



AFGHAN PEACE AND RECONCILIATION: PAKISTAN'S INTERESTS AND POLICY OPTIONS

Report of PIPS Consultation-5 held on September
3, 2022, in Islamabad

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BY

Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) expresses gratitude to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Islamabad for its generous support to this programme, helping the organisation to conduct policy-driven experts' consultations on Pakistan's role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Likewise, PIPS is thankful to all the learned resource persons who participated in this first quarterly consultation and shared their expert knowledge on the subject. PIPS hopes to benefit from their knowledge and insights in the future too.

CONTENTS

1

Participants of the consultation

3

Introduction and key findings

7

Exploring Pakistan's position, interests and policy options

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Afrasiab Khattak, political analyst, and expert on Afghan affairs
2. Ahmed Ali, Project Manager at PIPS
3. Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, member Senate of Pakistan
4. Aoun Sahi, director current affairs PTV News & head of PTV World
5. Farhatullah Babar, former Senator Pakistan Peoples Party
6. Lt. General (Retd) Nasser Janjua, former National Security Advisor of Pakistan
7. Maj. General (Retd) Inam Ul Haque, defence and strategic affairs analyst
8. Maulana Abdul Haq Hashmi, chief of Jamaat-e-Islami Balochistan
9. Maulana Abdul Qadir Luni, head of JUI- Nazriyati Balochistan
10. Muhammad Amir Rana, director PIPS (moderator)
11. Muhammad Ayaz Wazir, former Ambassador and former Director General (Afghanistan) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
12. Mushahid Hussain Syed, Senator Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz
13. Shabana Fayyaz, Head of Department of Strategic Studies at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad
14. Shahzada Zulfiqar, Quetta-based senior journalist, ex-president PFUJ
15. Syed Ali Wasif Naqvi, Senior Research Associate at SDPI Islamabad
16. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad
17. Zia Ur Rehman, journalist and analyst based in Karachi

INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) held its fifth periodic consultation with experts on the prospects and process of peace in Afghanistan on Sep 3, 2022, in Islamabad. The session examined implications of the emergent Afghan situation for Pakistan's internal security, particularly dissecting Islamabad's relations with the nascent Taliban regime in the context of its national interests and policy options. Spearheaded by PIPS, this biquarterly deliberation on Afghan peace process was initiated just a month prior to the fall of Kabul last year.

In this latest round, leading lawmakers, intellectuals, and veterans of military and diplomatic services probed key questions including the Taliban's expressed policy vs actual approach towards militants based in Afghanistan, and their pressing economic challenges. Likewise, Pakistan's policy options and responses, negotiations with the TTP, refugees, and border security etc. were reviewed in detail. The body of experts was provincially representative as the consultants belonged to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, and the federal capital.

Key findings and policy recommendations

The Taliban are holding power in Afghanistan for a full year now, yet the uncertainty remains about what comes up next on the horizon. Pakistan initially rejoiced in the return of the Taliban to power, but today it is scrambling to figure out how to tackle the fallout of Taliban takeover. Pakistan must form a policy to engage with the Taliban to manage the implications, exploit the opportunities, and make sure that the longstanding concerns between the two countries, especially the cross-border militancy, are addressed in due manner and time. Pakistan would want to help the

Taliban government in Kabul to address governance challenges, get rid of terrorist safe havens, secure peace, and stability, and achieve economic development in the country.

The participants identified some new challenges in bilateral relations since the Taliban takeover. They agreed that Pakistan needed a regional perspective on the Afghan problem, stressing on the urgency of Pakistan forsaking its conventional outlook and tried-and-failed policies towards its war-ravaged neighbor. In short, it was reiterated that Afghanistan must be treated as a sovereign state.

- ***Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan:*** Most of the participants believed Pakistan needed to revisit its ideological standpoint and practical approach towards Afghanistan and adopt a new policy based on both its national interests and dynamics of the wider region. They maintained that Pakistan has come a long way in these forty years of Afghan war but has not come out of the situation yet. While suggesting policy review, it was proposed to keep in view the prevailing circumstance as current dynamics are essential to think about the country's approach and priorities.
- ***The refugee issue and political ramifications of demographic change:*** Speakers underlined the socio-economic burdens of refugee inflow on Pakistan, saying the policymakers must carefully tackle the refugee problem to mitigate its ramifications for local demography. A few suggested citizenships with limited rights of access to basic public services such as education and health for the Afghans and their offspring who have been living in Pakistan for several generations now. Legal status would also help the country integrate refugees into the taxation system. It was also noted that without legal status and formal records, the Afghans who indulge in crimes or acts of terrorism on Pakistani soil remain beyond the radar of the law enforcement. Therefore, legal status would help improve law enforcement and crime surveillance.

