



Conference

Report

Pak-Afghan Relations: The Way Forward

Center for Global & Strategic Studies, Islamabad

Conference Report

“Pak-Afghan Relations: The Way Forward”

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Participants

The Conference was attended by renowned scholars, analysts and members of the CGSS Advisory Board. The list of participants is as follows:

Host **Lieutenant General Muhammad Zahir Ul Islam, HI(M), (Retd), Chairman, Center for Global & Strategic Studies (CGSS)**

Guest Speakers **Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani, Former Governor KP**

Ambassador Amjad Majid Abbasi, Member Advisory Board CGSS

Lieutenant General Khalid Naeem Lodhi, HI(M), (Retd), Former Secretary Defence, Member Advisory Board CGSS.

Participants

- a. Dr. Shoaib Suddle, Former Inspector General Police and Former Tax Ombudsman
- b. Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery, HI (M), (Retd), President CGSS
- c. Brigadier Mujahid Alam, (Retd), Principal Lawrence College Murree, Member Advisory Board CGSS
- d. Brigadier Akhtar Nawaz Janjua, SI(M), (Retd), Member Advisory Board CGSS
- e. Mr. Amer Hashmi, Advisor National University of Science and Technology (NUST), President Global Think Tank Network (GTTN), Islamabad
- f. Mr. Makhdoom Babar, Member Advisory Board CGSS
- g. Dr. Athar Jellani, Agriculturist, Member Advisory Board CGSS
- h. Brigadier Amjad Javaid, SI(M), (Retd), Member Advisory Board CGSS
- i. Brigadier Amir Yaqub, (Retd), Global Think Tank Network (GTTN), Islamabad

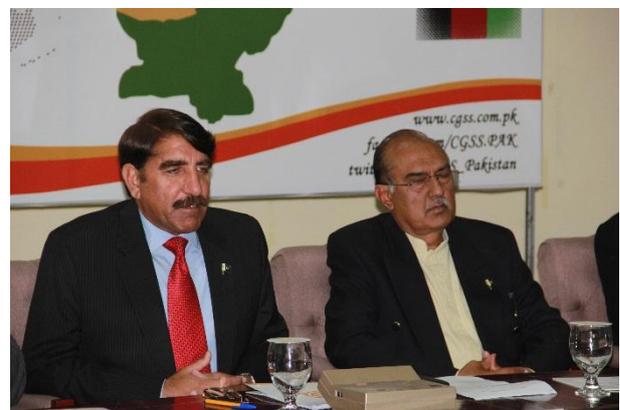
- j. Mr. Tahir Alam, Former Inspector General of Police, Islamabad
- k. Professor Humayun Khan, Lecturer National Defence University, Islamabad
- l. Dr. Fazal-ur-Rahman, Department of Strategic Studies, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defense University, Islamabad
- m. Mr. Tauqir Ahmed, Member Advisory Board CGSS
- n. Barrister Shahzad Akbar, Advocate Supreme Court, Member Advisory Board CGSS
- o. Major Azhar-ul-Islam, (Retd), Member Advisory Board CGSS
- p. Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Prime Institute, Islamabad
- q. Mr. Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad
- r. Brigadier Said Nazir Mohmand, (Retd), Defence Analyst

Lieutenant General Muhammad Zahir-Ul-Islam, HI(M), (Retd)-Chairman CGSS

Lieutenant General Muhammad Zahir-Ul-Islam, HI(M), (Retd) started his speech by thanking the participants present at the meeting especially the speakers; Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani-Former Governor KP and Baluchistan, Lieutenant General Khalid Naeem Lodhi, HI(M),(Retd)-Former Secretary Defence, and Ambassador Amjad Abbasi.

General Zahir (Retd), stated that the region has been unstable particularly because of the security threats which have spread like a plague in both countries. We have overwrought relations with our neighbour, Afghanistan. He briefly mentioned his efforts of conversing with the senior leadership of both the countries to bring peace and harmony. According to General

Zahir (Retd), there are highly qualified people on both sides who can contribute in bringing peace. To formally commence the discussion, General Zahir (Retd) invited the Former Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Baluchistan- Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani, to share his views on this important topic.



Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani-Former Governor KP and Baluchistan

Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani started his address by stating that it has been seven decades since we are dealing with the diplomatic and political front of Afghanistan but our approach towards our Afghan brothers has been a “routine approach.” He said that Pakistan’s run of the mill approach failed to achieve a friendly relation. While emphasizing on the significance of Pak-Afghan relations, he told the audience regarding one of his papers on the Afghanistan-Pakistan relations titled as “Beyond Routine.” He stated that Pakistan will always be impacted by the situation in Afghanistan and cannot turn a blind eye towards those issues. Therefore, he laid specific

emphasis on a regional level proactive and imaginative approach vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Today it is India and not Pakistan which has succeeded in achieving a strategic depth in Afghanistan. The turmoil in Afghanistan has left disastrous impacts on Pakistan since the last four decades. Keeping in view the sensitivity of the Afghan territory, it is imperative for Pakistan to deter foreign invasion in Afghanistan for Pakistan's survival. Historically, Afghanistan has witnessed two major invasions; firstly by the Soviet Union and then the USA. Moving on, he was of the opinion that we should place Afghanistan as a top priority right next to China in our foreign policy.



History suggests that Pak-Afghan relations have been hostage to the superpowers. At the time of independence, Pakistan was a close ally of the USA whereas Afghanistan was under the influence of communist clan which precluded the friendly ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan at that time.

Mr. Owais stressed on the fact that it is unfair to entirely blame the superpowers as the tragedy of Pak-Afghan affairs is that, both the countries failed to evolve an independent approach and identified their self-interest with those superpowers. He said that we had paid a huge price in the name of hegemonic designs of the superpowers and yet we have not made progress in any direction. He then presented his recommendation which he termed as possibly too idealistic rather than pragmatic, however, it is incumbent to keep them in mind before carrying out any

future discussions with Afghanistan. Following five major commonalities between Pakistan and Afghanistan were identified by Mr. Owais Ghani:

- a. Firstly, after the Soviet war, huge diaspora of Afghan refugee' influx headed towards Pakistan and settled mainly in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Baluchistan provinces. It is an immutable fact that 80% of the Afghans can speak Urdu which has become the common means of communication between the communities in the two countries. Above all, more than one billion people in the region can also understand Urdu which is the only new language that has emerged in the last three centuries.
- b. The second commonality that he mentioned was that we have a common currency system which is 'Rupees.' Adding further to this point, he said that our national banks are operating in Afghanistan and they still rely on our currency.
- c. Thirdly, we have a common trade system as well a common economic community. Not to mention that the Afghan refugees are the driving force behind this commonality. He further gave an example of Baluchistan and KP where one million refugees are working and exporting fruits and vegetables to Afghanistan, hence, adding value to the exports of Pakistan. At the same time, Afghans contribute to the carpet business having a worth of around \$30 Million per annum in Pakistan.
- d. Fourth, we have a common culture of affinity which ranges from food and sports to music. He quoted an example that Lahori Charcha is a popular food item in Afghanistan. Likewise, Peshawari Chapli Kababs are in great demand in Afghanistan.
- e. Fifth, Pakistan's wheat production capability gives us leverage over Afghanistan which depends enormously on our wheat exports for their survival. In conjunction, Afghanistan is a land-locked country. Hence, it is dependent on Pakistan for its exports through Karachi Seaport.



Furthermore, Mr. Owais stressed on the fact that if Pakistan wants to achieve a strategic depth in Afghanistan, then it should derive maximum benefit from the Afghan refugees who are more comfortable living in the cities of Pakistan rather than in their war-torn country. Discussing further on the commonalities found in Afghanistan and Pakistan, he said that both the countries have common challenges which are mainly; Jihadist philosophy, a sectarian divide emerged from a common background and lastly Narcotics. He provided statistics on the fact that 93% of the world supply of drugs has its roots in Afghanistan, out of which, 40% is smuggled through Pakistan. Furthermore, he stated that \$8-\$10 Billion worth of revenue is generated through the narcotics industry. Sharing his personal experiences, during his appointment as the Governor of KP, he explained the dealings he had with the narco mafia and its implication on terrorism.

Towards the end of the speech, Mr. Owais spoke on reasonable proposals and suggested some solutions that could enhance friendly relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He bifurcated his proposal in two phases; the immediate two-year phase and the post two-year phase.

