

Cross-border conflict drivers and breaks – Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq

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Question

What is the extent of the evidence base on cross-border conflict drivers and breaks that exist across Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq?

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1. Overview

This report provides an overview of the evidence on cross-border conflict drivers and breaks along the Pakistan–Afghanistan–Iran–Iraq route. Direct evidence on the nature of conflict-related flows along this route in its entirety is limited. Therefore, this report includes evidence on cross-border conflict dynamics between neighbouring countries along the route. This report was commissioned as an evidence mapping exercise, rather than aiming to carry out a full analysis of conflict dynamics across the four countries.

The following are some of the key points about the nature of evidence surveyed:

- The literature refers to disparate cross-border conflicts in the region. Two clusters of conflicts can be discerned: those relating to cross-border conflict dynamics along the borders between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, and those between Iran and Iraq. There is no evidence in the literature considered for this review to suggest that conflict dynamics in the two clusters are linked in any coherent way. It is therefore difficult to

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extrapolate findings from the disparate clusters of research to the nature of flows across the entire route.

- The evidence is more abundant on cross-border conflict dynamics stemming from the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces of Pakistan. Evidence on cross-border conflict dynamics between Iran and Iraq is limited.
- The literature considered in this review was largely gender-blind.

The following are the key cross-border conflict drivers identified in the literature:

- **Cross-border insurgency and militancy networks:** There is some evidence on the regional and international reach of Islamic State (IS). Networks extend from Iraq and Syria into Pakistan and Afghanistan, although the nature of flows is unclear and the extent of their presence is disputed. There are separate clusters of evidence on separatism and insurgency in border regions across the four countries. This includes analysis of the Baloch insurgencies in Pakistan and Iran, Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Kurdish separatism in Iran and Iraq. There are complex dynamics between some of these insurgencies and the cross-border operations of militant networks such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda.
- **Cross-border foreign policy and state support for non-state actors:** Cross-border foreign policy, and the use of militant and insurgent groups as proxies by neighbouring countries, are key conflict drivers. The evidence on this is mostly speculative, and is dispersed amongst studies and opinion pieces focusing on broader issues of militancy, insurgency and foreign policy.
- **Border security and law enforcement:** The evidence on border security is limited, and there is a lack of analysis on the effectiveness of law enforcement and border security agencies. The literature emphasises the porous nature of borders, the role of tribal affiliations, and ineffective border management practices.
- **Refugees and economic migration:** There is no direct evidence analysing cross-border migration across the whole route. There is a strong body of evidence on the Afghan economic migrants and refugees in Pakistan, some of which comments on the relationship between migration and stability. The literature points towards an Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan migration corridor, although the evidence is scarce.
- **Drugs trafficking and cross-border crime:** There is significant coverage of the distribution of drugs produced in Afghanistan to Pakistan and Iran, whilst evidence on drugs trafficking across the Iran-Iraq border is limited. Evidence on other types of illicit trade, such as arms trafficking, is also limited. The quality of the evidence is varied, ranging from robust data-based analysis on the nature of drugs flows to more speculative commentary on the nexus between cross-border drugs trafficking, crime, militancy and insurgency.
- **Economic, social and political marginalisation:** There is a lack of coherent analysis on how economic, social and political marginalisation has fuelled cross-border conflict, instability and crime. A few of the studies surveyed on militancy and insurgency touch on this issue as a conflict driver.

The following are the key cross-border conflict breaks identified in the literature:

- **Cross-border cooperation on trade, energy and security:** There is an abundance of studies commenting on bi-lateral relations between neighbouring countries along the route. This literature often comments on the potential for cooperation on trade, energy and security for improving stability.
- **Migration, cultural connections and cross-border economic opportunities:** Evidence on migration as a potential conflict break is scarce, and it is difficult to judge the validity of these claims.

2. Cross-border conflict drivers

2.1 Cross-border insurgency and militancy networks

There is a substantial body of evidence on militancy and insurgency, particularly in the Pakistan and Afghanistan border regions. The quality of evidence is varied, ranging from qualitative journal articles and policy briefs to opinion pieces. The literature often comments on cross-border conflict dynamics, but specific and robust analysis on the cross-border flows, such as on the movements of foreign fighters, is limited and difficult to unpack from more general analysis and commentary on the historical and contemporary nature of the various groups.

