

BORDER INCIDENTS ESCALATE AGAIN: IRAN KILLS PAKISTANI SOLDIER

Back on Thursday, I noted that Iran claimed the right to enter Pakistani territory to chase terrorists that it blames for a series of border incidents that have killed a number of Iranian border guards. Iran wasted no time following up on that threat, as on Thursday night Iranian shelling killed one Pakistani soldier. Iran followed that up with border guards entering Pakistani territory on Friday to interrogate a number of villagers. It appears that Iran confiscated a vehicle and other items during the incursion. Diplomatic posturing ensued.

Interestingly, Pakistan claims that the Frontier Corpsman who was killed by Iran was in the process of chasing “miscreants” when the soldiers came under fire:

“The FC personnel were chasing miscreants when they came under attack by Iranian forces. It was a targeted attack on Pakistani forces,” the spokesperson added. One FC vehicle was completely destroyed due to intense firing by Iranian forces. Iranian border guards continued firing for six hours. However, Pakistani forces did not retaliate to the offensive of the neighbouring country.

The big question is whether Iran feels that Pakistan’s Frontiers Corps is aiding the groups that cross into Iran or whether the Pakistani forces came under fire in this case through a mistake when they were chasing the same “miscreants” Iran presumably wished to target.

There was a small amount of additional cross-border shelling on Saturday that appeared to

have no effect.

For their part, Iran does not seem to have addressed the events Thursday night through Saturday, although they did put out a statement today praising their strong security in the border region and comparing the terrorist attacks to “mosquito bites”. Iran blamed trans-regional enemies (the Americans and Zionists) as well as unnamed regional enemies for the attacks.

In an analysis of the flare-ups in Dawn, we see mention of the Jaish al-Adl group, Iranian concerns about development of the port at Gwadar and the tension caused by the border putting an artificial barrier through the heart of the regional home of the Baloch people.

But returning to the point above, it is hard to reconcile the statement from Pakistan that the Frontier Corpsmen who came under fire by Iran while chasing “miscreants” were intentionally targeted. While Iran sees Sunni extremists at the heart of their cross-border attack problems, there would seem to be significant overlap between those groups and the Baloch militants that the Frontiers Corps has long been subject to criticism for human rights abuses while trying to quash said militancy.

If Pakistan is indeed serving as a “regional enemy” of Iran in this case and supporting or providing refuge to some of the groups involved in the attacks on Iranian border posts, then Iran would seem to be justified in attacking the FC personnel. The fact that the FC did not return fire would seem to fit that scenario and serve as a tacit admission that they had been caught doing wrong. However, if the FC were chasing a group that intended a cross-border attack, then Iran would be the ones responsible for needless escalation.