



## Conference Report

# "Post Doha Agreement Afghanistan: Implications and Options for Pakistan"



**Jointly Organized by**

**Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad &**

**Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia),**

**University of Peshawar on**

**22nd April 2020**



## Table of Contents

Brief Of The Event.....	2
Opening Remarks Maj Gen Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M), (Retd), President CGSS .....	3
<b>Speaker 1</b> .....	3
Mr. Rahimullah Yousafzai – Senior Journalist/Analyst.....	3
<b>Speaker 2</b> .....	4
Lt. Gen Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Retd), Former Federal Defense Minister & Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS .....	4
<b>Speaker 3</b> .....	6
Dr. Syed Akhtar Ali Shah – Former Secretary, Home, and Tribal Affairs Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.....	6
<b>Speaker 4</b> .....	9
Prof Hussain Shaheed Soharwardi, Director, Institute for Peace & Conflict Studies, University of Peshawar .....	9
<b>Speaker 5</b> .....	12
Dr. Simbal Khan, Consultant UNDP, Expert on Afghanistan.....	12
<b>Speaker 6</b> .....	14
Prof. Dr. Shabir Ahmad Khan – Director, Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar .....	14
<b>Speaker 7</b> .....	17
Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad, IR Department, University of Sargodha.....	17
<b>Speaker 8</b> .....	23
Ambassador Asif Durrani, Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran and Afghanistan.....	23
Concluding Remarks by Maj Gen Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M), (Retd), President, CGSS	24
Suggested Way Forward .....	25



## **BRIEF OF THE EVENT**

On 22nd April 2020, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS), Islamabad and Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar jointly organized an “National Conference” on the topic “**Post Doha Agreement Afghanistan: Implications and Options for Pakistan**”. The Conference was organized to analyze the peace deal between the U.S. and the Taliban and its implication for Pakistan. The Conference was moderated by Lieutenant Colonel Khalid Taimur Akram (Retd), Executive Director CGSS, and was attended by 52 participants which was followed by an interactive question and answer session. The panelists included the following:

- Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M), (Retd), President CGSS
- Mr. Rahimullah Yousafzai – Senior Journalist/ Analyst
- Lt. Gen Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Retd), Former Federal Defense Minister & Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS
- Dr. Syed Akhtar Ali Shah – Former Secretary, Home, and Tribal Affairs Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Prof Hussain Shaheed Soharwardi, Director, Institute for Peace & Conflict Studies, University of Peshawar
- Dr. Simbal Khan, Consultant UNDP, Expert on Afghanistan
- Prof. Dr. Shabir Ahmad Khan – Director, Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar
- Ambassador Asif Durrani, Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran and Afghanistan
- Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad, IR Department, University of Sargodha



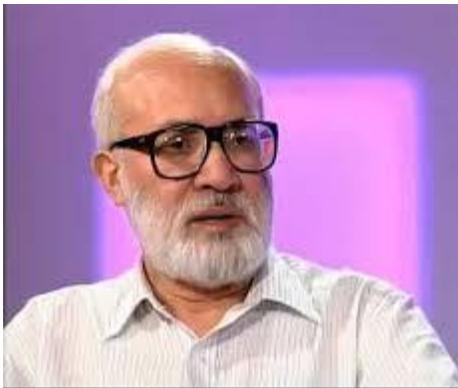
**Opening Remarks by Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M),  
(Retd), President CGSS**



General Jaffery (Retd) welcomed the panelists of the Conference and stated that developments in Afghanistan have taken place quickly while the world is grossed in coronavirus that has changed the geopolitics also. \$35 million have been given to Afghanistan by the U.S. for a fight against coronavirus. Abdullah Abdullah has been included as a part of the government to which he has agreed. Amrullah Salleh has been given the task of border areas, whether it is good or bad for us, we still have to see. U.S. is not showing too much of interest in Afghanistan now and EU has been given the task to be much more active on this front. In the regional scenario, after the U.S. the most important player seems to be China and with U.S withdrawal, we have to see how China responds to the situation.

**Speaker 1**

**Mr. Rahimullah Yousafzai – Senior Journalist/Analyst**



Mr. Rahimullah Yousafzai – Senior Journalist stated that the Doha peace agreement is still on hold and it is the biggest opportunity to bring peace and reconciliation if implemented in its true spirit this time. The inclusion of Abdullah Abdullah in the Afghan Government is a good move and he has demanded unconditional peace talks. The issue of releasing the prisoners is a huge hurdle now which does not seem to resolve easily. Afghan Government stated that it will release 1500 prisoners instead of five thousand which were agreed in Doha agreement. If the Afghan Government does not release the prisoners as per the agreement than Taliban will not take part in Intra-Afghan negotiations. Afghan Government has released 300 Taliban



