



Afghanistan at Crossroads

Promise of Peace and Geopolitical Imperatives



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Report of NIPS Webinar on

Afghanistan at Crossroads

Promise of Peace and Geopolitical Imperatives

NUST Institute of Policy Studies



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Executive Summary

The NUST Institute of Policy Studies organized a webinar on *Afghanistan at crossroads: Promise of peace and geopolitical imperatives* on Wednesday, June 2, 2021. A distinguished panel of seasoned experts, veteran security analysts, political and think tank leaders, and scholars discussed the challenges of establishing peace in the post-U.S. future in Afghanistan. The agenda also included identifying the fundamentals of peace negotiations, systemic and structural challenges for reaching a political settlement, and the role of extra-regional players and other stakeholders in realizing lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The people of Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy warm connections and deep affinities. There are close cross-border relations among ethnically similar populations. Despite Pakistan's limited economic pie, brothers from the neighborhood have been suitably looked after throughout the times of instability in Afghanistan. While emphasizing the responsibility of the people of Afghanistan to work out a peace deal, Pakistan has made commendable efforts for uniting them and providing a support mechanism for current peace talks. These efforts have been acknowledged by Afghans and the world community. Pakistan stayed closely engaged with the U.S. in the peace process and facilitated the signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement and the commencement of intra-Afghan talks. Pakistan's leadership has expressed

keen desire to contribute to peace-building measures. The U.S. has been seeking Pakistan's counsel and cooperation for negotiations.

The choice by far reflects mutual understanding and respect for Pakistan's deft diplomacy and significance for the peace process. The essence can also trickle to strategic matters of bilateral relations that usually stay uneven.

In the midst of a deadlocked peace deal, the supporting processes remain slow and intricate. However, sustainable peace in Afghanistan is synonymous to stability in this region which is being introduced to unprecedented development plans through grand initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Other win-win multilateral agreements for regional linkages include new land routes, railroads, and energy infrastructure. An untold saga of shared dividends awaits the region. Therefore, a stable and conflict-free Afghanistan is one of the essential conditions for regional peace and stability.

This document offers a critical analysis of the issue and represents collective views of the experts put forward during the webinar. The following recommendations were derived from the webinar deliberations:

- i. Afghanistan's chequered history is filled with problems related to foreign invasions, governance, and internecine power struggles. Its challenges are endemic and political in



nature. The circle of Afghan imbroglio can possibly be squared through Afghan-led and Afghan-owned dialogue, not military means. For the sake of their long-term national interest, the Afghan political elite should work on their common interests and for a truly representative government

ii. Extra-regional players should not see Afghanistan as a game. Rather, they must assist the country in gaining peace, stability, and balance. The zero-sum games have been unsuccessful for all parties. A new great game in Afghanistan is bound to repeat the history, albeit at a greater cost.

iii. The absence of peace in Afghanistan speaks louder than any player's claim of giving the country its due share. Global and regional power politics play an important role in ensuring peaceful approaches to the Afghan situation. The recent peace initiatives demand rational approaches of all actors to eschew perpetual conflict and make peace a possibility.

iv. The withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces must take place under a clear strategy. No step should be taken in haste. '...ending U.S. involvement in an endless war (in Afghanistan) does not end the endless war,' said David Petraeus, former commanding general of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan and former CIA director, in April 2021. The Iraq experience left many lessons to be learned, where a premature exit offered the

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ISIS a vacuum, besides triggering a series of civil war like situation in Iraq and its neighbourhood.

v. Although assurances have already been given in the peace agreement, the U.S. must keep assisting Afghanistan after the exit. A rushed pull off, as happened in the post-Soviet withdrawal, will not be a rational arrangement. In keeping with President Biden's resolve to make the U.S. foreign policy work better for the middle class, the U.S. will powerfully promote Afghan stability in the long run, if it were to commit major investments in areas like infrastructure, health, education, industry, law and order, and environment. Similarly, EU should also think about investing heavily in Afghanistan



between 2022 and 2030.

vi. Relocation of American and allied troops to other lands after their pyrrhic exit from Afghanistan, such as Central Asia, will exacerbate problems for the region.

vii. Since there is no military solution to the Afghan issue, the land must stay free from foreign military bases, facilities, and installations. It needs other forces that bind rather than further fragment the society.

viii. It can be reasonably expected that Afghanistan's near neighbors namely Pakistan, China, Turkey, Iran, and Russia will play a stabilizing role by means of helping in the economic development of the country, also through initiatives such as TAPI and CPEC and enhanced border trade. Bringing Afghanistan within the circle of common prosperity of China's Belt and Road Initiative is in common interest of the regional states and will help unleash the massive growth potential of Afghan people.

ix. Since 2014, the Afghan security forces have been in the lead for maintaining peace. However, it is still not clear whether they can deliver without the help of NATO forces - the latter will not be able to influence remotely after withdrawal. A strategy must, therefore, be anticipated and put in place before these forces exit.

x. After the exit, experts and advisors can be engaged, especially from neighboring states, on the consent of

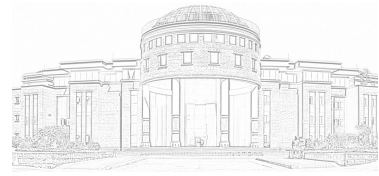
Afghan government/stakeholders for an inclusive development. This would bring foreign presence and intervention to a minimum, allowing the country to grow and prosper in a free and fair environment. The international humanitarian organizations can offer Afghanistan special assistance for some time till the socioeconomic indicators achieve a reasonable trajectory.

xi. Internal strife in Afghanistan is linked to its political culture and ethnic diversity that deeply affect

the country's present circumstances and its future. Pashtuns are in majority (nearly 40 percent) followed by Tajiks, Hazaras, and others. This political reality must be reflected in a future government and can no longer be wished away.

xii. The insecurities of three regions around Afghanistan - the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia - also exacerbate the former's challenges in a complex manner.

It can be reasonably expected that Afghanistan's near neighbors namely Pakistan, China, Turkey, Iran, and Russia will play a stabilizing role by means of helping in the economic development of the country, also through initiatives such as TAPI and CPEC and enhanced border trade.



Afghanistan is not integrated in any of these geographical regions. Numerous ethnic groups from these neighborhoods are present in Afghanistan and have morphed into the state and society during the last four decades. Various identities exert a centrifugal pull on these ethnic groups. Therefore, most countries in the larger neighborhood remain focused on Afghanistan through their own security calculi, rather than the prism of bilateral relations. The resultant guardianship of geographic spaces and laws along with regional rivalries create a competing framework of a broader, global context. To expedite peace, this perspective needs to be entrenched into its national security as well as development strategy of Afghanistan.

xiii. Peace in Afghanistan appears to be an expensive commodity. More so, because the protracted conflict involves the larger neighborhood and interests of global players. Consequently, the current approaches have less to offer to a common man. Afghanistan lies damaged and awaits structural improvement and that of governance, institutions, infrastructure, and socioeconomic landscape. The issue calls for a comprehensive policy focus soon after the intra-Afghan dialogue materializes.

xiv. No steps should be spared by the relevant offices of international peace and justice to evaluate the external influence and intervention in Afghanistan, have these actions audited, and design a rational and in-

clusive roadmap for the future.

The spoilers of peace process have to be clearly identified and contained. Regional and extra-regional actors can contribute towards peace by agreeing under a verifiable mechanism not to use any proxies in Afghanistan.

xv. To predict the future of Afghanistan, one must reflect into its unique past. Peace remained elusive even during a comparatively conducive international environment of the 1990s. Future scenario may bring forth several tendencies of the warring factions. Most important will be the reconciliation on two divergent views of so-called modernity and fundamentalism. Every development, including peace dialogue, is shrouded in uncertainty but the influence of Taliban is likely to expand gradually despite measures to counter it. Groups are over-focused on their ideologies but have less knowhow of running the state. A pragmatic power-sharing plan may make them work on mutually beneficial objectives.

xvi. The spoilers of peace process have to be clearly identified and contained. Regional and extra-regional actors can contribute towards peace by agreeing under a verifiable mechanism not to use any proxies in Afghanistan. The Taliban, who will be the central stakeholder in any future dispensation by virtue of their



numbers and other key factions must distance themselves from activities such as the support for ETM and Chechens (if any) in Afghanistan. Likewise, external players such as India must not be allowed to spoil the peace process.

xvii. The Muslim world – Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran – can design a new mode of mutual cooperation. Afghanistan needs help and its brethren are best suited to render support. Teachings of Islam and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) tie the Ummah within a strong obligation to support each other. Having different cultures and traditions, they share a unified way of life. A wisely designed collective vision will thus heal the wounds of Afghan brothers and normalize Afghanistan.

xviii. Takeover by the Afghan military after the U.S. withdrawal may bring ‘Afghans against Afghans.’ A carefully plaited security architecture will thus be needed to maintain neutrality and productivity. Afghan leaders may consider convening an inclusive Loya Jirga – the grand assembly – to proclaim the principles of neutrality and non-alignment. It will be a step towards banning hostilities or war for good.

xix. Over the years, Taliban have worked methodically to be recognized as a legal entity. Previously, they were not involved by the Western players in formal undertakings. They will now try not to lose the stronger foothold and what they

have gained on control so far. The new attitude will make cooperation with them easy if they are given an additional responsibility.

The withdrawal may bring ‘Afghans against Afghans.’ A carefully plaited security architecture will be needed to maintain neutrality and productivity.

xx. The likelihood of civil war after the military withdrawal is the worst fear of neighboring states and also the Afghan people. A divided Afghanistan would be a catastrophe. Spillovers of instability such as refugee influx will greatly affect the region. Vast production of opium and its derivatives, illegal cross-border movement, and unchecked inflow of equipment and weapons of various types are among other challenges. While various factions are part of peace designs, some others are allegedly accumulating arms and ammunition in anticipation of a possible civil unrest. The situation portends a danger of division. Local groups may also unite putting aside their differences to fight a common enemy. Guerrilla groups formed during post-1979 situation had the advantage over foreign troops and became an organized resistance movement. But civil war will engulf Afghanistan into an endless era of chaos and poverty.

xxi. To examine ways of restoring peace and tranquility in Afghanistan, political forums should be convened



at neutral venues. Soft diplomacy will attract and co-opt people, avert-

The likelihood of civil war after the military withdrawal is the worst fear of neighboring states and also the Afghan people. A divided Afghanistan would be a catastrophe.

ing the chances of civil war in Afghanistan. Given its exceptional record of and contributions for peace-making as an intermediary, Pakistan's help in formally institutionalizing think tank diplomacy will be crucial in this regard. The arrangement will catalyze positivity in the ongoing peace process ensuring the sustainability of efforts.

xxii. All factions in Afghanistan, which represent its people, deserve a piece in the pie and should be integrated into the peace process.

xxiii. A channel parallel to the broader peace dialogue can be created, comprising council of representatives from various ethnic and political groups, as a holistic approach.

xxiv. In essence, a focus on creating healthy social cohesion and essential economic activity is a durable way of normalizing Afghanistan. A national culture to develop capacities of the people has to be nurtured to bring them closer for collectively building their country. It is important to focus on cultivating the people, in education, personal organization, handicrafts, vocational and farming skills,

sports, and arts, so that they become the builders of nation.