Islamic State (IS)¹

There is no specific analysis of the cross-border activities and flow of Islamic State (IS) across the entire route. There is some evidence on the regional and international reach of IS, with networks extending from Iraq and Syria into Pakistan and Afghanistan. Most of this is in the form of literature reviews and analysis of news reports.

The evidence suggests that IS's presence in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq has led to competition with pre-existing militant networks. A journal article by Azami (2016) drawing on news reports and local interviews focuses on the emergence of IS's Khorasan² branch in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It contends that their presence challenges the Afghan Taliban's dominance over local insurgency; competition between the Taliban and IS changing the dynamics of militancy in the region and is a source of conflict (p. 131). It provides information on the sources of IS recruits in Afghanistan, including disaffected Taliban commanders, members and commanders of the Hizb-e-Islami (Islamic Party), activists of Hizb-u Tahrir, ordinary Afghans who have been influenced by Salafist/Wahhabist ideology and unemployed youth (p. 137). It also provides estimates of IS's numeric strength in Afghanistan, which range from 1000 to 7000 foreign fighters, stating that there is a stronger presence in eastern Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan (p.147). A journal article by Tomé (2015) examines the international expansion of the IS from Syria and Iraq to a range of countries, including Pakistan and Afghanistan. It argues that IS's presence in the region has fueled increased sectarian tensions between Sunnis and

¹ Islamic State also known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State (IS) and Da'esh.

² Khorasan is an ancient name for Afghanistan and the surrounding parts of Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia (Azami, 2016).

Shiites in Iraq, strengthening the power of opposing Shiite militias, and serving to intensify rivalries between Iran and Saudi Arabia (p. 132).

Other studies question the impact and presence of IS in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A global intelligence summary by Ghambir (2015) provides an overview of IS-related events in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan for the period March to May 2015. It argues that whilst IS has focussed on recruitment and training in Afghanistan, it has not conducted complex attacks. An Afghanistan Analysts Network report by Osman (2015) on the threat posed by IS in Afghanistan argues that their presence and impact has been exaggerated. It contends that events attributed to IS are often the work of other groups (p. 1). A Jinnah Institute Policy Brief by Abbas (2014) investigates the impact of IS on South Asia. It speculates that IS is unlikely to develop a foothold in Pakistan, where it is largely an idea attracting militants associated with pre-existing terrorist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban (p. 14).

More recent commentary in the news media suggests that IS is recruiting fighters from Pakistan. A report in *The Diplomat* by Kashani (2017) comments on Pakistan's efforts to counter the IS threat, stating that most IS fighters come from the Pakistani Taliban. *The Dawn* (2014) states that IS recruited 10 to 12,000 followers from the Hangu and Kurram Agency tribal areas of Pakistan.

There is a lack of coverage on the impacts of IS's activities on conflict in Iran. A report by the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre comments on the implications of IS activities on relations between Iran and Pakistan. It argues that the IS, and its anti-Shia violence, poses a threat to all the countries in the region, including Iran (Sial, 2015, p. 5).

The Taliban

The literature on the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban emphasises the complex and dynamic nature of militant networks operating in Afghanistan's and Pakistan's border regions. There are links between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, and Pashtun nationalists, but these are often part of more complex militant and insurgent networks operating in the region.

A literature review by Saikal (2010) comments on the linkages between Pashtun nationalists and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and on their cross-border movements in response to anti-terrorism campaigns. A report by Abbas (2009) explores militancy in Pakistan's borderlands and the implications for Afghanistan. It argues that the network of militants in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is complex, and that different groups have different tribal affiliations, objectives and shifting alliances (p. 4). It describes cross-border flows of militants in both directions. A journal article by Larsdotter (2014) looks at the transnational nature of the Afghan insurgency. In doing so, it emphasises the cross-border nature of militancy networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including the predominantly Pashtun Taliban, the Hezb-i-Islami and the Haqqani Network. It notes how in Pakistan's border areas such as FATA, Balochistan and Waziristan, borders are largely ignored and that ethnic ties and tribal affiliation are the basis of support networks for insurgents (p. 147). It argues that these areas provide safe havens for the Taliban and Haqqani network leadership, and that they have become important for the recruitment and training of fighters and for planning offensives in Afghanistan (p. 148).