- **Trade for peace:** Speakers said improved bilateral trade could contribute significantly to resolution of social, political, and economic issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Trade is mutually beneficial, and it would help stabilize Afghanistan's economy over time. However, speakers warned that the Afghan situation must not consume the Pakistani government's focus and energy because Pakistan itself is confronted with formidable domestic challenges.
- **The Durand Line issue:** It is a permanent bone of contention between the two neighbors. There is a need to *crystalize* this virtual line separating Pakistan and Afghanistan. Addressing this problem would also discourage ethnic nationalistic sloganeering.
- **The problem is complex:** The Durand Line is but one of the many components in the complex Pak-Afghan relations. Indigenous factor of geographic location and external factors of political and military interventions by the West and interferences by Afghanistan's other neighbors ultimately shape up the dynamics in Afghanistan. It was suggested that Pakistan needed a review who exactly get to decide the Afghan policy. A policy promoting people-to-people engagement would serve Pakistan best, participants said.
- **Reforming ex-FATA:** Pakistan needs to upgrade the merged districts (ex-FATA) to the status of a full-fledged province and promote democratic culture to discourage militarism and bring stability to the country.
- **Checking illegal trade:** Pakistan should frame a comprehensive policy to check smuggling on the Pak-Afghan border because illegal trade has been harming national economies in both countries for decades. Some participants claimed that certain government agencies were also involved in the booming cross border illegal trade. Unless the problem is addressed effectively, the instability on western borders will linger on indefinitely, participants warned. They also suggested the establishment of trade zones on the border to counter smuggling.

- **Talking to TTP:** Speakers called for putting the question of talks with TTP before the Parliament. Major political parties do not favor the secretive talks between the military and the terror outfit TTP. The PPP says Parliament is the principal stakeholder in any such negotiations and calls for engagement of all stakeholders in the process. Participants also questioned the past claims that the TTP had been crushed through military operations, adding that talking to such a terror outfit would only send a message that it is the state that has actually been defeated. Furthermore, the talks would empower the TTP. Speakers also cautioned that unilateral endeavors by the military would create a crisis of confidence between the Parliament and the security establishment.
- **Appreciating ground realities for conflict resolution:** Participants said Pakistan tends to view Afghanistan in primarily in relation to TTP, refugees, ID cards, etc. If these issues are put against much bigger ones like the foreign occupation of Afghanistan, the former seem comparatively small. The major issue of foreign occupation has already vanished with the withdrawal of US forces. The rest of the comparatively smaller issues can be resolved through tact and diplomacy.

Exploring Pakistan's position, interests and policy options



The consultation proceedings began with prayers for all those affected by recent rains and flooding. After a few preliminaries, **Muhammad Amir Rana**, director Pak Institute for Peace Studies, formally welcomed the august audience and honorable guests. Elaborating on the importance of the subject, he stated that the Taliban had completed their one year of rule since they took over Kabul in August 2021, and the consultation aimed to evaluate the prevalent situation in Afghanistan mainly in terms of what significant changes had taken place during this period. The second objective of the consultation was to discuss Pakistan's policy options to support Afghan peace and overcome the challenges posed by persisting instability in Afghanistan.

Moderating the discussion, Mr. Rana, after his welcome and introductory remarks, requested senior journalist and analyst Zia Ur Rehman to deliberate on the subject.

Zia Ur Rehman, journalist and analyst based in Karachi



An important development has taken place in Afghanistan since the previous consultation PIPS held in July this year. The presence of the Al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan and his assassination has heralded a new phase of more complicated state of affairs in the region. Pakistan hoped that the Taliban regime would facilitate it in countering Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), but the TTP has only grown stronger during the first year of the Taliban rule. Attacks by the TTP have escalated in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The effort made to reduce instability through negotiations with the TTP also did not work. The growing attacks by the TTP, mainly on police, highlight the end of the indefinite ceasefire that the group had announced few months back.

