



One Day International Conference on  
**Reconciliation & Peace in Afghanistan:  
Implications for Regional & International Stability**

Organized By



**Pakistan House**

Held at Islamabad

Edited by

**Muhammad Athar Javed**

&

**Fareeha Shamim**



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# Advisory Board, Pakistan House



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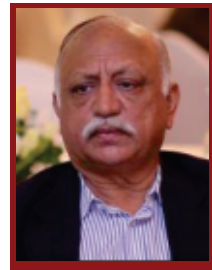
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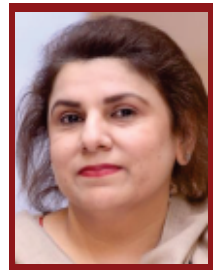
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On 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, Pakistan House organized a one-day International Conference in Islamabad on " Reconciliation & Peace in Afghanistan: Implications for Regional and International Stability". Ms. Sana Maqbool, News Anchor at PTV World, was the Master of the Ceremony.

This event witnessed the participation of ambassadors, diplomats, policy makers, academics, civil-military bureaucrats, government officials, media personnel, university students, and other dignitaries.

Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi (Retd), Former Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States; Mr Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady, Chairman and co-founder of the New National Front of Afghanistan (NNF), and Dr. Mohammed Alsulami, Chairman, International Institute for Iranian Studies (RASANA), KSA, honoured the occasion as Keynote Speakers.

The esteemed keynote speakers, other dignitaries, and audience members praised the event for providing eminent speakers with a platform to deliver an invaluable analysis on strategic coercion, its theories, and practice.

This report presents a summary of statements of the keynote speakers and provides with a comprehensive summary of key remarks delivered by the speakers during the conference. It also presents an analysis and policy recommendations for the state institutions. - - - - -

# Programme Layout



## Keynote Session \_\_\_\_\_

- **Welcome Remarks by Mr. Muhammad Athar Javed**  
Director General Pakistan House
- **Keynote Speaker 1:**  
**Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi (Retd)**  
Former Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States
- **Keynote Speaker 2:**  
**Mr. Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady**  
Chairman and co-founder of the New National Front of Afghanistan (NNF)
- **Keynote Speaker 3:**  
**Dr. Mohammed Alsulami**  
Chairman, International Institute for Iranian Studies (RASANAHA),  
KSA

## First Session \_\_\_\_\_

- **Reasons for Failure of Afghan Policy**  
**Chair: Ambassador Tariq Osman Hyder (Retd)**  
Distinguished Visiting Fellow, NDU

### **US Afghan Policy and International Stability**

#### **Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq (Retd)**

Former Secretary, National Security Division

### **Peace in Afghanistan: Political Responsibility of Afghan Government**

#### **Mr. Harris Ali Akakhail**

Journalist and Expert on Afghanistan

### **Role of Pakistan and Afghan Peace Efforts**

#### **Mr. Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri**

Director General (Afghanistan, Turkey & Iran) at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan



## Second Session \_\_\_\_\_

**Dialogue, Peace and Policy: A Stable Afghanistan**

**Chair: Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi (Retd)**

Former Pakistan's Ambassador to United States

**Presence of Da'esh and Threat to Peace in Afghanistan**

**Lt. General Asif Yasin Malik, HI (M) (Retd)**

Former Defence Secretary

**A Comparative Analysis: Role of India and China in Afghanistan**

**Mr. Imtiaz Gul**

Executive Director of Center for Research and Security Studies, Islamabad

**Dialogue between US and Taliban: A Way Forward**

**Mr. Juma Khan Sufi**

Author and Senior Expert, Afghanistan



## Speaker Profiles



Ashraf Jehangir Qazi has held various important positions as a diplomat. He served as the Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, China, Russia and Pakistan's High Commissioner to India.

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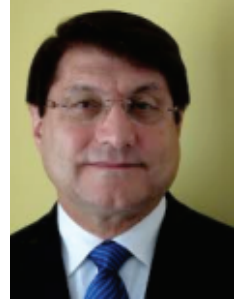
**Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi (Retd),**  
Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States

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Mr. Anwar-ul Haq Ahady is the chairman and co-founder of the New National Front of Afghanistan (NNF), an opposition political party in Afghanistan. He has served as the Governor of Afghanistan's Central bank; Minister of Finance, Afghanistan; and Minister of Afghanistan's Transportation and Commerce.

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**Mr. Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady,**  
Chairman and co-founder of the New National  
Front of Afghanistan (NNF)



Dr. Mohammed Al-Sulami is an expert in Iranian affairs. He is the Chairman of International Institute for Iranian Studies (RASANA), Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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**Dr. Mohammed Alsulami,**  
Chairman, International Institute for Iranian Studies  
(RASANA), KSA



Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq is a retired diplomat who has served as Pakistan's former Ambassador to Afghanistan, and Pakistan's former Deputy Ambassador to the United States. He has also served as the Secretary, National Security Division of Pakistan. Presently, he is the CEO of Sid Group of Companies.

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**Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq (Retd),**  
former Secretary, National Security Division

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Mr. Harris Ali Akakhail is a security analyst and a working journalist. He looks after bi-lateral affairs of Afghanistan & Pakistan in the context of Al Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS. He was formerly associated with a private news channels and currently writes for newspapers and Pakistan House.

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**Mr. Harris Ali Akakhail,**  
Journalist and Expert on Afghanistan



Mr. Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri is the Director General of Afghanistan, Turkey & Iran at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan

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**Mr. Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri,**  
Director General (Afghanistan, Turkey & Iran) at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan



Lt. General Asif Yasin Malik, HI (M) (Retd) is a former Defence Secretary. He has served as Corps Commander XI Corps, Peshawar. He has also served as a Director General in Inter-Services Intelligence and Director General of Joint Intelligence and Information Operations in the Joint Staff Headquarters.

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**Lt. General Asif Yasin Malik, HI (M) (Retd),**  
former Defence Secretary

Mr. Imtiaz Gul is the Executive Director of Center for Research and Security Studies, Islamabad. He has authored several books and has been contributing to international and national print media primarily on issues of security, radicalization and governance.

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**Mr. Imtiaz Gul,**  
Executive Director of Center for  
Research and Security Studies, Islamabad



Mr. Juma Khan Sufi is a Senior Afghanistan Expert and Author. His writings include Bacha Khan, Congress and Nationalist Politics in NWFP, Ghaffar Khan: Reluctant Nationalist, and Faraib-e-Natamam.

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**Mr. Juma Khan Sufi,**  
Author and Senior Expert, Afghanistan



### **Mr. Muhammad Athar Javed**

Director General Pakistan House

Assalamu Alikum and good afternoon. I especially extend my profound gratitude to Mr. Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady, Chairman and co-founder of the New National Front of Afghanistan (NNF); Dr. Mohammed Alsulami Chairman, International Institute for Iranian Studies (RASANAH) from Saudi Arabia; and to Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Pakistan's Former ambassador to the US, for being the Keynote Speakers for today's conference. I also take this opportunity to thank all foreign diplomats, civil-military bureaucrats, academics, students and media persons who are participating in today's international conference. Peace in Afghanistan is not only a necessity of the region, but it is mandatory for the entire world. This not only reflects the importance, but it also forecasts that all the international powers who are involved in Afghanistan for more than seventeen years, according to them against terrorism whereas according to Taliban for foreign occupation, have to realize the importance of peace in Afghanistan.

As an independent think tank, we are not part of any biased, prejudice opinions. Therefore, Pakistan House presents speakers with independent authority on the subject, and our institution maintains that Pakistan's interest in the region must be understood properly, thereby our organization is named 'Pakistan House'. Hence, we explain and highlight the role that Pakistan is playing in establishing peace in the region. I would now request our speakers to enlighten us on the topic, "Reconciliation and Peace in Afghanistan: Implications for Regional and International Stability".



## Keynote Speaker 1:

### Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir

Former Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States



“Reconciliation and Peace in Afghanistan: Implications for Regional and International Stability”, is a subject of interest for every Pakistani. Arnold Joseph Toynbee in his masterpiece, “A study of History” has written that two countries are the roundabout of history; one is Syria, rolled in the events that take place in the Middle East, whereas the other country is Afghanistan, also known

as the cockpit of Asia. This importance of Syria and Afghanistan is also tied to Sir Halford Mackinder’s Theory of Rimland and Heartland of Asia according to which whoever controls the Heartland is supposedly in an advantageous position to control the world. These theories emerged in the 19th century whereas America emerged as a major and dominant power in the 20th century.

Also, according to this theory the heart of Asia has a tremendous significance for Asia, and the modern application of the theory is the emergence of the concept of Eurasia, especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The concept of Eurasia has been promoted by Russia to a great extent, to retain and increase its influence within the territorial borders of what was the Union of Soviets Socialist Republics or the Soviet Union (USSR). In this region there are various hot spots: The Middle East which is a conglomeration of more than one hotspot for e.g. the Arabs, Israelis and Syrians; and competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Within Asia different alliances are emerging such as the US-Indo alliances, and Sino-Russian alliance. Meanwhile, Afghanistan continues to be extremely important and it suffers as a result of conflicts within Afghanistan as well as around Afghanistan.

