



International Online Conference Report

“Efforts of Pakistan & Uzbekistan towards the Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan: Prospects for Mutually Beneficial Cooperation”



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Opening Remarks:

Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI (M) (Retd), President, CGSS



A very warm welcome to all the participants, especially our friends from ISRS with whom we have long-standing understanding and also an MOU signed with them. We also welcome His Excellency the Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan, Mr. Zahid Nasrullah Khan. As all of you know, the Afghan conflict has proved to be one of the longest in modern history. The country has been ravished and nearly destroyed. The instability in Afghanistan continues to radiate effects not only in the region but indirectly globally as well.

Afghanistan, Central Asia and what is now Pakistan have been inextricably linked historically for nearly 3000 years, which is why they are interdependent. Any occurrence in the region has an effect on all concerned, both positive and negative, especially in countries with common borders. Uzbekistan and Pakistan have a common border with Afghanistan and they have been heavily affected because of the situation in Afghanistan, especially Pakistan which provides the easiest outlet to the sea. Also, because of the ethnic similarities Pakistan becomes a player on the region. In February this year, the long-awaited peace agreement was signed by the U.S. And the Taliban whereby U.S. finally recognized Taliban as a legitimate entity which in itself was a great achievement. The deal has yet not been fully implemented but the irritants are being removed gradually and a ray of hope has finally emerged. The Loya Jirga was quite successful, even Mr. Abdullah Abdullah expressed his hope for peace in future. We must remember that the agreement is not an end but the start. Difficult days lie ahead and there are number of things that Pakistan and Uzbekistan can do in order to overcome the issues. Both countries exercise a certain amount of influence in Afghanistan which can be used effectively to facilitate the intra-Afghan dialogue that is critical to improving the situation. Economically, a number of steps have already been taken especially by Uzbekistan for the uplift of common people in line with H.E. the President of Uzbekistan's initiative for Afghanistan, which is very appreciable. I will not go into the specifics but I am sure the speakers will cover it. One of the most important aspects in my view is the vision of post-US Afghanistan. This is very important for our

contingency planning. Who will fill the vacuum? The correct visualization will be important for our analysis. Will china fill the vacuum economically? Will there be resistance to China coming in the region and taking on the development of Afghanistan. It is very unfortunate that nearly after 30 years, the U.S. and its allies could not pay due attention to the development of infrastructure in Afghanistan and the economic well-being of the country. A lot depends on the future of political scenario and Pakistan and Uzbekistan and other regional powers must try their utmost to prevent a situation where there is a chance of conflict or civil war, God forbid, in Afghanistan. There are certain spoilers, we know that, who do not want a stable Afghanistan. They must not be allowed to derail the process. Afghanistan remains a natural corridor for access to the Arabian Sea and the CPEC for all the central Asian countries especially Uzbekistan, and this is again in line with the strategic vision of H.E. the President of Uzbekistan. So we hope that Pakistan and Uzbekistan together can work on a scenario which will provide for stability in Afghanistan. Thank you very much.

Speaker 1:

Mr. Akramjon Ne'matov, First Deputy Director, ISRS, Tashkent, Uzbekistan



Dear friends, participants! I am sincerely glad to meet you. We are ready to continue the dialogue on such an important issue of regional security, the situation in Afghanistan with great interest.

I. The war in Afghanistan has been prolonging for forty (40) years. This led to a massive humanitarian disaster. The number of victims of the conflict since 2001 has reached one hundred sixty thousand (160) people, of which forty three (43) thousand are civilians. The humanitarian situation is aggravated by the pandemic. The number of unemployed may exceed seventeen (17) million people, and about 20 million people may find themselves below the poverty line. The lack of stability in the country has led to the transformation of Afghanistan into a haven for terrorists. Today twenty (20) regional and international terrorist groups operate in Afghanistan. The ranks of these groups also include citizens of Central Asia and Pakistan. The emerging difficult situation in Afghanistan is causing serious concern in Uzbekistan. The suffering and misfortune that the Afghan people are experiencing cannot leave us indifferent. It is our common duty to help the brotherly people to overcome the war, with which we are bound by a common history, religion, traditions and customs. Pakistan was the first country to experience the negative consequences of the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan has received about 3 million Afghan refugees. Since two thousand (2000), about thirty (30) thousand Pakistani citizens have died in the fight against terrorism, seven (7) thousands of which are military personnel. At the same time, the damage from terrorism exceeded hundred (100) billion US dollars. In addition, instability in Afghanistan is holding back large and strategically important transport and infrastructure projects. The implementation of these projects will not only stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, but will also give a powerful impetus to the development of trans-regional cooperation between Central and South Asia. Over the past 3 years, the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Pakistan has increased 5 times and at the end of two thousand nineteen (2019) amounted to one hundred twenty three (123) million. However, the potential for trade between our countries is much higher. Uzbekistan is opening itself to Pakistan. This is evidenced by the fact that in just three years the

number of tourists from Pakistan to Uzbekistan increased from four hundred (400) to more than 4 thousand, that is, 10 times. We are convinced that the establishment of peace in Afghanistan will open up broad opportunities for expanding mutually beneficial cooperation between Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia and Eurasia. Great prospects are opened by the construction of Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar, which will significantly increase the geo-economic potential of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, allow the Central Asian countries to enter the seaports of Gwadar and Karachi, thereby realizing their full export potential.

On the other hand, Pakistan will become a key hub for the countries of the region in the supply of various goods from Central Asia to the countries of the Middle East and South Asia. Moreover, the construction of the railway will open access for Pakistan to promising and big markets in Central Asia, Russia, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Pakistan will become a land bridge between South Asia and the Middle East, between Central and South Asia. The construction of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line, which in the future may become a link in the CASA-1000 project, can bring great benefits. This will provide an opportunity for Pakistan to connect to the energy system of Central Asia and solve the problem of electricity shortages for the dynamically developing economy of Pakistan.