Several [other] militant groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), are also operational in Afghanistan. Being skeptical of the Afghan Taliban, some militant groups questioned the Taliban government about the Al-Zawahiri killing amidst high-security arrangements [in Kabul]. Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid, the [acting] defense minister of Afghanistan, stated that airstrikes were conducted through [using the airspace of] Pakistan and still drones could be seen flying. Such events signify a growing tension in bilateral relations of the two countries.

Pakistan wants to mend its relations with the United States through counter-terrorism operations. Two mandatory features of counterterrorism are intelligence and monetary resources. The statement of Afghanistan's defense minister was mainly in the context of growing US and Pakistan relations as well as a widespread anti-Pakistan sentiment in his country. Al-Zawahiri's killing has initiated a new phase of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, and the equation of Pakistan-Afghanistan-China needs to be reevaluated. China has developed direct relations with Afghanistan, and instability in Afghanistan poses threat to China's security. The Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan was attended by 30 major states including China, Pakistan, and the US. Afghan Taliban were of the view that if the states did not support them in countering terrorism, IS-K will continue to pose a greater threat to all the neighboring states as it has become a well-organized and extended militant organization. The IS-K now possesses capabilities to pose security threats to China, Pakistan, and the Central Asian States while being in Afghanistan.

Maj. General (Retd) Inam ul Haque, defense and strategic affairs analyst

Anti-Pakistan sentiment in the Afghan Taliban is impacting Pak-Afghan bilateral relations. Pakistani officials are aware of the sentiments but policymakers neither accepted nor comprehended it. Those who are dealing with the Afghan Taliban are unaware that the policies of the Taliban, and other Pakhtun and Afghan [groups] have similar



trajectories. These groups believe in the 'social equilibrium' and use all the means to achieve it in a way to maintain social equality.

The TTP and Afghan Taliban, belonging to Pakhtun tribes, are far ahead of Pakistani government in [the art of] negotiations because the traditional jirga system is part of their culture. During negotiations, participants need to understand the sociology and psychology of the conflicting parties as results are not always favorable to both parties. Propagation and reach-out policies had never been appropriate enough while engaging with Afghans, even when the anti-Pakistan sentiment was not present in Afghan society. Moreover, these sentiments have been augmented by Kabul's 'liberal brigade'; these are the Pashto-speaking individuals with Persian-dominated culture. Nonetheless, every day a lot of Afghans can be seen crossing the border to enter Pakistan, which shows they do not have an anti-Pakistan standpoint. As far as the top leadership of Afghanistan is concerned, they do not have any doubts about Pakistan's role and responsibilities. While interacting with Afghanistan and its officials, Pakistan needs to take care of its self-esteem and dignity. The negotiators should be those who understand and comprehend the social structure of the Afghan society.

With regard to Pakistan's policy towards TTP, [I believe] Pakistan's military officials should not have been involved in the negotiations. The TTP should be treated the way it deserves to be treated. Moreover, those who negotiate are rarely aware of the social underpinnings of the TTP. The [recent] negotiations with the TTP were mainly based on a sort of 'give and take' rather than building on the leverage Pakistan and its people have on the terrorist group. The Army Public School attack had martyred 154 students.

11 Exploring Pakistan's position, interests and policy options

The group has long remained engaged in perpetrating terrorist violence including suicide attacks. During the talks, Pakistani officials asked questions instead of discussing the real matters, while ignoring the fact that the 'give and take' policy suited to the TTP. Simultaneously, when Pakistan's government brings forward military and other higher officials, the avenues of negotiations and response celebration become limited, and ultimately, negotiations remain unsuccessful.

Muhammad Amir Rana (moderator)

Thank you, Mr Inam Ul Haque for sharing your valuable views on the subject. To move the discussion further, I invite Shahzada Zulfiqar to present his views on the situation prevalent in Balochistan, particularly in the context of Afghans' migration to the province and its impact on the local demographics and conflicts.

