IRAN KILLS SIX PAKISTANIS IN LATEST BORDER INCIDENT; IRAN SILENT (UPDATED)

CIA's map of Pakistan

Six more Pakistanis have been killed by Iranian border agents. The incident has been noted widely in the press in Pakistan, but I find no reports on the incident originating in Iran. This latest incident follows three fishermen killed by Iran around December 7 (although at least one report says there were four killed by Iran in the incident) and three Iranian border guards crossing into Pakistan on January 2 to kill a Pakistani national they were chasing. The guards were detained by Pakistan and released on January 15 after Iran paid blood money to the family of the victim.

The fishing incidents of course were in the coastal waters around the southernmost part of the Iran-Pakistan border and the latest incident was also near the southern end of the border. The January 2 incident was a bit farther north, about halfway to the southern edge of Afghanistan.

In the December 7 incident, the fishermen, who were from Sindh province, appear to have been fishing illegally:

> At least three Pakistani fishermen were gunned down, while two others were injured, by Iranian security forces when they wandered into Iranian territorial waters in the Pasaband area, about 40 kilometres off the Jewani coast in Pakistan.
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> /snip/
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> District Police Officer Gwadar Liaquat Baloch confirmed the incident and said the bodies are yet to be handed over to Pakistani officials.
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> “The trawler, Al-Mariam, entered into Iran’s territorial waters when Iranian security forces opened fire on them, killing three crew members on the spot, while injuring another two,” he added.
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> Station Officer of Jewani Imam Baksh said that there were 20 to 25 people onboard Al-Mariam, which was engaged in illegal fishing.

A later report in the Baloch press says the fishermen were Baloch and that four were killed:

> Iranian Naval forces indiscriminate firing on fishermen’s boat in Jiwani area of district Gwadar in Balochistan .According to details on day of Ashura ,Iranian Naval forces attacked a fishermen’s boat in coastal area of Jiwani in Baloch gulf.As a result of firing four Baloch fishermen died on spot while two other sustained serious bullet injuries.The Iranian naval forces taken away the dead and injured Baloch fishermen along with them to coastal town of Chabahar,a port city in western Balochistan.
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> Those who killed by the brutal Iranian

> forces are identified as Jan Mohammad,Lateef Baloch,Shakeel Ahmed and Abden Baloch,while the names of injured fishermen are Ghulam Jan and Haleem Baloch.According to the reports the Iranian Navy has taken away the deceased and injured fishermen to the port city of Chabahar in Iranian occupied Balochistan.
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> The deceased and injured fishermen are belong from coastal area of Gadani in district Lasbela and Mauripur,a Baloch dominated area in Karachi.The corpses and injured fishermen were in Iranian Naval custody until late Thursday evening.

As I noted in this post, the Express Tribune mentioned in its description that Iran is quite concerned about members of Jundallah crossing the border in the area where the January 2 incident took place.

For the most recent incident, the first report was from AP and carried by ABC. The initial version has been updated, but the reference to the victims transporting goats remains:

> On Thursday, Iranian security forces killed six Pakistani traders taking goats into Iran, a Pakistani official said. Iranian officials were not immediately available for comment.

The description in today's Express Tribune paints the incident as an ambush, but says the victims were transporting cattle:

> At least six Pakistani nationals were gunned down and four others wounded when Iranian border security guards opened indiscriminate firing without prior warning near the country's border with Iran.
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> According to reports, the incident took

> place in the Iranian territory close to the Zaran border overlooking Chah Bahar, which is a common route for informal trade between the neighbouring countries.
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> The Pakistani nationals were travelling in a vehicle carrying cattle and heading towards Chah Bahar from the Zaran border when they were intercepted by the Iranian border guards, the Balochistan Levies confirmed.
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> The Iranian security personnel – without any prior warning – opened fire at the Pakistani nationals from different directions. Six people died on the spot after receiving multiple bullet wounds while the four others sustained injuries.

Interestingly, not all those killed in this incident were Balochs. The Express Tribune article noted that some were Pashtuns being smuggled into Iran in search of better job opportunities. Pakistan's Daily Tribune also carries that information, but goes on to provide more details about the border region:

> Identities of the dead and injured could not be ascertained until filing of this report. However, locals claimed that some of the dead were Baloch residents of Gwadar district, while others could be Pakhtuns, who were being smuggled into Iran for better job opportunities.
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> It is pertinent to mention here that residents of border regions usually exchange goods, including cattle, to meet the demand for beef and mutton in Iranian Balochistan.
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> In recent weeks, Iranians have become more sensitive about border security after it was tightened during naval exercises in the region. Last month, a number of Pakistani fishing boats along

> with fishermen were captured close to Pakistani territorial waters near Chabahar. A number of fishermen were killed, as Iranian coast guards opened direct fire on some of the fishing vessels from the Pakistani side without any prior warning.

It’s pretty clear to me that Iran is generating significant levels of anger in Pakistan by these events. Note how often the descriptions are of “indiscriminate” firing and that it happens without warning. It should be kept in mind that this Baloch region of Pakistan is very close to open revolt and Pakistan’s Supreme Court is demanding daily updates on the security situation there, so Iran’s offenses appear to be overriding internal differences in this case.

In this latest incident, though, one has to wonder whether the extreme response by Iran may have been due to the presence of Pashtuns with the Balochs in the group of traders/smugglers. Iran is already on extreme alert for Balochs who might be associated with Jundallah, but a mixed group,with Pashtuns who come from lands several hundred miles to the north (see this very useful PBS map of these ethnic regions and click on “view ethnic divisions”), might have made the Iranians think about the false flag operation which has been alleged against the Israelis.

It appears that Iran has become quite trigger-happy when it comes to Pakistanis. Will that attitude carry over to Westerners passing through the Strait of Hormuz?

Update (Jan. 28, 9:30 am): A report in today’s Express Tribune adds to confusion about the nationalities of those killed. Especially striking is the statement that no family members have come forward to claim the bodies. Are these itinerant workers with no family or are there other reasons there is no family in the area?

> The six people, gunned down by Iranian guards on Thursday, were allegedly

> labourers who belonged to bordering villages of either side of the border between Iran and Pakistan.
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> According to Deputy Commissioner Gwadar Abdul Rehman Dashti, it is yet to be ascertained whether the victims were Pakistani or Iranian nationals.
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> “The victims are not from Gwadar, since no family approached the local administration. Earlier, people approached us for the bodies of Pakistani fishermen and Iran also informed local administration,” he told *The Express Tribune*, adding: “But this time no one has come forward.”
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> /snip/
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> he victims, said to be cattle dealers or labourers, were heading towards Chah Bahar when they were intercepted the Iranian guards and shot dead. According to reports from across the border, the security forces threw the victims’ bodies in the open.
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> Local police came and took away the bodies to a government hospital in Chah Bahar, reports said.
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> Iran had beefed up security along the Pakistan border after armed group Jundullah recently carried out a deadly attack on Iranian forces, killing at least four Iranian guards and injuring ten others.

So now we have the trigger-happy status of the Iranian border agents directly attributable to an incident in which four of them were killed by Jundallah. I will look later for more documentation of that incident and when it took place. I still find it very unusual that no families have come forward to claim those killed.