While talking about peace and the future of Afghanistan, it must be kept in mind that modern Afghanistan came into existence in 1747. Right from its birth, Afghanistan's major preoccupation has been with external interference. Although Ahmed Shah Abdali founded the state, but Afghanistan became a modern political reality under Amir Abdul Rahman. The external interferences have remained due to the tremendous importance; not because of its resources but its geo-strategic position which plays an important part in connecting different regions of the world; it connects South Asia, Southwest Asia, Central Asia and North-East towards China. So, there has been strong competition and, therefore, external influence in Afghanistan since a very long time.

Under the kings of Afghanistan, particularly after the Sudozais, were succeeded by Muhammadzais, the throne of Afghanistan did play a major role in consolidating Afghanistan's different ethnic groups into one nation which acquired an Afghan sense of identity; today, Pashtuns are the largest ethnic community in Afghanistan and before Pakistan came into being Pashtuns and Afghanistan were synonymous. However, the fact is that there are also many other ethnicities, apart from Pashtun, in Afghanistan such as the Persians, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens, Hazaras, and Nuristanis etc., but they have acquired an Afghan identity.

However, during the 20th century, as a result of the Cold War and the competition between the US-led block and the Soviet-led block, ethnic conflicts started to emerge in Afghanistan. Within all the developing countries the ideology of communism was very attractive then, and this environment led to the intervention of the Soviets in Afghanistan. Since then Afghanistan's history has become even more turbulent. Although, Soviet invasion and occupation ended through the assistance of the so-called, 'Free World' in which Pakistan and the Afghans played a major role, after the Soviet's withdrawal, Afghanistan had to face more turbulence and disorder that gave rise to the Taliban rule.

The Taliban rule itself was very controversial. For various reasons, including external factors after 9/11, the external interference in Afghanistan increased enormously, the Taliban were brought under pressure which eventually led to the American invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. So, the country has faced series of invasion

and turbulence. Though, the US occupation is coming to an end after seventeen years, it might take a little longer, and it is going to be very complicated due to various internal and external factors.

The internal factors are developing around few major questions; firstly, is the withdrawal of the US troops going to be a time-based withdrawal or is it going to be a condition-based withdrawal? Secondly, what kind of constitution will there be? As the one that has already been agreed upon by various stakeholders based in Kabul has not been accepted by the Taliban. Thirdly, what about the elections? The Taliban say they have struggled for an Islamic system against foreign occupation and paid huge sacrifices. They are not interested in any election because of the fear of losing it. They now have more influence and territory under their control. Hence, elections are going to be seen by the Taliban as a system that could deny them of their gains on the ground.



There are many people in Afghanistan who are extremely fearful of the Taliban and yet respect them, because they have always held the flag of Afghan nationalism and Afghan independence high. But there is also an international factor, and the whole Afghan settlement process, even if it is successful, will take place within this context. The rivalry between the US on one hand, and Russia and China on the other hand; Russia as the old rival and China as the emerging rival. Similarly, the India-Pakistan, US-Iran rivalry will have a huge impact on the



settlement as all these countries have their own interests and priorities. Therefore, Pakistan has always maintained that the whole process must be Afghan-led and Afghan-driven.

The peace process of Afghan settlement depends on various factors: Firstly, getting all the parties within Afghanistan together as there is comprehensive war weariness; everyone is tired of war in Afghanistan including the Taliban, the civilians, Kabul administration, US and the NATO forces. Although, the foreign powers want to leave but they also want to ensure that their essential interests are preserved. Differences in interests still exist; however, a positive development is that talks are underway. However, the outcome of these talks cannot be predicted until now.

Pakistan's role in Afghan settlement is very critical because if Pakistan is not content with the process in Afghanistan, it cannot reach its fulfilment; particularly when Pakistan has certain security concerns with rivals who have sought to use Afghanistan against Pakistan's interest. The primary step for Pakistan to take in order to make the maximum contribution to bring stability in Afghanistan is to win the trust of the two main parties inside Afghanistan - Kabul and the Taliban. Taliban had been dependent on Pakistan for a long time but had never fully trusted Pakistan, particularly after the American invasion. But Afghans must realize that they cannot do without Pakistan, because many of their people sought refuge in Pakistan.

As far as Kabul is concerned, they have always seen Pakistan as a rival. In fact, they think Pakistan has been more inclined towards the opposition. Despite of the fact that the rulers in Kabul are Pashtuns and major Pakistani communities concerned about Afghanistan are also Pashtuns residing on the border of Afghanistan in KPK and Baluchistan.

It is important that Pakistan wins the trust of all the players inside Afghanistan and develops a working relationship with all external players inside Afghanistan, primarily America, China and Russia.

The Indo-Pakistan factor inside Afghanistan cannot be ignored as well. If India and Pakistan relations remain as tense as they have been, there would be a clash of interests. Hopefully, under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is extending a hand of friendship and cooperation for peace and development with all

its neighbours, these differences would be solved. There is a need to establish a working relationship with India, which would help to make progress on core issues. As far as India is concerned, they maintain that the core issue is terrorism. It is important to note that Pakistan itself is in the forefront, not only as a victim of terrorism but as a country that is taking steps to eliminate terrorism.

This will be seen in the next few weeks, when Pakistan will get off the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Although there has been a considerable delay, Pakistan will implement the National Action Plan. India will not be able to accuse Pakistan for providing safe haven to terrorists which are bringing about instability in Afghanistan, in Kashmir and in India. India will have no option but to face the reality in Kashmir, where it has simply no option but to recognize that the new generation in Kashmir is no longer scared of death to achieve freedom. These are not young boys without any education, but they have been educated abroad, have terrific careers in front of them and yet, they have been driven to the point where they are willing to pay this price to achieve freedom.

In other parts of the world, the highly educated will never face death on a battlefield. In Kashmir it has come to this point where they are sacrificing and struggling for independence. This means India has no political solution; in the words of Yashwant Sinha, the former Finance Minister and Foreign Minister of India, "India is not losing Kashmir, but India has lost Kashmir". Amarjit Singh Dulat the former Research and Analysis (RAW) Chief and Chief Adviser to the Chief Minister of Indian Occupied Kashmir, has written in his book that the south of Kashmir is totally out of control. Now, in his latest interview he has said that it is not just the south, this is also spreading to the north as a result of India's policies.

Blaming Pakistan might make India feel good, but the answer lies in addressing the political problem inside Kashmir at a moment when all Kashmiris are united for a single cause. They may be divided on other issues, but they are united for their right to self-determination. The Kashmiris of the valley, who are 98% Muslims, are united on not being a part of India. Regarding Pakistan - they might have complaints, but their hearts are with Pakistan.

So, as far as India and Pakistan are concerned, progress must be made because playing zero-sum games with each other, including Afghanistan, will continue to further destabilize Afghanistan.

If Pakistan manages to do all the things required for it: including concrete measures regarding FATF, the National Action Plan, its economy and a working relationship with India, then India and Pakistan will not play zero-sum games in Afghanistan. However, if India doesn't respond to it, this will become a huge challenge for Pakistan's diplomats to convey to the Afghan people that Pakistan wants stability in Afghanistan and India wants to minimize or eliminate Pakistan's natural influence with Afghanistan - considering our cultural, linguistic and religious links with Afghanistan, which are far stronger with Afghanistan than with India.

Pakistan has a challenge but needs to play its cards right in order to contribute to the stability of Afghanistan. Afghanistan would then be in a position to choose its allies and extend economic ties with Pakistan. Every Afghan family is thankful to Pakistan for giving refuge to them during and after the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. At one point in time, the total number of refugees in Pakistan were estimated as almost five million, which is half of the world population of refugees at that time. So, those bonds, which because of unfortunate policies weakened off in the following years, should be restored for bringing stability in Afghanistan. Afghan stability would create a positive impact on the stability in other regions of Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia.

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## Keynote Speaker 2:

### Mr. Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady

Chairman and co-founder of the New National Front of Afghanistan (NNF)



Unfortunately, the conflict in Afghanistan is very old and destructive. There is a universal desire for peace in Afghanistan. Thus, any serious talks about peace in Afghanistan raises people's expectations and excitement. The ongoing talks in Doha between the Taliban and the US delegation have made the public very hopeful as we have

made the public very hopeful as we have had many false starts in the past. Although from a professional academic stand-point, it is rather dangerous to predict events of the next week or month. Nevertheless, I am reasonably optimistic about the outcome of the current peace talks in Doha.

Let me share with you the reasons of my mild optimism. Many scholars of conflict resolution have argued that a long military stalemate between adversaries to a conflict is conducive to political settlement. Some scholars of Afghanistan believe that during the past few years, military stalemate has dominated the conflict in this country. Even though the Taliban have gained significant strength in the past few years and have captured a large territory, it is not likely that they will be able to decisively defeat the government's armed forces; even if international forces were to withdraw from Afghanistan, as long as the afghan government receives substantial financial assistance for its security forces, the Taliban will not be able to decisively defeat government forces. In fact, the Taliban have not been able to maintain their control over any city in Afghanistan that they have captured.

The reverse is also true; despite Taliban's advances in the past few years, probably it is reasonable to argue that military stalemate characterizes the fighting in Afghanistan.