A literature review by Berg Harpviken (2012) provides an alternative viewpoint on the extent of cross-border militant networks and flows. It argues that transnational integration between the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda is limited (p. 212).

The Baloch insurgency

There is some coverage on the Baloch insurgency, which affects Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Studies often provide historical analysis and provide a brief analysis on cross-border dynamics and regional implications.

An analysis of emerging Pakistani-Iranian ties by the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre includes a section on cross-border insurgency. It argues that Baloch insurgent groups in Iran, such as Jundullah, JaishulAdl and Jaishul Nasr, have a substantial presence in both Iran's Sistan-Balochistan province and Pakistan's Balochistan province (Sial, 2015, p. 3). A Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre report explores the Baloch insurgency in Iran's Sistan-Balochistan Province. It comments on the linkages of Iranian Baloch militant groups (such as Jundullah, Jaish-ul Adl and Harakat Ansar Iran) with Baloch groups operating in Pakistan (Rehman, 2014). Kupecz (2012) provides a conflict analysis of the insurgency in Pakistan's Balochistan province. It includes a section on regional dynamics, linking increases in violence and instability in the province to the Afghanistan war and the subsequent arrival of Afghan Pashtun refugees and Afghan Taliban militants (p.104). A journal article by Pande (2016) has a brief section on bi-lateral relations between Pakistan and Iran with respect to the Baloch insurgency. It outlines how bi-lateral security agreements and cooperation against terrorism and drugs smuggling have been hampered by militant attacks in Iran by groups operating from Pakistan's Balochistan province (p. 89).

Kurdish separatism in Iran and Iraq

There is a lack of analysis on cross-border militancy flows across the Iran-Iraq border. A journal article by Tabatabai (2017) on Iran's counterterrorism apparatus comments on the key insurgent threats facing Iran, including Baloch and Kurdish separatist movements. The Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) is a Kurdish separatist group that operates along the border regions with Iraqi Kurdistan and has launched cross-border attacks on Iranian military targets.

2.2 Cross-border foreign policy and state support for non-state actors

The literature suggests that cross-border foreign policy, and the use of militant and insurgent groups as proxies by neighbouring countries, are key conflict drivers. The evidence on this is mostly speculative, and is dispersed amongst studies and opinion pieces focusing on broader issues of militancy, insurgency and foreign policy.

Pakistan and Afghanistan

A round table commentary by Goodson (2014) articulates Pakistan's primary national interests in Afghanistan. It argues that Pakistan sees itself as having a stake in Afghanistan's internal affairs, with the military leadership propagating a strategic doctrine against India known as "strategic depth" (p.35). An International Crisis Group (2014b) report provides a comprehensive account of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. It notes how military-oriented interventionist policies,

including the support of Pashtun proxies, continue to cause tensions and threaten stability in Afghanistan. An International Crisis Group (2014a) report briefly comments on Pakistan's role in the Afghanistan insurgency, describing growing tensions over the operations of the Pakistani Taliban across the Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. It notes how the two countries accuse each other of providing insurgents with continued access to safe havens, and contends that this is undermining stability and bi-lateral relations (pp. 23 - 24). A report by the Middle East Institute comments on the manipulation of Afghan refugees by the Pakistani state, who have been supporting militant organisations in Afghanistan to focus attention away from Pashtun nationalist demands (Grare and Maley, 2011). A current-affairs article in *The Diplomat* states that Pakistan has been accused of providing sanctuaries to the Afghan Taliban, who have been carrying out cross-border attacks in Afghanistan. It states that diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which were already poor, are unlikely to improve (Akbar Notezai, 2016). Offering an alternative view, Berg Harpviken (2012) contends that the extent of Pakistani state support to the Taliban is disputed (p. 219).