The rocky road to nationbuilding is full of struggle and requires unity, faith, and discipline among masses. Only Afghans can build Afghanistan. Together, they can bring their country out of disorder and instability.

The people of Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy warm connections and deep affinities. There are close cross-border relations among ethnically similar populations. Despite Pakistan's limited economic pie, brothers from the neighborhood have been suitably looked after throughout the times of instability in Afghanistan. While emphasizing the responsibility of the people of Afghanistan to work out a peace deal, Pakistan has made commendable efforts for uniting them and providing a support mechanism for current peace talks. These efforts have been acknowledged by Afghans and the world community.



1. Introduction

Peace and stability in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is essential for the collective security and development of the region and beyond. With a possible conclusion of the twenty years of America-led war edging nearer, Afghanistan remains mired in perpetual instability. Its peace and development is contingent on the pragmatic decisions and participation of stakeholders with diverse interests.

Inter alia the Afghan problem has been exacerbated by the measured pace of key players in reaching a durable political settlement. The degree of compliance with peace commitments appears low and is punctuated with increased setbacks due to violence against the civilians and troops. The U.S. has decided to withdraw with unfinished business of rebuilding Afghanistan while the prospects of an Afghan-led and -owned harmony also remain dim.

The United States, Afghans, and regional states play a pivotal role in ongoing negotiations process, cease-fire, power-sharing, and successful implementation of the peace accord. The diplomatic overtures in the Middle East reflect a possible shift in regional actors' postures for giving peace a chance. There can be no single lasting recipe for a way out but a political solution to the constant trouble that afflicts the country. The sooner this recognition finds manifestation in rational choices and inclusive actions of all relevant players,

Situated on the confluence of South, East, and Central Asia and the Middle East, Afghanistan is the land of towering mountain ranges, vast plains, lush green orchards and straight and friendly people who are as sturdy as their geography. Throughout its troubled history, Afghanistan has functioned as the hub of civilizations, harboring a unique mixture of ethnic identities and cultural norms.

the nearer will be a transition to stability, justice and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has a central role in the Afghan peace process by virtue of closely knitted geography, historical affinity, and sociocultural and ethnic connexion. Peace in Afghanistan is crucial to Pakistan's security, besides the obvious desire for a stable Muslim brother in the neighborhood. The deliberations at the webinar thus revolved around the most relevant moot questions. Participants evaluated five aspects of situation in Afghanistan. One, the degree of success and failure during the longest and unending war in American history that is ending in a withdrawal. Two, possible modus operandi and preferences of significant players for the



future. Three, usefulness of Afghan peace deal in altering the status quo for the better. Four, the options for regional actors including Pakistan, China, Russia, and Iran. Five, likely spoilers in the so-called endgame such as the case of Indian intervention in Afghanistan.

2. Afghanistan: Background in Brief

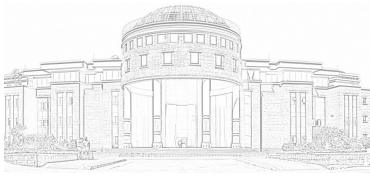
Situated on the confluence of South, East, and Central Asia and the Middle East, Afghanistan is the land of towering mountain ranges, vast plains, lush green orchards and straight and friendly people who are as sturdy as their geography. Throughout its troubled history, Afghanistan has functioned as the hub of civilizations, harboring a unique mixture of ethnic identities and cultural norms. The ancient megalopolises of Kabul, Herat, Balkh, and Kandahar were regional crossways for trade of goods, customs, and ideas. Today, more than twenty different ethnic groups with different languages and traditions live here. These further break down into several tribes with distinct dialects and customs.

The chronicle is filled with the accounts of numerous conquests, invasions, and the valor of Afghans. The struggle through the Great Game of the nineteenth and twentieth century and its aftermath were immensely consequential. The dawn of the twenty-first century brought in the so-called war on terror, once again

making Afghanistan the theater of war. While sailing through these ebbs and flows for centuries, situation in Afghanistan is now entrenched in the contemporary dynamics of internal politics and the international system. In the present form, Afghanistan occupies the centerstage of global politics, in every sense of the word.

Post-9/11, Afghanistan's challenges have become manifold and complex. After staying for two decades, competing for a comprehensive victory over the land, and striving to win hearts and minds of masses, the U.S.-led military alliance has decided to take an exit from the war-torn country. Long before the Americans stepped on the Afghan soil in 2001, the Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev had termed his country's costly war in Afghanistan 'a bleeding wound,' seeking steps to scale it down. The warning was worth taking a heed.

More than 120,000 Afghans have become a victim to another lengthy war since 2001.¹ Routine episodes of bombing and violence keep affecting people physically and psychologically. Other features comprising the partially kept promises of rebuilding and rehabilitation, dearth of credible governance structures and rule of law, damaged economy and infrastructure, and weak human development paint a murky and fragile picture. To the native Afghans, it has been only a change in focus – Russia



in support of a selected government versus the U.S. and allies in favor of a so-called elected regime. A large number of population in both cases has remained out of the political dispensation instigating an overall mayhem and mistrust.

Besides, vast production of opium and its derivatives and trends of illegal movement across the country have usually remained unchecked. These factors exacerbate the matters of security and stability in the region, particularly for the six immediate neighbors of Afghanistan, namely Pakistan to the east and south; Iran to the west; China to the northeast; and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north.

Diversity, which is generally considered a boon to promote constructive influence, has become a bane for Afghanistan. Instead of a collective allegiance with the nation, ethnic groups identify more closely with their tribes. The tribal mindset has led to myriad conflicts and often to war.² The country's fate once again will rest on the judgement and actions of the competing groups as the withdrawal of occupation troops from Afghanistan is underway.

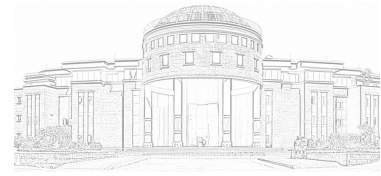
Although the departure has been placed in accordance with the peace deal, the decision has opened a new debate among the stakeholders, experts, and critics. Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned of 'huge consequences' of pulling the American troops out as Taliban, in her view, could retake control in a

manner similar to pre-2001 period. Terming it 'a wicked problem,' she pointed towards the 'consequences both foreseen and unintended of staying and of leaving.' The 'potential collapse of the Afghan government,' she stated, 'and a possible takeover by the Taliban could result in a new civil war.'³

The present-day situation in Afghanistan is largely being seen as complicated given the slow pace towards tranquility, stability, and substantial economic growth over the years. Civilians, mainly women and children,

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have sustained heavy losses. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, dubbed Afghanistan the 'deadliest place in the world to be a civilian.' While ascertaining the accuracy of losses, an expert posits:



“ No one knows how many people died in the fight: first, against the Soviet Union, in the civil war that followed, the expansion of and resistance to the Taliban, and the war since 2001. The estimates for the anti-Soviet war alone start at one million and rise from there. Millions became refugees and millions more were internally displaced. Afghans sacrificed their livelihoods, their education, and their health. They often feel that the world, the West specifically and the U.S. even more so, owes them a debt for these sacrifices.⁴

”

3. The Fundamentals of Peace Negotiations and Afghan-led Harmony

Since 2001, the peace and harmony in Afghanistan have been dependent on collective impact of four key stakeholders – the U.S., the Kabul government, the coalition of Taliban, and the civil society. Even if the definition of coherence is different for each of them, reconciliation over matters of mutual respect and consideration can be the only choice for achieving harmony in Afghanistan. The administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump made the Doha agreement with the Afghan government and the Taliban⁵ President Joe Biden’s administration undertook a review of the deal and has decided to cut its losses and withdraw American forces (Appendix A and B).

The Doha agreement was concluded

on February 29, 2020 and sought a fast-tracked timetable for a complete military withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan. The U.S. and the Afghanistan realized the ‘joint declaration for bringing peace to Afghanistan,’ that stated the shared commitment of both parties to work ‘together to reach a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement that would end the war in Afghanistan for the benefit of all Afghans and would also contribute to the regional stability and global security.’ The four proposed ‘interrelated and interdependent’ parts of the agreement were:

- ◆ ‘Guarantees to prevent the use of Afghan soil by any international terrorist groups or individuals against the security forces of the U.S. and its allies;
- ◆ A timeline for the withdrawal of all American and Coalition forces from Afghanistan;
- ◆ A political settlement resulting from intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations between the Taliban and an inclusive negotiating team of Afghanistan; and
- ◆ A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.’

The U.S. reaffirmed its commitment to seek funds on annual basis for ‘training, equipping, advising, and sustaining of Afghan Security forces,’ to allow Afghanistan independently defend itself against all threats.⁶



Also, the Afghan government shall participate in U.S.-facilitated confidence building measures with Taliban for reaching a political settlement on issues such as the release of prisoners on both sides and removal of the Taliban from the sanctions list.

On the same day, another agreement was realized in Doha between the U.S. and the Taliban named as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Four parts of this peace agreement were:

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- ◆ 'Guarantees and enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the U.S. and its allies;
- ◆ Guarantees, enforcement mechanisms, and announcement of a timeline for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan;
- ◆ After the announcement of guar-

antees for a complete withdrawal of foreign forces and timeline in the presence of international witnesses, and guarantees and the announcement in the presence of international witnesses that Afghan soil will not be used against the security of the U.S. and its allies, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the U.S. as a state and is known as the Taliban will start intra-Afghan negotiations with Afghan sides; and

- ◆ A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be an item on the agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms, which will be announced along with the completion and agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.'

The four-parts of the agreement were interrelated i.e. the first two had to pave the way for the other two. Although both these documents have almost similar objectives, the latter focused on seeking positive relations between both parties. A positive 'post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations' was expected to emerge out of the process. The U.S. undertook to arrange economic cooperation with



the setup that will emerge out of the intra-Afghan negotiations, without interfering in the latter's internal affairs.⁷

The recent process of negotiations is extremely significant by virtue of being first of its kind between the warring parties in the Afghan conflict after the 1990s. The progress on negotiations has, however, remained very slow. The exchange of prisoners took several months instead of a week. Thereafter continued discussions on the principles and processes for talks. The January 2021 meeting comprised the exchange of suggested agendas, having similar contents but differing order of preference. The Afghan government wanted cease-fire to be the foremost arrangement while the Taliban wanted it to be the last.