II. It should be noted that Uzbekistan has always pursued a policy of friendliness and good-neighborliness towards Afghanistan. This policy received a new impetus and acquired a holistic, comprehensive and dynamic character after the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as President of Uzbekistan. First of all, Uzbekistan began to consider Afghanistan as an integral part of Central Asia. We are convinced that the security and sustainable development of our region depends on peace and stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, we believe that it is not necessary to view Afghanistan as a country from whose territory only security challenges and threats originate. There is no need to isolate Afghanistan. It is necessary to affirm the understanding that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan offers great opportunities for achieving peace and sustainable development on a wider regional and global scale. Uzbekistan has always believed and continues to adhere to the conviction that the conflict in Afghanistan can only be resolved peacefully, through negotiations and compromises. At the same time, all intra-Afghan political forces should participate in the negotiations without interference from external forces. These principles were supported during a high-level international conference in Tashkent, which was organized on March, two thousand eighteen (2018), together with Kabul. The adoption of the Tashkent Declaration following the

results of the conference was a great achievement. For the first time, a comprehensive international and regional consensus was reached on a peacebuilding strategy in Afghanistan. All leading and regional countries have recognized that there is no alternative to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the need for an early start of inter-Afghan negotiations, the importance of integrating the Taliban as a legitimate political force into the political system of Afghanistan. In this regard, Uzbekistan welcomes the recent positive trends around the inter-Afghan talks. The signing of the Peace Agreement between the United States and Taliban, as well as the Agreement between the political leaders of Afghanistan on the creation of an inclusive government and the Supreme Council for National Reconciliation, once again confirms that the settlement of the situation in Afghanistan is possible only by peaceful means. The recent convening of the Loya Jirga is an important factor in achieving sustainable and long-term peace in Afghanistan. We know and highly appreciate that it was Pakistan who made a great contribution and continues to assist in the early start of the inter-Afghan talks. We are firmly convinced that without the support of Pakistan, it is not possible to resolve the Afghan issue. Given the common challenges and threats our countries face, as well as Pakistan's key role in ensuring security and sustainable development in the region, we pay great importance to strengthening the strategic Uzbek-Pakistani partnership in the Afghan settlement. This could be facilitated by the creation of a Joint Commission on Security Issues between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. This mechanism will allow coordinating interaction in the fight against international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, curbing the regional migration of international terrorist group members from the territory of Afghanistan; The development of trade and economic cooperation and the implementation of interregional infrastructure projects could be launched by the creation of a trilateral intergovernmental commission in the format of "Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan". This mechanism will allow coordinating interaction in the field of trade and infrastructure. During the pandemic, we consider it important to intensify cooperation in the production of medicines. It should be noted that in Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan there is a pharmaceutical free economic zone "Boysun-Pharm". This place is convenient for organizing a joint Uzbek-Pakistani production of drugs and equipment necessary in the fight against coronavirus, as well as their further supply to Afghanistan; For a timely exchange of views and the development of a coordinated approach to solving the Afghan issue, we consider it important to conduct a regular dialogue between the analytical and relevant structures of Uzbekistan and Pakistan.

In conclusion, I would like to once again express to our esteemed colleagues for organizing a conference on Afghanistan that is so acute today. I hope that today's dialogue will contribute to the development of new ideas and recommendations for bringing to a qualitatively new level of interstate relations between our countries on topical issues of bilateral cooperation and the settlement of the situation in Afghanistan.

Thank you for your attention!

Speaker 2:

Prof. Dr. Niaz Ahmad Akhtar (S.I.), Vice-Chancellor, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan



I must congratulate CGSS, I think you have assembled all of us on a very important topic and area of collaboration, which benefits between the two brother countries, Uzbekistan and Pakistan. I am grateful and very happy, I was talking to my colleagues in Punjab University today that we are having a webinar on this topic. Some of my colleagues, they had the history background and some of them from the language side. I told them about the speakers as well and they were also very happy that CGSS along with ISRS, have made this beautiful contribution for discussing on a very important area. I must extend gratitude to H.E. Mr. Zahid Nasrullah, I think he is playing a very difficult role in Afghanistan. Once again, many thanks for inviting us and giving us the opportunity to say a few words on this important area. Historically this link between Uzbekistan and Pakistan is for centuries, especially because of the two cities Samarkand and Bukhara. Then Afghanistan and Pakistan share common history, heritage and culture, of course these are the brethren Muslim countries. Mughals also came from Central Asia. Babur's forefathers were from Fergana which is now Uzbekistan. A very brief historical background - during the cold war, Central Asia was occupied by Russia and became part of the Soviet Union. Now the Uzbekistan and Pakistan both shares borders with Afghanistan, on one side there is Uzbekistan and on the other side there is Pakistan. The peace and prosperity in Afghanistan is in the interest of Uzbekistan as well as Pakistan. Economic ties of Uzbekistan and Pakistan are dependent on peace in Afghanistan. Ethnically Afghanistan has Uzbeks as well as Pashtuns. Uzbekistan can play a vital role in creating peace in Afghanistan. In last few months, I was reading some news about the Abdul Rashid Dostum, of course he can play a pivotal role in bringing peace in Afghanistan through Uzbek leadership. Great economic opportunities are also there, if peace comes in Afghanistan then rich resources of Uzbekistan, gas and oil reserves can be utilized. The Central Asian Region and Afghanistan, as you know, is landlocked whereas Pakistan can provide a seaport for trade and commerce, which can be in the interest of Uzbekistan or for the Central Asia as well. We know

that through CPEC, Pakistan is developing the Gawadar port which can be utilized by the Central Asian States as well. Tourism, as I said about Samarkand and Bukhara, it is well known in our country Pakistan. A lot of Sufis came from Bukhara, we have a Bukhari Sharif, and so we have a lot of interest in Uzbekistan. If peace and prosperity exist in Afghanistan, then both the Islamic countries, also if I include the Afghanistan, then Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan as well as all the Central Asian states can get the benefit conditional upon peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. Both the countries are members of ECO and SCO and I think from these two organizations both the countries can play a pivotal role in bringing the stability in Afghanistan. In our academic point of view, we think that whatever the agreement we sign, if there is no peace in Afghanistan, those common areas cannot be exploited that exist in Uzbekistan as well as Pakistan. I was listening one of the interview from the Chinese ambassador in Pakistan he said that if the situation gets normal in Afghanistan then we can have the CPEC continuation, this road extension in Afghanistan. We can have the railway track in Afghanistan. On the other side Uzbekistan which is rich in the gas or the natural resources can contribute economically and uplift their own country and at the same time helping Afghanistan also. If this extension takes place, and if there is peace in Afghanistan, we can have the mutual benefit of this communication, the energy, the tourism etc totally depending on the situation inside Afghanistan. Pakistan has the seaport, we have good influence in Afghanistan. On the other side, we have Uzbekistan which can play a good role for bringing peace and prosperity through dialogue as said by my colleagues. Having said that, if we go into the common objectives and we strongly believe that if there is stability in Afghanistan it is in the interest of Pakistan as well as the Uzbekistan for the economic growth. The way forward in my view is that you can have the secretaries meetings and dialogues in the later stages. But first is to bring the secretaries level discussion between the Uzbekistan and Pakistan. The minister level discussing should be an addition. Thirdly we can have summits at annual basis. In the current scenario when U.S. is leaving, we should come forward and help our brother country and we strongly believe from our side that both the countries can bring stability in Afghanistan. Again very important factor as I said is about the 80% it lies with the top leadership of Afghanistan. They should realize if there is peace in Afghanistan, it is in the economic interest of Afghanistan. I must stress that if one is bypassing Pakistan and other stakeholders, trying to bring stability in Afghanistan then that is not possible. Lastly again congratulating my friends from CGSS and thanks to ISRS for bringing all these intellectuals on one platform and lastly I must say