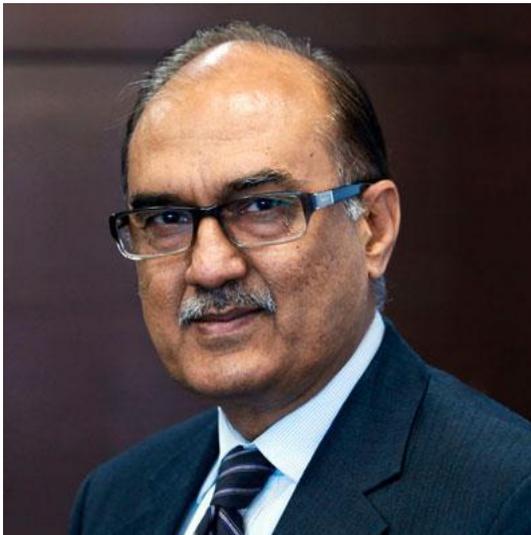
prisoners and the Taliban has released 60 government prisoners, but there have been allegations on both sides that the demanded prisoners have not been released. There has been an agreement on power sharing and its terms have been already discussed.

Afghan Government is in a position to use the prisoner issue as a bargaining chip. Afghan Government has two demands, first, reduced violence and second is the guarantee by each prisoner that they will not join the battlefield. However, these two demands are not being accepted by the Taliban. Unless this issue of prisoners is resolved, there are not going to be any intra-afghan negotiations which will further delay the fragile Doha peace agreement.

Amrullah Saleh has being given the charge of border areas. If the Minister in charge of the Afghan Government is strong, then Amrullah Saleh will not be able to overrule the law and order situation.

## **Speaker 2**

### **Lt. Gen Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Retd), Former Federal Defense Minister & Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS**



Lt. Gen Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Retd), Former Federal Defense Minister & Senior Member Advisory Board CGSS highlighted that many clauses of the Doha agreement have not been shared. Kabul Declaration was also signed on the same day at which the Doha agreement was signed, so the U.S. has very diplomatically signed two agreements on the same day, therefore it is a trilateral arrangement. U.S. is not leaving Afghanistan willingly due to the strategic proximity of Afghanistan and still has interests in the

region due to Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, CPEC, and the Indian Ocean. However, the U.S will pursue its interests through other means. Pakistan must



keep playing the role of a facilitator in the process as a peaceful, stable and friendly country, as Afghanistan is in the maximum interest of Pakistan. Certain fractions do not want the success of this agreement. These fractions are in minority. Many countries want peace and stability in Afghanistan including the citizens of Afghanistan, Afghan Taliban, Pakistan, Iran, Central Asian countries, Russia, and China. There are many other fractions involved in Intra-Afghan Dialogue other than the Taliban and Afghan Government.

These uncertainties and tensions will prevail until the U.S. withdraws its forces from Afghanistan. After the U.S. withdraws its troops from Afghanistan, the situation will completely change. Various implications including economic and political implications will be faced by Pakistan. Pakistan, due to its significant geostrategic location, will be used by big forces for their respective interests. Hence, the Pakistani leadership is required to deal with the situation efficiently. Pakistan must stay neutral. Another intimation for Pakistan will be the spillover impact after the establishment of Islamic Emirate if the Taliban becomes a major stakeholder in Afghanistan. However, it has yet to be seen that which system that delivers successfully to its people including better law and order situation and equal economic opportunities.



### **Speaker 3**

#### **Dr. Syed Akhtar Ali Shah – Former Secretary, Home, and Tribal Affairs Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**



Dr. Syed Akhtar Ali Shah explained that there is no doubt that the Doha Agreement is a stepping stone towards a national peace dialogue between the Taliban and a conglomerate of Afghan political factions and figures led by the government of Afghanistan. However, it is imperative to understand the perspective and ideological moorings of the parties. The ideological foundation of the Taliban is to establish a strictly Shariah-governed Afghan state 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'. The Taliban achieved this goal in 1996 and ruled

over Afghanistan as the main governmental body till 2001 and still wants to restore the Islamic Government. Ousted from power, the Taliban remained engaged to push U.S. and NATO military forces out of Afghanistan and delegitimize the governments of Afghanistan and used both conventional and unconventional tactics to pursue its goals. Mullahs from the Kandahari Pashtun tribes, known as the Quetta Shura enjoy political power. Taliban control 14 districts in Afghanistan (4% of the country) and maintain an active physical presence in an additional 263 districts (66%).

The group promoted jihad as a “divine obligation” and heavily encouraged it among members, citing that failure to support jihad is a sin. The rise of ISIS prompted the Taliban to publicly encourage the preservation of pan-Islamic unity. The group views ISIS as a threat to its goal of establishing a unified Islamist movement to expel Western powers due to its extremism.

Perspective of the Afghan Government is elected and legitimate government recognized by all members of the UN and wants political set up within the parameters of the Constitution. The government believes in pluralism and women’s rights, national reconciliation, and wants cessation of violence.