- a. First of all, Pakistan needs to be bold and imaginative while dealing with Afghanistan to develop a close and cordial relation.
- b. Secondly, any future intervention by foreign intruders should be deterred because it is in Pakistan's vital interests and a matter of survival.
- c. In its essence, there is no active hostility between the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan despite the provocations by intelligentsia and superpowers. However, it will be mutually beneficial if Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan is more people-centric.
- d. He also suggested that we should have a visa-free entry for Afghans. He estimated this gesture would allow approximately one Lac people to commute daily, across the border for their trade and business activities. Doing so will also make Pakistan an attractive destination for the businessmen in Afghanistan because they are fully aware of the fact that Afghanistan is not in a very good state as compared to Pakistan for trade and commerce. Therefore, we should not worry about the 20 Million Afghans dominating approximately 240 Million population of Pakistan. As a consequence of the visa-free system, Afghan traders will be pulled towards Pakistan which will build up pressure on the establishment in Afghanistan to work towards harmonizing good relations with its neighbour.

- e. In addition to the previous recommendation, he further emphasized that we should exploit the economic interests of Afghans in Pakistan to our advantage.
- f. We must work on developing more crossing points like Torkham and Chaman to facilitate the trade activities. However, proper surveillance/security should be ensured.
- g. At the same time, we should enhance the security through a proper Biometric Identification System through close cooperation with the Afghan government.

Mr. Owais suggested that in the post two year period, the dual nationality for the Afghans should be incorporated into the legal system of Pakistan. Furthermore, he requested for introducing dual nationality which should come with conditions, for instance, individuals should make adequate investments in Pakistan having a certain monetary amount, for example, Rs200 Million. As an outcome of this policy, rich Afghans will be inclined to enhance their stakes in Pakistan which in turn will pressurize the Government in Kabul to put their energies in developing friendly relations with Pakistan. He stressed on the fact that, with the strengthening trade links by adopting a visa-free regime, the Durand line will neutralize. However, the use of the word ‘confederation’ should be avoided at all costs because it pushes Afghans away by giving the impression that Pakistan might want to dominate their territory.

Coming towards the last part of his speech, Mr. Owais envisaged the reaction of the global powers if his proposals are transformed into concrete actions which are as follows:

- a. In the light of the above proposals, India will oppose these developments between Pakistan and Afghanistan because it will then pose a threat to its strategic depth in Afghanistan.
- b. The US is most likely to go against the proposal put forth because it is in the interest of the Western powers to keep the region destabilized. The USA will also be resistive towards the CPEC owing to its rivalry with China
- c. Russia will be amenable to these proposals. It can play its role by taking onboard all the parties in Afghanistan which are working on these proposals. It will be a step towards bringing peace and stability in the region.
- d. Iran will probably refrain from accepting these proposals owing to its own aspirations in the region. Iran will oppose CPEC and the developments at Gwadar port as it is working on its port at Chabahar which is only 72 km away from Gwadar. Iran has also funded a housing scheme in Afghanistan for the Shia settlement for increasing its influence in the region.

- e. China will support these proposals wholeheartedly because of the economic and commercial interests in the region but has reservations regarding the militancy. If Pakistan can reassure China that working on these proposals will help in bringing peace to the region then China is likely to back these proposals.

Lieutenant General Khalid Naeem Lodhi, HI(M),(Retd)- Former Secretary Defense- Member Advisory Board CGSS

Lieutenant General Khalid Naeem Lodhi, HI(M),(Retd) was of the opinion that without having a peaceful Afghanistan, there could never be a peaceful Pakistan. We have to introspect who does and who does not want peace. America wants to stay or leave? It is an immutable fact that the USA would want to stay in Afghanistan to deter China's connectivity with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) through CPEC and also to keep an eye on the nuclear program of Pakistan. India is obviously not favoring peace in the Afghan-Pakistan region owing to its vested interests. The narcotics mafia has high recompenses in maintaining volatility in Afghanistan. Therefore, they do not want to establish peace. Their business can only prosper in a troubled Afghanistan. He lamented the current regime in Afghanistan and labeled them of being under the Indian influence. He further argued that currently Afghanistan regime has control of only 45 percent territory while 15 percent of the area is contested between the Taliban and the Afghan government and the remaining parts of Afghanistan are under the full command of Taliban. These facts force us to reckon that Taliban is a reality and we cannot deny it no matter how much we abhor them.