However, conflict resolution experts argue that even though military stalemate is conducive to political settlement, not every military stalemate result in a negotiated settlement. According to one study, twenty-five percent of conflict with military stalemate have had negotiated solutions. So, in Aristotelian terms, military stalemate is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for negotiated settlement. Experts of conflict resolution have identified a number of facilitating factors (such as good will among adversaries, diplomatic capacity within each camp, the absence of spoilers, and, most important, a mutually hurtful status quo) that are likely to help the political resolution of conflicts that are characterized by military stalemate.

I do not want to spend more time on literature review. In my opinion, the most important factor that will help the political resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan is the significant change in the US position -favoring negotiated settlement almost at any cost. This change has made the resolution of a very difficult issue, namely, the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, one of the main demands of the Taliban, possible. Had the US government handled its willingness to make this concession a bit discreetly, I think the Taliban would have been willing to accept a much longer withdrawal schedule. Before the recent revelation of the US government pertaining to its willingness to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan even before concluding a peace settlement, the Taliban, in private conversations, had indicated that they were willing to accept a withdrawal schedule of even three years.

I believe that now the Americans are willing to accept a rather short-table for the withdrawal of their forces. Recent resolutions in the US calling for ending the war in Afghanistan before the end of 2019, and the fact that almost all Democratic presidential candidates call for the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan make the US negotiating position even weaker. Thus, I believe that the US will make, if it has not already made, the necessary concession pertaining to the length of the of the withdrawal process to satisfy the Taliban. I hope that the Taliban do not opt for an unreasonable position simply because they know that the US does not have a strong negotiating position.

The second most contentious issue is the nature of post-conflict Afghan polity. The current Afghan regime, as it was established after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, is an Islamic Republic with many liberal values and institutions. Of course, the Taliban regime of the 1990s in Afghanistan had very little in common with the current regime. Thus, there is a great fear among different segments of the population, that the Doha negotiations might negate the civil rights of most Afghans, particularly women rights, and democratic prerogatives that most Afghan politicians now enjoy. They fear that the Taliban might reject the principle of an Islamic republic and insist on the establishment of an Islamic emirate, as they have done in the past. Currently, these issues dominate discussions in the Afghan media. The Afghan government, because of its exclusion from the Doha talks, encourages people to voice these fears.



Despite the fact that Taliban's policies in the past and their political and cultural orientations lend credence to these concerns of politicians and ordinary citizens, I believe that the Taliban have changed and that their current orientations do not preclude reaching an agreement with Afghan politicians, civil society, and the government about the nature and structure of post-conflict Afghan state and the civil rights of Afghan citizens, including women rights. In the past three years, the Taliban representatives in Doha, in three Pugwash conferences, and last February in Moscow, have publicly endorsed women's rights to education, employment, and participation

in public affairs. Similarly, they have expressed support for civil rights such as enshrined in chapter two of the current Afghan constitution. They also have accepted Afghanistan as an Islamic republic and the principles of competitive politics such as elections for the President of the republic and people's representatives in parliament. Thus, I believe that the Taliban's position regarding the nature of the post-conflict regime in Afghanistan is not as different as some people think. The Taliban, however, must articulate these positions in public forums more frequently.

Furthermore, ethnicity is one of the most important factors in Afghan politics. Taliban are generally perceived as Pashtuns who are not sensitive to the interests of non-Pashtuns. However, recently Taliban have shown significant interest in gaining the confidence of the leaders of non-Pashtun Afghan communities; some of the recent peace talks between the Americans and the Taliban have specifically expressed support for the Taliban's position that the establishment of an interim government in Afghanistan must be an essential element of a peace agreement.

Thus, I believe that the chances of an agreement between the Taliban and other Afghan on the nature of post-conflict Afghan state has increased significantly.

There are two other thorny issues in peace negotiations. The Taliban insist that they will not negotiate with the Afghan Government. The Taliban justify their position in supposedly legal terms and argue that direct talks with the Afghan government would mean recognition and legitimization of government. I am not sure if this is a valid argument; nevertheless, it has made negotiation more difficult and has put the US government in an awkward position. Almost all Afghan politicians, including leaders of opposition, strongly support direct talks between the government and the Taliban. The Taliban welcome discussion with Afghan politicians but reject talks with representatives of the Afghan government.

On the other side, the Afghan Government rejects talks between Afghan politicians and the Taliban. Furthermore, in complete opposition to the Taliban's position, the government vehemently oppose the formation of any interim government as part of a peace settlement.

The government insists that the Taliban should participate in the upcoming presidential election.

However, the Taliban insist on Peace first and elections later. According to a recent opinion survey, ninety-two percent of the people prefer peace over election, which means rejection of the government's position. The Taliban do not propose a Taliban-led interim government, but an interim government that has the support of the Taliban. This is not an irresponsible proposition. I believe that the government will have to accept the formation of an interim government if there is going to be a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. This would require the immediate cancellation of the July-scheduled presidential elections. Given the Taliban's insistence on interim government, without Taliban's consent, a newly elected president would make peace negotiation with Taliban very difficult.



An emerging solution to the problem of who among Afghan's should negotiate with the Taliban proposes a joint politicians' and government officials' delegation to the peace talks with the Taliban. The Taliban do not mind talking to a delegation of prominent Afghans which includes some officials. It might be more productive if the government articulates its demands, redlines, and its position regarding the structure, values, and institution of post-conflict polity in Afghanistan through this joint Afghan delegation, instead of insisting on exclusive direct talks with the Taliban.

In the past few years, government's peace "proposals" have been rather unimpressive. Either they have called on the Taliban to join the current



government and become part of the current political system or at best, unconditional peace talks. While I believe it is unrealistic to think that the Taliban would be satisfied with simply having the right to participate in the current system. I have welcomed government's offer of unconditional peace talks, however, I think that the Taliban are too strong to seriously consider these offers.

Similarly, the Taliban have been talking about changes in the constitution, but despite demands for amending the constitution, leaving too many important issues unclear and undecided can cause problem in the future. The idea of an inter-Afghan dialogue between the Taliban, Afghan politicians, and a few Afghan official to discuss important constitutional issues is gaining national as well as international acceptance. Such a dialogue will crystalize Afghans' consensus on the principles and institutions of post- conflict Afghan state.

As mentioned earlier, scholars of conflict resolution warn that despite favorable environment to negotiate a settlement, spoilers can prevent progress towards peace. Regional rivalries are quite intense in Afghanistan, and some of these competitions are perceived as zero-sum games. The withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan in addition to the Taliban, will please Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and probably China. This should help with the de-escalation of the conflict. However, some regional rivalries will remain. Managing the rivalries of other regional powers will require great judgment and balancing act on the part of Afghan leaders. Afghan statesmen should not look at the country's relations with regional powers from a purely economic/ transactional or purely legalistic point of view. Afghanistan is a sovereign state and has the right to pursue an independent foreign policy, but in exercising its independence, it would be in the best interest of the nation to be aware of the sensitivities of some regional powers regarding some issues. Right now, the Afghan state is rather vulnerable and thus can be subjected to unreasonable demands. This vulnerability is the direct consequence of the past forty years of warfare and foreign intervention in this country.

The weakness of the Afghan state has allowed unhealthy competition among regional powers to gain influence in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the weakness of the Afghan state has allowed international terrorism to foster in this region.

With peace and reconciliation, it is highly likely that the Afghan state will gradually regain its strength which will enable it to control not only its territory, but its political process as well. Such a state of affair will diminish unfair destructive rivalries between regional powers in Afghanistan. A strong Afghan state will also be able to resist unhealthy foreign influence which will help the region to become more stable. In the short run, however, Afghan leaders will have to be keenly aware of the sensitivity of regional powers and exercise good judgment and wisdom in their relations with regional powers. Success in this regard in the short run, will prevent potential spoilers to undermine movement towards peace and help stability in Afghanistan in the long run.



The withdrawal of foreign forces should not mean the end or drastic decline of international support for the Afghan state. There is a need for fresh international understanding regarding Afghanistan, so the withdrawal of foreign forces does not create a power vacuum and a fresh scramble for influence. Even though the end of warfare should significantly reduce Afghanistan's security forces until the situation becomes stable. Furthermore, Afghanistan does not have the resources to sustain its current obligations to provide basic services to its citizens. Afghanistan will continue to need donor's support to provide basic services as such education and healthcare for its citizens until peace holds and development of natural resources become possible. Thus, at the conclusion of a peace settlement, another Bonn-2001

like international legitimacy to the interim government is needed to ledge continuous support for Afghanistan.

I believe that peace in Afghanistan is achievable. I call on all Afghans -the Taliban, the Afghan government, and Afghan political leaders, regional powers as well as relevant world powers to use their influence to bring peace to Afghanistan. Peace through negotiation is a moral imperative. I believe that a peaceful Afghanistan is also in the interest of foreign powers. No Country has gained from war in Afghanistan. The conflict in Afghanistan is ripe for resolution. I hope they do not squander this opportunity.