The Taliban and other factions of the country including representatives of the Kabul government will meet to begin an intra-Afghan dialogue that seeks to find solutions to the future political set up

The fundamental flaw in this agreement is that the internationally recognized Afghan government -not included in the negotiations. By accepting the Taliban demand to exclude the Afghan government, the Trump administration has betrayed the ally and elevated the Taliban to the US equal. The Taliban have broken off talks with the Afghan government on a prisoner exchange. Afghan Government has released 100 Taliban prisoners a day after the armed group said it was walking out of talks with Kabul. The Taliban wants 15 "top commanders" to be released, while the armed group has accused Afghan authorities of needlessly wasting time. Despite the setback over the prisoner release, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is optimistic. In Kabul, some significant players, including Ghani, are only reluctantly cooperating with Zalmay Khalilzad, the US peace envoy, who is pushing to convene the intra-Afghan dialogue as soon as possible, now that the agreement's March 10 deadline has passed.

To bring these two processes together is to create a Government of National Reconciliation (GNR) with ideally, Ghani responsible for governance and Abdullah for peace and for reconciliation efforts. The GNR would be fundamentally different from the National Unity Government (NUG) which has run Afghanistan for the past five years. Ahmad Masuod has suggested to bring structural changes within the constitution for a just and peaceful political order. He considers the present constitution as centralized not in consonance with the ethnic fabric of the society. He seeks decentralization of political power akin to the Swiss constitution. The Taliban have refused to engage in talks with a team of negotiators announced by the Afghan government, saying the move violates the insurgent group's peace-building pact with the United States. Unleashed a new wave of attacks against government forces in northern Afghanistan and overran a district. Maintained government can participate in intra-Afghan negotiations only as a group like other factions in the country. Alleged Kabul's move was meant to "monopolize" the issues and to create "impediments" on the way to intra-Afghan negotiations. Abdullah Abdullah endorsed the official



delegation for peace talks with the Taliban. He gives priority to the peace process, despite differences over the results of presidential elections announced earlier this year. Also, Ghani's spokesman Sediq Sediqqi, said in a tweet that the Taliban now have no more reasons to delay the intra-Afghan talks. The rare consensus among rival Afghan politicians has been hailed by the European Union. The number of Taliban inmates freed by the Afghan government is now a total of 300.

Ghani has offered to his main rival, Abdullah Abdullah, the protocol of vice president in a capacity as head of the High Peace Council, but an offer is not accepted so far. Hamid Karzai, Abdul Rab Rasoul Sayyaf, Yunus Qanooni, and Mohammad Karim Khalili, have urged President Ghani to stop the appointment of government officials for the time being. At the same time, efforts are also underway to help Ghani and Abdullah to resolve their differences.

Alice Wells, the US State Department's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, in a tweet said that international aid requires partnership with an inclusive government referring to Afghanistan.

Abdullah Abdullah in a statement has accepted the Afghan political leaders' call for the extension of the negotiations over ending the political crisis. Abdullah pledged to cooperate with the political leaders to solve the crisis. Maisam spokesperson says that Abdullah Abdullah and his supporters want a comprehensive and participatory system in the country. In this process, Hanif Ullah Atmar or some others may emerge as a consensus Presidential choice.

## **Implications**

In case the Intra Afghan Negotiations do not succeed, Afghanistan may plunge into a civil war. The peace deal will enable Trump to withdraw troops before November Elections, Conversely, the Taliban could use the deal to further consolidate their power and eventually seize Kabul.

This agreement has the potential to end the fighting in Afghanistan if the signatories and other actors are sincere in implementing the agreement. This is



not a small achievement that how averse the Taliban have been to negotiations in general and talking to the Afghan government.

Relative peace on the Western border will relieve troops and enable more concentration on the eastern border. Taliban Based in Pakistan will shift to Afghanistan. People to people contact will improve and will enhance trade, cultural, and education exchange programs.

Successful implementation of the agreement will boost Pakistan's diplomatic image as a facilitator and vindicate Pakistan's stance for a negotiated settlement which will give her an edge as a further parley within the region. The development of mineral and natural resources in Afghanistan will attract human resources from Pakistan.

Pakistan has to play its part well – acceptable to all stakeholders and countries of the region. Pakistan's interest lies in an intra-Afghan power sharing arrangements that leaves parties dependent on Islamabad for its enforcement. A Government of National Reconciliation with the Taliban as a shareholder in Pakistan's interest and not a Taliban's Exclusive Government.

#### **Speaker 4**

#### **Prof Hussain Shaheed Soharwardi, Director, Institute for Peace & Conflict Studies, University of Peshawar**



Prof Hussain Shaheed Soharwardi stated that complete collapse or a ray of hope- the future of Afghanistan lies in the hands of the United States: Its economic aid, military assistance, and its mode of withdrawal. However, the question is, will the US again take decisions in haste during Endgame, in the backdrop of Doha Peace Deal??