honorable, His Excellency our Ambassador in Afghanistan, the role he is playing we must acknowledge and we are very happy with that. Thank you very much.

Speaker 3:

H.E Zahid Nasrullah Khan, Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan, Kabul



Thank you very much. AOA and a very good afternoon to all, including the distinguished President of CGSS – Maj Gen Amir Jaffery, Mr. Akramjon Ne'matov and Prof. Dr. Niaz Ahmed Akhtar to whom I am very grateful for his generous remarks for me. Also I see that my distinguished colleague and superior, Ambassador Ayaz Wazir is also here. Let me start by saying that as the First Deputy Director of the ISRS mentioned that I had the privilege of visiting Uzbekistan during the Tashkent conference in March 2018. I still have very fond memories of Tashkent.

It was my first trip and I went from Lahore and it took hardly 1 hour and 30 mins to be there and I realized how close we are geographically. We do not realize that in Pakistan until we travel to each other's country. And very briefly, my personal experience was wonderful, the people were very hospitable and the conference was, as deputy director mentioned, a great success for all of us to move forward on the Afghan peace process.

I will structure my very brief remarks in two sections; the first section will be on fundamental things on Afghanistan and what role Pakistan has played; and the second section will be on identifying the areas of mutual cooperation which could be beneficial both for Pakistan and Uzbekistan, and try to identify that what should be the practical steps for way forward. So let me start by saying that our fundamental position on Afghanistan has always been that there is no military solution to the problem. There has to be an inclusive political dialogue to find an enduring and sable solution to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan and the region. For that inclusive political dialogue, we have always said that there are three parties to the conflict; the U.S., the Taliban and the Afghan Government. Our position has always been that we have always supported an Afghan led and Afghan owned process or talks, which is the only way forward. To this respect, we have supported and participated in all international efforts which have been directed towards Afghan led and Afghan owned process. So that has always been our approach. Given with these fundamental principles of our policy we have, as the First Deputy Director already mentioned,

played our due role in creating that niche that led to U.S. –Taliban talks. We released Mullah Baradar to facilitate the talks and we also urged the important regional members to support these talks, particularly Russia, China and Iran. We worked with them to convince the Afghan government and to create regional as well as international support for them and here I must appreciate that Uzbekistan was very forthcoming and supportive in our efforts. Now that we are at a crucial juncture after the holding of the Loya Jirga on the 7th of August we are hoping that the intra-Afghan negotiations would begin on either 15th or 16th of August in Doha. However, having said that, this should not by itself mean the Intra-Afghan Negotiations will automatically bring peace in Afghanistan. The 20 years conflict has driven deep and brought wounds into the Afghan society, there is deep mistrust here between the Afghans and it will take time to fill those wounds. And there will be very serious, hard, long grinding discussions in the IAN. However with another immediate neighbor of Afghanistan we will continue to work to ensure that the two parties that is the Taliban and the Afghan government engage constructively on the two main agenda items of the IAN i.e. the permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and a political road map which will then lead to the power sharing and a new government. I am very confident that that Uzbek government and the Pakistan government will, as in the past, continue to work in these areas. So that was first part and now I come to the second part. Before we identify the areas of mutual cooperation with Afghanistan in our side, let me just quickly brief you what is the economic situation here. The economic situation is that the Afghanistan Government required around \$ 10 billion according to the World Bank study to meet their budgetary requirements, out of this 4.5 billion is for their security posters. The Afghan government by itself raises about \$2 – 2.5 billion as revenue. So as Maj Gen Amir Jaffery just mentioned that what would be the post-withdrawal of international forces or the post-peace scenario? Can this economic gap be fulfilled? So we are at least looking for an \$8-\$10 billion that will be Afghanistan's requirement, at least, if everything goes well, ideally speaking, for the next 5 to 7 years. Now there is already a donor fatigue and the people are a bit concerned that the donor conference that would be held in October in Geneva this year may not come up with the kind of money that had come up in Brussels. The pledge conference, financial pledge for budgetary support and development support of Afghanistan will be held in Geneva in October this year and there are serious apprehensions among the donor countries as well as within Afghanistan whether given the COVID-19 situation, given the donor fatigue, given the uncertainty that we may expect during or after the IAN, we may not get i) the same amount of pledge that we

received in Brussels and ii) most importantly the tenure of those pledges may not be for such a long term as it was in Brussels. So all these questions are up in air and under discussion. So given this scenario and what the First Deputy also explained about the internal displacement and the poverty in Afghanistan because according to the World Bank Afghanistan Economy will get a big hit from COVID-19 and it may have experienced a negative growth of 4.4 percent. So very briefly in this scenario, how can Pakistan and Uzbekistan cooperate? As has been already pointed out by the First Deputy Director and also by the distinguished speakers, there are opportunities. There are opportunities in Trade, Transport Corridors, Energy Corridors and in joint ventures. The opportunities are there and they have been highlighted previously as well. There has been some initial preliminary studies on it but the challenge is that how do you realize them and capitalize on these opportunities. To do so, we will need practical steps forward. For example you know, there is a very good economic institutional framework already between Pakistan and Uzbekistan defined by around 20 MOUs. Similarly there is a very good institutional economic framework between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. So how could we all sit together and synergize that in a common framework so that we can then benefit from each other's complementarities in our economies. As you have mentioned for example that Pakistan is a major exporter of pharmaceuticals to Afghanistan. Similarly Pakistan is a major exporter of food items to Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is a major exporter of cotton to Pakistan. Afghanistan is of course a major exporter of fruits, coal and other products. So there are complementarities here but how do we optimize those, it remains the challenge. Now that challenge of course has already been identified and has become more stiff with these security challenges because if Afghanistan doesn't stabilize then it continues to destabilize the whole region. The interconnectivity – the regional interconnectivity, the infrastructure interconnectivity, the energy interconnectivity that we all look as great opportunities remain on the drawing board. They don't come up. Therefore it is very important that Afghanistan does stabilize. Let me identify some of the projects, which I think is the way forward. First in the infrastructure connectivity and the transport corridor, I think there is a very good project with regard to Kabul – Peshawar Motorway, which we can extend right up to Tashkent. This is a low hanging fruit because this project has a low cost of U.S. \$300 million. It can be constructed in a short period of time and can bring down the distances and the time taken presently which is a long time takes more than 15 to 20 days for Pakistani products to transit through Torkham. So I think the way forward is to look at these low hanging fruits which have

