually agreed upon Chatham House Rule, under which the entire conference was held.

PROGRAMME

DAY 1			
3 rd October 2023 (Tuesday)			
Conference Day 1			
Introductory Session			
Time (hours)	Activity	Remarks	
0830-0840	Welcome Remarks by Dr Henrik Breitenbauch, Dean of the RDDC		
0840-0850	Introductory Remarks by Major General Raza Aizad, HI(M), DG ISSRA, Head of the NDU Delegation		
0850-0900	Introductory Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Shoaib Sarwar, Pakistani Ambassador to Denmark		
Workshop Session: RDDC-NDU Cooperation - New Areas and Pathways			
0900-0910	Presentation of Ideas and Options from the RDDC		
0910-0920	Presentation of Ideas and Options from the NDU		
0920-0945	Plenary Discussion about Future Cooperation of the NDU and RDDC		
0945-0950	Group Photo		
0950-1015	Stretch Break		
Working Session 1: The (Re) emerging Challenge of Transnational Terrorism			
Time (hours)	Activity	Guest Speaker	Remarks
1015-1020	Introductory Remarks by Moderator	Brigadier Ajab Khan (Retd)	
1020-1040	Transnational Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Preventing and Countering Extremist and Militant Groups	Dr Simbal Khan	
1040-1100	Global Counterterrorism from Afar: Opportunities and Challenges with “Over-the-Horizon” Strategies: The European Perspective	Dr Troels Burchall Henningsen	
1100-1150	Interactive Session		
1150-1200	Wrap-up by Moderator		
1200-1300	Lunch		
Working Session 2: Transforming Security Order and Regional Security Cooperation			
Time (hours)	Activity	Guest Speaker	Remarks
1300-1305	Introductory Remarks by Moderator	Ambassador Michael Zilmer-Johns	

1305-1325	Danish Perspectives on a Changing European Security Order	Dr Amelie Theussen	
1325-1345	Conflict Resolution vs Conflict Management in South Asia: Pakistan's Perspective	Dr Maria S. Effendi	
1345-1445	Interactive session		
1445-1500	Wrap-up by Moderator		

DAY 2
October 4th 2023 (Wednesday)
Conference Day 2

Working session 3:
Regional Integration through Sustainable Cooperation

Time (hours)	Activity	Guest Speaker	Remarks
1000-1005	Introductory Remarks by Moderator	Mr David Vestenskov	
1005-1025	Reintegration of Afghanistan into the World Community: A European Perspective	Mr Jens Vesterlund Mathiesen	
1025-1045	Engaging with Afghanistan: A Regional Perspective	Major General Inam Ul Haque (Retired)	
1045-1145	Interactive session		
1145-1200	Wrap-up by moderator		
1200-1300	Lunch		

Closing Session

Time (hours)	Activity	Remarks
1300-1310	Closing Remarks by the Commandant RDDC	Major General Flemming Mathiasen
1310-1320	Closing Remarks by the Head of NDU Delegation	Major General Raza Aizad, HI (M) DG ISSRA
1320-1325	Closing Remarks by Organizers	
1325-1330	Group Photo	



Key Conclusions of the Conference

- **US-China Rivalry's Impact on Strategy and Cooperation:** Despite overlapping interests regarding terrorism in Afghanistan, the intensifying US-China rivalry is likely to significantly hinder the development of a cohesive strategy and cooperation, primarily due to a lack of trust and information-sharing mechanisms.
- **Contextual Interpretation of Global Events:** The perception of global events is inherently influenced by contextual and geopolitical interests. Europe predominantly focuses on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, viewing Russia as the principal aggressor, while Pakistan's attention is centred on the ongoing conflicts in South Asia.
- **Resurgence of Transnational Terrorism:** The resurgence of transnational terrorist organizations using Afghanistan as a hub has re-emerged as a critical political issue for both Western and regional countries.
- **Divergent Approaches to Afghanistan:** Western states have generally exhibited



greater reluctance in engaging with Afghanistan, in contrast to neighbouring countries and regional actors who have adopted a more flexible and pragmatic approach.