The total US cost to raise the Afghan Army is \$ 90 Billion. It provides around \$ 4 Billion to maintain security forces and almost \$ 500 million in civilian aid to Afghanistan. Moreover, international



donations finance 75% of Afghanistan's public expenditures per year. Keeping this in view, the Doha Peace Deal was to settle almost two-year long effort for a war that has lasted for nearly two decades. The presence of the US in all forms, whether it is military, political or social, has been essential in molding the country and this is the very reason Pompeo's recent announcement of cutting \$1 Billion of the US aid to Afghanistan on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March that has left many to scratch their heads and rather anxious for the entire region. This action was taken to relay a warning to the Afghan government to settle the dispute between both the Presidential candidates, Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani, squabbling for Presidency only to hinder the Reconciliation Process. President Ghani has emphasized in the past that the Afghan security forces (Army as well as police) would not survive for more than six months after the cutting of US aid.

To form the backbone of the country through financing various forms of reconstruction and aid to Afghanistan over the past eighteen years by the United States is a total of approximately \$137 billion, for economic cause, establishing and sustaining the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). Initially it was not clear that which area this cut would be directed towards, they recently announced that the cut would directly be applied to Afghan Security Forces. It would be from the \$ 4.2 billion Pentagon fund that is allotted to the annual budget for three quarters of the forces. On the other hand, fighting is already taking place in 16 provinces every day. ISIS is not only knocking at the door but has established itself initially. Afghanistan security forces are already overstretched and weary fighting at one end with insurgents and the other with foreign terrorists. They are in civil war and war simultaneously. Any reduction in their training, equipment, or facilitation will ruin the whole process of counter terrorism militarily and Doha Peace Deal politically.

Being the 'graveyard of empires', the strategy for Afghanistan has been continuously revised on many occasions due to its increasing intricacies. President Trump in one of his speeches in 2017 specifically highlighted this issue using phrases like the 'political settlement through effective efforts of the military', making it evident that the US policy has mostly been military and security-centric. The accelerated efforts on their behalf are a clear indication of the hasty withdrawal the US is trying to execute. An example of this is how the



Peace Process was revived in Qatar in 2018: The Trump administration backed off from its long-standing 'Afghan-led' process, resorting to engaging with the Taliban directly. Under the prevailing political circumstances, the possibility of myopic decision-making can't be neglected. Examining it under the state-level analysis of foreign policy, it is an apparent win for Trump, especially considering the upcoming elections in November. The withdrawal entails two alternative possibilities- an apt contingency plan for the stability of the region or just another reminiscent of its past endeavors. Previously, when the US won its war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during 1991, it left this land in haste. Hence, with US short-sightedness, a wonderful victory of winning the Cold War was converted into a stupid defeat by the rise of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This time, reducing the US military assistance to Afghanistan will be counted in the same para: premature, insane, untimely, and short-sightedness.

Considering how the ethnic clashes perpetuate the tattered social fabric, there is no doubt that they have crept into the Afghan military and an inept dealing can prove detrimental. Lawmaker Abdul Qader Qalatwal emphasized that if the forces don't receive the needed support it could lead to factions within the army resulting in a more divided Afghanistan. According to a spokesperson for the Defense Ministry, Gen Mohammad Zahir Azimi forces have been given a more nationalistic color by having quotas based on ethnicity, with 40-45 % for Pashtun, 30-35 %Tajik, 10-12 percent Hazara and 8-10% Uzbek and other groups. Despite these measures to curb the tension, the Afghan army is still dominated by minorities from the North (non-Pashtun i.e. 55%) who see the Taliban as oppressors, the majority of whom are Pashtuns.

Given the above statistics, it is highly likely that the forces in minority would be inclined towards backing the currently announced President by the official Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, Dr. Ashraf Ghani. While Dr. Abdullah, ethnically a non-Pashtun, has a chance of garnering the support of the non-Pashtun majority in the country's military. This may disintegrate the Afghan Security Forces resulting in further chaos and turbulence between already ethnically fractured and fragile Afghan society.

Needless to say that the lack of Afghan Government's representation at the signing of the Accord, i.e., the US directly having engagement with the Pashtun Taliban, only fueled the fire. Non-Pashtuns feel alienated during the whole



process. This grudge may be seen in the intransigent attitude of the non-Pashtun representative-Dr Abdullah for not accepting the peace broker's role of both Zalmay Khalilzad as well as Mike Pompeo for a National Unity Government. The US has and continues to play a key role in the war-torn region and only long-term strategic depth and a well-put withdrawal plan can ensure the peace and prosperity of the region. If failed to do so, the country is susceptible to another chapter of turbulence

A multi-billion dollars army needs support rather than punishment. The Afghan army is already drained and tired of an unending series of wars taking place at home. Reduction in their budget will result in factions in their rank and files. This may lead to the balkanization of Afghanistan at ethnic and sub-ethnic levels, which will hamper the US interests in the region. With the US haste policies, no more to Frankenstein's effects in this region. American regional strategy and interests still depend on Afghanistan's government and its security forces.