Iran and Pakistan

Kupez (2012) contends that the Baloch insurgency has become a point of tension between Pakistan and Iran, with both countries suspecting the other of internal political interference (p. 106). A literature review by Atarodi (2011) provides coverage of Iran's Baloch insurgency and related tensions between Iran and Pakistan. It notes how the Iranian government suspect Pakistan of providing support to Iranian Baloch militias (pp. 22-23). Sial (2015), p. 3) describes Iran's concerns over these groups seeking protection in and operating from Pakistan's border areas (p. 3).

Iran and Afghanistan

A RAND Corporation report authored by Nader and Laha (2011) argues that Iran has pursued contradictory objectives in Afghanistan to undermine U.S. goals. This includes measured support for the Taliban, which it has traditionally opposed, which is in part fueled by Iran's perceptions of U.S. support for the Baloch insurgency (p. ix). Goodson (2014) states that Iran wants to preserve its influence in Herat, western Afghanistan, where there are cultural and historical similarities. Afghans in this area are closer to Tehran than Kabul, and Afghanistan is developing its own route in Afghanistan to combat Pakistan's influence in the southern and eastern Pashtun areas (p. 38).

Iran and Iraq

An International Crisis Group (2015) report on international support to Iraqi Kurds against IS includes a section on Iran's spheres of influence in Iraq. It reports that Iran has increased its involvement in Iraq after the emergence of IS, organising, supporting and providing intelligence to Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Peshmerga, Shiite militias, and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and People's Protection Unit (YPG) militias, attempting to bring them under the unified command of Iranian Revolutionary Guards (p. 14). A GSDRC report on Iraq's conflict dynamics and potential for peacebuilding includes coverage of Iranian support to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), the Peshmerga, and various Kurdish political parties in the fight against IS. It argues that this has upset the fragile equilibrium among Kurds, between Kurds and Sunni Arabs, and between the Kurds and the governments in Baghdad and Tehran, which risks weakening Iraq's unity and allows IS to endure (Rohwerder, 2015, p. 6). A section in the United States Institute for Peace's *Iran Primer* (Eisenstadt, n.d.) provides commentary on Iran's strategic interests in Iraq.

Post-Saddam, Iran has attempted to influence Iraqi politics through supporting Shiite and Kurdish political parties and militias. Iran's allies in Iraq include the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, the Badr Organization, Dawa, the Sadrists and the Kurdish Democratic Party. It argues that Iran's political strategy of Shiite unity in Iraq has proved elusive, and that its allies have frequently clashed.

2.3 Border security and law enforcement

The evidence on border security as a conflict driver or break is limited, and there is a lack of analysis on the effectiveness of law enforcement and border security agencies. The literature emphasises the porous nature of borders in region, the role of tribal affiliations, and how poor border management practices provide opportunities for cross-border militancy and crime.

Larsdotter (2014) provides a brief overview of the role of tribal affiliations in facilitating cross-border flows between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It contends that borders are largely superficial and ignored by border communities, and that this has been exploited by insurgent groups (p. 147). A UNHCR study by Davin and Majidi (2009) on cross-border movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan provides an overview of the border region and border management practices. It states that the two major official border points are Torkham and Spin Boldak, although hundreds of unofficial border points populate the 2250-kilometre-long Durand Line (p. 13).³ The report highlights the irregular nature of movements across the border, and argues that border controls are limited to a small margin of the actual flows (p. 4). An International Crisis Group (2014b) report on Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan briefly comments on border management issues. It states that an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 people cross the Durand Line each day. However, Afghanistan's refusal to recognise the Durand Line together with Pakistan turning a blind eye to the cross-border movement of Afghan insurgents compounds the challenges of border management (p. 2).

An East-West Institute report on the state of Afghanistan's borders focuses on the border control efforts of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. It argues that the Afghan Border Police (ABP) and the Afghan Customs Police (ACP) are understaffed, under-resourced, highly fragmented, and under-trained in dealing with clandestine cross-border threats and organised crime (Gavrillis, 2015, p. 12). It states that a lack of political will amongst government officials to combat cross-border crime, combined with corruption within the ABP and ACP, are key impediments to effective border control (p. *ibid*). It argues that the contested nature of the Durand Line poses further problems: neither government accepts the right of the other to pursue insurgents and traffickers over the border, and incidents between the two countries' border forces have sometimes escalated into violent skirmishes (p. 19). This is contrasted with Iran's border control efforts, which are considered to be more intensive and effective. In addition to a substantial police and military presence the borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Iran has constructed substantial physical barriers, including embankments, deep canals and concrete walls (p. 16).