General Khalid (Retd), stated that the Americans need a face-saving strategy in Afghanistan to pull out as they had been facing such retreats, for example, the Vietnam debacle and many other incidents. He stressed that Americans have a robust economic and political clout, therefore, it is not in our favor to deteriorate the relations with a superpower. Furthermore, he was of

the opinion that ordinary Afghans are not responsible for the reckless behavior of the current Afghan regime. Hence, they must not be reproved. He assessed that the recent closure of border had impacted the hidden elements. He augmented his analysis by stating the UK government's offer for hosting the Pakistan and Afghanistan Ambassadors to mediate the deadlock.



He reminded the audience that such steps are not taken to normalize the relations between both neighboring countries but as an instrument to support their interests in the region. General Khalid (Retd), further remarked that Russians are interested in CPEC as they want to reach the warm waters even as back as during the times of Tsar of Russia. Another angle of Russia’s interests is to take the revenge for their downfall in Afghanistan due to the active American support extended to the Afghan Mujahedeen during the Soviet invasion. It is time to teach the Americans a befitting lesson. He further opined the loss of focus due to Pakistan’s intake of financial assistance which resulted in the loss of

focus and priorities. This practice has to cease, and national interest should be upheld.

General Khalid (Retd), recommended that Pakistan should be clear in its stance. Being vague regarding our positions during conflicts may further aggravate the circumstances to our detriment. Consideration should be given to the suggestion of joining Russia, China, Iran and Turkey bloc. General Khalid (Retd), concluded his speech by recommending his opinion to side with the emerging bloc of Russia, China, Iran, and Turkey and also facilitate the Afghan reconciliation process.

Ambassador Amjad Majid Abbasi-Member Advisory Board CGSS

Ambassador Amjad Majid Abbasi started by saying that the first time he was asked to speak about Afghanistan was as far back as the summer of 1981. The place was PMA Kakul where they were called for appearing in tests for the selection of platoon commanders.

Ambassador Amjad stated that, in between where ever he was posted abroad, the most frequent topic of discussion remained Afghanistan. While attending the international crisis management course at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, he was a part of the syndicate which was supposed to put up a research paper on “The Way Forward in Afghanistan”. During his professional course at various government institutions, Afghanistan remained the favorite topic for a number of intellectual discussions.



During the tenure at the foreign office as the Director Afghanistan and Director General Afghanistan and later as the Ambassador of Pakistan in various countries, he made it a matter of practice, to lecture every available audience on Afghanistan whether they wanted to listen or not. That was intentional because I wanted to educate them about Pakistan’s side of the story which very few knew.

Today after 36 years of speaking, thinking, arguing and discussing Afghanistan, Ambassador Amjad questions himself, ‘why we are unable to understand the way forward?’ despite the passage of nearly half of our life span.

Ambassador Amjad opined that time has come where maybe, he can convince himself as to what went wrong and where it went wrong.

The following lessons he learned from my personal assessments:

- a. The enemy has to be fought with the principle of “an eye for an eye.” Burying the head in the sand will not shy away from the threat.
- b. The rules of governance of a country applicable centuries back, may not be applicable nowadays. Therefore, the flexibility of actions should always be exercised. Whereas, the lessons learned from history about the people and geography may never be forgotten.
- c. If you do not keep an eye on your enemy, most likely he will take out that eye.
- d. No matter how smart you are, the fire you light in the neighborhood, its flames are bound to reach across the fence and into your own home one day.
- e. If a nation is not strong economically and militarily, no one will take it seriously.