### Keynote Speaker 3:

#### **Dr. Mohammed Alsulami**

Chairman, International Institute for Iranian Studies (RASANAH), KSA



As Iran is the neighbour of Afghanistan, it faces threats, challenges and has its own opportunities in the Peace Process of Afghanistan. The threats which Iran faces mainly are the presence of the US forces, extremist groups, drug trafficking (coming from Afghan territory), and the presence of Afghan refugees in Iran.

Meanwhile, the opportunities are to spread influence within the Afghan territories through putting pressure on the American forces stationed there; cooperating with Afghan extremist groups and recruiting them to carry out operations against the interests of their regional and international rivals; agreement with the Afghan government to carry out projects and supply of gas to India through Afghanistan. Hence, Iran is not opposed to the peace process in Afghanistan but seeks to direct it in a way that serves its national interests.

Other important stakeholders in Afghanistan are Russia and China, and both share cordial relations with Iran. Although, they agree on achieving Iran's objectives in Afghanistan, but are resisting the creation of Hezbollah model militia in Afghanistan. These two nations will strive hard for their mutual goals to be achieved in a manner that ensures the implementation of their economic projects in the region, and at the same point wiping out the US forces and Western forces from Afghanistan particularly, and Central Asia generally.

out of Afghanistan. The partial withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan in 2014 created an environment conducive to the comeback of Taliban on the one hand and increasing Iranian influence on the other hand. Afghanistan has become a lose arena for both sides; violence and extremism by the Taliban and the expansionist schemes and wresting control by Iran. Iran has, therefore, strengthened the Taliban and provided them with weapons to weaken the US position, although this prevents the achievement of other Iranian goals. The Chief of Staff of the Afghan Army General Sharif Yiftli said in 2017 that he has evidence of Iran supplying the Taliban with weapons and military equipment. At the same time, the Iranian support for the Taliban formed a new alliance that enables Iran to carry out terrorist operations through the Taliban.

The second strategy is that it is using ideology and sectarian goals by enabling the Afghan Shiites in leading the political scene. Enabling the Afghan Shiites to lead the political process in Afghanistan is a medium-term goal of the Iranian strategy in Afghanistan. Given the nature of the political and social system in Afghanistan, this objective cannot be achieved in the short term as the presidential system does not allow minorities to lead the political scene.

Whereas, the third strategy is the return of Liwa Fatemiyoun (Afghan Shia militia) who are fighting in Syria. A human rights organization announced that Iran was sending thousands of Afghan refugees to participate in the Syrian war. Iran not only started temptation of refugees to do so, but also used pressure and threat. Many Afghan political experts have expressed concern that the Fatemiyoun Division will return to Afghanistan under the pretext of war with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They might ignite other wars in Afghanistan or make political gains under this pretext.

Fourthly, the economic development in Afghanistan is also an important factor in Iranian strategy vis-a-vis Afghanistan. There is no doubt that the economic development of Afghanistan brings benefits for Iran. But Iran considers this goal to be among the long-term goals alongside the two previous goals, while it is of utmost importance to Afghanistan. The Iranian plan for development in Afghanistan does not depend on the development of the Afghan productive sectors, it rather aims to transform Afghanistan into a base to support Iran in the transit trade to maximize the Iranian route for the transport of gas and Chinese goods in the face of other routes.

The Iranian route cannot be relied on without being accomplished through the Afghan territories. In recent years, Iran has completed the project of the Iranian port of Chabahar overlooking the Sea of Oman and turning it into a base for Indian presence on its territory to facilitate the passage of Indian trade to Afghanistan and Central Asia without passing through Pakistan (considered a traditional foe).



So, as far as the future of Iranian role in Afghanistan is concerned; Iran wants a successful peace process in Afghanistan as it wants to deal with the presence of Afghan refugees inside Iran and wants to get rid of the American presence near its borders. Another important factor is whether the American-led or the Russian-led talks will succeed in providing solutions to the Afghan crisis. The American process in which the United States is committed to the participation of the current Afghan government in the negotiations stumbles into the Taliban's rejection of dialogue with the current Afghan government. Whereas, the Russian blueprint overcomes this point and involves the opponents of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in talks with the Taliban, depending on the scenario that President Ashraf Ghani might not be reelected, especially with the Taliban succeeding in controlling a large portion of the territory of Afghanistan. Hence, Russia sees the fall of the current Afghan government as inevitable.

The second factor that contributes to determining the future of the Iranian role is the nature of the Qatari mediation in the crisis. The Taliban movement operates internationally from

its headquarters in Doha. There is no doubt that there is considerable consultation between the movement and Qatar. Some wonder whether it is possible that the Iranian-Qatari rapprochement could lead Qatar to persuade Taliban to prefer the Russian trajectory as an alternative to the American one, enabling Iran to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan. So far there is no concrete progress on both trajectories. But the crucial point is that the Russian trajectory depends on the passage of time and the Afghan presidential elections which might be postponed. The Russian envoy to Afghanistan, Damir Kabulov, has already announced that the postponement of the Afghan presidential election is not a solution to the crisis. So, the Russians see the postponement as a result of US pressure.

Therefore, the situation is at a very sensitive stage for the security and stability of Afghanistan as well as the Iranian influence and role in Afghanistan. If Iran succeeds in achieving its goals in Afghanistan, Afghanistan will become a base for Iranian influence, upsetting the balance equations in South and Central Asia. This will overshadow the Iranian incursion into the Arab world, as Afghanistan will be counted as an added force to Iran. Regardless of this; Iran has to change its tools and approaches and go beyond sectarian (Shia-Sunni Division) factor because neither Afghanistan nor the region will benefit from this approach.

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## Noteworthy Snippets

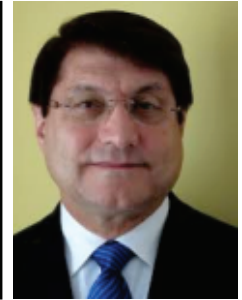


*“It is important that Pakistan wins the trust of all the players inside Afghanistan and develops a working relationship with all external players inside Afghanistan, primarily America, China and Russia.”*

***Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi (Retd)***

*“Managing the rivalries of other regional powers will require great judgment and balancing act on the part of Afghan leaders”.*

***Mr. Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady***



*Iran has to change its tools and approaches and go beyond sectarian (Shia-Sunni Division) factor because neither Afghanistan nor the region will benefit from this approach.”*

***Dr. Mohammed Alsulami***



*“The US is a rational actor, but it possesses the power to make drastic policy changes as far as Afghanistan is concerned.”*

***Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq (Retd)***



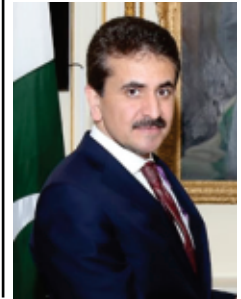


*Pakistan can contribute a lot to the peace talks between Afghan government and Taliban as it has been engaged with both for a very long time.”*

***Mr. Harris Ali Akakhail***

*“It’s a matter of immense satisfaction that Pakistan is the only country that has consistently maintained that the only solution to the conflict in Afghanistan is a negotiated settlement between the concerned parties, and no military solution would work in Afghanistan.”*

***Mr. Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri***

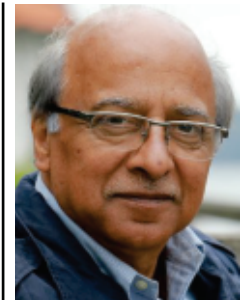


*The economic activities in FATA and Balochistan must take pace so that the people of those regions can engage into business activities.”*

***Lt General Asif Yasin Malik, HI (M) (Retd)***

*“The key to peace and development rests in the resumption of dialogue with India, because India has increasingly used Afghanistan as a springboard for whatever has been happening in Pakistan and Balochistan particularly.”*

***Mr. Imtiaz Gul***





*We need to be vigilant and must marshal our entire influence to prevail upon both sides to show flexibility and to reach an amicable and workable solution.”*

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***Mr. Juma Khan Sufi***



### **Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq (Retd)**

Former Secretary, National Security Division

The US policy in Afghanistan, from the very beginning has always been in flux because it changed its direction and objective frequently. And it changed so quickly that a very few strategic thinkers could predict what United States was intending to do. The most successful time for the US in Afghanistan was in the beginning of its intervention in 2002, when it had about

twelve-hundred Special Forces in Afghanistan. It was the golden period of the United States in Afghanistan, since then every single year, if one looks at the abrupt changes in US policy in Afghanistan, they are astonished.

The problem that arises when United States changes its policy so suddenly is that it impacts everybody; it does not only impact the people of Afghanistan but it impacts the region as well. These changes are very distinct and have huge impact on other countries because United States on the basis of its military and economic power cannot be matched by any country in the contemporary world. Moreover, in my opinion, Mexico and Canada are not the only neighbours of United States, but other international countries are also linked to United States because of the outreach and power that it has on the international stage. Therefore, when US changes its policy it affects every state in the world.

The US also faces a dilemma that Afghanistan is not an easy country to rule, control, or occupy. This unease is further compounded by the regional location of Afghanistan as every country which

comes closer to Afghanistan whether for stability, economic or social development or using it as a springboard for some other purpose, it is not only challenged by the Afghan people but the entire region as well. To comprehend the real situation in Afghanistan is, therefore, difficult as one powerful country has occupied it whereas other regional countries also share stakes in this conflicted territory.