### **Speaker 5**

#### **Dr. Simbal Khan, Consultant UNDP, Expert on Afghanistan**



Dr. Simbal Khan, Consultant UNDP, Expert on Afghanistan highlighted the existence of divergent forces within the Afghan Government and the negotiating team. She stated that two things are very important to remember first of all there are a huge number of factions within the Afghan political setup and Taliban and do not seem very cohesive. The Ghani government is using delaying strategies and looking at the results of US elections in November 2020. Ghani faction is not interested in any end or meaningful settlement. They are status quo actors and their power is linked to the continuation of U.S. military and economic support even if it is shrinking. Iran and other regional countries, as well as multilateral institutions, must be involved. We should look at the 6+2



framework again to bring the region together and to discuss all possible scenarios.

She further stated that the Doha Agreement still hasn't moved forward. Two things are very important to remember, there are two parties for the discussion on the Intra-Afghan dialogue, one is the Ghani Government, political setup, and Taliban on the other side. It is not a very cohesive picture because within that there are a huge number of factions and within the heart of the political polity.

Abdullah Abdullah leading the dialogue process is also playing with some cabinet positions but there are certain contexts to why he wanted to be leading the dialogue process. Ghani Government and Abdullah Abdullah have set up a unified and joint negotiating team, but both sides are trying to negotiate two different ends. Abdullah Abdullah faction getting into the dialogue process are not interested in five more years of Ghani Government. They are hoping as the Taliban are hoping that this peace process is going to lead quickly within a year or so to some kind of an interim setup where new setup comes forward because they did not recognize that the Ghani election also and there's a lot of doubt.

Ghani's side is trying to delay the process as much as possible and because he wants to go through his five more years of government as far as long as possible. So there are huge divergent forces within this whole process, which is very complicated. There is a delay which is a proper strategy that Ghani government is thinking. There's a lot of wagering going on. That is why there is incitement from the Taliban to break the dialogue. These are the things that Pakistan needs to remember. There is a lot till November that can happen.

There are many benefits and merits to get the International Community and international multilateral institutions involved. UN role should be expanded so that all kinds of multilateral guarantees can come and give confidence to the process.



## **Speaker 6**

### **Prof. Dr. Shabir Ahmad Khan – Director, Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia), University of Peshawar**



Prof. Dr. Shabir Ahmad Khan stated that whatever happens in Afghanistan is more important for Pakistan than happenings in any other state in historical and geographical perspectives.

Due to the phenomenon of 'layover' regional politics have been absorbed by politics at a global level for the last four decades.

USA has taken many policy turns on the region during the last two decades or so. USA might be serious in withdrawal because of election-year there while the chaos and instability if prevails and prolongs, the neighbors of Afghanistan will have to deal with. It means sub-contracting security to the neighbors of Afghanistan.

Balkanization of Afghanistan and the region at large has been on cards since long. Middle East has been devastated, it seems escalation of conflict in Central Asia is the option.

The division of Afghanistan on ethnic or sectarian basis will have catastrophic consequences for its neighbors. Bringing and sustaining peace in Afghanistan must be a shared responsibility of the regional states.

Historically Afghans have never been able to resolve their issues internally and have always sought foreign assistance. During the 19th Century, Shah Shuja came to South for seeking British assistance while Sher Ali went to North after Russian help. During the 20th Century one Afghan faction invited Soviet Russia while the other again came to South and this time sought Pakistan's help. In 21 Century, one section welcomed American attack while the other Afghan section opposed it and looked for foreign backing. That is why Afghan peace settlement can neither be negotiated nor sustained without its neighbors' back. Major Powers also operate through regional countries. If neighbors of Afghanistan



pull different groups in different directions peace process may stall. Therefore the unanimity of neighbors of Afghanistan on the peace process is imperative.

Pakistan and other regional states need to re-construct the regional security paradigm through regional integration. Importantly regional dynamics have changed and the necessity for connectivity has been understood. This is the main challenge; Pakistan needs to be closely engaged with the neighbors of Afghanistan as peace process implementation must be a shared responsibility and Pakistan cannot commit to be the sole guarantor for anyone.

The worst scenario can emerge if Iran and Pakistan engage in a proxy war in Afghanistan. It makes little difference to extra-regional powers whether Pakistan bleeds, Iran bleeds, or both along with Afghanistan. Western desires to keep the Eurasian powers divided and hamper the Eurasian integration will be realized in that scenario as Russia will support Iran while China will support Pakistan. Pakistan's economic situation can't afford this kind of scenario and therefore must be in close consultation with Iran, Russia, Central Asian Republics and China to persuade these countries to utilize the capabilities of the Taliban for enduring peace in Afghanistan through a strong central government.

Doha agreement has legitimized the Taliban as a political entity in Afghanistan. Americans call it a lost opportunity when Taliban were ignored to be part of the Afghan govt. in 2001.

When the Taliban were excluded in the immediate post 9/11 period from a political settlement, it could not resolve the issue. If any other group is excluded from the future setup now that will be harmful for sustainable peace. It is worth mentioning that each ethnic group has a majority in one part of the country. Pakistan, therefore, needs to reach out to all groups whether in government or out of government currently.