“Peace in Afghanistan is not simply a matter of allocating provinces and ministries among the various government and Taliban factions. It requires accommodations between modernity and fundamentalism, between governance based on popular sovereignty and on divine inspiration, and most of all it requires agreed means of forging two warring armies into a unified national security establishment. Closure on such fundamental issues will require wrenching concessions from both sides.⁸

”

There are several fundamental facets of peace negotiations leading to harmony in Afghanistan. Firstly, the Doha agreement was a two-pronged peace effort, supposed to be followed by a dialogue. As part of this agreement, the U.S. was to withdraw all troops by May 1, 2021. The American pronouncement to extend the deadline till September 2021 received a sharp reaction by Taliban, who termed the decision a clear violation of the deal. Moreover, the pace of fulfilling other commitments of the agreement remained slow. In the wake of such matters and the untoward attitude of various factions, the intra-Afghan dialogue has also suffered delays.

The success of dialogue depends largely on the success of the U.S.-Taliban peace deal. Achieving peace is difficult in case various factions fail to reach a common point. The situation thus leaves greater onus on the U.S., which on one side has to exit from Afghanistan following the 2020 deal and on the other has to ensure peace in the country so that the exit may not turn into a prolonged internal conflict or a civil war.

The other fundamental aspect of peacebuilding is the issue of reduction of violence in Afghanistan while staying cognizant of potential spoilers. Despite the ongoing process of peacemaking, violations of the agreement's agenda are frequent and rising. The responsibility of these incidents is accepted by one or the other faction. In the given circumstances,



peace depends largely on the dynamics of domestic arrangements.

A broad consensus on the governance model for the new administrative setup in Afghanistan is another key feature for stabilizing the country – contrasting outlooks and value-systems may even destabilize it. The Afghan constitution completely complies with the teachings of Quran and Sunnah. The Taliban, however, have expressed a keen desire of creating a Sharia state with strict rules for masses. Taliban's previous actions have also been raising concerns including the demolition of Buddhas' statues in 2001. Likewise, the rights of women and minorities will have to be well-defined under the preferred system of governing the country. An Afghan-led harmony demands synergy of ideas and unanimity of goals and the means to achieve them.

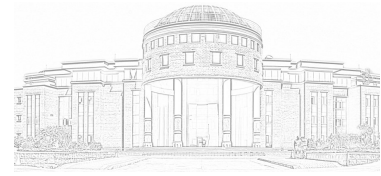
An inclusive and transparent approach for the peace process will confine misperceptions to minimum level. History offers useful lessons in this regard. The exclusion of the so-called Afghan Mujahedeen from the formal process of Geneva Accords in the 1990s caused mistrust. The sentiment contributed to the civil war, leading to the rise of Taliban. The American decision to bring all Afghan parties on board this time is rational, unprecedented, and vindicates what Pakistan had been proposing in last two decades. This step, if sustained, is likely to reap dividends of peace.

The synergy of efforts among Af-

The geopolitical imperatives of the region around Afghanistan are driven by the interests and engagements of multiple players – the West that seeks a liberal rules-based order in its offshore dealings; resurging Russia; rising China; and states in the Middle East and Afghanistan's immediate neighborhood. This is a critical crossroads not only for Afghanistan, which is struggling to embark on the journey of self-sustainability, but for all these countries whose rational choices will save the region from instability and perpetual disharmony. The sagacity of these players' actions holds keys to Afghan issue and pullout of foreign forces.

ghans is a crucial fundamental of peacebuilding. Perhaps, there subsists a misunderstanding on both sides of each other's power. They need to come closer and eschew differences for a greater benefit of their homeland. The Afghan nation is a unique combination of different ethnicities. A fairly strong tribal system has ensured affinity through centuries. Together, these tribes have defended their land and endured invasions. Today, this quality must not become the biggest hindrance in reaching a peaceful settlement.

4. The Withdrawal of Foreign Forces and Regional Horizon



The geopolitical imperatives of the region around Afghanistan are driven by the interests and engagements of multiple players – the West that seeks a liberal rules-based order in its offshore dealings; resurging Russia; rising China; and states in the Middle East and Afghanistan’s immediate neighborhood. This is a critical crossroads not only for Afghanistan, which is struggling to embark on the journey of self-sustainability, but for all these countries whose rational choices will save the region from instability and perpetual disharmony. The sagacity of these players’ actions holds keys to Afghan issue and pullout of foreign forces.

“ Efforts to build and sustain peace are necessary not only once conflict has broken out, but long beforehand through preventing conflict and addressing its root causes. We must work better together across the peace continuum, focusing on all the dimensions of conflict. (UN Secretary-General António Guterres).⁹

”

Major powers, such as Russia and U.S., have been playing a crucial role in Afghanistan through their interventions of different nature in different times. The Chinese strategy is of economic interdependence through the massive plans of Belt and Road Initiative. The interest of these three players still outweigh other elements.

The U.S. President Joe Biden’s ad-

ministration has decided to withdraw forces from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. The U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken insisted in his hearing for the post before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that his government wanted to ‘end this so-called forever war’ and bring their forces home. However, The U.S. exit plan has been termed by some experts as the strategy of ‘leaving through the door and coming back again from the window.’ The assessment is driven by the USD 3.3 billion allocation for operational support to sustain Afghan security forces for the FY 2022 U.S. military budget. If apportioned, it will be a 9.2 percent increase from the previous year.

There are reports that the bulk of forces will withdraw by end July 2021. The U.S. has withdrawn more than 50 percent of its equipment and officially handed over six facilities to the Afghan Ministry of Defense, according to the U.S. military.¹⁰

Taliban has already begun filling the vacuum. On June 13, 2021 four districts in four provinces fell to the Taliban in twenty-four hours. The affected provinces were Kunduz, Farah, Ghor, and Zabul. Such power vacuum shall increase the imbalance within Afghanistan and there is clear and present danger that the ensuing infight can engulf neighboring countries, especially Pakistan.

If the reports of the U.S. fielding a 60,000 strong covert army across the world are true, it can have unforeseen repercussions for the country



and regional stability. The secret service is being employed in countries like Afghanistan to work 'under masked identities and in low profile' as 'part of a broad program called signature reduction.' This secret service operates by creating entirely new identities for its troops, who work in the garb of and in concert with civil enterprises. The latter reportedly charges around USD 900 million per annum for such services.¹¹

If such covert army replaces withdrawing military from Afghanistan, the U.S. shall have more leverage to create effects that it was previously constrained due to international law and transparency.

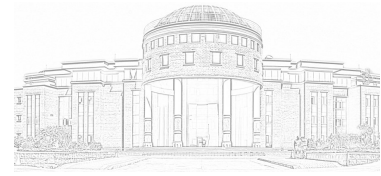
If the reports of the U.S. fielding a 60,000 strong covert army across the world are true, it can have unforeseen repercussions for the country and regional stability. The secret service is being employed in countries like Afghanistan to work 'under masked identities and in low profile' as 'part of a broad program called signature reduction.' This secret service operates by creating entirely new identities for its troops, who work in the garb of and in concert with civil enterprises.

However, such a situation can have grave consequences for the region and beyond. An unconstrained use

of military force can increase violence and drive the country farther away from well-sought peace. If war and bloodshed increase, Pakistan is likely to witness a large influx of refugees. However, the ongoing fencing by Pakistan of Durand Line implies that the influx can be controlled and regularized.

The American foreign policy also remained focused on the greater Middle East after September 2001. The Middle Eastern states can play a strong role in rebuilding Afghanistan. Many of these states follow tribal system of justice. Although there have been problems, the system remains tested for negotiations and other channels of peacemaking. The system works by the same token in Afghanistan. The complete Afghan community, representing different groups, regions, and ideologies, should be included in the peace process - especially once there is foreign involvement in the government system. Moreover, it is rooted in the teachings of Islam to discourage aggression and help various groups to reconcile and shun differences.

The **Middle Eastern countries** mostly share a predicament with Afghans - their abundant natural resources are a curse they cannot benefit from. These countries are troubled and unstable by repeated political crises. The Arab Spring, for instance, is yet to reap the so-called promised dividends of peace and democracy in many areas. In this regard, unity among these nations through forums



such as the Arab League can ensure strength against external pressures and fortify their joint military capability and sustainable economic growth.

Some positive developments include U.S. President Joe Biden's diplomatic stance for restarting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran and urging Saudi Arabia to end war against Yemen's Houthi forces. The de-escalation of tensions between countries in the Persian Gulf region will impact the Afghan situation in a positive manner. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey are significant players in this regard. Diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Tehran became colder in 2016 after Riyadh executed a revered Saudi Shia cleric.

A recently arranged meeting of their representatives in Iraq in April 2021 aimed at reduction in regional tensions. Although these talks have not established a major breakthrough, they have at the minimum provided an avenue for engagement. The positive outcome of cordial relations between these states will certainly reach far and wide in the region.

Turkey is another influential actor in the region. It is the member of U.S.-led NATO and has been providing security at Kabul airport. Turkey-U.S. relations strained after the former's deal for Russian S-400 air defense system worth USD 2.5 billion. As a result, the U.S. expelled Turkey from its F-35 fighter jet program. Other restrictions included asset

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freeze of Turkey's military procurement agency, visa restrictions, and banning of export licenses.¹²

Steps taken by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in pursuit of his country's national interest – such as the energy deals and military involvements – also raised concerns in the American policymaking circles. On the other hand, Turkey rejected President Biden's recognition of the Armenian genocide during the Second World War. Turkey has always stressed that regional issues must be solved by member states and not by outsiders whose focus on self-interest generally diminish collective gains. Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan can be considered as examples.

At the same time, the interests of Turkey and the U.S. intersect at crucial junctures of regional geopolitics. The U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu discussed the importance of their security cooperation and shared interests on matters including Afghanistan during their



meeting at the NATO Foreign Ministerial in Brussels in March 2021.¹³ Turkey has reportedly shown interest in keeping troops in Afghanistan to protect Kabul airport which is the central exit route for Western diplomats and humanitarian workers. The deal may mature after reaching some legal and financial conditions. The details though remain unclear.

Before leaving for the NATO summit at Brussels, where a meeting was set-up between the Turkish and U.S. leaders, President Erdogan said that Turkey would be the 'only reliable' country left to stabilize Afghanistan after the troops' pullout.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the Taliban do not support such an arrangement. They maintain that Turkey should leave Afghanistan along with all other foreign troops, following the deal signed with the U.S. in February 2020.¹⁵

Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy warm connections among their people and deep affinities. There are close cross-border relations among ethnically similar populations. Shared ethno-linguistic groups such as Pashtuns, Hazaras, and Gujjars live on both sides of the Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan accommodated millions of refugees from Afghanistan in the 1980s and now hosts nearly three million of them. This is the second-largest refugee population in the world after Syrians in Turkey. The Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR), established in 1980, works under the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) for the management of

these refugees in Pakistan. Despite Pakistan's limited economic pie, brothers from the neighborhood have been suitably looked after throughout the years. The visa and residency schemes of 2017-18 further mainstreamed them in the system. The economic and logistics landscape of landlocked Afghanistan is intensely tied with its relations with Pakistan.