- f. A nation has to be treated with respect even if they are rendered destitute at your doorstep. It could happen to anyone including us.
- g. The people who sleep with a copy of ” **The Prince**” under their pillows, will never be impressed with the righteousness you preach and practice by being the followers of the Holy Quran. So do not waste your time on them.
- h. Speaking of governance, all good deeds of the previous governments need to be acknowledged instead of scuttling every initiative taken by the political rivals. The process of continuity on such complex issues is the essence to their resolution.
- i. Regarding food security, (referring to the transit trade) miserly and petty politics will never be remembered with gratitude and respect.
- j. Afghanistan’s turmoil will never subside till the time India can sleep peacefully.
- k. Hindus never have and will never reconcile with a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan. This is the most important lesson we have learned from our common history.
- l. Ambassador Amjad stated that with all what he has concluded and with all his experience about Afghanistan if someone will ask him the scariest question i.e. where we are standing on this issue as of today? He will sadly say “nowhere.” Heartbreaking, depressing, demoralizing, dejecting, derogatory and deeply disturbing –indeed.

Ambassador Amjad further stated that he had not reached the end of the world on the issue yet. Though he is not appreciative of the way, the Foreign Office has conducted itself in the last ten years over this most important foreign policy challenge, after the debacle of East Pakistan back in 1971.



The foreign policy guidelines coming out of the Foreign Office during these years were mostly coined to please certain ears and at best, lacking motivation. Mostly petty and characterless minds were put in charge of posts which needed honest, deeply motivated, efficient and morally brave individuals. To him, incorrect and wrong decisions are not a crime because sooner or later they are corrected and put right whereas those with bad intent are not to be forgiven.

He always appreciated the brave and bold role played by the men in the uniform as far as Afghanistan is concerned, but in certain aspects, the lack of knowledge on the part of political elite leaves little space for maneuverability, something so essential in the international diplomacy. Lack of sincere coordination among the top national institutions formulating policy on Afghanistan, delayed important happenings and the synergy so important in such situations, remained elusive throughout.

In the third and last part of his, talk Ambassador discussed a few actions which he thought should be taken or not taken, as the do's and don'ts. His humble suggestions are as follows:

- a. We need to discard all the decisions and courses of actions which proved wrong during our struggle for peace in Afghanistan. They should not figure anywhere in the future policy formulation.
- b. We need to start afresh even if we have to go back to square one.
- c. Without any hesitation or mercy, kick aside the institutions/individuals who we know have had the backing of the foreign governments or agencies and had played the role of the spoiler in our quest for stabilizing Afghanistan. This may have to include many elements of the candle lighting mafia as well as the mullahs sitting on the pulpits with dollars stashed underneath.
- d. All Ds solutions should be thrown in the dustbin. A clean slate will invite a clearer picture.
- e. All those who think Pakistan will collapse without them in the lead should be taken to the graveyard to show them the permanent resting places of many like them.
- f. Russia and China are not only neighbours of Afghanistan they are two very important stakeholders as well. Together with Pakistan and Afghanistan, they can make a decisive difference. Any attempt by the US and India to be included in the core decision making may be thwarted. Both have lost the game in Afghanistan, and their only aim is to keep the region destabilized.

- g. Any attempt to pick and choose or bring people of own choice in Afghanistan will not be prudent.
- h. The existing gap between the Northern Alliance and the Pakhtoons of Afghanistan has to be bridged at all costs.
- i. The Panjsheris are playing with the nerves of Tajikistan, and Rashid Dostum does the same with Uzbekistan. Ismael Khan's followers and Hazaravals are always seeking favors from Iran. These dramas have to come to an end. That will be made easy by actively involving the governments of Iran, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the major consultative issues.
- j. Two very important initiatives will have to be undertaken with total involvement and very active support of the United Nations (UN):
 - a. De-weaponisation of the Afghans completely
And
 - b. Afghanistan needs to ensure zero percent cultivation of poppy crops during a timeframe of three years'.

NOT POSSIBLE? WHY NOT? If that ragtag militia the world knows as Taliban could do it, why the rest of the world put together cannot.

Where there is a will, there is a way. Halfhearted and ill-intentioned attempts on such important issues can never produce results.

- k. ISIS and Daesh have been reincarnated by the Modi government. Hit it hard and hit it everywhere. If we continue playing Miss Goody Good Shoes with India, they will redouble their efforts and damage us beyond repairs.
- l. Let Afghans do their own decision making.
- m. Give the devil his due and snatch the due if you are playing the devil.
- n. As a befitting tit for tat policy, destabilize India to the farthest extent. Anything less will not make them understand. Our nuclear preparedness had put an end to their routine chest beating and threats of war. A merciless, punitive and violent response to every terrorist act of theirs, will be the only language they understand.
- o. An exclusive formally designated committee of senior officials from the Armed Forces and MOFA should be nominated with a mandate of finalizing the important aspects of the policy with special focus on Afghanistan. A thorough, open and frank discussion

will be far better than the hotchpotch sessions taking place now and then and apportioning of blame whenever there is a failure.

