

OPINION

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

The idea of greater cooperation between India and China would have seemed like an improbable scenario only a year ago, when troops from both countries were locked in a tense standoff in Doklam. However, since de-escalation, India and China have made efforts to restore a degree of normalcy to a complex bilateral relationship. The recently signed security cooperation agreement between Chinese minister of public security, Zhao Kezhi, and Union home minister, Rajnath Singh, can be seen as part of this ongoing process.

The media has been quick to hail the agreement as “unprecedented”; however, according to information available, the current agreement is a revised version of an existing memorandum of understanding that was signed between India and China in 2005 and lapsed two years ago.

Moreover, details on what cooperation and coordination of security and counter-terrorism entails remain scarce. This begs an important question: is the agreement simply a token gesture of cooperation or will it pave the way for New Delhi and Beijing to iron out their differences on issues concerning transnational terrorism? The short answer: unlikely. Given New Delhi and Beijing’s divergent interests on transnational terrorism, meaningful cooperation will remain limited.

From Beijing’s perspective, establishing cooperative partnerships to counter transnational terrorist threats is a key priority, especially during a time when the Belt and Road Initiative is pushing greater numbers of Chinese companies and citizens into potentially unstable regions in Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Chinese public security officials have repeatedly stressed that the scourge of terrorism can only be eliminated through joint efforts and regional cooperation. Beyond bilateral agreements, Beijing has signed statements with counter-terrorism components at regional forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus 3, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Clearly, as Beijing’s overseas economic interests expand to South Asia, so too will the desire to safeguard them from such transnational threats.

Furthermore, China has long identified social unrest and militant opposition in Xinjiang as a threat to stability. Over the years, these militant elements have found support and shelter beyond China’s borders and into parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. For example, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which is largely manned by Uyghurs is known to have received training in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). As such, Beijing is keen on information-sharing agreements with foreign governments that will help authorities track and extradite these militant elements abroad. During the high-level dialogue, the Chinese delegation raised these concerns with Indian counterparts, and have sought New Delhi’s cooperation to track the movement of Uyghur militants.

From India’s perspective, cooperation with China on security and counter-terrorism also has its limitations. China’s ambivalence on Pakistan’s sponsorship of terror as state policy stands in the way of any umbrella agreement on cooperation in these matters.

Beijing has actively stymied Indian attempts to sanction Masood Azhar, the founder of UN-blacklisted terror group Jaish-e-Mohammed. Officially, Beijing strongly condemns all forms of terrorism; however, its refusal to sanction Azhar at the United Nations Security Council not only serves as an irritant in the bilateral relationship but calls into question China’s approach towards countering terrorism.

In addition, China has also refuted claims that Paresh Baruah, chief of the banned outfit United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) operating in India's North East sectors, received its support.

Another relevant case is that of Afghanistan. There is growing realization in India and China that domestic instability in Afghanistan can have a negative spillover effect in the region. In particular, China's immediate interest is to prevent potential spillover from the ongoing militancy in Afghanistan into its violence-prone Xinjiang province.

At the Wuhan Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping identified the instability in Afghanistan as a shared concern and vowed to assist the country by working jointly on economic development projects. A recent manifestation of this cooperation can be seen in the development of the joint-training of Afghan diplomats by New Delhi and Beijing. This month, 10 diplomats from Kabul arrived at the Foreign Services Institute in the Indian capital to receive joint training from their Indian and Chinese counterparts.

These cooperative mechanisms are certainly a welcome step, but a fundamental difference on how to resolve the Afghan problem persists. While Beijing views Pakistan as part of any long-term solution, New Delhi sees Pakistan as the fundamental problem—a difference in approach that might hamper efforts to deepen cooperative efforts in the future.

India-China cooperation will remain limited so long as these divergent interests remain. New Delhi and Beijing will have to look beyond their narrow interests and find common ground should they truly wish to tackle the scourge of transnational terrorism.

Kabir Taneja and Keshav Kelkar are research fellows with the strategic studies programme of the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

Crack