Pakistan needs a multiple track policy to be in touch with all groups in Afghanistan and its neighbors through a backchannel, track II, and track I simultaneously. When America was signing a deal with the Taliban in Doha on the same day they were signing deals with Ashraf Ghani in Kabul. What I want



to say is that when some Pakistani politicians and journalists participated in Ashraf Ghani's oath taking ceremony, it would have been better some also participated in Abdullah Abdullah's oath taking ceremony. India is planning to unite all anti-Taliban groups to sabotage the peace process and also weighing the option to invite all groups including Taliban to India.

All the neighbors of Afghanistan desire a strong Central Govt in Afghanistan which is capable of securing its borders and controlling drug production and marketing. Taliban have shown their ability during 1990s to control and maintain peace in their country because of the punishment of corrupt officials and discouraging criminality. Protecting traditional values and dispensing quick justice has earned populations support for the Taliban. It is also obvious that they have been matured politically, visited all regional capitals including Tashkent, Tehran, Beijing, Islamabad, and Moscow. Taliban have no desire to move beyond their national borders. This was the message conveyed by them to the regional capitals.

However it is also a reality that the Taliban cannot become absolute power in Afghanistan as other groups have majority and control in at least some parts of the country while also have the backing of some neighboring countries. In 1998 Taliban had agreed to a cease-fire, allowing women education and join talks with the United Front or Northern Alliance but unfortunately that opportunity was missed. Taliban did not enjoy the respect and support of major powers and neighboring countries then, but now they enjoy the hard-earned respect and support of neighboring countries.

The main agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue, according to the Doha Peace agreement, is to sort out a future political roadmap, so an inclusive government dominated by the Taliban can be instrumental for sustainable peace in Afghanistan through a strong Central Government.

Intra-Afghan peace talks must have a clear focus and a limited set of people needs to be engaged with a full mandate from the respective side. A clear mechanism and realistic timeline need to be set for intra-Afghan talks. Tashkent has already offered to host intra-Afghan dialogue. It is a good omen as Uzbekistan a double landlocked country desperately looking for peace in



Afghanistan to initiate its connectivity infrastructure particularly rail and electricity projects. Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian Republic which has pursued an independent foreign policy and has the guts to take bold decisions in its national interests irrespective of Russian or American pressure. Pakistan needs to encourage such developments and also invite all groups to host such meetings for bringing different Afghan groups to the table for talks.

### **Speaker 7**

#### **Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad, IR Department, University of Sargodha**



Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad stated that the US- Taliban Peace Deal is an opportunity for stability in Pakistan and stabilize deterrence and strategic stability in South Asia. An important aspect of the deal is U.S though termed Taliban as “insurgents, a terrorist group and oppressor.” Yet, it signed an agreement with the Taliban.

U.S-Taliban has established “Military Channel” under the agreement. It will serve Confidence and Security Building Measure mitigate distrust, and improve bilateral relations. US Military Commander General Scott Miller held meeting with Taliban Officials in Doha office to discuss two important issues. First, the prisoner release issue. Second, the Taliban concerns that the US could breach the agreement.

We should not forget that the US and the Soviet Union established a hotline in the wake of 1962, the Cuban Missiles Crisis. Hotline prevented future crisis and the outbreak of violence. Before the establishment of the Military Channel, President Trump has suspended the dialogue process. It was resumed due to the involvement of external actors. Group of P5+ 1 countries negotiated with Iran. Direct communications led to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In India-Pakistan Case, New Delhi suspended the



dialogue process and it led to the animosity, increased suspicions, and resulted in a dangerous crisis including the Balakot Crisis.

All these instances emphasize that the direct communications between adversaries results in improving relations and mitigate distrust.

### **Perception about the Deal in the US**

The deal is criticized by several quarters in US.

- i. **John Robert Bolton** Former National Security Advisor compared it with, “Paris Peace Accord,” wherein the U.S signed an agreement with North Vietnam in 1973, to end the Vietnam War. Bolton has also termed it similar to Operation Frequent Wind. US evacuated its embassy staff from the US Embassy in South Vietnam.
- ii. Several quarters have equated the accord with “Full US retreat, a document of surrender, appeasement and encourage totalitarianism.”

### **Afghan’s Perception of the Deal**

A segment of Afghan society believes that the deal will bring peace in Afghanistan and reduce the level of violence. However, the majority believes that,

- i. **Undermined Afghan Govt.** It is believed that despite Taliban attacks against Govt it is recognized and government authority is undermined.
- ii. **Deal Gave recognition to and Legitimised Taliban.** It is a wide spread belief that the deal takes away everything from the government. US gave legitimacy and recognition of the Taliban.
  - (i) **Siraj-Ud-Din ink an article in NY Times.**
  - (ii) **Trump** announced to hold a meeting with Taliban leaders. Later, I held a telephonic conversation with Mullah Baradar in Doha Office.