Shahzada Zulfiqar, Quetta-based journalist, and ex-president of PFUJ



The frequency of migrations from Afghanistan to Balochistan has decreased lately. Still, conflicts [related to refugees] keep happening but rarely, as the local people prefer not to discuss these issues with their tribal heads. Overall, Afghans who have been residing in Pakistan for decades have the nationality of Pakistan. [But the cross-border movements were never completely on the basis of such documentation as]

Mullah Muhammad Omar Mujahid did not have an identity card from Pakistan, yet he was able to cross the border thirty-six times. It is a decade-old problem. The Afghans living for decades in Pakistan hold several professional occupations in Pakistan. Most Baloch people embrace Afghans, but still, many protest about the occupation of their lands and label them as migrants.

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, member Senate of Pakistan



The people of Balochistan believe that due to the influx of Afghan migrants Baloch people will become a minority and Pashtuns will dominate the society if the migration continues. On the other hand, the economy of the region appears to be threatened by demographic changes. Social, political, and economic concerns compel policymakers to overcome the ramifications of demographic changes. Since 1979, the mismanagement of refugee issue by Pakistani state has allowed migrants to have identity cards and passports. The local communities' basic life problems are directly linked to this "identity theft". Whenever illegal migrants are caught, they would bribe the authorities and police, and their cases would be rarely reported.

The International Convention on Refugees in 1951 had introduced new restrictions for citizenship. The solution is to provide Afghans with permanent residence and legislate to ensure their rights. It will give rise to political engagement and political movements in a few decades. Moreover,

they will contribute to the economy as a new labour force and thousands of Afghans will automatically enter the taxation system of Pakistan. [For instance,] the second largest industry in Dubai belongs to Afghans, who are interested in leased properties.

Pakistan also needs to rationalise its institutional approach for socio-economic development. Policymakers have been unable to determine and respond to the prevalent challenges, and Afghan earnings have never become part of Pakistan's revenue. It has been 40 years and still there is no realisation that the provision of nationality [to Afghan migrants] will be in the favour of Pakistan. No one is intentionally changing the demographics of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The only solution to all challenges is the provision of the right to vote, education, and opportunity to Afghans and their children living in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, the state has not provided legal status to those who have been living in Pakistan for the past four decades. If the state does not give them the nationality of Pakistan, they could not be held accountable in accordance with the legal system of Pakistan and would get away with crimes easily. Therefore, it is significant to rationally discuss the dynamics of Afghan refugees in the political, social, and economic spectrum. When [former prime minister] Imran Khan stated that we can reconsider awarding nationality to Afghans, we witnessed a reaction from Sindh and Balochistan provinces. So, what could be the outcome of these debates [in the light of those reactions]?

Zia Ur Rehman

That is true that Sindh and Balochistan showed relatively greater sensitivity over the nationality issue. After the partition of the subcontinent, Sindh's demography changed and several incidents on the issue of identity and nationality took place. Sindh not only has an Afghan population, but it also has Burmese and Bengalese, who have their own political parties and Union Councils. It is a genuine human problem, and there should be a rational solution to accommodate them. Imran Khan announced granting citizenship to various groups after winning the elections and faced a lot of reaction from several political parties and groups such as the Baloch Nationalist Party (BNP), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Sindhi nationalist parties. When the national identity is not granted by the government, the immigrants may search for safe heavens by joining militant groups.

Senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar

There is no doubt that the former prime minister raised the issue in the National Assembly, but these problems cannot be solved with such royal decrees; they need to be resolved by getting into dialogue with civil society, media, and political parties. There is a need to have clarity about the future course of action. The backlash to the premature declaration affected the good intentions of solving the problem.

The Baloch and Sindhi populace should raise the question and ask about the solutions. According to them, an identity theft is underway, and demographics are changing. However, the demography has already changed, and the political process has been affected. The solution lies in

accepting the reality and formulating a solution-based approach and rapprochement.

Afrasiab Khattak, political analyst, and expert on Afghan affairs

We are seeing the situation in bits and parts. Policymakers cannot find a way out until Pakistan's Afghan policy is analysed in totality. Pakistan's current policy towards Afghanistan is quite similar to General Zia-ul-Haq's policy when he stated, "we are inhabitants, and they are migrants."



Once Pakistan brought five million Afghan refugees in Pakistan without passports. At that time [of Soviet-Afghan war] the government did not think about solving the problem. These are all fallouts of Pakistan's flawed Afghan policy. Pakistan have been ignoring the emerging dynamics. Now the Taliban have been brought back [in Afghanistan] to open a new front in Central Asia and to create obstacles for China. The Taliban still do not have full control over their population and the IS-K problem remains crucial for them, among others.