acceptable costs in them and can be realized quickly as compared with other infrastructure projects. Secondly I think it is very important for us, we have a transit and trade MOU with Uzbekistan, and we have a Pakistan-Afghanistan transit trade agreement. So the three of us – Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan should sit together and reach a common transit trade agreement. It is most important for all three of our countries, as has been mentioned by the director of ISRS that to realize the geopolitical significance of the country and to fully optimize its geopolitical potential, it is essential to have this type of connectivity where our countries become land bridges for each other. So we need to have this common soft infrastructure as well in place which includes custom facilities and other framework, which we have bilaterally but not in a trilateral manner. Also, I think that with regard to the people to people contact between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, we need to have more travel connectivity with each other and until the situation stabilizes in Afghanistan and where we can go by road to each other's countries perhaps we should work more for air connectivity. We need to have a greater frequency of travel and I am sure that people would love to travel to Uzbekistan, it is such a beautiful country, such a historical country and similarly people from Uzbekistan would be very happy to visit Pakistan which will be mutually beneficial for both our countries. Yes, there is a great opportunity for joint ventures, I fully support that proposal by ISRS on the pharmaceutical, yes that would be very good opportunity and should be explored. Pakistan and Uzbekistan have a joint business council so that should be made proactive in looking out at these business proposals and finding out partners on both sides who can engage in such joint ventures. So this is a way forward in the economic area. In the security area I think it is very important while we are both members of SCO but there should be a joint commission. So I think we need to create the institutional framework for that. We need to have an MOU where we need to create this security framework and where we also get involved in joint counter terrorism cooperation, where we do exchange actionable intelligence which is useful for both our countries because especially both Pakistan and Uzbekistan there could be a threat when the international forces withdraw as there would be a security vacuum, there would be a lose security situation so we need to cooperate urgently on this area, including of course drug trafficking that is very relevant. My last point and I will end my submissions here is that for all this to happen in the security area, in people to people exchange and in the economic areas I think it is very important to have interaction at the political leadership level. I think we need to make some framework for annual exchanges between our political leaders either through bilateral visits or meetings at

international forums such as the UNGA, which is going to be held very soon, or other international forums such as the SCO where we should have sidelines, bilateral meetings and discussing the substantive issues because we will need the political support and for that our political leadership should have both, an official and personal repo for these issues to be pushed forward. Thank you

Speaker 4:

Mr. Bakhtiyar Mustafayev, Head of Center, ISRS, Tashkent, Uzbekistan



Recently, the issue of launching peace talks in Afghanistan has become a dominant topic in the foreign policy of almost all countries involved in resolving the Afghan conflict. The «Afghan crisis», once in the background, is once again becoming important as a priority for many world capitals. Today, the world powers and Afghanistan's neighbors are showing pragmatism and are ready to take an active role in peaceful settlement of the

Afghan conflict. In this context, most foreign experts say that today the most appropriate moment to resolve the situation in Afghanistan has developed around the peace processes. However, it should be noted that the current situation is fraught with a number of problems or factors needed to be considered and addressed in order to get real progress in the Afghan peace process. In particular:

- a) The application of a «selective approach» of the main external forces in cooperation with the countries involved in the Afghan crisis contributes to the process of forming tactical alliances;
- b) The promotion of various competing and ignoring each other initiatives and formats to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan leads to the dispersion of resources and unhealthy competition;
- C) Ignoring the interests of other internal political forces in Afghanistan in launching peace talks with the Taliban;
- d) Holding negotiations with the Taliban in various formats creates the ground for postponement and non-implementation of the reached agreements by the Taliban;
- e) The reduction of US troops in Afghanistan without developing a comprehensive plan or program for the phased implementation of the negotiation processes.

In particular, key issues remain in question, such as the mechanism for integrating the Taliban and other political forces into the government; the prospect of activity of the Taliban factions that are

against negotiations; and further assistance to Afghanistan in matters of governance, economic development and national security forces. In view of the above, the need for implementation of comprehensive measures to address the Afghan problem is actualizing. An analysis of efforts for peace by the took by Afghan authorities, regional and world powers shows that the main postulate in resolving the crisis by political means should be the promotion of the peace process in Afghanistan at three interrelated and interdependent levels.

As President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated during a high-level international conference under the auspices of the United Nations in Tashkent in March 2018, «in order to facilitate the launch of peace talks in Afghanistan it is necessary to ensure at the intra-Afghan, regional and global levels»:

- 1) Launching a direct dialogue, without preconditions, between the Central government and the main armed opposition forces, primarily the «Taliban»;
- 2) Achieving a strong consensus at the regional level, as well as understanding and common approaches among non-regional players;
- 3) Principled political support for the peace process and financial assistance to the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan from the leading world powers and donor organizations.

As a result of the Tashkent conference, a Final Declaration was adopted that includes the following fundamental aspects of the Afghan peace process: 1) respect for the independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan; 2) support for start direct negotiations with the Taliban without any preconditions; 3) joint assistance to advance the peace process and socio-economic development in Afghanistan; 4) recognition of the importance of international and regional initiatives to ensure peace in the IRA.