- p. The postings of important desks within the Foreign Office and designation of important ambassadors should not be left at the mercy of one man. Thus if a petty man is placed at that very important post and God forbid he is sold out as well, rest assured, no amount of intellectual inputs and Oxford driven English will prevent the lethal damages inflicted to the country due to his criminal inefficiency.

It is imperative that a merit-based system of appointments is ensured in the foreign countries and foreign secretary alone should not be left to decide the fate of these appointments. Very often it has been seen that one telephone call seals the fate of all important appointments and 99.9 percent of the Pakistanis never come to know what cheating was done how the damage was created.

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

Major General Syed Khalid Amir Jaffery, HI(M), (Retd), started his speech by thanking all the participants of the meeting who have gathered together to brainstorm on the possible way forward on the stalemate of the Pak-Afghan talks. He said that Afghanistan is not a normal country, so we better not tend to treat it in a normal way. According to General Jaffery (Retd), the most important fact that should be kept in mind is that government at Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan are two disparate entities. Furthermore, he highlighted the fact that there are many players in the region which influence Afghanistan namely; US, Russia, Iran, India, and Pakistan. Therefore, the fate of Afghanistan is contingent on the policies of these countries.



General Jaffery (Retd), then underscored the significance of the recent interest of Russia in Afghanistan. Since the USA has failed in bringing peace to the region, it has made Russia more eager to influence the region through peace talks. He presented his personal point of view that in the wake of the recent developments he foresees more turmoil in the region. He stated that it was a failure on our part that we have let India increase its influence in Afghanistan. He also emphasized that CPEC is in the interest of, both, Afghanistan and Pakistan so we should take all the possible actions to befriend Afghanistan.

Moving on, General Jaffery (Retd), discussed the geopolitical influence of the USA in Afghanistan and predicted that the USA establishment would never let the Trump's Administration leave the region. It is a well-known fact that ISIS is deliberately brought into Afghanistan to destabilize the region.

Brigadier Mujahid Alam, (Retd), Principal Lawrence College Murree, Member Advisory Board CGSS

Brigadier Mujahid (Retd), initiated his talk by congratulating the Speaker's panel of the conference who spoke on the topic of Pak-Afghan affairs and acknowledged their knowledge and erudition on the matter. Sharing his personal views, he mentioned about his visit to Afghanistan just two years after USSR invaded the country in 1979. He said that mistakes had



been made on our part as well. We bungled the data and misinterpreted information that has nothing to do with the reality. Furthermore, he supported Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani's recommendations and shared his thoughts that if we continue to blame each other, then we will benefit no one but our enemies. He focused on the fact that our policy towards Afghanistan should be Afghan People-centric and we must look at Afghans as our brothers. Furthermore, he stressed that we should never lose our patience under any circumstances.

Brigadier Mujahid (Retd), then shared his thoughts about the social media and how it has created propaganda against the Afghans, labeling them as untrustworthy and treacherous. He expressed his sorrow that even very responsible people in our country do not abstain from indulging in such propagandas which give air to the underlying poison in Pak-Afghan relations. We must not be responsive rather proactive. The most pragmatic option according to his views, is that we should draft coherent policies that could be implemented with ease in the near future. Furthermore, he stated that sealing of border was the need of the hour. However, it must not be deemed as a long-term or a permanent solution because doing so would only aggravate the sufferings of the Afghan people.

Brigadier Mujahid (Retd), posited that we must not label people as traitors if they defer from the official policy. Moving on, he anticipated that a Russia-China block would emerge sooner or later, so it is to the best of our interests to better align ourselves with it. At the same time, he placed particular emphasis on that fact that we should not antagonize the USA because we are in no position to fight with it. Instead what we should do is to define our interests and wherever our interests converges with the USA we should work together, however, where our interests diverge then we should convey the message in a clear-cut manner to our US friends.