There are two basic problems with the United States policy on Afghanistan: firstly, the Policy makers in United States never try to understand Afghanistan and make decisions in isolation without considering the public opinion of Afghans. In my opinion, certain countries in the World have left too much impact on history, like Afghanistan, but United States has no regard for the history and traditions of Afghanistan. Secondly, the US has no static policy on Afghanistan. The policy changes as soon as the President changes or when the Pentagon has a difference of opinion with the White House.

I concluded on the basis of my calculation that the United States changes its policy, either partially or fully in Afghanistan, practically every nine months; therefore, it is very unpredictable. Back in August 2017, the United States issued a policy document on South Asia which gave a certain guideline to act in Afghanistan. The basic idea in that policy was to put pressure on the resistance of the Afghan Taliban in order to weaken them, divide them, and then bring them to the table in a relatively weaker position. But in reality, this strengthened the Taliban even more and gave them further recognition and now they are being accepted by the world as an alternate government in Afghanistan. It made the Islamic Emirate a more United front. So, this situation is exactly opposite to the policy envisaged in August 2017. But a country like the United States can afford to do that, as they can make one policy and change it during implementation, without the need to give an explanation and take any other country in confidence. Even in August 2017, when the United States announced this policy no government except the Indian and the Afghan government welcomed it. But the United States went ahead with that policy and soon changes were observed, and the implementation of that policy was exactly the opposite. The results were also contrary to what the policy envisaged.

Currently, the US policy is focused on the peace process; to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table and to keep them in that process, the United States has made a lot of compromises.

These concessions have actually betrayed the National Unity Government which in start was prompted and supported by the United States. So, bringing the Taliban on the table conveniently ignored the unity government. Although the United States maintains that in the second stage the National Unity Government will become a party to talks. But practically, due to these acts of the United States, the National Unity Government has been delegitimized as presently it is not a part of the peace process, which would decide the future of Afghanistan.



Analyzing the Doha talks led by the US, we get two narratives. Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad and the State Department's Spokesperson always give the same narrative: we have talked, and we will have another session of talks with the Afghan Taliban, we are moving towards the peace process, the ceasefire, and finally moving towards including the National Unity Government in the second phase of talks. This narrative is presented after every session in briefings and in written statement. On the other hand, there is the Afghan Taliban narrative; Mr. Zabiullah Mujahid (Spokesman of Taliban) sent a press release in which he stated that the talks are focused on withdrawal of occupation forces only not mentioning the ceasefire. In a situation like this, one is surprised why the United States is in such a haste? After spending two decades there and resisting talks with the Taliban, President Trumps' sudden decision of withdrawal and to leave Afghanistan is surprising. In my opinion, he didn't consult anybody, neither his international partners

nor his national security advisors who were a part of the policy formulation of August 17. This decision is being resisted by the US establishment. So, two parties are involved in the present U.S' Afghan policy, one is the deep state (establishment) and other is the White House - and the both parties are not in agreement.

It is astonishing to notice that at the time of the US administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan, construction activity is taking place on one of the largest US bases in Afghanistan. That means the government and Pentagon have different policies. They are gearing towards a longer stay in Afghanistan. In my opinion, the US is going to stay in Afghanistan in one way or the other.

Although, the announcements recently made by the States Department and President Trump's election campaign focused on withdrawal from Afghanistan, yet this seems not the case. Being a super power, the United States lacks responsibility towards the international system; they can do anything and get away with it. The policy of the US can change at any time and we must be ready for such circumstances. The US is a rational actor, but it possesses the power to make drastic policy changes as far as Afghanistan is concerned.

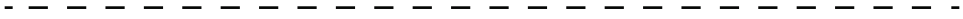
People who understand these dynamics are of view that Taliban could also agree with the United States' temporary stay in Afghanistan to bring peace. Pakistan also holds the view that sudden withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan will be very irresponsible. The Taliban would probably demand the withdrawal of forces, but will allow small numbers to stay until the situation stabilizes.

The decision impacts regional countries and the international politics as well. Considering the timeline of Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad's statements, the final act of the United States will wind up in the second half of 2020. This is very close to the 2020 American elections. This might maximize the chances of Trump's re-election. Trump thinks that staying in Afghanistan is a waste of resources. However, the US establishment thinks differently. The cost United States is paying in Afghanistan in blood and treasure is much less today as compared to the past.

The time, resources, and manpower that the US has invested in Afghanistan is very high, this makes the US establishment less

likely to leave everything behind. Historically, the US has always maintained that their stay in a certain country is temporary. But one observes that the United States' stay in Japan and South Korea is not temporary, although they claimed it to be.

The regional countries and the international actors must be ready for a surprising situation even if the US stays or leaves or even if there is a peace deal with Taliban or no peace deal at all. Personally, I hope that there is a peace deal in Afghanistan as the Afghans deserve peace.





### **Mr. Harris Ali Akakhail**

Journalist and Expert on Afghanistan

The other respected speakers who have spoken before me gave a theoretical and philosophical point of view on Afghanistan. I, being a journalist, would be empirical in my presentation.

The topic which I get to speak on today is, “Peace in Afghanistan and the Political Responsibility of the Afghan

Government”. The concept of nationalist movement has become very vague in the nation-state system. Many term the nationalist movements as insurgent or rebellious movements.

Any government which comes across the situation of insurgency should look into three fundamental factors:

1. Economics
2. Delivery of services by the government to the public
3. To have a superior ideology to undermine the ideology of the insurgents.

My assessment of the strategic and social policies of successive governments in Afghanistan is based on these three fundamental factors. First, let us analyze these factors in the Afghan Interim Administration & the Afghan Transitional Administration (2001-2004); the Interim government with the tenure of six months and The Afghan Transitional Administration with two and half years. In these three years Afghanistan observed peace, people started to move back to the economic zones like Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat,



Oppressive rule of the Taliban ended and economy of the country experienced a twenty percent growth. Secondly, government services started to improve; the business industry, the media industry, the airline industry and the telecom industry boomed as well.

In that period, two opportunities could have been grabbed to initiate a reconciliation process in Afghanistan; and if those two opportunities were availed, we would have never been here where we are today. The first opportunity emerged when Mullah Mohammed Omar (Former Afghan Mujahideen Commander) approached Mr. Hamid Karzai (Former President of Afghanistan) and second one was when Jalaluddin Haqqani (Afghan Militant Leader) approached Mr. Hamid Karzai. But all these opportunities were futile as no concrete solution was discussed for establishing peace in Afghanistan.

In the decade of Mr. Hamid Karzai's rule, Afghanistan was ranked between 190 to 180 out of 200 countries in the corruption index. This was an evidence of the corrupt rule in Afghanistan. Justice system was also inefficient and collapsed, as justice was being delayed, and the whole governance system was distorted.

Mr. Hamid Karzai did not target a single warlord during his whole tenure. Although, he wanted to chase Pacha Khan Zadran (Militia leader in Afghanistan) in the lower Paktia region, but he did not have the resources to do so. He also approached the American authorities to help him take down Pacha Khan Zadran, but Americans refused.

The first summer offense by Taliban occurred in 2006. Mullah Dadullah (Taliban Military Commander), Obaidullah Akhund (Taliban Military Commander), Mullah Mansoor Dadullah (Senior Military Commander of the Taliban), and Akhtar Mohammad Osmani (Senior Leader of the Afghan Taliban) were the Taliban commanders responsible for the first summer offense.

The first actual effort to start peace process in Afghanistan was made by the Norwegians in 2008 and the second one came in 2010 in Germany when Americans and Taliban sat at a table to shed light on the reconciliation process. After that, Mr. Hamid Karzai established a proper institution - the Afghan High Peace Council - in 2010. So, things were being delivered on the economic and service front, but engagement with the Taliban on ideological grounds was still missing.

Mr. Hamid Karzai even started to doubt the American policies. According to open sources, he was in doubt of the American mission in Afghanistan saying that the Americans are not serious about ending the war in Afghanistan.

In 2014, Mr. Ashraf Ghani became the President of Afghanistan. When he took over, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission ended and he picked up another mission called Regiment Support to train, to advise and assist the Afghan forces.

Economic analysis of the year 2015 suggests that the Afghan economy was going down swiftly. The overall economic and social situation wasn't in the favor of prosperity of Afghans.

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To tackle the downfall in Afghanistan's social and economic system, Mr. Ghani had three options in front of him:

- Firstly, fix the economy and make himself a formidable national leader in Afghan history,
- Secondly, to eliminate all the powerful people and highlight the role of central authority in Kabul.
- Thirdly, to connect Afghanistan to the regional and international world.



Mr. Ghani started connecting Afghanistan to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and China. In 2014, Pakistan and Afghanistan had a bilateral trade of 2.7 billion dollars which has now reduced to 900 million dollars. So, presently, Afghanistan is now more engaged with other regional states. The Lapis Lazuli project is also in execution which is an international trade route aimed at establishing direct access from Afghanistan to Central Asia and Europe, and the Chabahar Port, Iran. These are the fundamentals on which a country wants to establish its economy. Moreover, the revenue generation in Afghanistan has also increased as, presently, Afghanistan is collecting 2.6 to 2.7 billion dollars of revenue per year.