- (iii) **US outsource Counterterror Operation to Taliban.** Earlier the group was viewed as oppressors, insurgents, and Pariah today they are viewed as **“Peace Builders.”**
  - (iv) **Haqqani Network** is viewed as reformers in Afghanistan.
- i. **Taliban sustained US Pressure** because of Pakistan.
  - ii. **India was deliberately kept out of the peace process to please Pakistan.**
  - iii. **Pakistan has a working relationship with Taliban**
    - (i) Taliban thanked Pakistan at the occasion of the signing of the accord.
    - (ii) Pakistan’s Foreign Minister was present at the occasion in Doha.

Critics believe these are sufficient proofs to prove that Pakistan has a working relationship with Taliban.

1. **Pakistan Imposed Taliban of Afghans** is a widespread belief in Afghanistan.
  - i. **President Ashraf Ghani** and political circles in Afghanistan criticizes Pakistan.
  - ii. **Pakistan’s Role in Peace Process.** Afghan government and political circles are refuting Pakistan’s political role in creating a conducive environment for conflict resolution which led to the signing of the peace deal.
  - iii. **Differences among Intra-Afghan** groups are consolidating Pakistan backed Taliban.



## **Implications for Pakistan**

The peace deal was in first phase and Pakistan played an important role. The second phase is Intra-Afghan Groups and Pakistan may not be able to play a vital role.

- i. **A United Afghan Government** can restrict Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan.
- ii. **Taliban Can Challenge Pakistan.** Taliban have gained international recognition and can become overconfident conversely can challenge Pakistan in future.
- iii. **Indian Intelligences can reach Taliban.** Indian intelligence agencies can reach Abdul Ghani Baradar as he was in Pakistan's custody. Baradar may have feelings of resentment for Pakistan. Or RAW can also approach Sher Abbas he is Chief negotiator in Doha Office. Abbas graduated from the Indian Military Academy.
- iv. **Taliban Splinter Group.** Probably Taliban splinter groups including the Mashad Shura may pose challenges for Pakistan.
- v. **Indian Govt. may Establish Working Relationship with Taliban.** New Delhi based strategists and decision makers may emulate from Iran, the US, Chinese and Russian policy and establish working relationships with Taliban.
- vi. **Indian Propaganda.** Indian media, writers, think tanks, and diplomats have launched propaganda against Pakistan and trying to sell the narrative that Pakistan is supporting Lashkar-e-Taiba. LeT will mount attacks in Indian illicit occupied Kashmir. Further, the Pakistani government provided safe heavens to Al Qaeda leadership.



## **Prospects for Pakistan**

- i. Peace Deal will bring an end to US accusation and pressure against Pakistan.
- ii. Prior to the signing of the Peace Deal US forces killed several TTP leaders in Afghanistan.
- iii. Taliban and Haqqani Network is recognized by the US and International Community. Pakistan will be able to openly maintain relations with them and out-source counterterrorism operations against TTP. US State Dept. recently claimed that there are probably 3000 to 5000 TTP fighters in Afghanistan.
- iv. **Countering RAW with Taliban Support.** Islamabad with the Taliban's support will enjoy an edge over the security situation in Afghanistan leading to counter R.A.W. anti-Pakistan activities through its consulates in Afghanistan. Conversely, stability will be restored in the Baluchistan and tribal areas of Pakistan.
- v. **Withdrawal of Pakistani Forces from Western Front.** TTP R.A.W. funded activities led to the deployment of Pakistani armed forces on Western Front. Despite intense crisis e.g. Balakot crisis Rawalpindi could not withdraw its forces and deploy them on the Eastern border therefore Peace Deal is an opportunity for stability in Pakistan and stabilize strategic stability in the region.
- vi. **Counter Land Warfare Doctrine.** The withdrawal of armed forces from the Western border and subsequent deployment on the Eastern border will enable Pakistan to counter LWD.
  - (i) **Page 12 of LWD Discusses Fighting in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Environment.** Indian armed forces carried out Military Exercises Gagan Shakti and Vijay Prahar in April and May 2018 for this purpose.
  - (ii) **LWD enables India to Deploy its Forces within 36 to 48 hours.**



- (iii) T-90 MS Tanks** equipped with the PKUZ-1A protection system enables the crew to operate it in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Environment. It is fitted with an anti-craft gun and anti-tank guided missile.
- (iv) S-400 Ballistic Missile Defence System.** If it is deployed in Jalandhar Indian Air Force (IAF) will be able to shoot PAF fighter jets hovering over Islamabad. If S-400 is deployed in Himachal Pardesh will enable IAF to cover entire Kashmir and deployment in Amritsar will enable IAF to neutralize PAF fighter jets over Peshawar.



## **Speaker 8**

### **Ambassador Asif Durrani, Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Iran and Afghanistan**



Ambassador Asif Durrani stated that for a successful outcome of the post-Doha Agreement multiple actions by the stakeholders would be required.