There were speculations about the reported drone activity in Kandahar and Helmand, and assumptions whether the drones belonged to Russia, Iran, or Pakistan. Furthermore, in April and May this year, missiles were fired towards Tajikistan and Uzbekistan from Afghanistan and the Middle East. It was claimed that the missiles were fired by the IS-K, which brings in the question whether Afghanistan is controlled by the Taliban or IS-K.

Afghanistan could break into pieces if the ongoing situation persists and deteriorates. The Taliban are kidnapping women and marrying them. For how long will the women be able to put up with it? If Afghanistan collapses, Pakistan will bear the brunt. Therefore, rather than justifying the 40-years-old policy, the preferences of the affected communities should be considered before framing a new Afghan policy. Pakistan's policymakers need to seriously think about the future regional and national dynamics of Afghanistan crisis. Moreover, as noted earlier, Baloch and Sindhis have serious grievances, and it is significant to understand their problems and induce change through the reconstruction of our core policies to maintain national unity and establish a peaceful society. Pakistan needs to revisit its Afghan policy which is not working in any respect.

Lt. General (Retd) Nasser Khan Janjua, former National Security Advisor of Pakistan

Pakistan's parliament needs to formulate new policies and legislations for integrating Afghan refugees and resolving the consequences of the Afghan situation. Pakistan also needs to revisit and adopt a new policy on Afghanistan. Pakistan has come a long way in these forty years of Afghan war but has not come out of the situation yet.



There is a need to keep in view the prevailing circumstance and dynamics while thinking about the country's approach and priorities. The region is going through a challenging situation. According to the National Action Plan,

the country tried to resolve the issue of Afghan refugees with the help of the visa regime, and Pakistan's policymakers dealt with the matters accordingly. The problem of Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) has come out of the perpetual war of forty years. Afghans felt that conditions were not getting better in Afghanistan and considered Pakistan as their own country which turned out to be a preferred country for them. National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has been criticised many times for issuing fake identity cards to Afghans. When it came to the census in Balochistan, the government of Pakistan was concerned that what would happen if Pashtuns outnumbered all other ethnicities, since so many fake CNICs have been issued.

Pakistan is already engaged on multiple fronts and cannot get into another conflict such as the one is reportedly in the offing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in form of militants' regrouping. Moreover, a chaos in southern Afghanistan can occur due to the divisions between the rival factions from the north and the south. These divisions in Afghanistan will have a significant impact on Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan must deliberate on these problems as the complications are escalating, and it must endeavor for a rational Afghan policy.

Everyone in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan is aware of those who have migrated [to their areas]. Since the migrants have identity cards, they are counted on both sides of the border, which creates confusion. Revered politicians from Balochistan are undermined by the Baloch since the latter claim that these politicians are trying to change demographic figures in collusion with refugees by providing identity cards. This issue and unsettled

Afghanistan have a larger context, and they demand due attention from policymakers. A way out should be found while keeping goodwill in mind. One can hope that complications in Afghanistan settle down and refugees get a chance to return and rehabilitate, respectfully. Pakistan should deal with the issues of migrants in such a way that their identity remains intact.

Maj. General (Retd) Inam Ul Haque

If it is believed that Afghan refugees would go back and everything will be in order, then it is not likely to happen. The north-to-south ingressions have been there since the beginning of times and policies need to be formulated while considering these dynamics.

Farhatullah Babar, former Senator (Pakistan People's Party)



At the moment, there is no [specific] law in Pakistan to deal with the refugees or even internally displaced persons (IDPs). The federal cabinet had decided in 2017 that Pakistan could not make the refugees its nationals and suggested passing a domestic resolution related to the management of the refugees. The decision also pressed that considerations of the host communities should also be kept in mind. As Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is back in power, those recommendations can be presented in Parliament to uphold their previous decision regarding domestic resolution related to refugees. The PTI government, which came into power in 2018 after the PML-N government, had reversed the decision [of not granting citizenship to refugees] and

maintained that Pakistan would grant them citizenship. Pakistan needs to move step by step to address the challenges that arise out of cross-border migration. Similarly, matters of national security [and their foreign corollaries] need to be discussed and debated.