Brigadier Amir Yaqub, (Retd) Director Operations and Collaborations Global Think Tank Network (GTTN), Islamabad

Brigadier Amir Yaqub (Retd), Director Operations and Collaborations Global Think Tank Network (GTTN) started his address by reinforcing the fact that we should exert our energies on building healthy relations with our Afghan brothers and must focus on enhancing people-to-people interactions. He raised a question that what vibes are we giving to Afghans. Is it the message of love or hate?

Brigadier Amir (Retd), shared a personal experience in which he stated that he has witnessed Afghans coming to Chaman to just have a feel of electricity and other facilities. In conjunction with the previous points, he suggested that we must work towards making FATA a model area and build economic zones as doing so would eventually lead to enhanced people-to-people linkages. According to his opinion, the only way forward for us is to develop education and model towns alongside the border areas.



Brigadier Said Nazir Mohmand, (Retd), Defence Analyst

Brigadier Said Nazir Mohmand, (Retd), agreed with the other participants that peace in Afghanistan is imperative to peace in Pakistan and stressed that destabilization has to be cut from its roots and concerted efforts are required to achieve this goal. He questioned the intentions of Americans regarding the establishment of peace in Afghanistan as they want a role in the affairs of the region. He stressed that Pakistan, China, and Russia could form an alliance to counter the challenges in the region but there are some strategic detriments to this coalition which are as follows:

- a. Firstly, if peace prevails in Afghanistan, then Americans will be pressurized by Kabul to pull out which will not allow the USA to influence the region.
- b. Secondly, the CPEC will be targeted by miscreants to dent the economic and strategic interests of this alliance in the region.
- c. The border should not be fenced or closed as it will create mistrust and hence Afghans will be disenchanted which will create a vacuum for India to fill in.

Brigadier Said (Retd), further recommended that education, health as well as the trading zones should be established on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He

reiterated that such conciliatory moves by Pakistan would have positive implications on the Pak-Afghan relations and Afghans will be dependent on Pakistan's assistance which will diminish the Indian involvement in the region. Furthermore, he underscored the policy of winning hearts and minds as both countries cannot be segregated owing to the religious, cultural and blood ties.

Brigadier Said (Retd), went further with the recommendation that people to people contact is a vital aspect of this policy. Hence, the traditional Qaumi Jirgas should be convened to reach out to common Afghan masses and take people into confidence which will enhance trade ties between two countries as well. He presented his assessment that Russia could press for warm waters using its soft policy rather than relying on the traditional hard way as is evident from its previous invasion of Afghanistan.

Mr. Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad

Mr. Shakeel diverted the attention of the audience towards the efforts of Pakistan in assisting Afghanistan with education. The Afghan students who studied in Pakistan are an asset which can be brought under one umbrella through establishing alumni network countrywide to build Pakistani narrative in their country. Another aspect of his discourse was the proficient use of social media as it has become a digital warfare and we are not utilizing the medium effectively.



Dr. Shoaib Suddle, Former Inspector General of Police and Former Tax Ombudsman

Dr. Shoaib Suddle expressed his apprehensions that the current state of affairs between both countries, are bleak owing to different reasons discussed by various participants. Although he accentuated the fact that with an imaginative approach and out of the box thinking, Pakistan

can achieve the goal of tranquility between the two neighboring countries, but maintained his reservations regarding ineptitude of bureaucracy and government in Pakistan. He further highlighted the need for good governance inside Pakistan as it will translate into favorable consequences in relation to Pak-Afghan affairs.

Manifesting possible solutions for improving Pak-Afghan relations to the audience, Dr. Shoaib articulated few options which are as follows:

- a. CPEC presents a ray of hope, as the project will involve the Chinese in this region and for safeguarding their interests, they can play a constructive role in Afghanistan.
- b. Pakistan should give precedence to evolving a robust border management system, as Afghanistan is likely to entail such measures due to their past attitude and low capacity.
- c. Although he expressed his deprecation at recent closure of borders between both countries, however, since the step has been taken, the debate about it is counterproductive. Hence there is a greater need to chalk out plans for the future course of action regarding the issue of cross-border militancy.
- d. Addressing the participants about his views relating to the calls of Integration between Afghanistan and Pakistan comparable to the European Union (EU) as the economic integration in Europe materialized before the integration of physical boundaries. Furthermore, he emphasized the need to have a credible system of identification as the idea of roaming free in another country is purely idealistic and impractical in current circumstances.
- e. Provided we have consensus; we can progress on certain avenues in our bilateral issues with Afghanistan ranging from cooperation in Sports, providing scholarships to Afghan students as well as other incentives to build confidence.
- f. We should not compete with India in assistance and evolve our independent approach while dealing with Afghanistan.
- g. Karzai banned Pakistani media channels in Afghanistan, and it continues to this day. This should be addressed through a proper policy.
- h. We have initiated assistance to the war-torn country by providing ambulances, building hospitals, girls' and boys' hostels, Jalalabad-Kabul road but most of the projects were delayed. The inconsistency should be mitigated while providing aid to Afghanistan.

- i. Those Afghans who were born in Pakistan tends to relate more with their Pakistani counterparts and have same language and culture. Therefore, they should be given an option for having dual nationality. He was of the view that if given an option, most Afghans will prefer to relocate to Pakistan as their first choice.

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Prime Institute, Islamabad

Dr. Manzoor underscored that the perception of Pakistan in Afghanistan is of a country which is meddling excessively in its neighbour's affairs. Responding to the idea of Ambassador Amjad Majid Abbasi about de-weaponization through UN. He remarked that it is a good idea but highly impractical considering the ineffectiveness of de-weaponization drive in Pakistan in the past. Therefore, the success of the UN-led program may not be practical. Dr. Manzoor called the participants attention to the fact that Afghanistan is one of the few countries with whom Pakistan has a positive balance of trade and an embargo on trade between two countries will not favor Pakistan's interests.

Augmenting the argument, Dr. Manzoor identified that Pakistan's exports have plummeted to \$20 Billion from \$25 Billion in the past few years. Therefore, a trade ban with Afghanistan



will further aggravate the situation. He concluded the discussion by saying that closure of borders with Afghanistan should not be an option and also stressed on introspecting our own deficiencies in the past which must not repeat in the future.

Major Azhar-ul-Islam, (Retd), Member Advisory Board CGSS

Major Azhar-ul-Islam, (Retd), gave a brief remark by stating that the contemporary developments have created such a situation in which we cannot isolate this region from the influence of the superpowers. Therefore, we now have to align our foreign policy and work towards the possibilities that favor Pakistan's national interests only.

Lieutenant General Zahir-Ul-Islam HI(M), (Retd)- Chairman CGSS

Lieutenant General Zahir-Ul-Islam HI(M), (Retd), concluded the conference by saying that Taliban have been fighting the USA and current Afghan Government because they have their conviction that the US and NATO have illegitimately bombed them out of power and to some extent they are correct regarding this contention.

Recalling the past efforts entailed by Pakistan to bring peace in Afghanistan, he mentioned that Doha-1 and Doha-2 dialogues were facilitated by Pakistan between Afghan Taliban and Karzai government. The process was derailed by Karzai government. Hence, talks did not succeed in achieving its goal of reconciliation. He stressed on the need that the only plausible solution to Afghan turmoil lies in a constructive dialogue between, both, the current government and the Afghan Taliban.

General Zahir (Retd), further outlined that the current setup of Afghanistan is an amalgamation of four dynamics consisting of history, geography, demography and culture. The need for winning hearts and minds of people by reaching out to common masses is an indispensable need. Pakistan has undergone conscious efforts in contributing towards the development of Afghanistan such as building schools and colleges and providing ambulances to their hospitals, but it is ironic that we are witnessing growing Indian influence in Afghanistan as opposed to Pakistan.

He further suggested that a special Pak-Afghan Ambassador should be appointed to oversee the developments in the region as well as concentrate on policy-making for Afghanistan. To bolster the Pak-Afghan Ambassador with the expertise we should establish a dedicated setup whose only task should be to look after the affairs of Afghanistan. He expressed his belief that this suggestion can be materialized into a reality.

In his conclusive remarks, General Zahir (Retd), reminisced the incumbent President Ashraf Ghani's stance regarding the Durand line as a finished business. He further lamented the approach of President of Afghanistan who retreated from his previous stance.





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