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Afghans Say Pakistan Behind Cross-Border Fire

By Hafizullah Gardesh

07/12/2012

Official claims more than 800 rockets land in eastern Kunar province in recent weeks

Tensions are building along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with Kabul threatening to refer Islamabad to the United Nations Security Council if rocket attacks into the eastern Kunar province do not stop.

Wasefullah Wasefi, spokesman for the provincial government in Kunar, said in late June that some 850 rockets had been fired from neighbouring Pakistan into Kunar in recent weeks, displacing around 500 families. Ten people had been killed or injured since the shelling started in May, he said. More reports of attacks have come in since Wasefi made the claim.

President Hamid Karzai's office contacted the Pakistani government about the ongoing attacks, and said it would refer the matter to the Security Council if the bombardment does not stop.

Residents of Kunar's Dangam, Sirkanay and Asmar districts staged protests against the attacks for several days in late June, at one point blocking the main road from Kunar to Jalalabad, the capital of neighbouring Nangarhar province, for several hours.

The demonstrators vowed to continue until the Afghan government applied pressure on Pakistan to stop the rocket fire.

Pakistan's embassy in Kabul strongly denied that the country's military was firing on Kunar.

Embassy press officer Akhtar Munir said insurgents operating on either side of the border could be firing the rockets in the hope that Afghans would blame Pakistan.

"There is no evidence to suggest that Pakistan has attacked Kunar province with rockets," Munir said. "It is just propaganda to defame Pakistan."

People often mistakenly pointed the finger at Pakistan when such incidents occurred, he said, stressing that "the people of Afghanistan are all brothers and sisters".

"We do not want our brothers, sisters and children to be killed in Afghanistan. These claims are groundless," he said.

Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security, rejected the embassy's version of events, and insisted that the rockets belonged to the Pakistani military.

"We now have enough evidence to prove that the rockets used in these attacks belong to the Pakistani army," the agency's spokesman Shafiqullah Taheri told Reuters news agency on July 2.

Maulavi Shahzadah Shahed, a member of parliament from Kunar, also blamed the Pakistani military, arguing that the rockets weighed 120 kilogram and were therefore too heavy for either the Afghan or the Pakistani Taleban to transport.

He also alleged that Kunar residents had witnessed the rockets being fired from the vicinity of Pakistani military installations.

"The sun cannot be hidden with two fingers. Residents of border regions of Kunar have seen the areas from which the rockets are fired with their own eyes," he said.

Kunar is mountainous and heavily forested, and borders Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, over which Islamabad has limited control.

The area experienced similar tensions in June 2011, when Afghan officials accused Pakistan of firing rockets into both Kunar and Nangarhar provinces.

Government sources in eastern Afghanistan said at the time that more than 520 rockets had landed in the area in a matter of weeks, killing 26 civilians and forcing hundreds of residents to flee their homes. (See [Afghan-Pakistan Tensions Over Rocket Fire](#).)

A Pakistani army spokesman said at the time that a few munitions might have accidentally landed across the border as security forces countered militant incursions from Afghanistan, but insisted it had not fired rockets into the country deliberately.

One year on, mutual allegations of covert attacks are swirling along this volatile frontier area.

On July 2, Pakistan said to 60 Afghan soldiers had crossed from Paktia province into Pakistan, provoking clashes that killed two local tribesmen, AFP news agency reported. Afghanistan denied the allegation.

There have also been claims that insurgents crossed into Pakistan through Kunar late last month and launched a particularly brutal attack.

On June 27, Taleban militants released video footage showing the severed heads of 17 Pakistani soldiers laid out on a white sheet. Responsibility for the beheadings was claimed by the Pakistani Taleban, although the attackers had entered from Kunar, AFP reported, citing a senior security official in Peshawar.

Maulavi Faqir Mohammad, a commander in the Pakistani Taleban, told the BBC's Persian service that the group accepted responsibility for this attack, but the raid was not launched from inside Afghanistan.

Since the source of the latest rocket attacks remains unclear, a range of theories are circulating in Kabul.

Abdul Satar Sadat, a political analyst, suggested that Pakistan was using the attacks to try to extend its territorial control into Afghanistan.

"As far as I am aware, Pakistani forces have advanced up to 20 kilometres into different areas during the last year," Sadat alleged.

The two neighbours are separated by the disputed Durand Line – a poorly-defined border established by an 1893 agreement. Kabul does not recognise the line, which Pakistan would like to see formalised as the official frontier.

Sadat said Pakistan would be happy if Afghanistan reported the bombardment to the UN Security Council, so that the legitimacy of the Durand Line could also be raised there – "something Pakistan has longed for for years", he said.

He said Kabul may have been initially reluctant to speak out about the bombardment because it wished to avoid discussing the Durand Line.

Another analyst, Fazel Rahman Oria, said Islamabad might be in aggressive mood because it felt outmanoeuvred by Kabul and Washington, particularly in light of their recent agreement on relations beyond the 2014 withdrawal of foreign troops. (For more on this, see [Afghan Parliament Approves US Partnership](#).)

As for the Afghan government, he said, it had its hands full just ensuring its own survival and was therefore reluctant to tackle Pakistan, he said.

“We have a very weak state,” Oria said. “This government does not want to get involved in such matters, it just wants to live for a few more days. The Afghan people have no expectations of this government.”

Some Afghans have questioned why Kabul has not launched a robust military response.

Kunar resident Gol Ahmad fled to Kabul after the shelling started, and said that rather than going on the offensive, Afghan border troops deployed there had moved to the main provincial town Asadabad and other more built-up areas.

“They are protecting themselves by setting up security checkpoints close to people’s houses and the highways,” he claimed. “They are protecting themselves by locating themselves near people.”

Afghan defence ministry spokesman Zaher Azimi told a press conference that the military would respond whenever it received orders to do so.

“The Afghan armed forces are completely prepared to take action against the rocket attacks by Pakistan, but we are waiting,” he said. “We will take action in accordance with any order issued by the presidential office.”