The TTP in Afghanistan has become one of the largest militant organisations in a year. Recently, United Nations released a report which said that around 3000-4000 foreign militants were residing in Afghanistan, and most of them belonged to the TTP.¹ Since the TTP is becoming so dominant in Afghanistan, it is having a spillover effect in Pakistan in form of increased incidence of terrorist violence. Pak Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS) annual security report for 2021 noted that terrorist attacks in Pakistan in the year has increased [by 40 percent] from the year before. Terrorists are also demanding extortion money, even from members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly from different political parties. Former spokesman of TTP, Ihsanullah Ihsan recently tweeted that the ex-governor of KP has paid 7.5 million rupees as extortion. Another significant development is that the Taliban government in Afghanistan is reluctant to take any action against the TTP. The Taliban claim that they are ready to host and facilitate negotiations between TTP and Pakistan and that Pakistan should address the grievances of TTP. This way, the TTP has not only grown stronger, but it has also got more support from the Afghan Taliban. As a result, the gulf between Afghanistan and Pakistan has

¹ The reference seems to be to the thirtieth report of the UN's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, which came out in mid-July. The report assessed the TTP as the largest among the foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan. (The report can be downloaded here: <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2075689/N2239429.pdf>)

widened. Meanwhile, Ayman Al-Zawahiri's assassination suggests the existence of Al-Qaeda and other militants in Afghanistan. Similarly, China is likely to hold a conference because of the threat that Uyghur militants pose to it while being based in Afghanistan.

All the state institutions such as parliament, political parties, the federal cabinet, and the bureaucracy should be well informed about the negotiations with the TTP. The unilateral decisions have allowed TTP to strengthen and they have regrouped in Swat, Chitral, Dir, Bajaur, and Waziristan. It appears as if there is someone behind their resurrection, who wants to keep the militants alive so that they can be used for internal political purposes. But it is Pakistan that will have to bear the burden of the resurgence of militants. This will also have far-reaching implications for Pakistan-China relations; therefore, it is important to openly discuss mentioned issues across the table with China.

Muhammad Ayaz Wazir, former Ambassador, and former DG (Afghanistan) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Any decisions for former FATA should be made cautiously. The TTP leaders demanded the reversal of the FATA merger with KP. The proscribed terrorist group has categorically stated that it would not back down from its demand for the reversal of the merger of erstwhile FATA with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Before all of this happened, people even went to the Supreme Court to get the FATA merger reversed.

It was all a gambit because getting it approved by the National Assembly might have been difficult but if Supreme Court does it, no one will object to it.

The residents of FATA have been dealt with unethically. Even while deciding on the FATA merger, the representation of the FATA people was ignored, and the new governance status has influenced the socio-political aspects of the tribal people. For instance, the merger has increased the number of people appointed in government offices in ex-FATA from Charsadda, Mardan, Swat, and other regions of KP. The merger provided more benefits to the people who are already privileged while ignoring the residents of tribal areas. A month after the merge, 400-500 jobs were offered in the health department of ex-FATA, and only 50 people from merged tribal districts were chosen for these posts, while most were from Swat and Malakand. Moreover, the federal government's promise that Rs 110 billion will be spent on security of the merged districts remains unfulfilled.

Furthermore, the refugee crisis is a major problem. The security issues and the local people's concerns are also real. A couple of days ago, the new Corps Commander of Peshawar met locals, where one citizen remarked that the military should not have anything to do with the development projects, and it should remain in its remit and look after matters pertaining to defense. Pakistan needs to change its policy rather than using force.

Also, people's opinion regarding Duran Line fencing is likely to challenge Pakistan's security policy on the ongoing project of securing the Pakistan-

Afghanistan border. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's defense minister's statement declaring they had 'no issues' in sending army personnel to India for training highlights the Afghan Taliban's foreign policy priorities. The Taliban are in power in Afghanistan, and not all are happy with Pakistan. Half of the Afghans were disappointed already [with Pakistan], and now half of the Taliban are also disappointed. The prevalent situation demands the redirection of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan.