Now, an important question is: is Talibanization a Pashtun phenomenon? Yes, Talibanization was a Pashtun phenomenon but presently this has changed. In my professional career, I have travelled across half of Afghanistan; I have traveled all over the tribal districts of Pakistan and have interacted with the Taliban. During President Ghani's tenure the Taliban were active in the south of Afghanistan. When North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) withdrew, the Taliban started to move towards the north of Afghanistan. Presently, the Taliban are in Kunduz, Badakhshan, Samangan, Faryab and Jowzjan. These provinces are dominated by Pashtuns, except for Kunduz which is dominated by Uzbeks and Hazaras. But, most importantly, now, the Taliban Guidance Council has Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara representation as well. So, in present scenario the Hazaras, and the Shia community in Afghanistan support Taliban as well. In the operations conducted in Jaghori District and in Ghazni province, the Hazara community was standing along the Taliban and supporting them. Talibanization is no more a Pashtun ideology rather it has gained a more nationalistic tone to overtake Afghanistan.

The Taliban have denied to talk to the Afghan government accusing it of being a puppet of American authorities. They are concerned with talking to American authorities directly, but Americans favored the Afghan government and said that Afghan government is operating under resolutions of the Charter of the United Nations (UN), the whole international community accepts the authority of the Afghan government so that Taliban should start reconciliation with Afghan government. This vicious cycle is hugely impacting peace talks in Afghanistan.

In August 2017, President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, in a statement said that they are no more into the nation building in Afghanistan that means America is planning to come hard on Taliban. For the next one year they pushed the air campaign to the maximum limit. There were Special Forces operations and every night 20 to 25 special operations were being conducted. The civilian life was getting disturbed, the causality rate was rising.

Recently, the United States' special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in Doha to facilitate the Afghan peace process. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of South and Central Asia Affairs Alice Wells was accompanying him too. The reconciliation talks were surrounded on; firstly, the exit of foreign forces from Afghanistan; secondly, the Afghan soil should not be used by the US allies and the US itself; thirdly, the ceasefire with the Afghan government and the US forces will take place as well; fourthly, Taliban should start negotiating with Kabul; and lastly, the prison exchange and acceptance of the Qatar office.

The Taliban specifically marked two things as vital for Afghan peace: first, the exit of the foreign forces from Afghanistan and second the intra-Afghan dialogue for ceasefire and negotiating with Kabul.

Ashraf Ghani wants to take the ownership of the peace talks in Afghanistan. He has formulated a peace board consisting of 12 members but this board is not representing the whole Afghanistan.

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## Future Course of action for Afghanistan:



Ashraf Ghani should let things go; he has done his part and now he should allow the interim government to represent the whole country. The Taliban are going to take huge turn on a lot of things for example the Taliban forces will be amalgamated into the Afghan forces with the passage of time. The Jirga should happen to let the people of Afghanistan decide for themselves.

Regional powers are concerned about the establishment of peace in Afghanistan. Iran is concerned about Afghanistan, because of the Shia community and Afghan government is also asking the Iran government to force Taliban for peace talks. Russian government is concerned about northern Afghanistan because there has been a presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in Darzab district, Jowzjan province and a little presence in Faryab province as well. China is concerned about The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in Badakhshan province, and its economic gains as well.

In the end, I would like to emphasize that Pakistan can contribute a lot to the peace talks between Afghan government and Taliban as it has been engaged with both for a very long time.

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### **Mr Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri**

Director General (Afghanistan, Turkey & Iran) at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan



The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is unique. The uniqueness of this relationship originates firstly from history that both these countries share; secondly, the fact that the both countries share over 2600 km long border; and thirdly, the fact that Pakistan has been affected by the conflict in Afghanistan since four decades. Moreover, this relationship is also unique

because of the ethnic linkages between the two countries and presence of around three million Afghan brothers and sisters in Pakistan.

Pakistan is not only an important stakeholder in Afghanistan, but also the major beneficiary of peace inside Afghanistan, because Pakistan's security is inextricably linked to the security of Afghanistan, and it is also the largest trading partner of Afghanistan. Additionally, the respectable dignified repatriation of Afghan brothers and sisters would be possible only if there is sustainable peace in Afghanistan. These factors make Pakistan an important stakeholder and beneficiary in Afghan peace process.

Despite the challenges in Pak-Afghan relationship, Pakistan has always tried to strengthen its relations with Afghanistan as every successive government in Pakistan has endeavoured to strengthen relations with this neighbouring country. The major breakthrough in this regard, a landmark understanding, came in the form of Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). It is a comprehensive mechanism and it requires flexibility from both sides, and that is how this landmark understanding could be achieved.

This framework works under five working groups ranging from intelligence, military, political and diplomatic cooperation to trade, as well as the matter of refugees. Pakistan has been putting a lot of efforts to further strengthen this mechanism. Recently, the pace of this process has seen to be slowed down, but Pakistan is very hopeful to revive this process to an appropriate level.

Pakistan's view on the resolution of Afghan conflict is very clear. It's a matter of immense satisfaction that Pakistan is the only country that has consistently maintained that the only solution to the conflict in Afghanistan is a negotiated settlement between the concerned parties, and no military solution would work in Afghanistan. So, what Pakistan has believed for so long has become the guiding principle of the international community's engagement with Afghanistan. Similarly, Pakistan interprets and favours Afghan Peace Process as Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, and thought it sounded like a cliché in past, but now it has become a policy of all stakeholders who are looking for peace in Afghanistan today.

Any country or an individual who wants to work with Afghanistan needs to understand the ground realities and the history of the country. For example, it was a ground reality that the Taliban are a political force, despite of no country recognizing them, but today it could be seen that their territory is finally being accepted.

Similarly, understanding the history of Afghanistan is also very important. The lesson from history is that no outside power has ever been able to fully control Afghan territory for a long period of time; neither the Mughal (Babur) nor the British nor the Soviets. Pakistan has not only understood the ground realities in Afghanistan but also has understood the Afghan history, and it immensely respects the Afghan nation.

The peace process in Afghanistan gained momentum with the recent US push followed by talks in Abu Dhabi and Doha. These talks have brought mixed success. As I said earlier; Pakistan has always believed that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is the only solution to the conflict. To make it clear Afghan-led peace process does not mean or include intra-Afghan dialogue.

The four issues including: withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan; the cease fire; the intra-Afghan dialogue and guarantee that Afghan soil would not be used by the US allies or any other non-state actor are under debate. And significant progress has been made on at least two of those four areas.



Pakistan will continue to support and play its role in the Afghan Peace Process. Pakistan has an important role in not only finding resolution of the conflict but also ensuring sustainable peace in Afghanistan. It is in Pakistan's own national interest because its security is interlinked with the Afghan security.

Pakistan is the largest trading partner of Afghanistan as sixty percent of Afghanistan's exports come to Pakistan including ninety percent of its fresh fruits and vegetables, providing income to the Afghan people.

Pakistan has also been playing an important role in the capacity building of Afghan people. We have so far enrolled over fifty thousand students in our universities, colleges and training institutes and have provided six thousand fully funded scholarships to Afghan brothers and sisters. It is Pakistan's belief that this human resource will be critical in Afghan development and reconstruction.



There are some misnomers about Pakistan. One misnomer is that Pakistan controls Taliban; to put it straight, Pakistan is not involved in any such action. Pakistan, like other countries, has contacts with the Taliban. The role that Pakistan has been playing is of good faith and a shared responsibility. Likewise, Pakistan expects every country to play its role in establishing Afghan peace. As evident, US is also shifting its Afghan-strategy which is a vindication that there is no military solution to Afghan conflict.



The second misnomer about Pakistan is that it is looking for a strategic depth in Afghanistan. This perception too, is wrong as it is Pakistan who is building fence along the Pak-Afghan border because in order to build trust it is important to have only legal and legitimate movement across the border. The third misnomer is that Pakistan wants to see Taliban government in Afghanistan; contrary to that, Pakistan actually wants a government in Afghanistan that is elected by the people of Afghanistan through an electoral process which is transparent and credible.



**Lt. General Asif Yasin Malik, HI (M)**

(Retd) Former Secretary, National Security Division

First, I will elaborate on the difference between Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) also known as Daesh, and the Taliban. Daesh believes in the universality of caliphate or a global Caliphate of Islam. Tehrik-i-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA) on the other hand is a nationalist force that believes in fighting for the removal of occupation forces from Afghanistan. Taliban in

Afghanistan are the successors of the Mujahidin who fought the Russian invaders in Afghanistan and, with the help of West, were able to evict the Russians ultimately causing the demise of the erstwhile Soviet Union.

In Syria and Iraq, Daesh had its foot in grounds then its slow transition into Afghanistan was seen for two reasons:

Afghanistan was a strife-torn country.

The geopolitics prevailing in Afghanistan was favourable to such activity.

A lot of terrorist activities are ongoing in Afghanistan. Previously, the Afghan government's hold was limited to Kabul and a few more cities of Afghanistan so there were a lot of areas where terrorists could hide and promote terrorism. Daesh has, only, limited territorial control for their existence in conflicted lands like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Otherwise, they would have been carrying out terrorist activities all over Afghanistan, mostly in far-flung areas.