The initiatives and proposals of the Republic of Uzbekistan are based on the following key factors: *first*, the results of the international community's efforts over the past 40 years have clearly shown that there is no military solution to the Afghan problem; *second*, the Afghan conflict has now been completely internationalized and its content and structure have fundamentally changed; and *third*, we must look at Afghanistan not as a problem, but as a strategic opportunity, as new prospects for mutually beneficial regional cooperation. In general, the multi-stage nature of the Afghan peace process once again confirms the relevance of developing and implementing a unified and agreed

at the intra-Afghan, regional and global levels comprehensive peace program for Afghanistan. The initial stage of consolidating the efforts of the international community in stabilizing the situation in the IRA may be the development of a unified position on the Taliban Movement and the fight against Islamic state militants, the implementation of joint projects in the fields of education, medicine, energy, transport and agriculture. All this will contribute to the early establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan, turning it from a place of confrontation into a place of cooperation and interaction that will benefit all parties involved in the Afghan crisis.

Speaker 5:

Brigadier Said Nazir Mohmand (Retd), Member Board of Advisors, CGSS



Thank you. AOA. My special thanks and gratitude to the CGSS and ISRS. As the speakers dwelled upon the subject in quite length and of course so many areas but let me briefly talk regarding Uzbekistan; its national potential and especially the three areas, which is its landmass that is 56th in the world as far its greatness is concerned and it has got a great depth besides it is pivot to Central Asia and the heartland of the CARs. So in that perspective there is lot of strength with Uzbekistan.

Second strength is of course its economy so if I count it amongst the first twelve in the world so it is gaining 7th position in gold, copper production is 10th, in Uranium they are 12th, in gas they are at 11th position and as far as the cotton goes, it is the 5th largest exporter of cotton. Besides this, it is among the 26th top progressive economies. There is a third factor which could be counted as strength but at the same time there is a challenge as well and that is the openness which the President of Uzbekistan, H.E. Shavkat Mirziyoyev is pursuing and of course ISRS has got great contribution towards that policy vision. Let me now come to the vulnerabilities and I suppose that are the areas where Pakistan and Uzbekistan can converge and benefit from each other experience and can go ahead on this path. First of all is of course as far as Uzbekistan is concerned, this balancing it that they are exercising in the foreign relation, it could be strengthened. The cooperation between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asia goes in the aftermath of the peace in Afghanistan through political, social and economic connectivity and of course their openness to the world economy and then the exchange of this expertise and people to people contact etc. Secondly, Uzbekistan is a doubly landlocked country and such a country is in dire need of the access to the warm waters or sea water. On that account I suppose Pakistan is the prime factor which can facilitate it. The third is of course the depleting of water resources which of course, the upper riparian and the lower riparian if they are resolved, I suppose they can benefit from that as well. Let me now come to the major contours of Uzbekistan's foreign policy perspective that is the Tashkent under the president ship of Mr. Mirziyoyev is more pragmatic in defining its foreign

policy parameters to be diversified to increase options and limit its reliance on the big powers or any military bloc. Secondly, a multi vector policy by prioritizing regional harmony and the conflict resolution in the immediate neighborhood and remaining insulated to the influence of big powers. The third is of course that what so ever they are doing in this respect it is in the backyard of Russia, economic growth of China especially the economic corridors and third, it is the far distance but near neighbor of U.S. via Afghanistan positioned in the extra regional forces. So in this perspective I suppose the openness to the market economic regional resources and sharing are reaching out to the global market through the joint regional transport network with the neighbors of course it is a very important project rather a flagship project which should unfold in the process or I the aftermath of the Afghan conflict resolution. Then, prioritize the conflict free environment in the Central Asia and spearheading political and diplomatic maneuvers by the President, Prime Minister and the Diplomatic core in finding a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict. In this regard. They have carried out a series of visits to the big capitals as well as the neighboring countries. Summits have been conducted, conferences have been made, consultation and facilitation offers all has been extended and I suppose this is a very proactive approach to peace and on this Pakistan and Uzbekistan are on one page. Then, a common goal of Pakistan and Uzbekistan is bringing peace to the region and realization of the common geo political economic and social security interest through mutual cooperation. If these are the things to be pursued I suppose, Pakistan and Uzbekistan are on one page as regarding Afghanistan peace process. Because both believe that there is no militarily solution to the Afghanistan conflict. Then of course this should be without interference of the outside pressure. The last is of course that this dialogue which is taking place it should be without precondition and should lead to a peaceful Afghanistan by accommodating all stakeholders. Now coming to the Uzbekistan foreign minister during his visit to Pakistan in 2018, he proposed a ground breaking initiative of the rail road between Pakistan - Uzbekistan via Afghanistan. Besides I propose that Hairatan, Mizar e Sharif railway road network, a prime project that is there, but if from the Termez, which could be converted into a transportation hub for Tajikistan, Turkmenistan as well as Uzbekistan, from there descending to Mizar e Sharif then to Kabul, and from Kabul to Peshawar, it is not more than about 800 km plus. And this 800 km is already paved with the roads but it requires of course uplifting and dual carriage and of course the railway network. Besides this from Mizar e Sharif it would go to Herat and from Herat to Quetta. So two way connectivity to Pakistan, one via Peshawar, and one via Quetta and

then both leading to the two sea ports of Pakistan that is Gawadar deep sea port and then is the Karachi. This connectivity further reinforced by the CPEC could be a link towards the China, Central Asia and the West Asia corridor. In this way, I suppose, a big network of connectivity is in the offering if Uzbekistan and Pakistan especially converge on this mutual connectivity by using the broken bridge of Afghanistan. Presently the bridge is broken and it is because of the insecurity situation. It will bring a lot many ways and means for cooperation between the two countries. There is another thing which I think in the geopolitical or the regional scenario that Pakistan has to de hyphenate itself from the Indo-Pak subcontinent hyphenation and this hyphenation should come to the Central Asia. Instead of looking toward east, we should be looking towards the North West. There is a great opportunity lying for Pakistan in this de hyphenation and hyphenation. Why because, there is inimical and hegemonic power India which is a source of instability and threat to the regional peace and peaceful neighborly relations. Second is that India is averse to regional cooperation by hijacking SAARC and picking arms with its neighbors. And third, it is on the course of Hindutva targeting and discriminating Muslims in particular of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh origin as well as Muslims in general including the CARs. So if seen in this particular perspective I suppose the wind which will be blowing from the North West from the CARs, Pakistan should comb its hair according to this particular wave. So this will be a new opening on the geographic front, on geopolitical front as well as the progress stability and people to people connectivity and so many other areas. This linking and de-linking will lead to peace and progress, and it will create a huge landmarks. These landmarks will be connected to the sea ports and it will gel together, thereby converging on the common interests. The common interest and stakeholder ship in all the projects will ensure the security and mutual interest of each other. Then the economic corridor that is the BRI launched by China, in two of its flagship projects that is the CPEC and the other is China Central Asia and West Asia economic corridor, these could be the game changers in the region. And of course, Afghanistan and Iran could be connected in central Asia so two corridors are available. China is presently very interested and there is a deal which is in progress that could lead to some sort of concrete understanding that is a \$400 billion project. If it materializes, then Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia as well as Turkey, it will be an economic activity unparalleled seen by the world. Let me come to the last aspect of my talk, there are opportunities as so many have been pointed out, besides that I must say that enhancing trade and people to people contact and tourism will come with the connectivity. Then interdependence