Muhammad Amir Rana (moderator)

Thank you, Ambassador Muhammad Ayaz Wazir, for your focused discussion on the topic. It is significant to discuss the progress the Taliban have made so far during this year and the challenges they face. Afghanistan's economic instability certainly impacts Pakistan, and I would like to ask the panelists that if the economic situation worsens there what options will Pakistan have? Moreover, it has been reported that the inflow of dollars [from Pakistan] has helped the Afghan trade, but keeping in view the vulnerable economy of Pakistan, what consequences could it have for Pakistan?

**Syed Ali Wasif Naqvi, Senior Research Associate at SDPI,
Islamabad**



It is a fact that Pakistan and Afghanistan share religious and cultural sentiments, but there is a difference between supporting and recognising [the Taliban], as we cannot burden ourselves with Afghanistan. Pakistan's government must give preference to trade to resolve the country's economic instability. A lot of political, social, and economic problems between Afghanistan and Pakistan can be solved through trade. Currently, Afghanistan is performing better than Pakistan, as Afghanistan's export progress is far better than that of Pakistan. I would reiterate that it would be better to give our problems due attention rather than focusing and bearing the burden of Afghanistan.

**Dr. Shabana Fayyaz, Head of Department of Defense and
Strategic Studies, QAU**

Afghanistan's problem is complicated and likewise is Pakistan's policy on Afghanistan. The problems between Afghanistan and Pakistan cannot be justified simply by focusing the Durand Line issues, because these problems are multidimensional. Firstly, Afghanistan and Pakistan's geography is the major problem. Secondly, considering that the



leaderships of both sides hold a significant influence, we must not forget that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto had convinced the Afghan leader Daud Khan to

recognize the Durand line, after a detailed series of meetings in Rawalpindi in August 1976. These are the statements that should be significant for policymaking. Thirdly, foreign interventions and regional states' policies towards Afghanistan are also important to be evaluated. Pakistan has vital interests in Afghanistan, and so do have India and other countries, regardless of their size. The policies of major powers and states have caused instability in Afghanistan. Fourthly, it is significant to look at Afghans' capacity to provide for their stability and development. Lastly, it is significant to explore who makes Pakistan's Afghan policy, as it is important to rethink and reconsider the enactment of an indigenous policy.

The Afghan Taliban's "conquest" was celebrated publicly by Pakistan when they came into power in Kabul, but at the same time, there is a need to be careful about the [ideological] sensitivities of the Afghan Taliban. In the past, when the Taliban were in power, they did not agree to hand over to Pakistan violent sectarian individuals hiding in Afghanistan. States prefer their national interests, and so did Pakistan when it initiated dialogue with TTP, although the decision was not supported by many as TTP has good relations with India.

Aoun Sahi, director current affairs PTV News & head of PTV World

According to some reports, around 1,300 Afghan journalists applied for Pakistan's visa within 2-3 months after the Taliban takeover. Many of them are residing in Islamabad, and many are unable to report as they receive constant threats. The Afghans taking sort of shelter in Pakistan, do not desire to either stay in Pakistan or return to Afghanistan; they want to move on to Europe or other developed countries. Some INGOs took the initiative to train Afghan journalists including in the use of social media platforms and mobile journalism. Afghan journalists have to provide their family members with a safe place, before disseminating the information. Currently, almost every media platform in Afghanistan has collapsed.

In the early days of the Taliban's previous government, human rights violations against women were reported. Similarly, those who did not follow the [Taliban's] shariah law had to face the consequences. Recently, a social media trend ran that featured one of the Taliban's prominent members entering the house of a woman and molesting her. Currently, the world is entirely unaware of the social developments taking place in Afghanistan. For the last 20 years, the only source of information about the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, India, and China had been the western media due to the lack of primary sources of information. Western sources report and

analyse the problem through their lens and perspectives, which influences the analyses of journalists and authors in Pakistan.

While keeping in view the despair of Afghan journalists, we need to put efforts to report the socioeconomic issues prevalent in Afghanistan, especially in Kandahar. The world rarely gets a chance to hear the voices of natives of Afghanistan, whilst the perspectives disseminated are of a few selected individuals, who have always supported the Taliban. Moreover, despite having visas, journalists will be less likely to prefer to report on the problems of the Taliban, for if they do, they will have to face the music such as a journalist was detained for a few days by the Taliban. As long as the Taliban suppresses dissidents' voices, the information space will continue to shrink. We are in a dilemma as neither can we send nor have someone from Afghanistan to report about the problems of Afghanistan. If journalists decide to take a step against the Taliban, they will have to suffer the consequences.