Since Taliban have emerged as the strongest party, they would be required to fulfill certain conditions to make the reconciliation process a success and durable. Taliban would be expected to:

- a. Announce a ceasefire as confidence-building measure;
- b. Should come out clearly on women issues as a Pro-forma statement that “women issues would be dealt in accordance with Sharia” would not be enough. Besides, US/EU would be closely monitoring their behavior towards women and may have implications for the recognition of their government, if they come to power or become a major stakeholder
- c. The ethnic and sectarian balance would be required for the success of future dispensation; Taliban’s demand that all major ethnic and sectarian groups leaders declare their allegiance (Baiyat) to Mullah Haibatullah Akhund may derail the entire process;

Ashraf Ghani not to apply delaying tactics for the release of Taliban prisoners to prolong his rule, He must honor its timelines under the Doha agreement which require the delisting of Taliban under 1267 Committee of the UNSC and withdrawal of troops in 135 days to bring it down to 8600 level and complete withdrawal in another 9.5 months; and counsel India not to sabotage the reconciliation process and stop meddling in Pakistan through the Afghan territory.



Time has come that Pakistan may seriously consider formulating a strong regional policy, which centers around a peaceful neighborhood. This would relieve the country looking for allies far afield.

**Concluding Remarks by Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery HI(M),  
(Retd), President, CGSS**

Concluding the Conference, General Jaffery (Retd), stated that a stable Afghanistan is in favor of Pakistan. We must stop looking across the Atlantic and have a policy with factors towards Central Asia, Russia China. A question arises here will the Americans leave Afghanistan in totality as it has been discussed that their interest will remain, will they be able to operate through Pakistan, and do they trust Pakistan to that extent? That remains to be seen. The drug production is sustaining Afghanistan to quite an extent at all sections of society. If the Taliban come into power, this will affect because this is the stimulating policy. It will be very difficult for the status quo people to accept this. The civil war in Afghanistan will affect Pakistan and will not affect India. So will it be possible for the Indians to encourage the Civil War and not to allow these agreements to take place? We hope whatever happens will be to the advantage of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region.



### **Suggested Way Forward**

- The issue of prisoners' release must be resolved at priority, if it remains unresolved then there are not going to be any intra-afghan negotiations that will further delay the fragile Doha peace agreement.
- The fundamental flaw in the Doha peace agreement is that the internationally recognized Afghan government has not been included in the negotiations. By accepting the Taliban demand to exclude the Afghan government, the Trump administration betrayed the ally and elevated the Taliban to the US equal. Therefore, the Afghan Government should also be involved.
- The way to bring these two processes together is to create a Government of National Reconciliation (GNR) with, ideally, Ghani responsible for governance and Abdullah for the peace and reconciliation efforts.
- Afghanistan security forces are already overstretched and weary fighting at one end with insurgents and the other with foreign terrorists. They are in civil war and war simultaneously. Any reduction in their training, equipment, or facilitation will ruin the whole process of counter terrorism and the Doha Peace Deal politically.
- On the regional platform, Iran has been the missing piece. Iran has not been included which is a huge player and has a great impact on what happens inside Afghanistan. Iran and other regional countries, as well as multilateral institutions, must be involved. We should look at the 6+2 framework again to bring the region together and to discuss all possible scenarios.
- There are many benefits and merits to get the International Community and international multilateral institutions involved. UN role should be expanded so that all kinds of multilateral guarantees can come and give confidence to the process.
- Intra-Afghan peace talks must have a clear focus and a limited set of people needs to be engaged with a full mandate from the respective side. A clear mechanism and realistic timeline need to be set for intra-Afghan talks.



- Pakistan may be used by other forces to pursue their interests, therefore, the situation must be dealt with diligently by the leadership of Pakistan and it must stay neutral.
- Pakistan must keep playing the role of a facilitator in the process as peaceful, stable and friendly, Afghanistan is in the maximum interest of Pakistan.
- Successful implementation of the agreement will boost Pakistan's diplomatic image as a facilitator and will clear Pakistan's stance for a negotiated settlement which will give her an edge in further parleys within the region.
- Relative peace on the Western border will relieve troops and enable more concentration on the eastern border. Taliban based in Pakistan will shift to Afghanistan. People to people contact will improve leading to increase trade, cultural, and education exchange programs.
- Pakistan needs a multiple track policy to be in touch with all groups in Afghanistan and its neighbors through a backchannel, track II and track I simultaneously and closely engage with the neighbors of Afghanistan as peace process implementation must be a shared responsibility and Pakistan cannot commit to be the sole guarantor for anyone.
- Immediate neighbors of Afghanistan- Pakistan, China, Iran, and Russia may ensure that the peace process remains on track and avoid encouraging any of the Afghan parties to sabotage the process.
- Major Powers also operate through regional countries. If neighbors of Afghanistan pull different groups in different directions peace process may stall. Therefore the unanimity of neighbors of Afghanistan on the peace process is imperative.