Tabatabai (2017) surveys Iran's counterterrorism and border security apparatus, arguing that the various institutions have overlapping mandates and occasionally operate at cross purposes. Some branches are engaged in counterterrorism against non-state actors, while at the same time supporting others (p. 9).

³ The Durand Line is the British-drawn 1893 boundary, which serves as the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (ICG, 2014b, p. 2)

2.4 Refugees and economic migration

There is no direct evidence analysing cross-border migration across the whole Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran-Iraq route. There is a strong body of evidence on Afghan economic migrants and refugees in Pakistan, some of which comments on the relationship between migration, conflict and stability. The literature points towards an Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan migration corridor, although the evidence is scarce.

The International Organization for Migration's Afghanistan Migration Profile (IOM, 2014) provides a comprehensive account of migration from Afghanistan, but contains little analysis on this as a conflict driver. It states that Pakistan and Iran are the primary destination countries for Afghan migrants, and permanent as well as circular migration between these countries is common (p. 57). It provides migration data, stating that there are 1.6 million registered Afghans living in Pakistan and 800,000 in Iran, but that the actual numbers including undocumented migrants are expected to be much higher (pp. 60 -61).

International Crisis Group (2014b) comments on the Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan, the vast majority of whom are ethnic Pashtuns. It argues that refugees in Pakistan face uncertainty about their status, and that Pakistan's policy of voluntary and gradual returns is short-sighted. The report contends that domestic perceptions of refugees and inter-ethnic tensions have contributed to instability in host communities (p. 22). A report by the Middle East Institute comments on Pakistan's Afghan refugee management policy, describing how Pakistan's own economic and security concerns have reduced the tolerance of Pakistani authorities and citizens towards Afghan refugees (Grare and Maley, 2011). A situation report by the Afghanistan Analysts Network comments on the linkages between Taliban attacks in KP and Pakistan's policy towards Afghan refugees. It notes how new anti-terrorism measures in response to attacks emphasise the repatriation of Afghan refugees, which has led to indiscriminate action and discrimination against registered and undocumented refugees. It states that undocumented refugees are considered a security threat, face resentment from host communities, are blamed for crime, unemployment and militancy, and have been subject to raids and deportation (Roehrs, 2015).

2.5 Drugs trafficking and cross-border crime

There is significant coverage of the distribution of drugs produced in Afghanistan to regional and international markets through Pakistan and to a lesser extent Iran. Evidence on drugs trafficking across the Iran-Iraq border is limited, as is evidence on arms trafficking and other forms of cross-border crime.

Drugs trafficking

The quality of the evidence on drugs trafficking varies. It ranges from data-based analysis on the nature of flows to more speculative commentary on the nexus between drugs trafficking, crime, militancy and insurgency.

A UNODC (2015) report provides a comprehensive analysis of Afghan opiate trafficking to global markets through Pakistan and Iran as part of 'the southern route'. The report provides detailed analysis of the various trafficking routes, but does not comment specifically on cross-border conflict or crime dynamics. It argues that the geographic locations of Iran and Pakistan make them a major transit point for Afghan opiates and that they both face tremendous challenges in

dealing with large flows (p. 10). An UNODC (2009) report on the transnational threat of the Afghan opium trade provides a deeper analysis of the drugs, crime, and insurgency nexus. It estimates that 40 per cent of Afghanistan's heroin is trafficked to Pakistan whilst about 30 per cent enters Iran (p. 11). It states that Afghan and Pakistani Taliban benefit from the drug trade through taxes and transit and trade levies (p. 18). There is a strong overlap between insurgency, tribal networks and the drugs trade in southern and eastern Afghanistan, extending into Pakistan's tribal areas, where cross-border tribal links among Baloch and Pashtun groups facilitate the drug trade. Furthermore, it argues that the existence of diasporas in transit or destination countries such as Iran have allowed trafficking organisations to expand their networks beyond the immediate region (ibid.).