- **Counterterrorism as a Pathway to Engagement with the Taliban:** A potential avenue for engagement with the Taliban lies in the realm of counterterrorism, where overlapping interests exist despite divergent views on significant social or political issues.
- **The Jammu and Kashmir Dispute:** The Jammu and Kashmir issue, seen as a matter of the self-determination, poses concerns for Pakistan, especially in light of the violations of UNSC resolutions and the heightened western security cooperation with India.
- **Expansion of Military-to-Military Academic Cooperation:** The longstanding military-to-military academic collaboration between the Royal Danish Defence College and the National Defence University, Pakistan, holds the potential for expansion into new domains, such as joint research, lectures, and projects focusing on 'wargaming'.

DAY 1

Introductory Session



INTRODUCTORY SESSION:

The introductory session commenced with warm welcoming remarks by Dr. Henrik Breitenbauch, Dean of the RDDC, followed by Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, HI(M), Director General ISSRA, representing the NDU delegation. His Excellency Ambassador Shoaib Sarwar, the Pakistani Ambassador to Denmark, also delivered opening remarks.

The session highlighted the willingness of both the NDU and RDDC to further enhance and deepen their cooperation. Although the primary focus was on military-to-military academic collaboration, Ambassador Shoaib Sarwar emphasized the strength of Danish-Pakistani relations across various sectors. He noted the significant business ties, exemplified by trade agreements with companies like Novo Nordisk and Mærsk, and highlighted recent high-profile visits, including that of the former Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod to Pakistan after collaborating with Pakistani partners during the successful evacuations following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021. Moreover, the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Climate Policy, Dan Jørgensen, met with the former Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in Islamabad in June 2023 and signed the Green Framework Engagement Agreement, seeking new potentials for joint initiatives and projects in renewable energy driven by technological advancements.

The closed roundtable format, under the Chatham House Rule, was praised for its effectiveness in facilitating candid discussions on sensitive and strategically important issues, allowing for open and discreet exchanges of perspectives.

The discussion generated several ideas for the potential continuation and expansion of NDU-RDDC collaboration:

- **Joint Conferences and Seminars:** It is proposed to maintain a continuous series of activities, such as the roundtable in Copenhagen or the joint conference held in Islamabad earlier this year. Planning for the next event at the NDU in the first half of 2024 should commence promptly. These gatherings, whether termed as 'conferences,' 'seminars,' or 'roundtables,' should focus on knowledge-sharing and debate, adhering to the Chatham House Rule format.
- **Joint Research and Lectures:** Both institutions can bolster their collaboration through joint research, potentially publishing in outlets like the Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies (SJMS) and the NDU's Margalla Papers, NDU Journal, ISSRA Papers, Strategic Thought, and Journal of International Law. There should be provisions for visiting researchers to exchange knowledge between institutions, with opportunities to access office space, time for writing, and avenues to contribute to courses and seminars, possibly through online platforms like Zoom.
- **Advancing Cooperation in New Areas:** The NDU-RDDC partnership, historically cantered on strategic and security studies, could branch into new areas like military technology, international humanitarian law (IHL), and defence planning (acquisition and procurement). Emphasizing 'wargaming' could prove beneficial, possibly developing wargames that address specific global situations of mutual interest as part of a conference setting.

Both institutions identified the evolving US-China rivalry as a critical geopolitical issue of academic interest for the coming years. Specifically, the RDDC has maintained a consistent focus on understanding the current situation in Afghanistan and its broader implications for the surrounding region.

DAY 1

Working Session 1

THEME OF THE SESSION

The (Re)emerging Challenge of Transnational Terrorism

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adopting a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism is crucial, focusing on institutional engagement to address the root causes of terrorism, such as identity grievances and marginalization.
- Exploring avenues for mutual cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism, where regional stability is a shared strategic objective, can help enhance trust between the US and China.
- Regional actors, particularly neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, would benefit from joint counterterror operations to mitigate the risk of Afghanistan becoming a terrorist safe haven.