and cooperation of the region is again linked to the interconnectivity. In the last, let me say that ethnicities of Afghanistan derive its strength from its common ethnic groups in Pakistan as well as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. So both the countries have influence on these ethnic communities to contribute towards the peace and stability in Afghanistan and make this peace process a success story. A stable Afghanistan is a dual carriage bridge between Pakistan and Uzbekistan so that this Termez and Peshawar highway is a dream that could be fulfilled. There are a lot many hopes attached to the peace process but there are also game spoilers which are in Afghanistan, which are in the region who are using their land as well as their human resource. So how to save the peace process from the game spoilers. That also requires a diplomatic, political and more so a cooperative understanding and approach on how to defeat their ulterior designs because of the mayhem or instability and violence suit them. There are other non-state actors like DAESH, TTP etc, and so all these factors could be defeated once we have got a unified approach. This unified approach can choke the influence of these groups and block their funding and more so, put a diplomatic pressure on such forces and such countries and fight against them together. This particular webinar will prove to be a harbinger of peace, stability and of course reinforcement factor for peace, rehabilitation and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Speaker 6:

Mr. Rustam Khuramov -Head of Department at ISRS under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan



Along with the diplomatic efforts, Uzbekistan is also investing in the economic future, the social stability of Afghanistan and the younger generation of Afghans. Considering economic development as the most effective factor in resolving the situation in Afghanistan Uzbekistan has launched large-scale infrastructure and socially significant projects in Afghanistan. I would like to highlight some of them:

First, the construction of the railway Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar. In December 2018, the first meeting of the heads of the railway administrations of Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and

Uzbekistan for the construction of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway was held in Tashkent.

We are convinced that the implementation of the Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway project is also beneficial to all countries of the region. The possible participation of China in the implementation of this project provides an opportunity to create a multi-variant system of transport and communication corridors through its connection to the “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor”. As a result, the Central Asian states will have access to the Pakistani port of Gwadar, Pakistan - to the countries of Central Asia and the CIS, China - the possibility of reducing the length of transport links with the countries of Europe and the Middle East. I also consider it possible that in the future India may join this project.

We believe that the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan railroad with access to the ports of Pakistan and Iran in the Indian Ocean, could be integrated into an extensive network of transport corridors “One Belt, One Road”.

Second, the development of cooperation in the field of energy. Uzbekistan is a reliable supplier of electricity to Afghanistan. Compared to 2002, the volume of electricity supplies from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan increased 30 times. At the same time, in January 2018, Uzbekistan reduced the price of electricity supplied to Afghanistan by 35%: from 7.6 to 5 cents per kW. At present, Uzbekistan begun construction of the Surkhan - Puli-Khumri transmission line. Within the framework of this project, specialists from Uzbekistan have already carried out design and survey work in Balkh (85 km), the next ones are planned soon in Samangan

and Baghlan (116 km). A feasibility study of the project has been developed, which is currently being discussed with the Afghan side.

Reference: The project payback period is 12 years. The capacity of the line will be 1000 MW and it will be possible to transmit over 24 million kW / h per day. Through the construction of this power line, it is possible to increase the supply of electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan by 70% - up to 6 billion kW / h per year. The power transmission lines will connect Kabul to the unified energy system of Central Asia, which will provide an opportunity for other countries of the region (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan) to supply electricity to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India as part of the CASA-1000 project.

Third, investing to the future of Afghanistan. In January 2018, an educational center was opened in the city of Termez, the Republic of Uzbekistan, in which Afghan youth will be enrolled in two-, four-, and six-year full-time programs in 17 areas of higher education and 16 areas of secondary special and vocational education. Today, 122 students are trained at the Center in such specialties as railway engineering and Uzbek language. So far, 136 Afghan students have completed their studies at the Center, of which 96 received bachelor's degrees in the direction of the Uzbek language and literature, 40 took short-term courses in the Russian language, as well as agricultural and business skills. Today, some of them work in the parliament, ministries and departments of the country, teach at universities in Afghanistan, and run independent businesses. Since September 2019, 172 students are studying at the Educational Center in the areas of “Uzbek language and literature”, “obstetrics and nursing”, “ground transport systems and their operation”, of which 46 are girls.

Moreover, this year Tashkent plans to host a ministerial meeting of the eighth Conference of Regional Economic Cooperation on Afghanistan - RECCA. We expect that the main outcome of the forum will be the elaboration of a further strategy for the development of the partnership of the neighboring countries of Afghanistan for the common goals of peace and prosperity.

In general, it should be noted that Uzbekistan will continue its practical assistance in creating the infrastructure of Afghanistan, considering this as an indispensable condition for promoting peace and prosperity in this country. We are convinced that the achievement of amity and stability in Afghanistan is a decisive factor not only for regional but also for global security, which opens up opportunities for solving vital problems of sustainable social and economic development for all states and peoples living in the region of Central Asia.



ANALYSIS/SUMMARY

1. Brief Overview

- a. The instability in Afghanistan has radiated effects regionally and globally also, because any occurrence in the region impacts all concerned, especially the countries with common borders. Uzbekistan and Pakistan have a common border with Afghanistan and they have been heavily affected because of the situation in Afghanistan.
- b. The long-awaited peace agreement, signed by the US and the Taliban is a great achievement, however, the deal has yet not been fully implemented and the irritants are being removed gradually. The agreement is not an end but the start. Difficult days lie ahead and Pakistan and Uzbekistan can contribute to overcome the issues.
- c. One of the most important aspects, for our contingency planning, is the vision of post-US Afghanistan. Unfortunately after nearly 30 years, the US and its allies could not pay due attention to the development and the economic well-being of Afghanistan.
- d. Instability in Afghanistan is holding back strategically important transport and infrastructure projects, which if implemented, will not only stabilize the situation in Afghanistan but will also give impetus to the development of trans-regional cooperation between Central and South Asia.
- e. Pakistan, Uzbekistan and other regional powers must try their utmost to prevent a situation of conflict or civil war in Afghanistan. There are certain spoilers who do not want a stable Afghanistan. They must not be allowed to derail the peace process.