A paper by Aftab (2014) explores the impacts of opium, heroin and cannabis trafficking from Afghanistan and the possible impacts on Pakistan's economic and society. It describes the key trafficking routes into Pakistan, stating that the majority of opium is cultivated in the southern Afghan provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, which then enters Pakistan through FATA and Balochistan. This is facilitated by the strong familial and economic linkages amongst the tribespeople living in border regions and the general ineffectiveness of law enforcement agencies (p.7). It also states that a small proportion of the drugs trafficked into Pakistan are distributed through Balochistan into Iran before being distributed further west (p. 8). On the organisation of drugs trafficking, it argues that loosely structured groups in Afghanistan are gradually converging into larger organised crime networks, whereas In Pakistan it is more likely that the drugs trade is controlled by loosely structured small groups (p. 14). It contends that organised crime and drugs trafficking has a direct impact on political stability in Pakistan, with the government losing resources and the efficacy needed to provide security and maintain the rule of law (p. 17). Whilst providing no hard evidence, the paper speculates that the proceeds of drugs trafficking are likely being used to fund the Taliban and other militant groups (p. 19). A journal article by Usman and Khan (2013) explores drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Pakistan, commenting on the factors driving the drug economy, the routes used for trafficking, and the implications for Afghan-Pak relations. It argues that drugs smugglers are not militants or Taliban themselves, but that these groups profit from taxation and protection (pp. 36-37). Shelly and Hussain (2009) explore the global dynamics of the drugs trade in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. They find that traffickers rely on western routes via Iran and southern routes via Pakistan. They argue that the drugs trade across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is weakening state control whilst strengthening linkages between drugs traffickers, the Taliban, insurgents and criminal groups. They note how ethnic linkages between Tajik, Uzbek, Pashtun and Baloch Afghans and their counterparts in Pakistan and Iran provide a platform for the organisation and networks necessary to deliver opiates to regional and international markets (p. 26).

Robust evidence on drugs trafficking from Iran into Iraq is limited. Recent news coverage suggests that Basra in the south of Iraq is experiencing a drugs epidemic. An article by Saadoun (2016) states that drugs smuggling from Iran into Iraq is increasing, with Basra the hardest hit province. Drugs trafficking is linked to armed conflicts between gangs, murders, kidnappings and armed robberies. The proliferation of drugs in Basra indicates that a large mafia controls the drug market and may have sufficient weapons and money to pose a threat to the local authorities (ibid.). A Guardian article reports that Iranian-produced crystal meth is flooding across the porous border. It mentions that Basra is a hub on the opium trafficking route from Afghanistan through Iran to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Abdul-Ahad, 2016).

Arms

The evidence on cross-border arms trafficking is limited. The 2012 Small Arms Survey includes a chapter on illicit arms in Afghanistan and Iraq by Schroeder and King (2012). It states that the largest proportion of weapons seized in Iraq originate from Iran, which suggests that Iranian weapons are being acquired and used by armed groups in Iraq, although the extent of Iranian government involvement is unclear (p. 318). It describes the key routes that arms traffickers use from Iran, including through Amara, Basra, and Diwaniyah (p. 328). The report highlights the importance of the arms trade in mountainous border regions between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, stating that common routes from Afghanistan into Pakistan include the border provinces of Logar and Wardak (p.335)

A journal article by Cheema (2014) comments on small arms trafficking in Pakistan and the crime-militancy nexus. It argues that the Pakistani Taliban, the Haqqani network and Al Qaeda have all played a role in the illicit transfer of arms in Pakistan's tribal areas, which has in turn affected Pakistan's internal security (p. 46). It states that the arms smuggling route goes from the Afghan province of Kunar into the tribal region of Bajaur in Pakistan. Arms are then delivered to the Pakistani Taliban and Haqqani network in FATA and KP and to Baloch insurgents in Balochistan (p. 48).