It is important to differentiate between the Taliban and Daesh in Afghanistan, Taliban in Afghanistan believe in territorial control, but most of the land in Afghanistan is not in the control of Taliban which is contrary to the image portrayed by the Western media. Some provinces are under the control of Taliban with their reasonable influence.

Economically speaking, Daesh is ahead of Afghan Taliban. Taliban are relying on their domestic resources (Afghanistan) for more of their activities, whereas, most of the financial support for Daesh is coming from sources other than Afghanistan. Daesh started its operations from eastern side of Afghanistan and then started moving towards the other parts of Afghanistan, wherever they found a vacuum. As far as Pakistan is concerned, the most alarming thing that happened was, apart from Nuristan Province and other provinces, when some of the terrorist elements were reported to be in the area of Tora Bora. The case of Osama bin Laden (founder of Al-Qaeda) and the presence of the Al-Qaeda network was an alarming thing for Pakistan as well. But after 2017, no corroborating evidence of terrorist presence was found.

Daesh targeted the youth of Afghanistan. There are a lot of jobless Afghans dishearten from the socio-political system of Afghanistan, they can be targeted easily and Daesh has excelled in targeting them. Most of the Daesh leadership consists of non-Afghans, whereas, most of the foot soldiers are Afghans. They also tried to layer in some Taliban, a very nominal number of Taliban splintered and joined Daesh. They also launched a scientific propaganda against Taliban. But, soon, Daesh understood that it is not possible to make a sizable dent into the Taliban.

According to some estimates, 3000 to 4000 fighters are operating under Daesh's control. But a stage has come where their influence is limited, they are now weak and do not pose any imminent threat to Afghanistan or Pakistan in any classical manner.

Presence of Daesh in Syria and Iraq influences the political and social system of Afghanistan. When Daesh poses more threat in Syria and Iraq, the more Afghanistan becomes vulnerable to terrorist activities. And instability in Afghanistan means instability in the whole region. Peace in Afghanistan is important for regional as well as for international harmony. If Afghanistan is not stable and secure, then it is an ideal place for Daesh which an eminent threat to all.



Daesh is a threat to Pakistan as well. Allegedly, some elements of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had crossed over to Afghanistan and are known to be working with Daesh. Pakistan needs to establish mechanisms to protect the vulnerable youth on the Pak-Afghan border from terrorist elements. Balochistan is also a weak point of Pakistan as foreign forces are operating in that province to weaken Pakistan's hold on it. The weak security situation in Balochistan is also a treat for Daesh. Pakistan has to ensure that this vacuum is not provided to any non-state actor and hence border fencing along the Afghanistan border is a good initiative.

The merger of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KPK) was a fine step to tackle the security situations in Pakistan; this must be completed effectively and a socio-economic package for FATA must be released for the socio-economic development of that area. The economic activities in FATA and Balochistan must take pace so that the people of those regions can engage into business activities. In the end, I would like to say that who has his own bread-and-butter is least likely to fall prey, so it is important that people of FATA and Balochistan are economically uplifted.



### **Mr. Imtiaz Gul**

Executive Director of Center for Research and Security Studies, Islamabad

The role of India in Afghanistan, particularly post 9/11, has been totally geo-political in nature. It focuses more on regaining the space and hold that India had once lost since the Mujahidin factional war and Taliban era. However, India entrenched itself gradually once the Hamid Karzai's government took place in Kabul in 2002. India's former Ambassador to Afghanistan Vivek Katju

was a primary driver of India's Afghanistan policies. He stayed in Afghanistan for four years. In December 1999, I met him at Kandahar when he came to negotiate the release of the Indian airline flight C 814. He said to me, "Remember we will absorb what you have done to us, but Pakistan will not be able to absorb what we could do to Pakistan." Over the years things have evolved. Vivek Katju and the ambassadors following him, invested heavily in key government positions in Kabul, thereby creating considerable influence inside governance echelons, the number of Indian advisors present in key Ministries in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif were noticeable. There was a lot of unusual coordination among the Indian government and the Karzai Administration, followed by President Ashraf Ghani's administration as well.

China's role in Afghanistan is more tilted towards geo-economics. The way China exercised and pursued its policies across the world is primarily through extending its influence through economics and trade. But in 2013, China jumped into the fray; gradually taking over a proactive role in Afghanistan by appointing the first special envoy to Afghanistan. China, the Asian giant, has started warming up to the potential role of a big power in the region. In 2013, China realized



that if it wants to expand its commercial connectivity then it has to try to smoothen things in Afghanistan. From 2016-2018, China has hosted the reconciliation meetings twice; number of bilateral as well as trilateral dialogues on counter terrorism and economic cooperation have taken place. These dialogues have taken place both at official and private level. China wanted and still wants an end to the conflict, that's why it took Pakistan and Afghanistan into confidence. Thereby opening the way for number of other dialogues to take place in the future. To reap the benefits the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan shall have to normalize first.

Comparing the role of India and China in Afghanistan, India has pursued a policy which has pushed Afghanistan's ruling elites into security-centric responses to various problems including Pakistan as well as Taliban. So, they have refused to move away from the security-centric approach and Pakistan centric approach. We have been conducting Pakistan-Afghanistan dialogues for the past four years. Pakistan has encountered many problems just because of the refusal of some Afghan factions; they need to look at Pakistan from their own prism instead of the Indian prism, because Indian prism has vitiated the atmosphere.

The key to rapprochement between Pakistan and Afghanistan lies in New Delhi. The key to peace and development rests in the

resumption of dialogue with India, because India has increasingly used Afghanistan as a springboard for whatever has been happening in Pakistan and Balochistan particularly.

Pakistan's former ambassador to Afghanistan Tariq Aziz-Ud-Din once stated that when he was in the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) captivity in 2008, Baitullah Mehsud (Militant Leader in Pakistan) confessed to him that India was offering him substantial support, but they rejected those offers against Pakistan. On the contrary I think he did get involved with India against Pakistan to some extent. Several manifestations could be seen; the way insurgency mounted in Pakistan, the TTP went haywire from the General Headquarters Rawalpindi (GHQ) to schools and to markets. There was no method but simply sheer terrorism that was piling misery on Pakistan.

The question of who could have been behind the terrorist attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan has not been articulately addressed by our government officials. Nor we have ever confronted the Americans or any other diplomat in asking that who is involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan. Whom should we blame? Kulbhushan Jadhav case made many things clearer.

It is clear that Afghanistan is headed for an interim government. Recently, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in an interview, distributed by the Taliban sources, said that Taliban have great expectations after 16 days of talks with Zalmay Khalilzad (US diplomat and the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation at the Department of State) because the recently concluded talks have laid the ground for future talks and dissolution of the war. He said that Taliban will gain their sovereignty, the foreign troops will leave the nation (Afghanistan) and Afghans will live like brothers. He added that those who will reconcile with Taliban will be considered as brothers. All countrymen will be respected, and nobody should leave the country. He urged his mujahidin brothers to respect all national leaders, so reconciliation and negotiations take place in consultation with a Kabul government.

If the reconciliation process takes place as mentioned by Mr. Baradar, India would have been relegated to a secondary position. If there is an interim government in Afghanistan in the next 2-3 months led or shared by Taliban themselves, that means China would possibly be leading this regional consensus that has emerged on the Taliban

as the bulwark against the Daesh.

In the end, I would like to say that the American government is in a rush, desperate to leave Afghanistan, and we are hoping that the American desperation doesn't create more problems for Afghanistan as well as for Pakistan.

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### **Mr. Juma Khan Sufi**

Author and Senior Expert, Afghanistan

The Fifth round of Talks between US team and Taliban team ended without any peace deal. And as Khalilzad so many times reiterated that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.' This is crux of the matter.

These talks should be viewed with cautious optimism and concern. Until now no common ground has been found by the interlocutors. There still exist two divergent views, though both sides exude optimism and agree to continue negotiations. This is encouraging.

Americans would like that all four interconnected issues (1) denial of Afghan soil to outside terrorists (2) timetable of troops withdrawal (3) ceasefire and (4) direct talks with the Kabul government should be agreed upon. On the other hand, Taliban insist upon reaching an agreement on external aspect of the issue, i.e., total withdrawal of US troops in the shortest possible time and guaranteeing that the Afghan soil would not be used by any outside terrorist group, including al-Qaeda, Daesh and others. Taliban had all along made commitments that in future they would never allow Afghan territory to be used as a launching pad against any power, including USA, by any outside group. Khalilzad has tweeted that they have agreed on some draft about these issues.

But Americans cannot agree to fix the timetable of their pullout from Afghanistan until and unless there is an agreement on all the four issues; this is the trump card they should not easily throw.

The Taliban refuse to sit on table with Afghan Government as they consider it illegal and a puppet. They would like to talk to all other Afghans as they did in the recent Moscow meeting in which they shared table with former President Hamid Karzai and also talked to him and his team.