2. Socio-Economic and Political situation in Afghanistan

- a. The war in Afghanistan has led to a massive humanitarian disaster. The victims of the conflict since year 2001 has reached 160,000 of which 43,000 are civilians. The humanitarian situation is aggravated by the pandemic. The number of unemployed may exceed 17 million and about 20 million may find themselves below the poverty line.
- b. The lack of stability has led to the formation of haven for terrorists in Afghanistan. Today 20 regional and international terrorist groups operate in Afghanistan. The ranks of these groups also include citizens of Central Asia and Pakistan.
- c. Afghanistan required around \$ 10 billion according to the World Bank study to meet their budgetary requirements, out of this, 4.5 billion is for their security posters. The Afghan government by itself raises about \$2 – 2.5 billion as revenue. In the post-withdrawal of international forces there is dire need to fill this economic gap. \$8-\$10 billion will be Afghanistan's requirement, at least, if everything goes well for the next 5 to 7 years.
- d. About the internal displacement and the poverty in Afghanistan, according to the World Bank Afghanistan Economy will get a big hit from COVID-19 and it may have experienced a negative growth of 4.4%.
- e. There is already a donor fatigue and serious apprehensions among the donor countries as well as within Afghanistan about the pledge conference, financial pledge for budgetary

support and development support of Afghanistan, given the COVID-19 situation, the donor fatigue and the uncertainty expected after the IAN. We may not get the same amount of pledge that we received in Brussels and most importantly the tenure of those pledges may not be for such a long term as it was in Brussels.

3. Pakistan's Stance And Role in Afghan Issue

- a. Pakistan was the first country to experience the negative consequences of the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan has received about 3 million Afghan refugees. Since year 2000, over 30,000 Pakistani citizens have died in the fight against terrorism, 7,000 of which are military personnel.
- b. Pakistan has continued to make great contributions and assist the inter-Afghan talks. Without the support of Pakistan, it is not possible to resolve the Afghan issue.
- c. Our fundamental position on Afghanistan has always been that there is no military solution to the problem. There has to be an inclusive political dialogue to find an enduring and stable solution to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan and the region.
- d. For inclusive political dialogue there are three parties to the conflict; the U.S., the Taliban and the Afghan Government.
- e. Pakistan has always supported an Afghan led and Afghan owned process, which is the only way forward. To this respect, Pakistan supports and has participated in all international efforts which have been directed towards the peace process.
- f. Pakistan played due role in creating niche that led to U.S. –Taliban talks. We released Mullah Baradar to facilitate the talks and also urged the important regional members to support these talks, particularly Russia, China and Iran. We worked with them to convince the Afghan government and to create regional and international support for them.
- g. We will continue to work to ensure that the two parties, the Taliban and the Afghan government, engage constructively on the two main agenda items of the IAN i.e. the permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and a political road map which will then lead to the power sharing and a new government.
- h. Pakistan has to de hyphenate itself from the Indo-Pak subcontinent, and its hyphenation should come to Central Asia. Instead of looking toward east, we should be looking towards the North West.

4. Uzbekistan's Stance And Role in Afghan Issue

- a. Uzbekistan policy towards Afghanistan received new impetus and acquired a holistic, comprehensive and dynamic character under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Uzbekistan considers Afghanistan as an integral part of Central Asia.
- b. Uzbekistan believes that; a peaceful and stable Afghanistan offers great opportunities for achieving sustainable development on a wider regional and global scale; and that all intra-

Afghan political forces should participate in the negotiations without interference from external forces.

- c. Tashkent conference in March 2018, was a great achievement as for the first time, a comprehensive international and regional consensus was reached on a peacebuilding strategy in Afghanistan.
- d. The initiatives and proposals of Uzbekistan are based on the key factors including, that there is no military solution to the Afghan problem; the content and structure of Afghan issue has fundamentally changed; and we must look at Afghanistan not as a problem, but as strategic opportunity and new prospects for mutually beneficial regional cooperation.
- e. The Peace Agreement between the US and Taliban, as well as the Agreement between the political leaders of Afghanistan on creation of an inclusive government and the Supreme Council for National Reconciliation, reaffirms that settlement of Afghan conflict is possible only by peaceful means. The recent convening of the Loya Jirga is an important factor in achieving sustainable and long-term peace in Afghanistan.
- f. Given the common challenges and threats, as well as Pakistan's key role in ensuring security and sustainable development in the region, the strategic Uzbek-Pakistani partnership must be strengthened for the Afghan settlement. This could be facilitated by creation of a Joint Commission on Security Issues between Uzbekistan and Pakistan.
- g. This mechanism will allow:
 - I. Coordinating interaction in the fight against international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, curbing the regional migration of international terrorist group members from the territory of Afghanistan
 - II. The development of trade and economic cooperation and the implementation of interregional infrastructure projects could be launched by the creation of a trilateral intergovernmental commission in the format of “Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan”.
- h. Coordinating interaction in the field of trade and infrastructure.

A. Economic Contributions of Uzbekistan

- Along with the diplomatic efforts, Uzbekistan is investing in economic future, social stability of Afghanistan and younger generation of Afghans. Uzbekistan has launched large-scale infrastructure projects in Afghanistan.

B. Construction of the railway Mizar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar.

- In December 2018, the first meeting of the heads of the railway administrations of Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for the construction of the Mizar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway was held in Tashkent.
- The possible participation of China in this project provides an opportunity to create a multi-variant system of transport and communication corridors through its connection

to the CPEC. Consequently, Central Asian states will have access to Gwadar, Pakistan to the Central Asia and the CIS, and China to Europe and Middle East.

- China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan railroad with access to the ports of Pakistan and Iran in the Indian Ocean, could be integrated into an extensive network of transport corridors of BRI.