INTRODUCTORY SESSION:

The first working session delved into the resurging challenges of transnational terrorism, with a specific focus on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Sahel region. The resurgence of terrorism in Afghanistan has catapulted the threat posed by groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) to the forefront of political discourse due to their expanding influence in recent years. The session encompassed discussions on preventative and countermeasures against extremist and militant groups, as well as the opportunities and challenges presented by over-the-horizon counterterrorism (CT) strategies from both Pakistani and European viewpoints.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Terrorism is intricately linked with both intrastate and interstate conflicts. In regions like Afghanistan and Pakistan, key drivers of conflict often stem more from intergroup social factors and grievances rather than ideology. When devising preventive measures against extremist and militant groups, it's crucial to address factors that exacerbate or mitigate identity grievances. Factors such as globalization, migration, and social media have been identified as catalysts for intergroup tensions. Additionally, the disparity in global development contributes to the structural roots of conflict, as certain groups continue to live under primitive conditions while others experience rapid development, leading to societal grievances and marginalization.

The reintegration of former fighters into society is often overlooked in broader peacebuilding processes. Inadequate reintegration can trigger a new cycle of terrorism. Disengagement from institutions and joblessness leaves former fighters susceptible to associating with terrorist organizations. Therefore, states are encouraged to adopt a bottom-up, community-focused approach, channelling more resources into rehabilitation initiatives for marginalized groups through local partnerships. These initiatives should be tailored, recognizing regional and gender-based differences in what drives individuals to become terrorist fighters. The strategy should emphasize social policy and investments over military means, a case in point is the De-Radicalization and Emancipation Programmes (DREPs) of Pakistan.

Pakistan remains susceptible to conflict, especially with the Taliban's takeover impacting the wider region. Neighbouring countries including Pakistan are apprehensive about the potential (re) establishment of a terrorist safe haven in Afghan territory. Despite the Taliban's reported efforts, the threat from TTP persists, challenging Pakistan's security due to the transnational nature of its operations. A successful strategy involves disrupting the operational control of these groups, thereby reducing their dependence on other factions.

While the threat of transnational terrorism remains significant, political attention has shifted towards regional conflicts and other priorities. The escalating US-China rivalry poses a risk of complicating and potentially obstructing cooperation as their relations become competitive across more policy areas. The prisoner's dilemma analogy aptly describes the current situation between the US and China, where a lack of trust and inadequate information sharing can lead to non-cooperation despite shared interests. Although both nations could benefit from regional stability and minimizing global terrorism threats, they struggle to find common ground. Meanwhile, Europe grapples with the Russian-Ukraine war and the deteriorating situation in the Sahel region, hindered by disagreements among states and a lack of unified counterterrorism strategy.

DAY 1

Working Session 2

THEME OF THE SESSION

Transforming Security Order and Regional Security Cooperation

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Identifying and studying successful conflict resolution processes could provide valuable guidelines to foster future peace negotiations.
- Recognizing the negative implications of dehumanizing opposing groups in political discourse is crucial, as it can obstruct the possibilities of constructive engagement.
- Understanding that the interpretation of global development is contextually and geographically based on geopolitical priorities is essential. Recognizing that threat perceptions can vary significantly between parties is key to fostering international understanding and cooperation.

The existing security order is transforming as both historical and emerging border conflicts resurface, underscoring the need for enhanced regional security cooperation in Europe and South Asia. The second working session aimed to address potential conflict resolution in two key geographical areas, offering insights into the changing European security order from a Danish perspective and exploring conflict resolution and management in South Asia from a Pakistani viewpoint.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

In February 2022, the European security order was significantly disrupted by the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war. Some Danish participants noted this as a challenge to the Western rule-based order and the fundamental norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This event shifted European threat perception, reinforcing the Baltic States' long-held view of Russia as a significant threat to neighbouring states and ultimately leading to the Finnish and Swedish NATO memberships. Conversely, some Pakistani participants interpreted Russia's approach in Ukraine as strategic patience, anticipating a weakening of US-EU unity. Nevertheless, both sides concurred that the Russia-Ukraine war's secondary and tertiary effects have had global repercussions, leading to a worldwide food crisis and surging energy prices.