To my mind Taliban would agree to talk to all Afghan groups and personalities, including Ghani government being a part of them, but not as a government. The proposed meeting of the consultative Loya Jirga as announced by President Ashraf Ghani to be held on 29th April should decide this matter and the government should form a negotiating team not necessarily comprised of officials. This would meet the demand of the Taliban. There is possibility that all the groups and personalities who participated in the recent Moscow meeting would fly to Doha in April to participate in a meeting with Taliban. This means that Taliban do not shun to meet Afghans outside government.

It is in the interest of all internal and external stakeholders, and the people of Afghanistan that Unity Government maintains rather augment its solidarity and avoids any disintegration as disintegration would spell disaster. This is the responsibility of US and international community that all components of the Unity Government which are already factions-ridden should remain intact. In this regard, the holding of July polls need to be postponed as election campaign and election results will further divide society and the factions within the Government.

Time is on the side of the Taliban. Therefore, they are adopting delaying tactics and pushing for more vigorous attacks on Government positions. They have already announced their Spring offensive. In this way, they will try that Kabul government disintegrates and no party is left to negotiate with. But this situation would prolong the civil war and encourage another influx of desperate refugees towards Pakistan. The sooner the deal is reached the better it is for peace. The accentuation of retaliatory aerial strikes on Taliban positions also entails collateral damage to population.

Ceasefire is essential for any intra-Afghan negotiations to take place. Any talks with other Afghans should precede a comprehensive ceasefire. Taliban would resist starting intra-Afghan talks without declaring a ceasefire. The easiest solution is to form an interim

government which should merge the civil and military fractions of both sides. Taliban are not ready to accept the present form of power structure and parliament. On this score concessions can be made.

Right lessons should be drawn from the flawed Geneva Accords signed by Afghanistan, Pakistan and guaranteed by US and former USSR in 1988. The two superpowers were only interested in the withdrawal of Soviet forces and all other instruments of non-interference and refugees return were just an eyewash. They continued using their proxies to fight it on the battlefield. The core issue of power structure at Kabul was not decided upon and Geneva created conditions for a prolonged civil war and finally the emergence of Taliban. That sort of situation would also mean defeat of US-led NATO and international community, including Pakistan.

As Pakistan is playing its due role in facilitating the negotiations, it is also duty of Pakistan to avoid another spat of civil war which would spell disaster to its own stability and peace. We need to be vigilant and must marshal our entire influence to prevail upon both sides to show flexibility and reach amicable and workable solution. Otherwise we cannot afford another prolonged civil war of attrition and destruction. There are forces within both sides which would like to fight on at the battlefield. There is news that some forces in the north and central part of Afghanistan have already started preparations for worst-case scenario.

If broad agreement is reached between US and Taliban, other issues of interim setup, new constitution, form of government, women rights of education and employment, youth problems, the welfare system devised with the help of international community to look after the hundreds thousands orphans and widows, preservation of most gains of US presence in the field of education, health and social sectors can be thrashed out in the intra-Afghan dialogue. However, the details of implementing the agreement would be another difficult task.

One cannot predict the mechanism that would be acceptable to both sides. Taliban abhor elections and consider it a western and an un-Islamic phenomenon. They know that in peacetime they would lose whatever type of elections were envisaged in the agreement. However, with a lot of persuasion they can be coaxed to join an interim government

with other Afghans. Non-Pakhtun components of the Kabul government and outside, would stress upon decentralisation of power and power sharing at all levels.



Taliban would like the revival of Islamic Emirate in the new constitution as they would never accept the present constitution, which they reject as superimposed by the Americans. On the other side, the revival of Emirate is unacceptable to Afghans and the international community. The Taliban leadership knows it, but they will remain under the pressure of their diehard fighters on the ground.

Keeping the Afghan reality in view, whatever agreement is reached, some sort of factionalism on the part of beneficiaries of war might not be ruled out; they may not agree to any settlement. Preparation should be made to stem such recalcitrant elements at the outset. This devolves on Americans to keep their house in Afghanistan in order; Pakistan can only facilitate. If the post-Najibullah situation is kept in mind and with it the role of Mujahideen thereafter, Afghans are not easily amenable to persuasions and they will act according to their whims. Hence, vigilance is needed at every step.

Former President Hamid Karzai has asked the Government to release some Taliban prisoners as a goodwill gesture. I think this would help create an environment for successful negotiations at Doha. Everything should not be left to the outsiders and Afghans themselves

should also take initiatives in order to make the peace process Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

At the end I would emphasise that any document of peace prepared on the successful conclusion of negotiations should be endorsed by all regional and big powers as well as the Afghan stakeholders. Barring Kashmir which is internationally and bilaterally recognised dispute, the signatories should reiterate non-interference in internal affairs of other countries; non-interference presupposes recognition of each other territorial integrity and national sovereignty under the existing borders. This is of paramount importance to Pakistan.

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## Analysis & Recommendations



### Analysis:

The ensuing analysis of speeches highlights the need for bringing reconciliation in Afghanistan for regional stability, and the role and contribution of Pakistan in establishing peace in the region. After seventeen years, as the US occupation is nearing its end, various internal and external factors generate complications and unanswered questions. Many queries arise from the current situation in Afghanistan; would the withdrawal of the US troops be a time-based withdrawal or a condition-based withdrawal? What kind of constitution will there be? How will the Taliban perceive the elections in Afghanistan? How would the India-Pakistan and US-Iran rivalry impact the settlement in Afghanistan?

Pakistan has always maintained that the peace process must be Afghan-led and Afghan-driven. The primary step for Pakistan to take in order to make the maximum contribution to bring stability in Afghanistan is to win the trust of the two main parties inside Afghanistan - Kabul and the Taliban. Kabul has always seen Pakistan as a rival; in fact, they think Pakistan has been more inclined towards the opposition, despite the fact that the rulers in Kabul are Pashtuns and major Pakistani communities concerned about Afghanistan are also Pashtuns residing on the border of Afghanistan in KPK and Baluchistan.

It is important that Pakistan wins the trust of all the players inside Afghanistan and develops a working relationship with all external players inside Afghanistan as well, primarily America, China and Russia. The Indo-Pakistan factor inside Afghanistan cannot be overlooked when considering the peace process. If India and Pakistan relations remain as tense as they have been, there would be a clash of interests. Hence, by extending a hand of cooperation for peace and development with all its neighbours and by establishing a working relationship with India, progress on the core issues can be achieved.

Pakistan has a challenge but needs to play its cards right in order to contribute to the stability of Afghanistan. Pakistan should take further steps to strengthen its bonds with Afghanistan by extending

economic ties with Afghanistan and establishing people-to-people relations that have deteriorated over time because of unfortunate policies. Hence efforts need to be made to restore the relations for bringing stability in Afghanistan as Afghan stability would create a positive impact on the stability in other regions of Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia as well.

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The following recommendations for policy practitioners and concerned quarters are proposed:

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— **Ensuring that the Peace Process is Afghan-led and Afghan-driven**

Contrary to a prevalent contradiction that Pakistan wants to see Taliban government in Afghanistan, Pakistan has always been vocal about the peace process being Afghan-led and Afghan-driven. Pakistan has always maintained that dialogue is the key to peace in Afghanistan and there can never be a military solution. The international community should also be pressurized to advocate for the solution in Afghanistan to be according to the desire of Afghans and the government of Afghanistan to be elected through an electoral process which is transparent and credible.

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— **Continuation of International Support for Afghanistan**

The withdrawal of foreign forces should not bring an end to the international support for the Afghan state. There is a need for fresh international understanding regarding Afghanistan, so the withdrawal of foreign forces does not create a power vacuum and a fresh scramble for influence. Afghanistan will continue to need donor's support to provide basic services as such education and healthcare for its citizens until peace holds and development of natural resources become possible.

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— **Addressing Misnomers Regarding Pakistan's Attitude towards Afghanistan**

A key misnomer regarding Pakistan is that it controls Taliban; Pakistan however is not involved in any such action. The role that Pakistan has been playing is of good faith and a shared responsibility. Likewise, Pakistan should persuade every country to play its role in establishing Afghan peace. There is also a perception that Pakistan is that it is looking for a strategic depth in Afghanistan. This perception,



too, is wrong as Pakistan is building fence along the Pak-Afghan border because in order to build trust it is important to have only legal and legitimate movement across the border. Sincere efforts, hence, are required to clear misconceptions regarding these notions and to strengthen people-to-people relations between the both countries.

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— **Facilitating the Afghan Peace Process while Maintaining Internal Stability**

As Pakistan is playing its due role in facilitating the negotiations, it is also duty of Pakistan to avoid another spat of civil war which would spell disaster to its own stability and peace. Pakistan must remain vigilant and must marshal its influence to prevail upon both sides to show flexibility and reach amicable and workable solution. There are forces within both sides which would like to fight on at the battlefield and hence, Pakistan should maintain efforts to encourage the peace process among the relevant stakeholders in Afghanistan.

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— **Endorsing the Prospective Peace Document**

Any document of peace prepared on the successful conclusion of negotiations should be endorsed by all regional and big powers as well as the Afghan stakeholders. Barring Kashmir which is internationally and bilaterally recognised dispute, the signatories should reiterate non-interference in internal affairs of other countries; non-interference presupposes recognition of each other territorial integrity and national sovereignty under the existing borders.

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# Photo Gallery