Pakistan has made commendable efforts for uniting the Afghans and providing a support mechanism for current peace talks, largely appreciated by Afghans and the world community. It stayed closely engaged with the U.S. in the peace process, and facilitated the signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement and the commencement of intra-Afghan talks. Several high-level exchanges have taken place between Pakistan and Afghanistan during the last few months. These visits helped in formally building trust and resolving grievances.

Pakistan's leadership has been expressing keen desire to contribute to peacebuilding measures. Prime Minister Imran Khan has often highlighted the significance of peaceful political transition in Afghanistan after the departure of U.S. forces.¹⁶ While speaking at the Islamabad Security Dialogue held in March 2021, Chief of the Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa conveyed a firm stance:

“ We intend to leverage our vital geostrategic location for our own,



regional and global benefit. Our robust role in current quest for peace in Afghanistan is proof of our goodwill and understanding of our global and moral obligations. Our close collaboration and crucial support for the peace process has led to the historic agreement between Taliban and U.S. and paved the way for intra-Afghan dialogue. We will continue to emphasize on a sustained and inclusive peace process for the betterment of people of Afghanistan and regional peace. Moreover, besides offering our all-out support to Afghanistan peace process, we have also undertaken unprecedented steps to enhance Afghanistan's trade and connectivity by:

- ◆ Re-energizing the Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement and also providing access to Afghanistan to export her goods to India.
- ◆ Improving economic and trade environment along Pak-Afghan border by establishing border markets and development of infrastructure.
- ◆ Being part of energy and trade corridors binding Central, South and West Asia through land routes and inviting Afghanistan to be part of CPEC.¹⁷

”

The fourth Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue was virtually held on June 3, 2021 by Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan. The three sides had a 'comprehensive' and 'in-depth' ex-

change of views on Afghan peace and reconciliation process. They 'called for responsible and orderly withdrawal of foreign troops to avoid deterioration of the security situation in the region or giving terrorist forces the opportunity to re-emerge and grow.'¹⁸

The U.S. has been seeking Pakistan's counsel and cooperation throughout the process of negotiations. The choice by far reflects mutual understanding and respect for Pakistan's deft diplomacy and significance for the peace process. The essence can also trickle to strategic matters of bilateral relations that usually stay uneven and require a stand-alone approach. U.S. Defense Secretary, General Lloyd Austin, told the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that he saw Pakistan as an 'essential partner' and that building 'relationships with Pakistan's military would provide openings for the U.S. and Pakistan to cooperate on key issues.' He further said:

“

Pakistan is an essential partner in any peace process in Afghanistan... I will encourage a regional approach that garners support from neighbors like Pakistan, while also deterring regional actors, from serving as spoilers to the Afghan Peace process...Pakistan will play an important role in any political settlement in Afghanistan.¹⁹

”

The Doha agreement between the



U.S. and Afghan government stated a commitment to 'facilitate discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan to work out arrangements to ensure neither country's security is threatened by actions from the territory of other side.' Despite a clear understanding of issues on all sides, several spoilers keep upsetting the process. The recent 'undignified' outburst of Afghan National Security Advisor Hamadullah Mohib against Pakistan fueled mistrust. The resulting diplomatic spat can highly affect the pace of peace process.

The episode also drives linkages with Indian involvement in Afghan affairs. In addition to Pakistan's continuous efforts, Russia, Iran, and China have developed a working relationship with the Taliban. Conversely, India's reluctance in recognizing Taliban as a political entity despite the American bid has earned it the favor and liking of the incumbent Afghan government. Islamabad has time and again lodged complaints against India for using the Afghan soil against Pakistan and has even submitted dossiers containing 'irrefutable evidence' of India's involvement in fueling violence in the country. However, the U.S. stays keen to ensure Indian role in Afghanistan - validation being the invitation to the signing of U.S.-Taliban deal in February 2020 and on commencement of the intra-Afghan talks in September.²⁰

The issue of Indian support to Daesh / ISIS in South Asia has also been brought forth by Pakistan on

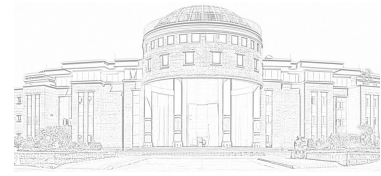
international forums. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi indicated Pakistan having an evidence of New Delhi's 'support to terrorist organizations in Pakistan.'²¹

This constant flow of negative activities has the potential to magnify as one of the biggest spoilers to the peace process. As a non-permanent member of UN Security Council and head of the UNSC Taliban Sanctions Committee, India must now shun politics of odds and willingly step into the new era of peacebuilding and shared futures.

In order to ensure durable peace and stability, the Afghan people will need to show true discernment and realize at long last that Afghanistan will not find a more staunch, reliable, and sincere friend than Pakistan. In days to come Afghanistan and Pakistan together will have to draw upon their solid bond of common faith to realize that mutual trust is the only guarantee for lasting peaceful coexistence.

After the military withdrawal, the U.S. hopes to keep a residual military force nearby Afghanistan. The Pentagon is likely to move the only aircraft carrier presently based in the Asia Pacific, the U.S. Seventh Fleet named USS Ronald Reagan, towards the Middle East for nearly four months, to support the American pullout from Afghanistan.²²

The American decision to keep forces nearby Afghanistan will enhance dependency on neighboring states. Russia and Turkey are likely to



oppose any new base in Central Asia. Amidst rumors on American consideration of Pakistani airbases, the Foreign Office denied the presence of any U.S. military or airbase in Pakistan, terming any speculation as 'baseless and irresponsible.'²³

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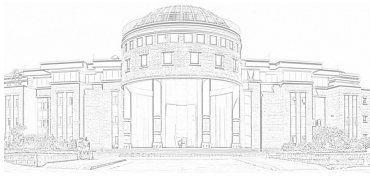
5. The Future of Peace in Afghanistan

Twenty five hundred years ago, the sage Lao Tzu said that 'those who want to obtain it by force will ruin it [and] those who hold it by force will lose it.' The wise proposition echoes the story of today's Afghanistan. One would simply ask that after nearly four decades of conflict, scarcity, and

instability, why peace and development in Afghanistan still remain elusive and challenging. Another query would involve the manner in which various stakeholders, primarily the international community, have been handling the affairs of the state – whether the approach was based on mere conflict management or an enhanced strategy of conflict resolution leading to sustainable peace. In any case, the success of international community's peacebuilding endeavors in Afghanistan will be able to raise the former's image; contrariwise, its credibility will be seriously hampered to be employed for building peace elsewhere.

The following recommendations derived from the webinar deliberations can be useful in chalking out a roadmap for the future of peace in Afghanistan:

- ◆ Afghanistan's chequered history is filled with challenges related to foreign invasions, governance, and internecine power struggles. Its challenges are endemic and political in nature. The circle of Afghan imbroglio can possibly be squared through Afghan-led and Afghan-owned dialogue, not military means. For the sake of their long-term national interest, the Afghan political elite should work on their common interests and for a truly representative government.
- ◆ Extra-regional players should not see Afghanistan as a game. Rather, they must assist the



country in gaining peace, stability, and balance.

- ◆ The zero-sum games have been unsuccessful for all parties. A new great game in Afghanistan is bound to repeat the history, albeit at a greater cost.
- ◆ The absence of peace in Afghanistan speaks louder than any

One would simply ask that after nearly four decades of conflict, scarcity, and instability, why peace and development in Afghanistan remain elusive and challenging. Another query would involve the manner in which various stakeholders, primarily the international community, have been handling the affairs of the state – whether the approach was based on mere conflict management or an enhanced strategy of conflict resolution leading to sustainable peace. In any case, the success of international community's peacebuilding endeavors in Afghanistan will be able to raise the former's image; contrariwise, its credibility will be seriously hampered to be employed for building peace elsewhere.

player's claim of giving the country its due share. Global and regional power politics play an important role in ensuring peaceful approaches to the Afghan situa-

tion. The recent peace initiatives demand rational approaches of all actors to eschew perpetual conflict and make peace a possibility.

- ◆ The withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces must take place under a clear strategy. No step should be taken in haste. '...ending U.S. involvement in an endless war (in Afghanistan) does not end the endless war,' said David Petraeus, former commanding general of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan and former CIA director, in April 2021. The Iraq experience left many lessons to be learned, where a premature exit offered the ISIS a vacuum, besides triggering a series of civil war like situation in Iraq and its neighborhood.
- ◆ Although assurances have already been given in the peace agreement, the U.S. must keep assisting Afghanistan after the exit. A rushed pull off, as happened in post-Soviet withdrawal, will not be a rational arrangement. In keeping with President Biden's resolve to make the U.S. foreign policy work better for the middle class, the U.S. will powerfully promote Afghan stability in the long run, if it were to commit major investments in areas like infrastructure, health, education, industry, law and order, and environment. Similarly, EU should also think about investing heavily in Afghanistan between



2022 and 2030.

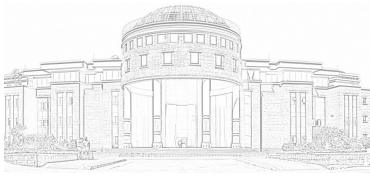
- ◆ Relocation of American and allied troops to other lands after their pyrrhic exit from Afghanistan, such as Central Asia, will exacerbate problems for the region.
- ◆ Since there is no military solution to the Afghan issue, the land must stay free from foreign military bases, facilities, and installations. It needs other forces that bind rather than further fragment the society.
- ◆ It can be reasonably expected that Afghanistan's near neighbors namely Pakistan, China, Turkey, Iran, and Russia will play a stabilizing role by means of helping in the economic development of the country, also through initiatives such as TAPI and CPEC and enhanced border trade. Bringing Afghanistan within the circle of common prosperity of China's Belt and Road Initiative is in common interest of the regional states and will help unleash the massive growth potential of the Afghan people.

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- ◆ Since 2014, the Afghan security

forces have been in the lead for maintaining peace. However, it is still not clear whether they can deliver without the help of NATO forces – the latter will not be able to influence remotely after withdrawal. A strategy must, therefore, be anticipated and put in place before these forces exit.

- ◆ After the exit, experts and advisors can be engaged, especially from neighboring states, on the consent of Afghan government/stakeholders for an inclusive development. This would bring foreign presence and intervention to a minimum, allowing the country to grow and prosper in a free and fair environment. International humanitarian organizations can offer Afghanistan special assistance for some time till the socioeconomic indicators achieve a reasonable trajectory.
- ◆ Internal strife in Afghanistan is linked to its political culture and ethnic diversity that deeply affect the country's present circumstances and its future. Pashtuns are in majority (nearly 40 percent) followed by Tajiks, Hazaras, and others. This political reality must be reflected in a future government and can no longer be wished away.
- ◆ The insecurities of three regions around Afghanistan – the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia – also exacerbate the former's challenges in a complex manner. Afghanistan is not



integrated in any of these geographical regions.