Other types of illicit trade

Specific analysis on other types of illicit trade is limited. In a report by The National Bureau of Asian Research on the impact of the drug economy on military conflict, Felbab-Brown (2009) states that the Pakistani Taliban are involved in the smuggling of legal goods, charging tolls and protection fees, the taxation of economic activity in the areas they operate, the theft and sale of NATO supplies in transit to Afghanistan via Pakistan, and illicit logging (p. 14). Shelly and Hussain (2009) argue that the Taliban and al Qaeda are closely linked to criminal activities along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, including extortion, kidnapping for ransom and human trafficking.

2.6 Economic, social and political marginalisation

There is a lack of coherent analysis on how economic, social and political marginalisation has fuelled cross-border conflict, instability and crime. Some of the studies on militancy and insurgency surveyed in this report touch on this issue as a conflict driver.

Kupez (2012) contends that the contemporary conflict drivers of the Baloch insurgency in Pakistan are control over natural resources and repression by the Pakistani government. Natural gas exploitation is an historical grievance, and Balochistan has received few developmental benefits despite having Pakistan's most abundant natural gas reserves (p. 100). Infrastructure projects, such as the construction of the Gwadar port, have largely occurred with minimal Baloch employment or involvement in decision-making (p. 103). Atarodi (2011) suggests that increased Baloch nationalism is a response to the brutal suppression of Baloch insurgencies by the Pakistani army and to central government cultural policies (p. 17).

Rehman (2014) states that the Baloch people, who are an ethnic and religious minority in predominantly Shia Iran, have long suffered racist persecution and have been victimised by successive Iranian Shia governments (p. 2). Sistan-Balochistan is one of the poorest and most deprived provinces in Iran, despite having significant reserves of natural resources, including

gas, gold, copper, oil and uranium (ibid.). This lack of development, along with ethnic and religious repression, has fuelled popular support for the insurgency, which has in turn been met by harsh measures by Iranian security forces (pp. 2-3).

Saikal (2010) contends that the Pashtun people that straddle Afghanistan and Pakistan constitute an ethnic-based nation. He argues that efforts by the Afghan and Pakistani governments and allied forces to remove the Pashtun-dominated Taliban are perceived as encroachments upon religion, land, resources and socio-cultural norms. Consequently, the Taliban are being accommodated as a religious and nationalist movement in pursuit of an independent “Pashtunistan” on both sides of the border (p. 5). The KP and FATA provinces, where the Pashtuns form the majority ethnic group, are under-represented in Pakistan’s power structure and lag other provinces in terms of social and economic development (p. 12). An Asian Development Bank (2010) post-conflict needs assessment of the FATA and KP provinces contends that that militants have exploited marginalisation and inequality, which have been reinforced by current legislation, underdevelopment, weak governance and corruption.

3. Potential conflict breaks

Evidence on cross-border conflict breaks across the route is very limited. In some cases, it is difficult to discern whether certain factors, such as cross-border foreign policy and state support to non-state actors in neighbouring countries, have served as conflict drivers or breaks. The literature surveyed suggests that migration and cross-border cooperation on trade, energy and security could potentially serve as conflict breaks.

3.1 Cross-border cooperation on trade, energy and security

There is an abundance of studies commenting on bi-lateral relations between neighbouring countries along the route. This literature often speculates on the potential for cooperation on trade, energy and security for improving stability. The geo-strategic importance of Afghanistan as a transit corridor for the transfer of energy supplies to large markets in Asia is often highlighted as the basis for neighbouring country interests in supporting Afghan stability and reconstruction. The nature of the evidence varies from opinion contained in journal articles and policy briefs to more recent analysis in the news media.

Multi-lateral cooperation

The evidence suggests that cooperation on trade, energy and security is predominantly bi-lateral. One exception is the Triangular Initiative between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Gavrilis (2015) states that under this initiative, border liaison offices have been established at key border-crossing points between the three countries (p. 16). UNODC (2015) contends that joint operations and planning as part of this initiative serve as a potential means of combatting drugs trafficking (p. 123).

