

PIPS CONSULTATION-5 ON AFGHAN PEACE & RECONCILIATION

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) held an expert consultation on September 3, 2022, titled “Supporting the Afghan peace process: Pakistan’s position, interests, and policy options” in Islamabad. The main themes of the consultation were “One year of Taliban rule: Emerging Afghan situation and its interface with the countries near and beyond” and “A review of emerging Pak-Afghan relations.” The event was fifth one in a series of eight quarterly consultations on Afghan peace and reconciliation PIPS has been organising since July 2021. Prominent lawmakers, academicians, former diplomats, retired army officers, journalists, and experts on security and Afghan affairs from Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Karachi and Punjab participated in the discussion.



The participants noted that Pakistan’s relations with neighbouring Afghanistan have been facing some new challenges over the last one year since Taliban took over Kabul. Pakistan needs to adopt a regional approach while framing any policy towards the landlocked country. Some observed that Pakistan should revisit its policy towards Afghanistan and treat the country as a sovereign state.



Seasoned politician and Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Defence Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed in his keynote address to the participants said, “our biggest fallacy on Afghan policy is that we have been playing favorites.” Senator Sayed further deplored that even after over 40 years, the Afghan story was not over and there were new challenges in this regard. In the context of Pakistan, he said that the focus should be “who makes the policy and what policy should be made.” He also supported the suggestion that a working group should be formed on the Afghan issue.



Former National Security Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Nasser Khan Janjua in his remarks endorsed the view of other experts that policy review is required for Afghanistan. He stressed that the Afghan issue was still unsettled in the larger context and Pakistan should treat the Afghan people with honour and respect. Taliban are facing testing times and we should support them, he said.

Janjua said that they should keep in mind that banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was a defeated phenomenon. He further said that Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA) wanted TTP to go back to Pakistan with respect. "We want closure of war," he said, adding that Pakistan should see Afghanistan in the larger context that both have a common future. He also rejected the notion that Afghanistan ever remained the strategic depth of Pakistan.

Political analyst and expert on Afghan affairs ex-Senator Afrasiab Khattak said that Pakistan needed to revisit and rectify its policy towards Afghanistan. "Afghanistan is facing the threat of disintegration and Pakistan will have to face the consequences of this worst-case scenario," he said and added, "We should see our Afghan policy critically."



Senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar shed light on the issue of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan for decades and said that there was a need to rationalize this matter. He proposed that they should be given permanent resident cards of Pakistan to connect them with the formal economy and tax net. He argued that Afghan refugees should be given all rights including rights of education except right to vote.

Defence and strategic affairs analyst Major General (retd) Inam Ul Haque disagreed with another participant that there was strong anti-Pakistan sentiment among Taliban ranks and added that such a sentiment was only limited to few people. He said that Pakistan enjoyed respect among the rank and file of Taliban and common citizens of the neighbouring country. He also rejected the notion that Pakistan's policy for Afghanistan was flawed and added that there was a problem in its implementation. He viewed that the propagation of Pakistan's narrative on Afghanistan was not right. "We should keep our positive leverage in Afghanistan."

Former Senator Farhatullah Babar said that the interim government of Taliban was reluctant to take action against the banned TTP. "This is the reality of the last one year that TTA has become a supporter of TTP," he said. He showed his surprise that the Taliban government was reluctant to take action against TTP and was now asking Pakistan to address reservations of the militant group. He said that the recent killing of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a drone strike in Afghanistan showed that militant groups were still growing in Afghanistan.

Babar said that militants were being inserted into the territories of Pakistan artificially and this will have severe consequences on Pak-China relations. He also said that Pakistan should frame its Afghan policy keeping in view the ground relations and all stakeholders should be taken into confidence about the motives behind talks with the TTP. "Otherwise there will be a crisis," he warned.

Former Ambassador Muhammad Ayaz Wazir also endorsed the view that Pakistan should revisit its policy towards Afghanistan and address reservations of the Afghan people. He said that Pakistan should avoid interfering into the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami Balochistan Maulana Abdul Haq Hashmi said that it was unfortunate that there was no discussion in Pakistan at the academic and political level on the ideology of Taliban, which was contrary to what they had accepted during negotiations with the US. “We don't touch the aspect of their (Taliban) ideology,” he said, adding that they even don't believe in those thoughts about which they have been propagating to the world. He said that Taliban are fearful from the US, Iran, Central Asian States and even Pakistan.



Professor Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal of the Quaid-e-Azam University talked about Pakistan's border issues with Afghanistan and proposed that they should get rid of the illegal border economy to bring stability on the borders. He said that the Durand Line should be made a permanent border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Aoun Sahi, Director Current Affairs PTV News & Head PTV World talked about the conditions of journalism in Afghanistan and argued that there was total blackout of information under the Taliban regime. He said that those Afghan journalists living in Pakistan and other countries before or after August 15 for fear of Taliban reprisal even cannot report on Afghanistan as their families living there would be under threat. “There is a dearth of information in Afghanistan,” he

said. He further told the participants that there was no factual or verified information coming from there.

Dr Shabana Fayyaz, Head of Department of Strategic Studies at the Quaid-e-Azam University talked about Pakistan's negotiations with the TTP and said that the dialogue initiated with the banned group was shocking news for the people at large. After consulting with my students belonging to different parts of the country, I understood that this was a flawed notion, she said. "It looks like there is a gap between people, politicians and the military establishment."

She questioned what you are going to tell the families of victims of terrorism, especially of Army Public School (APS), Peshawar, through these talks. She said that there should have been at least counselling of such families before initiating any dialogue with the TTP



Ziaur Rehman, senior journalist and Karachi-based analyst, opined that there was an anti-Pakistan sentiment among Taliban ranks. "It looks like there is a policy shift from the Taliban towards Pakistan." He said that after the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, a new phase of Pak-Afghan relations has started and there are new challenges in this regard. "Since last one year, Pakistan and the Taliban regime did not enjoy good relations."

Zia said that Pakistan should form any Afghan policy while keeping in view its internal security problems and ground realities.

Syed Ali Wasif Naqvi, senior research associate at Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), urged the need to promote trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He questioned why Pakistan is taking the whole burden of neighbouring country on its own shoulders instead of talking about promoting trade only. "We need to focus on resolving our own issues before

extending help to the troubled country,” he said. He suggested that Pakistan should revive its policy of trade with Afghanistan.

PIPS Programme Manager Ahmed Ali said that few reports coming from Afghanistan suggested that persecution of minorities including Hazara community was underway under Taliban rule.

Earlier, Director PIPS Muhammad Amir Rana in his introductory remarks said that the primary purpose of the consultation was to take a review of the Afghan situation after one year rule of Taliban, and of the emerging Pak-Afghan relations.