The right to self-determination in the Jammu and Kashmir conflict was a central topic. Pakistani participants expressed concerns over the increased Western engagement with India, despite India's non-adherence to UNSC resolutions, which they believe impedes the resolution of the longstanding Kashmir dispute. Conversely, Danish participants acknowledged global efforts to ensure the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination through India-Pakistan cooperation. However, the region's divided territorial integrity complicates international cooperation, rendering numerous UN resolutions ineffective in resolving the conflict, making near-future conflict resolution unlikely, although efforts must persist.

The session underscored that interpretations of global development and threat perceptions are inherently contextual and geographically based. Danish participants focused primarily on the Russian-Ukraine conflict, viewing Russia as the main aggressor, while Pakistani participants emphasized injustices by Western and Indian actors in their region. The selective and sometimes controversial involvement of the international community in global disputes highlights the challenges of universally applying and accepting fundamental international law principles.

A history of worsening relations and mistrust often derails new attempts at conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The session facilitated discussions on fostering regional security cooperation to transform the security order. It was noted that political rhetoric and the 'dehumanization' of opposing groups hinder constructive engagement, as established 'enemy images' disseminated to the public are challenging to change. Participants recognized that constructive peace negotiations often arise through specific 'windows of opportunity' related to particular events. Investigating how these opportunities emerge, such as identifying mutual interests where regional actors or global powers benefit from overlapping goals, was recommended.

DAY 2

Working Session 3

THEME OF THE SESSION

Regional Integration through Sustainable Cooperation

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Western countries could benefit from adopting the pragmatic approaches of Afghanistan's neighbouring countries in engaging with the Taliban.
- To enhance Western engagement with the Taliban, dialogue should concentrate on 'picking the low-hanging fruit', meaning focusing on areas of mutual understanding and overlapping interests.
- One of the shared strategic objectives is ensuring that Afghanistan does not evolve into a terrorist safe haven. This concern offers a potential platform for engagement and collaboration.

The third working session delved into the repercussions of two decades of Western military involvement in Afghanistan. The unexpected takeover of Kabul by the Taliban raised numerous questions about Afghanistan's future under Taliban rule and how the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) would navigate international politics. The session explored whether the Taliban's foreign relations could potentially undermine their legitimacy and control, and it also examined the possibilities and conditions under which the international community, especially Western states, could further engage with the Taliban.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

To date, no state has formally recognized the Taliban as Afghanistan's legitimate government. Nevertheless, international engagement with the Taliban has been steadily increasing, hinting at the Taliban's gradual reintegration into the global community. This trend prompts a re-evaluation of the role of formal diplomatic recognition, especially when trade cooperation seems to thrive without it.

Western states have demonstrated a more cautious approach to engaging with the Taliban, in contrast to neighbouring countries and regional actors who have adopted proactive diplomatic strategies, including signing trade agreements and appointing diplomatic personnel to Afghanistan. Pakistan's proximity and intertwined relations with Afghanistan, marked by substantial daily cross-border movement, especially for medical care and education, render complete disengagement impossible.

Post-August 2021, Western engagement with the Taliban has largely occurred through third-party intermediaries. The West's reluctance is partially rooted in the failure of the 20-year military intervention in Afghanistan, which is often seen as a collective Western trauma. The Taliban's return to power, despite substantial loss of life and resources, symbolizes a stark reminder of perceived Western ineffectiveness, making any direct engagement with the Taliban politically sensitive. However, the human cost of non-engagement, particularly the worsening conditions for the Afghan populace, was highlighted by Pakistani participants, emphasizing the moral implications and global responsibility, especially by Western countries.

Participants concurred that engagement with the Taliban should pivot around shared interests, such as counterterrorism, rather than contentious social or political issues like women's rights. A common strategic goal for both Western nations and the Taliban is ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a terrorist safe haven. This aim is echoed by regional neighbours and the West alike, as regional stability and preventing terrorist activities originating from Afghan soil represent areas of mutual concern. Focusing on shared interests can build trust and foster more constructive cooperation, preventing further deterioration of relations and alleviating the humanitarian consequences for the Afghan people due to withheld foreign aid.

PICTURE GALLERY









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National Defence University, Islamabad - Pakistan

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