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Numerous ethnic groups from these neighborhoods are present in Afghanistan and have morphed into the state and society during the last four decades. Various identities exert a centrifugal pull on these ethnic groups. Therefore, most countries in the larger neighborhood remain focused on Afghanistan through their own security calculi, rather than the prism of bilateral relations. The resultant guardianship of geographic spaces and laws along with regional rivalries create a competing framework of a broader, global context. To expedite peace, this perspective needs to be entrenched into its national security as well as development strategy of Afghanistan.

- ◆ Peace in Afghanistan appears to be an expensive commodity. More so, because the protracted conflict involves the larger neighborhood and interests of global players. Consequently, the current approaches have less to

offer to a common man. Afghanistan lies damaged and awaits structural improvement and that of governance, institutions, infrastructure, and socioeconomic landscape. The issue calls for a comprehensive policy focus soon after the intra-Afghan dialogue materializes.

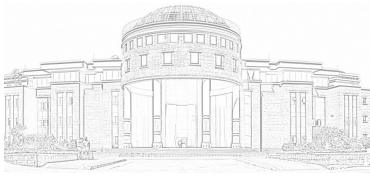
- ◆ No steps should be spared by the relevant offices of international peace and justice to evaluate the external influence and intervention in Afghanistan, have these actions audited, and design a rational and inclusive roadmap for the future.
- ◆ To predict the future of Afghanistan, one must reflect into its unique past. Peace remained elusive even during a comparatively conducive international environment of the 1990s. Future scenario may bring forth several tendencies of the warring factions. Most important will be the reconciliation on two divergent views of so-called modernity and fundamentalism.

No steps should be spared by the relevant offices of international peace and justice to evaluate the external influence and intervention in Afghanistan.

- ◆ Every development, including the peace dialogue, is shrouded in uncertainty but the influence of the Taliban is likely to expand



- gradually despite measures to counter it. Groups are over-focused on their ideologies but have less knowhow of running the state. A pragmatic power-sharing plan may make them work on mutually beneficial objectives.
- ◆ The spoilers of peace process have to be clearly identified and contained. Regional and extra-regional actors can contribute towards peace by agreeing under a verifiable mechanism not to use any proxies in Afghanistan. The Taliban, who will be the central stakeholder in any future dispensation by virtue of their numbers and other key factions must distance themselves from activities such as the support for ETM and Chechens (if any) in Afghanistan. Likewise, external players such as India must not be allowed to spoil the peace process.
 - ◆ The Muslim world – Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran – can design a new mode of mutual cooperation. Afghanistan needs help and its brethren are best suited to render support. Teachings of Islam and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) tie the Ummah within a strong obligation to support each other. Having different cultures and traditions, they share a unified way of life. A wisely designed collective vision will thus heal the wounds of Afghan brothers and normalize Afghanistan.
 - ◆ Takeover by the Afghan military after the U.S. withdrawal may bring ‘Afghans against Afghans.’ A carefully plaited security architecture will thus be needed to maintain neutrality and productivity. Afghan leaders may consider convening an inclusive Loya Jirga – the grand assembly – to proclaim the principles of neutrality and non-alignment. It will be a step towards banning hostilities or war for good.
- Every development, including the peace dialogue, is shrouded in uncertainty but the influence of the Taliban is likely to expand gradually despite measures to counter it. Groups are over-focused on their ideologies but have less knowhow of running the state.
- ◆ Over the years, Taliban have worked methodically to be recognized as a legal entity. Previously, they were not involved by the Western players in formal undertakings. They will now try not to lose the stronger foothold and what they have gained on control so far. The new attitude will make cooperation with them easy if they are given an additional responsibility.



- ◆ The likelihood of civil war after the military withdrawal is the worst fear of neighboring states and also the Afghan people. A divided Afghanistan would be a catastrophe. Spillovers of insta-

Vast production of opium and its derivatives, illegal cross-border movement, and unchecked inflow of equipment and weapons of various types are among key challenges.

bility such as the refugee influx will greatly affect the region. Vast production of opium and its derivatives, illegal cross-border movement, and unchecked inflow of equipment and weapons of various types are among key challenges. While various factions are part of peace designs, some others are allegedly accumulating arms and ammunition in anticipation of a possible civil unrest. The situation portends a danger of division. Local groups may also unite putting aside their differences to fight a common enemy. Guerrilla groups formed during post-1979 situation had the advantage over foreign troops and became an organized resistance movement. But civil war will engulf Afghanistan into an endless era of chaos and poverty.

To examine ways of restoring peace and tranquility in Afghanistan political forums should be

convened at neutral venues. Soft diplomacy will attract and co-opt people, averting the chances of civil war in Afghanistan. Given its exceptional record of and contributions for peacemaking as an intermediary, Pakistan's help in formally institutionalizing think tank diplomacy will be crucial in this regard. The arrangement will catalyze positivity in the ongoing peace process ensuring the sustainability of efforts.

- ◆ All factions in Afghanistan, which represent its people, deserve a piece in the pie and should be integrated in to the peace process.
- ◆ A channel parallel to the broader peace dialogue can be created, comprising council of representatives from various ethnic and political groups as a holistic approach.
- ◆ In essence, a focus on creating healthy social cohesion and essential economic activity is a durable way of normalizing Afghanistan. A national culture

The rocky road to nationbuilding is full of struggle and requires unity, faith, and discipline among masses. Only Afghans can build Afghanistan. Together, they can bring their country out of disorder and instability.



to develop capacities of the people has to be nurtured to bring them closer for collectively building their country. It is important to focus on cultivating the people, in education, personal organization, handicrafts, vocational and farming skills, sports, and arts, so that they become the builders of nation. The rocky road to nationbuilding is full of struggle and requires unity, faith, and discipline among masses. Only Afghans can build Afghanistan. Together, they can bring their country out of disorder and instability.

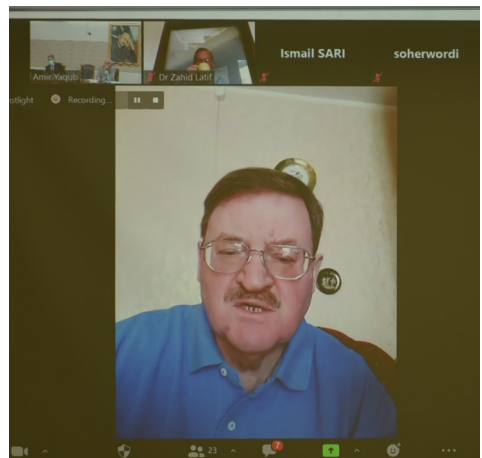
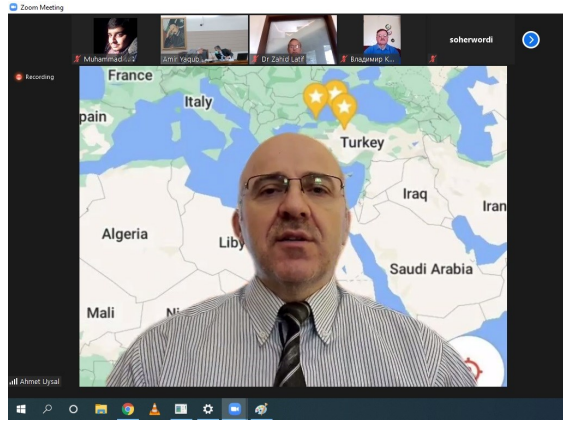
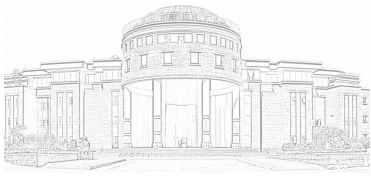
6. Conclusion

The contemporary trends of stay and exit situation in Afghanistan undeniably leave behind pertinent considerations for those who are believed to be instrumental in scribing the next chapter for the country. With the goalposts changing, some crucial investigations may include the insofar performance of key players - whether peace still has a chance once the overlong combined efforts by the allied forces and the Afghan government presently lurk in dismay. A land of around forty million people should not stay as the political and military testing ground of external actors.

Peace in Afghanistan is synonymous to stability in this region which is being now introduced to unprecedented stories of development such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and other win-win multilateral

agreements on regional linkages through land routes, railroads, and energy infrastructure.

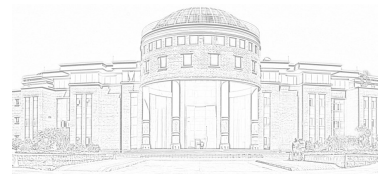
Therefore, a stable and conflict-free Afghanistan is one of the essential conditions for regional peace and stability.

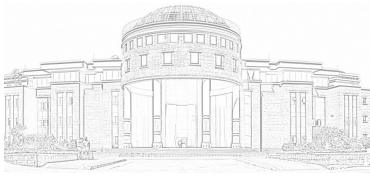


AFGHANISTAN AT CROSSROADS: PROSPECT OF PEACE AND GEOPOLITICAL IMPERATIVES









Experts at the Webinar

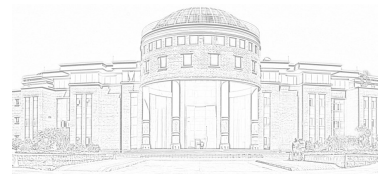
Speakers		
Sr. No.	Name	Designation/ Institution
1.	Dr Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi	Professor, Chairman, Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar
2.	Dr Vladimir P. Kozin	Leading Expert, Military-Political Studies Center, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, (MGIMO), Russia
3.	Professor Ahmet Uysal	Director of Middle Eastern Studies Center (ORSAM), Ankara, Turkey
4.	Lt Gen (Retd) Dr Muhammad Zahid Latif Mirza	Former Secretary Defence Production
Moderator		
5.	Brigadier (Retd) Amir Yaqub	Director, Operations & Collaboration, NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS)
Discussants		
6.	Lt General (Retd) Naeem Khalid Lodhi	Former Caretaker Defence Minister of Pakistan & Former Defence Secretary of Pakistan
7.	Lt General (Retd) Tariq Waseem Ghazi	Former Defence Secretary of Pakistan & Former President of National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad
8.	Lt General (Retd) Muhammad Masood Aslam	Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Mexico