Pakistan-Iran

An issue brief by the Institute of Strategic Studies outlines the prospects for Pakistan-Iran economic relations. It states that the volume of trade is very low but there is new impetus for cooperation through Iran’s potential involvement in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). A five-year strategic plan signed in 2015 proposes to enhance bilateral trade and

increase Iranian gas and electricity exports to Pakistan. The brief argues that this could benefit the economic development of Balochistan province in Pakistan (Arif, 2016, pp. 2-3). Sial (2015) outlines the main channels of cooperation between Pakistan and Iran. The two countries created a Joint Investment Committee in 2014, which includes provisions for cooperation on small and medium enterprises development cooperation, and increased economic and technical assistance (p. 2). Other bilateral cooperation agreements signed in 2014 include provisions for countering terrorism and enhancing border security (pp. 3-4). An opinion piece in *The Diplomat* suggests that economic realism is leading to improving bilateral cooperation on issues of security, trade and energy (Rafiq, 2015).

Pakistan-Afghanistan

Goodson (2014) describes the importance of Afghanistan's natural resources and transit corridors to Pakistan, stating that Afghanistan is geo-strategically important for trade, infrastructure and natural resources because it connects Pakistan with Central Asia. The International Crisis Group (2014b) contrasts the strategies of Pakistan's military and civilian leaderships towards Afghanistan. The civilian leadership who, driven by the need for economic stability, have attempted to reduce bi-lateral tensions. It contends that there are bi-lateral opportunities for improving stability, expanding economic ties, reducing cumbersome security measures and combatting corruption (pp. i - ii). A Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre report analyses Pakistan's present and emerging foreign policy position on Afghanistan. It describes efforts by Pakistan to ensure a peaceful, stable and non-hostile Afghanistan that are based on economic and energy needs, and on mutual interests to counter militant and extremist threats (Sial, 2013, p. 7). It contends that Pakistan's perceived inaction against the Afghan Taliban should be viewed as an effort to reduce the risk of internal threats, rather than a plan to seek strategic depth (ibid.).

Iran-Afghanistan

A section in the United States Institute for Peace's Iran Primer (Milani, n.d.) provides commentary on Iran's strategic interests in Afghanistan. Major goals include: collaborating and supporting the central government; investing in Afghan reconstruction; and reducing the flow of narcotics into Iran. A literature review by Barzegar (2014) provides an overview of Iran's foreign policy in post-Taliban Afghanistan. It argues that Iran has supported stability and state-building efforts of the Afghan central government, largely on the basis that Afghanistan plays a key role in preserving stability in Iran's eastern borders (p. 123). It states that Iran considers a stable Afghanistan as vital part of its 'look to the East' policy, which aims to foster economic and energy relations with India, China and Japan (p.119). It also notes how Iran is one of the key energy suppliers to Afghanistan, exporting 1 million tons of oil products annually since 2011 (p. 121).

Iran-Iraq

Esfandiary and Tabatabai (2015) assess the significance of Iraq to Iran through economic, cultural and security lenses. They state that Iraq is one of Iran's top five trading partners and that Tehran has encouraged Iranian companies to invest in Iraqi infrastructure projects to increase the two countries' interdependence (p. 4). They also note how security relations have intensified in recent years: in 2013, Iran pledged to provide counter-terrorism assistance, including training and equipping the Iraqi police (p. 5).

3.2 Migration, cultural connections and cross-border economic opportunities

Evidence on migration as a potential conflict break is mentioned in two studies reviewed for this report, but beyond that it is difficult to judge the validity of these claims. The International Organization for Migration's Afghanistan Migration Profile (IOM, 2014) suggests that remittances of Afghan migrant workers in Pakistan and Iran are a key tool for household income and macro-economic development (p. 242). The International Crisis Group (2014b) contend that the repatriation of Afghan migrants in Pakistan could contribute to stability in Afghanistan if it is voluntary and if economic migrants can travel freely, allowing them access to cross-border economic opportunities (p. 20). It adds that cross-border movement between Afghanistan and Pakistan could benefit bi-lateral relations through enhancing people-to-people and economic linkages (p. 18).

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Key websites

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The Diplomat - <http://thediplomat.com/>

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