C. Development of cooperation in the field of energy.

- Uzbekistan is a reliable supplier of electricity to Afghanistan. Since 2002, the volume of electricity supplies from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan increased 30 times. At the same time, in January 2018, Uzbekistan reduced the price of electricity supplied to Afghanistan by 35%: from 7.6 to 5 cents per kW.
- Presently, Uzbekistan began construction of Surkhan - Puli-Khumri transmission line. Under this project, specialists from Uzbekistan have carried out design and survey work in Balkh (85 km), the next ones are planned soon in Samangan and Baghlan (116 km). Through the construction of this power line, it is possible to increase the supply of electricity from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan by 70% - up to 6 billion kW / h per year.
- It will connect Kabul to the unified energy system of Central Asia, and provide opportunity for other countries of the region (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan) to supply electricity to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India as part of the CASA-1000 project.

D. Initiatives for Youth

- In January 2018, educational center was opened in Termez, where Afghan youth will be enrolled in two-, four-, and six-year full-time programs in 17 areas of higher education and 16 areas of secondary special and vocational education. So far, 136 Afghan students have completed their studies at the Center, of which 96 received bachelor's degrees, 40 took short-term courses.
- Since September 2019, 172 students are studying at the Educational Center in the areas of “Uzbek language and literature”, “obstetrics and nursing”, “ground transport systems and their operation”, of which 46 are girls.

5. Prospects for Mutually Beneficial Cooperation

- a. There are many opportunities in Trade, Transport and Energy Corridors, and in joint ventures between the two countries, but the challenge is how to capitalize on these opportunities. We need practical steps forward, for example, there is a very good economic institutional framework already between Pakistan and Uzbekistan defined by around 20 MOUs. Similarly there is a very good institutional economic framework between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.
- b. Pakistan is a major exporter of pharmaceuticals to Afghanistan and of food items to Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is a major exporter of cotton to Pakistan, and Afghanistan is a

major exporter of fruits, coal and other products. Now that challenge has already been identified with security situation in Afghanistan. The regional, infrastructure and energy interconnectivity are great opportunities and so it is very important that Afghanistan stabilizes.

- c. The low hanging fruits which have acceptable costs and can be realized quickly as compared with other infrastructure projects are the way forward. For example, the infrastructure connectivity and the transport corridor. A great project with regard to Kabul – Peshawar Motorway, which we can extend right up to Tashkent. This is a low hanging fruit having a low cost of U.S. \$300 million.
- d. It is very important to have a transit and trade MOU with Uzbekistan. So Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan should sit together and reach a common transit trade agreement. We need to have common soft infrastructure in place which includes custom facilities and other framework, which we are present at bilateral level but not in a trilateral manner.
- e. In the security area, both Pakistan and Uzbekistan are members of SCO but there should be a joint commission, so we need to create the institutional framework for that. We need to have an MOU to create security framework and to initiate joint counter terrorism cooperation, exchange actionable intelligence as there could be threat after international forces withdraw, due to a security vacuum.
- f. It is important to interact at political leadership level and we need some framework for annual exchanges between our political leaders either through bilateral visits or meetings at international forums such as the UNGA, which is going to be held very soon, or other international forums such as the SCO.
- g. Uzbekistan is a doubly landlocked country and needs access to the warm waters. On that account, Pakistan is a prime factor which can facilitate it.
- h. Over past 3 years, the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Pakistan has increased 5 times and by 2019 amounted to 123 million. However, the potential for trade is much higher. Uzbekistan is opening itself to Pakistan and in just 3 years the number of tourists from Pakistan to Uzbekistan increased 10 times.
- i. Great prospects are opened by the construction of Mizar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar, which will significantly increase the geo-economic potential of the CPEC, allow the Central Asian countries to enter the seaports of Gwadar and Karachi, thereby realizing their full export potential.
- j. Pakistan will become a key hub for the countries of the region in the supply of various goods from Central Asia to the countries of the Middle East and South Asia. The construction of the railway will open access for Pakistan to big markets in Central Asia, Russia, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe.
- k. The construction of the Surkhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line, which in the future may become a link in the CASA-1000 project will provide opportunity for Pakistan to connect to the energy system of Central Asia and address issue of electricity shortages.

- l. During the pandemic, it is important to intensify cooperation in the production of medicines. In Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan, a pharmaceutical free economic zone “Boysun-Pharm”, is convenient for organizing joint Uzbek-Pakistani production of drugs and equipment necessary in the fight against coronavirus, as well as their further supply to Afghanistan.
- m. The Central Asian Region and Afghanistan is landlocked, and so Pakistan can provide a seaport for trade and commerce, which can be in the interest of entire Central Asia. Through CPEC, Pakistan is developing the Gawadar port which can be utilized by the Central Asian States as well.

6. Key Issues in the Peace Process and Their Solutions

- a. The current situation is fraught with a number of problems or factors needed to be considered and addressed to advance Afghan peace process, these include:
- b. The application of a selective approach of the main external forces in cooperation with the countries involved in Afghan crisis, contributes to the process of forming tactical alliances
- c. Ignoring the interests of other internal political forces in Afghanistan in launching peace talks with the Taliban
- d. Holding negotiations with Taliban in various formats creates the ground for postponement and non-implementation of the reached agreements by Taliban
- e. Reduction of US troops in Afghanistan without developing a comprehensive plan or program for the phased implementation of the negotiation processes
- f. Mechanism for integrating Taliban and other political forces into the government

- **Solutions:**

- a. Resolving the crisis by political means and promoting peace process in Afghanistan can be done at three interdependent levels.
- b. Launching a direct dialogue, without preconditions, between the Central government and the main armed opposition forces, primarily the Taliban
- c. Achieving a strong consensus at the regional level, as well as understanding and common approaches among non-regional players
- d. Principled political support for the peace process and financial assistance to the socio-economic reconstruction of Afghanistan from the leading world powers and donor organizations.

7. Spoilers of the Regional Peace

- a. There is inimical and hegemonic power, India, which is source of instability and threat to the regional peace and peaceful neighborly relations. India is averse to regional cooperation by hijacking SAARC and picking arms with its neighbors. It is on the course of Hindutva targeting and discriminating Muslims in particular of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh origin as well as Muslims in general including the CARs.
- b. There are other non-state actors like DAESH, TTP etc, and all these factors could be defeated once we have got a unified approach. This unified approach can choke the influence of these groups and block their funding and more so, put a diplomatic pressure on such forces.
- c. To save the peace process from the spoilers, requires a diplomatic, political and more so a cooperative understanding and approach on how to defeat their ulterior designs because of their mayhem and violence.