9.	Major Gen (Retd) Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery	President Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad.
10.	Ambassador (Retd) Syed Ishtiaq Hussain Andrabi	Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Saudi Arabia
11.	Ambassador (Retd) Rustam Shah	Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan
12.	Ambassador (Retd) Shahid Kamal	Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Germany, Sweden, and Finland; Advisor, Commission on Science & Technology for Sustainable Development in the South (COMSATS)
13.	Dr Ashfaque Hassan Khan	Principal and Dean, NUST School of Social Sciences & Humanities (S3H) & Director General, NIPS
14.	Ambassador (Retd) Syed Hasan Javed	Director NUST Chinese Studies Center & Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Germany
15.	Dr Ghulam Mujaddid	Professor of Strategic Studies, Faculty of Aerospace Sciences & Strategic Studies, Air University, Islamabad
16.	Brigadier (Retd) Mahmood Shah	Leading Expert on Afghanistan.
17.	Mr Sayed Ishaq Gailani	Founder and Leader of National Solidarity Movement of Afghanistan
18.	Dr Attaullah Wahidyar	Deputy Minister of Education (MoE), Kabul
19.	Dr Ismail Sari	Senior Fellow, Center for Middle Eastern Studies - ORSAM & Lecturer, Ankara Haci Bayram Veli University



20.	Mr Ali Shah	Head of Research, NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS)
21.	Mr Evgeny Loginov	Expert on Afghanistan
22.	Mr Solvere Lim Swee Keng	Advisor & Chief R&D, Asia Center of Technologies, Singapore
23.	Ms Noor ul Huda	Senior Researcher South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI).
24.	Dr Farah Naz	Assistant Professor NUST S3H
25.	Ms Azeema	Researcher South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI)
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About the Speakers*

Professor Dr Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi



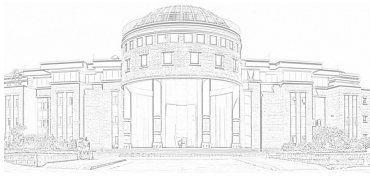
Prof Soherwordi is the Chairman, Department of International Relations at the University of Peshawar. He completed his PhD from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK. He was Carnegie Fellow in 2008 and has taught as Visiting Professor under American Fulbright Commission in Bulgaria from 2010 to 2016. Dr Soherwordi has written more than forty research papers on India, Pakistan, Tribal Areas of Pakistan, War on Terror, Afghanistan, Pak-US relations, Conflict Resolution and the application of strategies to the prevention of terrorism and amelioration of counter-terrorism. He has written two books and his forthcoming book is 'Pak-US Foreign Policy Institutional Interaction.'

Professor Dr Vladimir P. Kozin



Dr Kozin is a Leading Expert, Military-Political Studies Center, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, (MGIMO). He also served as the Head of the Group of Advisers to the Director of Russian Institute for Strategic Studies. He is the Member of the Russian Academy of the Natural Sciences and Russian Academy of Military Sciences. He has also served as Professor at the Russian Academy of Military Sciences. He is the Member of Scientific Board, Russian National Institute for Global Security Research and the Global Senior Fellow at NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS).

*The profiles are in order of presentations at the webinar.



Professor Dr Ahmet Uysal



Dr Uysal is a political sociologist interested in studying Arab affairs and Turkish-Arab relations. He is currently serving as Director of Middle Eastern Studies Center (ORSAM) in Ankara. He is also a Professor of Political Sociology in Istanbul University. He has published two books, titled 'Turkey's Image in Egypt before and after the Revolution' in Turkish and 'Sociology of Social Movements.' He writes and comments on the Middle Eastern affairs in national and international platforms including the academia and media outlets such as Aljazeera, BBC, and TRT.

Lieutenant General (Retd) Dr Zahid Latif Mirza



Dr Zahid Latif is a graduate of National Defence University Islamabad, Command and Staff College Quetta, and Peoples Liberation Army Command College, Nanjing, China. He is also an alumni of Near East South Asia Centre for Strategic Studies, Washington DC and Cranfield University UK, and visiting fellow at Kings College London. He is a Scholar at Heart with a PhD from Peking University. In 2009 - 2010 he represented Pakistan in Headquarters U.S. Central Command, Tampa Florida. The areas of his expertise include Conflict Dynamics of South Asia, Afghanistan, Counter Terrorism, National Security and Foreign Policy.



Appendix A

Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan

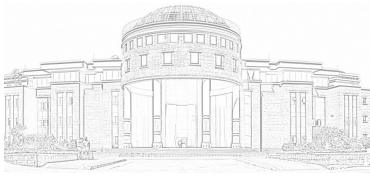
The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, a member of the United Nations and recognized by the United States and the international community as a sovereign state under international law, and the United States of America are committed to working together to reach a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement that ends the war in Afghanistan for the benefit of all Afghans and contributes to regional stability and global security.

A comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement will include four parts: 1) guarantees to prevent the use of Afghan soil by any international terrorist groups or individuals against the security of the United States and its allies, 2) a timeline for the withdrawal of all U.S. and Coalition forces from Afghanistan, 3) a political settlement resulting from intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations between the Taliban and an inclusive negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and 4) a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. These four parts are inter-related and interdependent. Pursuit of peace after long years of fighting reflects the goal of all parties who seek a sovereign, unified Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States have partnered closely since 2001 to respond to threats to international peace and security and help the Afghan people chart a secure, democratic and prosperous future. The two countries are committed to their longstanding relationship and their investments in building the Afghan institutions necessary to establish democratic norms, protect and preserve the unity of the country, and promote social and economic advancements and the rights of citizens. The commitments set out here are made possible by these shared achievements. Afghan and U.S. security forces share a special bond forged during many years of tremendous sacrifice and courage. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan reaffirm their support for peace and their willingness to negotiate an end to this war.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan welcomes the Reduction in Violence period and takes note of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, an important step toward ending the war. The U.S.-Taliban agreement paves the way for intra-Afghan negotiations on a political settlement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reaffirms its readiness to participate in such negotiations and its readiness to conclude a ceasefire with the Taliban.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan furthermore reaffirms its ongoing commitment to prevent any



international terrorist groups or individuals, including al-Qa'ida and ISIS-K, from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States, its allies and other countries. To accelerate the pursuit of peace, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan confirms its support for the phased withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement and any agreement resulting from intra-Afghan negotiations.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States therefore have made the following commitments:

PART ONE

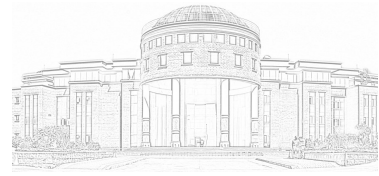
The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States recognize that al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K and other international terrorist groups or individuals continue to use Afghan soil to recruit members, raise funds, train adherents and plan and attempt to conduct attacks that threaten the security of the United States, its allies, and Afghanistan. To address this continuing terrorist threat, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States will continue to take the following steps to defeat al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and other international terrorist groups or individuals:

1. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reaffirms its continued commitment not to cooperate with or permit international terrorist groups or individuals to recruit, train, raise funds (including through the production or

distribution of narcotics), transit Afghanistan or misuse its internationally recognized travel documents, or conduct other support activities in Afghanistan, and will not host them.

2. The United States re-affirms its commitments regarding support for the Afghan security forces and other government institutions, including through ongoing efforts to enhance the ability of Afghan security forces to deter and respond to internal and external threats, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments. This commitment includes support to Afghan security forces to prevent al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals from using Afghan soil to threaten the United States and its allies.

3. The United States re-affirms its readiness to continue to conduct military operations in Afghanistan with the consent of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in order to disrupt and degrade efforts by al-Qa'ida, ISIS-K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals to carry out attacks against the United States or its allies, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments and with the existing understanding that U.S. counterterrorism operations are intended to complement and support Afghan security forces' counterterrorism operations, with full respect for Afghan sovereignty and full regard for the safety and



security of the Afghan people and the protection of civilians.

4. The United States commits to facilitate discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan to work out arrangements to ensure neither country's security is threatened by actions from the territory of the other side.

PART TWO

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States have consulted extensively on U.S. and Coalition force levels and the military activities required to achieve the foregoing commitments including through support to Afghan security and defense forces. Subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, and the Coalition jointly assess that the current levels of military forces are no longer necessary to achieve security objectives; since 2014, Afghan security forces have been in the lead for providing security and have increased their effectiveness. As such, the parties commit to take the following measures:

1. The United States will reduce the number of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 and implement other commitments in the U.S.-Taliban agreement within 135 days of the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will work with its allies and the Coalition to reduce proportionally the number of Coalition forces in Afghanistan over an

equivalent period, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S. - Taliban agreement.

2. Consistent with the joint assessment and determination between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, its allies, and the Coalition will complete the withdrawal of their remaining forces from Afghanistan within 14 months following the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will withdraw all their forces from remaining bases, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement.

3. The United States re-affirms its commitment to seek funds on a yearly basis that support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of Afghan security forces, so that Afghanistan can independently secure and defend itself against internal and external threats.

4. To create the conditions for reaching a political settlement and achieving a permanent, sustainable ceasefire, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will participate in a U.S.-facilitated discussion with Taliban representatives on confidence building measures, to include determining the feasibility of releasing significant numbers of prisoners on both sides. The United States and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will seek the assistance of the ICRC to support this discussion.

5. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan commits to start diplomatic engagement with members of the UN Security Council to remove members of the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by May 29, 2020, and in any case no later than 30 days after finalizing a framework agreement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.

PART THREE

1. The United States will request the recognition and endorsement of the UN Security Council for this agreement and related arrangements.
2. The United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan are committed to continue positive relations, including economic cooperation for reconstruction.
3. The United States will refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs.
4. The United States will continue to work to build regional and international consensus to support the ongoing effort to achieve a political settlement to the principal conflict in Afghanistan.





Appendix B

Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America

February 29, 2020 which corresponds to Rajab 5, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 10, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar

A comprehensive peace agreement is made of four parts:

1. Guarantees and enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies.
2. Guarantees, enforcement mechanisms, and announcement of a timeline for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.
3. After the announcement of guarantees for a complete withdrawal of foreign forces and timeline in the presence of international witnesses, and guarantees and the announcement in the presence of international witnesses that Afghan soil will not be used against the security of the United States and its allies, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will start intra-Afghan negotiations with Afghan sides on March 10, 2020, which corresponds to Rajab 15, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot

20, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar.

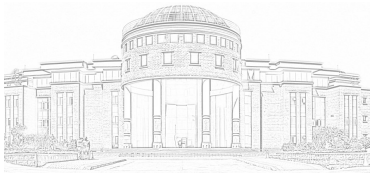
4. A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be an item on the agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. The participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms, which will be announced along with the completion and agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.

The four parts above are interrelated and each will be implemented in accordance with its own agreed timeline and agreed terms. Agreement on the first two parts paves the way for the last two parts.

Following is the text of the agreement for the implementation of parts one and two of the above. Both sides agree that these two parts are interconnected. The obligations of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban in this agreement apply in areas under their control until the formation of the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations.

PART ONE

The United States is committed to withdraw from Afghanistan all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors,



trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel within fourteen (14) months following announcement of this agreement, and will take the following measures in this regard:

A. The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will take the following measures in the first one hundred thirty-five (135) days: 1) They will reduce the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to eight thousand six hundred (8,600) and proportionally bring reduction in the number of its allies and Coalition forces. 2) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will withdraw all their forces from five (5) military bases.

B. With the commitment and action on the obligations of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban in Part Two of this agreement, the United States, its allies, and the Coalition will execute the following:

1) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will complete withdrawal of all remaining forces from Afghanistan within the remaining nine and a half (9.5) months.

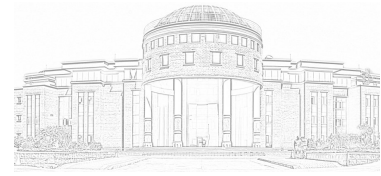
2) The United States, its allies, and the Coalition will withdraw all their forces from remaining bases.

C. The United States is committed to start immediately to work with all relevant sides on a plan to expeditiously release combat and political prisoners as a confidence building measure with the coordination and

approval of all relevant sides. Up to five thousand (5,000) prisoners of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and up to one thousand (1,000) prisoners of the other side will be released by March 10, 2020, the first day of intra-Afghan negotiations, which corresponds to Rajab 15, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 20, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar. The relevant sides have the goal of releasing all the remaining prisoners over the course of the subsequent three months. The United States commits to completing this goal. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban commits that its released prisoners will be committed to the responsibilities mentioned in this agreement so that they will not pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies.

D. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United States will initiate an administrative review of current U.S. sanctions and the rewards list against members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban with the goal of removing these sanctions by August 27, 2020, which corresponds to Muharram 8, 1442 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Saunbola 6, 1399 on the Hijri Solar calendar.

E. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the United States will start



diplomatic engagement with other members of the United Nations Security Council and Afghanistan to remove members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by May 29, 2020, which corresponds to Shawwal 6, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Jawza 9, 1399 on the Hijri Solar calendar.

F. The United States and its allies will refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs.

PART TWO

In conjunction with the announcement of this agreement, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will take the following steps to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qa'ida, from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies:

1. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will not allow any of its members, other individuals or groups, including al-Qa'ida, to use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies.
2. The Islamic Emirate of Afghani-

stan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will send a clear message that those who pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies have no place in Afghanistan, and will instruct members of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban not to cooperate with groups or individuals threatening the security of the United States and its allies.

3. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will prevent any group or individual in Afghanistan from threatening the security of the United States and its allies, and will prevent them from recruiting, training, and fundraising and will not host them in accordance with the commitments in this agreement.

4. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban is committed to deal with those seeking asylum or residence in Afghanistan according to international migration law and the commitments of this agreement, so that such persons do not pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies.



5. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban will not provide visas, passports, travel permits, or other legal documents to those who pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies to enter Afghanistan.

PART THREE

1. The United States will request the recognition and endorsement of the United Nations Security Council for this agreement.

2. The United States and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban seek positive relations with each other and expect that the relations between the United States and the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations will be positive.

3. The United States will seek economic cooperation for reconstruction with the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations, and will not intervene in its internal affairs.

Signed in Doha, Qatar on February 29, 2020, which corresponds to Rajab 5, 1441 on the Hijri Lunar calendar and Hoot 10, 1398 on the Hijri Solar calendar, in duplicate, in Pashto, Dari, and English languages, each text being equally authentic.



Appendix C

The Evolving Situation in Afghanistan and Policy Options for Pakistan*

Introduction

What are the prospects of early peace in Afghanistan and whether peace can exist in the prevailing state of affairs? This was the moot question raised by NIPS for the roundtable discussion on May 29, 2019 about the Evolving Situation in Afghanistan and Policy Options for Pakistan. The discussion encapsulated crosscutting issues such as hurdles in the way of a win-win resolution of Afghan conflict; basic flaws in the American approach towards establishing a new order of peace and stability in Afghanistan; and a pragmatic mechanism to find a way forward that can generate useful spill overs for the region and beyond. A panel of experts contributed to the discussion. The discussion included a thought-provoking round up of the situation and geopolitical environment.

There was a general consensus that Afghanistan is pivotal to augment trade and channelize crude oil, natural gas and other natural resources from the energy-rich Central Asian states towards energy-deprived Southern Asia. However, Afghanistan has not been able to optimally utilize its potential due to endemic political turmoil that is punctuated by the diametrically opposite interests of regional and interna-

tional actors. This situation affects Pakistan's security because there can be no sustainable progress and peace on the western front of Pakistan until Afghanistan in that neighborhood stabilizes.

Hurdles to Peace in Afghanistan

Participants examined the competing interests of various parties involved in the Afghan imbroglio and observed that the U.S. is the key stakeholder, whose geopolitical and economic competition with Russia and China affects any outcome. Inter alia, American interests in Afghanistan draw from its intent to contain China, Russia, and bring a regime change in Iran. To serve these ends, the U.S. is maintaining military presence in Eurasia, establishing strategic and economic influence in the Central Asia and beyond and surrounding Iran. Russia seems interested in chipping away the American leverage in Afghanistan. Iran is strengthening its partnership with Russia in the region. China is apparently the smartest player on the strategic chessboard and is considered to be more concerned about expanding its weight in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, besides carrying out efforts to establish peace through negotiations.

In Afghanistan, there are significant hurdles to peace caused by warlordism – a legacy of perpetual conflict, historical intra-Afghan ethnic distrust, and domestic cleavages. The central government has not been able to establish its legitimacy. There was general agreement that Pakistan

*This is the report of NIPS roundtable discussion session held in May 2019.



wants a peaceful and stable Afghanistan because its own and regional progress is contingent on Afghan peace. Contrarily, India is the spoiler in the future of Afghanistan because it is playing a shell game wherein New Delhi uses the country to create troubles for Pakistan. Indian clout in a country that does not even share borders with it neither does it have any cultural similarities is worrisome and questionable.

Evidently, Afghanistan remains the main stakeholder. On the premise of the faction-driven environment in the country, the interests of Afghan parties to the conflict were also analyzed. The Taliban unequivocally require departure of the U.S. from their country. For this reason, they are engaged in talks with Russia and China to resolve their differences. The Afghan government in Kabul is concerned more about keeping the Taliban in check and extending its own limited geographical control, while winning peace under the influence of a third party.

With regard to flaws in the present American approach towards peace, there exist intransigence in forcing its own agenda upon and divergence of objectives with local and regional influencers. Also, differences within President Trump administration regarding the proposed military pull-out from Afghanistan can be perplexing. Whether this move will serve the U.S.'s regional interests is disputed by quarters within the current administration.

Pakistan's position in this setting

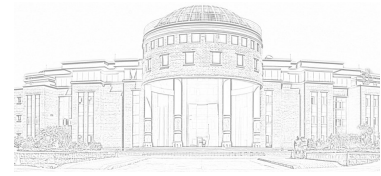
was quantified to be in a regional as well as international 'nutcracker,' as it is often perceived to be an 'interferer' by ordinary Afghans. Thus, a diminishing goodwill of Pakistanis among the Afghan people. Pakistan's support for the people of Afghanistan, including education, healthcare, and trade opportunities along with accommodating more than three million Afghan refugees for decades, goes unrecognized. Regardless of this challenging external environment with rather limited policy options, Pakistan is continually playing a positive role by bringing warring factions – the U.S. and the Taliban – to the table of peace talks.

The Future Course of Measures

The discussion achieved a predominant agreement that the Afghanistan issue is not going to settle down in the foreseeable future, given the divergent interests and vague objectives of various regional and international stakeholders.

Four important policy recommendations for Pakistan were offered:

First, it must be realized by all stakeholders that the Afghan government should genuinely represent its people and peace talks should be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led. Emphasis should thus be laid on quadrilateral negotiations comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and Iran. The U.S. could prefer staying out of this process so that the talks do not undergo a risk of failure.



The mechanism has to be jointly designed.

Second, Pakistan should facilitate intra-Afghan dialogue – arguably the most difficult role to play – while offering a cold shoulder to the Doha talks, unless a useful Pakistani representation is ensured.

Third, people-to-people contacts between Afghanistan and Pakistan should be increased and border trade expanded wherever possible. Cross-border hubs of cooperation and integration in trade, health, education and sports should be established, thus setting in motion a ‘soft power revolution.’

Fourth, Pakistan should formulate a strategy with China, Russia, and the Taliban to defeat Daesh, which in some experts’ view, is being nurtured in Afghanistan by the U.S.

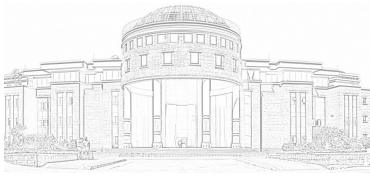
Any positive development in Afghanistan will have a cascading effect in the region. The key stakeholders, therefore, must be taken into confidence. Pakistan and Afghanistan share a long border that remains untapped despite an enormous potential of trade and sociocultural linkages. The borders must therefore be lightened up through initiatives such as Border Area Economic Zones (BAEZs).

The potential of Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry that focuses on promotion of mutually beneficial trade, commerce, investment, technology transfer, industrial

collaborations, trainings, exchanges, and many other areas of economic cooperation needs to be fully utilized. Joint activities will bring people and eventually the governments closer. A network of transportation infrastructure will not only instigate multidimensional linkages but will also gradually lessen the burden on main cities. All roads for interdependence and trust building lead to a greater prosperity of the region.

Subsequently, as agreed upon by the discussants, Pakistan can not accept responsibility for any potential failure in the dialogue or future settlement in Afghanistan, since this remains the responsibility of actual parties to the conflict. Pakistan holds a unique position by virtue of its longstanding efforts for regional balance. The Taliban, being sophisticated negotiators, are not seen to be kneeling down to the Americans and agreeing to peace on the latter’s terms.

By the same token, the Indian involvement in the Afghan matter calls for evaluation, given the former’s unusual interest and deep efforts for setting a pitch in the country against Pakistan. India might not like to witness a pacified Afghanistan, while exploiting every opportunity to aggravate the existing crisis, to the detriment of Pakistan. This is particularly pertinent given the fact that Mr. Modi has recently been re-elected to power, and has not



reciprocated Prime Minister Imran Khan's peace overtures in the same coin. India's undue interference inside Pakistani territories is also no secret.

The discussants also laid particular emphasis on Pakistan 'putting its own house in order first.' The economic and political weaknesses do not serve its cause when viewed from the eyes of global community, even with Pakistan's continued efforts for regional peace and stability. India could always be expected to leverage such fault lines of Pakistan in order to cause further trouble.

Therefore, while preventing India from meddling inside Pakistan using the Afghan soil and managing other challenges, the Pakistani policymakers must also concurrently prioritize the remedy of Pakistan's domestic problems. Towards the end of the discussion, a divergence occurred among the participants on a proposed paradigm shift in terms of Pakistan's current Afghan policy. Some of them urged to eschew the old habit of considering Afghanistan a 'backyard.' Afghanistan should be treated as a sovereign state by all other states, and the dignity and historical pride of the Afghan people should be respected by all in order to earn their much-needed goodwill.

It was also noted that Pakistan could not afford to completely disengage itself from this case due to its compulsion being the next-door neighbor. Also, because Pakistan's absence from negotiations could leave open

space for adversaries and seekers of hegemony to meddle into the affairs of Afghanistan.

Although the prospects of early peace in Afghanistan in the existing environment were seen to be heavily fraught with hurdles, it was concluded that Pakistani foreign policy makers must be absolutely decided that they require peace and economic prosperity in Afghanistan for the sake of Pakistan itself. So should be true for all other actors involved in the Afghan peace process.



Appendix D

GOING FORWARD*

1. Consult and Coordinate

Immediate measures should be taken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to conduct extensive consultations with different relevant ministries and departments, including the military, as well as key national business, corporate, and financial leaders that shall have a significant bearing on the improvement of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. This process and pipeline of extensive coordinated consultations must be initiated by the MOFA, if it has already not begun, and can be extended later to cover the totality of Pakistan's foreign policy. This process should be based on a structured approach following concrete, scientific, deliberative, evaluative, and expository methodologies pegged to clear outcomes and deliverables for a successful goal-oriented foreign policy formulation.

2. Persuade and Influence the U.S.

With regard to the overall U.S. strategy for the region, concrete steps should be taken to ensure that India's presence in Afghanistan does not end up destabilizing Afghanistan. Such an occurrence will not happen if the U.S. becomes convinced that the prominence of India in Afghanistan is a flawed approach and detrimental to the U.S. interests in the last analysis.

3. Seek Consultations with China

China's peaceful development can also be impacted with the increasing role of India in Afghanistan. Indian ambitions in Afghanistan will undermine the goals of all-round cooperation being pursued by China. Therefore, coordination should be sought with Beijing in this regard in the greater interest of regional peace and stability.

4. Engage Afghans Constructively

Pakistan should continue its stoical and balanced approach toward Afghanistan. This approach should maximize the economic-cultural complementarities between the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan. People-to-people, business-to-business, Pakistani-business-to-Afghan-people, Afghan-business-to-Pakistani people contacts should be coordinated along with state-to-state coordination for improving bilateral relations. There is a dire need for the urgent investment of financial and social capitals in the peoples of Afghanistan.

4.1 Financial Capital Investment in Afghanistan

In so far as the investment of financial capital is concerned in the context of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, Pakistan can announce an integrated Pak-Afghan economic development plan consisting of special economic zones (SEZs) and border economic zones as key nodes of social and economic development at

*The excerpt is titled, "Going Forward" in the book and forms the third section at pp. 180-186 of Chapter 6, titled, "Promoting Regional Cooperation and Stability," of the book, titled, Pakistan in the Contemporary International System, authored by Ali Shah, Head of Research, NIPS, and published by NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS) in December 2020.



viable points along the long border with Afghanistan. These zones should focus on building locational regional advantages and follow the philosophy of positive externalities and powerful spill-over effects for neighboring regions. Pakistan should also invest in suitable projects in Kabul and other important cities of Afghanistan, especially those located in the provinces bordering Pakistan.

These projects should be related to education, health, agriculture, housing, small and medium enterprise (SME) development, entertainment & recreation, infrastructure, and sports facilities. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) should be formed and maximally utilized for such projects. Financial capital investment should be buttressed and protected by a veritable vibrant socioeconomic interaction between the two peoples. Normalization of Pak-Afghan relations will be assisted by such an approach. However, its key determinant would continue to be strategic in orientation.

4.2 Social Capital Investment in Afghanistan

In so far as social capital investment in Afghanistan is concerned, goodwill for Pakistan should be built through utilizing the cultural and religious commonalities between the two peoples. This is advised because currently the society is stronger than the state in Afghanistan. Consistent focus on the peoples of Afghanistan is, therefore, the correct approach in this phase of Afghan evolution. It shall also stand Pakistan in good

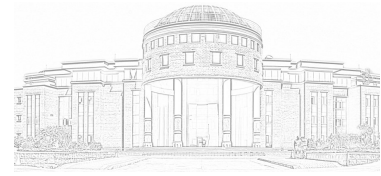
stead when this is no longer the case and the state would have become cohesive in Afghanistan.

5. BRI Complementarities

It is important to remember that BRI encourages participating countries to propose cooperation projects in infrastructure, trade, finance, culture, etc., under its overall umbrella which could be financed through the financial institutions of the BRI like the AIIB and the Silk Road Fund. MOFA, in consultation with relevant ministries and departments, can champion this process because the economic dimension of diplomacy is a long-standing fundamental foreign policy goal of nations and states. Immediate efforts must be made to seek coordination and integration between the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and CPEC-BRI. This coordination should be sought with special reference to the main deliverables of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. This shall also help in Pak-Afghan normalization. Iran should be co-opted into CPEC as a part of seeking greater synergy under the umbrella of BRI to help Iran gravitate away from Indian aspirations in the region. China can take the lead in this process.

6. Integration of ECO and BRI

From the platform of the ECO, Pakistan should push for more cooperative and collaborative projects and initiatives with fellow ECO members, bilaterally and multilaterally and have these recognized within the framework of BRI and funded



through new financial mechanisms of AIIB and the Silk Road Fund. ECO members should collectively commit themselves to the successful completion of central and southern routes and corridors of BRI as they directly pass through ECO member countries. This collective action should seek to ensure complementarities with the northern route focused on Russian-Chinese integration in time. The aim should be to promote well-considered alignment of different national visions for mutual development.

The fact that China was invited to attend the 13th ECO Summit in Islamabad in March 2017 as a special guest was a welcome move in the right direction. Work should be undertaken actively for the implementation of ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA). The goal of two-fold increase in the intra-regional trade by 2022 should be achieved expeditiously as per the ECO's Islamabad Declaration. Work should begin intensively with other ECO members for establishing and empowering the Islamic Organization for Food Security and achieve collective food security for ECO members later extendable to other Muslim countries if possible. Water security cooperation should be made an integral element of ECO framework as a logical move beyond welcoming UN General Assembly Resolution on the international Decade for Action for Water for Sustainable Development 2018-2028. Development of free-trade area with Af-

ghanistan, after having reckoned with Pakistani reservations can be promoted from the ECO and BRI connectivity platforms. This shall allow Afghanistan to realize the significance of its natural partnership with Pakistan.

Pakistan should make constructive efforts to help increase Iran's participation in CPEC and BRI considering increased Indian investments in the latter's infrastructure projects. Higher education and health have been included in ECO deliberations. It should include increased educational, knowledge and S&T cooperation among member states as well as the preparation of a good educational and health package for Afghanistan.

Energy has been made part of ECO agenda so regional energy projects should be the focus of subsequent developments. The Summit prioritized innovation and entrepreneurship promotion as well as SME development efforts in the ECO region. This should also mean intensified science park cooperation between ECO members and China.

An innovative policymaking mechanism should be devised that allows the ECO members to expeditiously formulate and execute cooperative projects in the light of the Islamabad Declaration and ECO Vision 2025. The speed of execution should be such that the Vision 2025 should be achieved in 2021. The potential of the ECO Trade and Development Bank (ETDB) should be fully leveraged for



achieving these goals.

7. Avoid Provocative Statements

It is good that Pakistan has taken a resolute stance in various areas of its foreign policy. However, statements by concerned leaders and state functionaries of Pakistan in this regard should not be needlessly provocative. Every public pronouncement should be the outcome of the process of coordination, consultation, and careful drafting buttressed by firmness, and enriched by a dynamic historical understanding of key issues. It is encouraging to note that official foreign policy statements by Pakistan are already well-deliberated and balanced but ever-present room for improvement should be utilized for greater success.

8. Diversification as a Valuable Policy Option

Pakistan's defense reliance on the U.S. seems to be considerably less now than was the case in the past with the former having diversified its defense acquisitions in terms of country sources. Diversification should be practiced in other critical spheres of the national economy as well. The fact is undeniable that Pakistan requires strategic autonomy and space to conceive and practice a foreign policy that allows the prioritization of the national interest.

9. Be Realistic in Pakistan-U.S. Relations

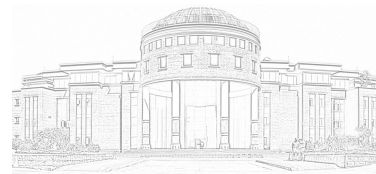
In the context of an evolving Pakistan-U.S. relationship, concrete, realistic, and actionable suggestions, pro-

posals, and recommendations should be put together to deal with an evolving partnership. A paradigm shift is indeed required in the bilateral relations. Such a shift should be based on an understanding of the motive forces of the domestic political priorities of the American foreign policy as well as the role that conviviality plays in the public and personal lives and interactions of Americans.

Among other things, this requires a fluent command of both formal and colloquial American English, a thorough understanding of the historically-shaped American cultural norms, and an irrepressible confidence in the correctness of one's position. The makers of Pakistan's U.S. policy will have to be well-versed in the arts of deep thinking, nimble action, masterful diplomacy, and frank conversation that resonates with the American psyche.

10. Carefully Consider America's Domestic Strengths and Weaknesses for a Holistic U.S. Policy

Among other things, Pakistan's foreign policy should carefully consider the liabilities and assets of the U.S. as outlined by the late Zbigniew Brzezinski, the brilliant former National Security Advisor of the former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter. This "balance sheet" can allow Pakistan to craft a successful U.S. policy. Brzezinski considers "national debt, flawed financial system, widening social inequality, decaying infrastructure, and public ignorance" to



be American weaknesses, and deems the U.S.' "overall economic strength, innovative potential, demographic dynamics, reactive mobilization, geographic base, and democratic appeal" to be its fundamental strengths.²⁴ For instance, Pakistan should stress the strong potential of knowledge-based collaboration centering on science, technology, and innovation and higher education in Pak-U.S. relations, and periodically propose collaborative projects in these areas relevant to the critical sectors of the U.S. economy. In order to be truly effective, our policy statements and initiatives with regard to the U.S. should be properly informed in terms of domestic "assets" and "liabilities" of the U.S. For instance, "gridlocked politics," if smartly dealt with, can benefit Pakistan.

11. Deepen Pakistan-Turkey Partnership

Pakistan should focus keenly on developing a comprehensive partnership with Turkey in key areas like manufacturing, banking and financial services, higher education, and S&T-based R&D. This partnership can be based on matching required resources and should aim to invest at least USD 25-35 billion in collaborative projects by 2035.



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