Ahmed Ali, Project Manager at Pak Institute for Peace Studies



We lack a verified source of information available on Afghanistan and that most of the information is acquired through social media. Until now, the situation in Afghanistan related to sectarianism validates the ongoing persecution of the Hazara community. It has been reported on social media that the Hazara community faced a depopulation

drive in Daikundi. To save themselves people fled to mountainous regions—living without shelter.

When the Taliban came to power, they included some Shia Hazara Taliban commanders in the government, but later in their reaction to Hazara persecution, they were killed by the Taliban. Recently, one Hazara Taliban commander was fleeing the country to Iran and was returned to the Taliban by Iran officials.² As there is a complete blackout of information in Afghanistan, access to information is difficult, but social media highlights the ongoing persecution of the Hazara.

Maulana Abdul Haq Hashmi, Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami Balochistan

I appreciate PIPS and its management for arranging this insightful discussion. [I will start with sharing my views on] the role of ulema or Islamic scholars in diplomacy for TTP negotiations. The ulema delegation was under pressure, therefore, they agreed to initiate negotiations with the TTP. It depicts the reason for negotiations as being unsuccessful. Moreover, a delegation from KP who had a dialogue with TTP, returned without any positive outcome. The policymakers view it from the political perspective of the TTP and the Afghan Taliban, ignoring its origin and historical background. I do believe that the TTP has an impact on the whole process of negotiations. Although religious scholars accepted to initiate negotiations

² An apparent reference to Mehdi Mujahid, a Taliban commander from Afghanistan's minority Shia Hazara community, who was killed [in August], according to local reports, in captivity; official accounts said he was killed while attempting to flee to Iran. Mehdi Mujahid split with the Taliban leadership in June this year.

with TTP, the incapacity to run democratic machinery and address the problem had been one of the reasons for the setback.



The Taliban are cautious about Iran, Pakistan, Central Asia, and the United States (US); even indifference from other states is considered as enmity by the Taliban. Pakistan needs to consider the insecurities of the Afghan Taliban. It has been reported that Pakistan policymakers have a difference of opinion while framing Afghan policy. It aggravates an atmosphere of strange confusion across the whole border. Conclusively, those who think that Afghanistan could become the fifth province of Pakistan and hold it as a subordinate state must shun such thoughts [now] as the Afghans would never abandon their stance on equality and sovereignty. How can Pakistan's policymakers think that they would survive in Afghanistan? We need to give preference to their tribal and cultural norms while negotiating or dealing with the Afghan Taliban.

Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

First, we need to understand that Afghanistan is an independent state and should treat it as such, and likewise treat the Afghans as an independent state's citizens. When refugees around the world are allowed to settle, as the host states need manpower, the nationalities are granted to the refugees. We need to frame a specific policy to address the refugees' status, keeping in view our ethnic and economic problems. It is a fact that

migrations do happen from North to South, but migration has rarely been appreciated by modern states. Secondly, whenever any government is democratically elected in Pakistan, it is toppled before even completing its tenure. The government of Pakistan is said to be dependent on the establishment of Pakistan, so it cannot be expected that negotiations with the Taliban regime can be done independently.



Thirdly, the Durand Line, which is virtual border, should be made practical, and we need to strengthen it. We need to dismantle our continuous usage of religious and ethnic narratives. We should consider the state as a state and neighbor as a neighbor. The notion of “state within the state” should be discarded. Finally, as far as ex-FATA is concerned, Pakistan needs to make it a province if we want the growth of democracy and stability. We need to frame a policy to control and impede the growing illegal trade across the border. Our law enforcement agencies and the locals too are involved in illegal cross-border trade. Therefore, if Pakistan wants a stable western border, its policymakers need to pay due attention.

Muhammad Amir Rana (moderator)

To address the issue of illegal economic activity on the western border, we should establish trade zones along the border. I request Zia Ur Rahman to share his recommendations on Pakistan's [required] policy shift on Afghanistan.

Zia Ur Rahman

Our policies should be based on reason and ground realities, not on personal whims and wishes. The US withdrawal was an important and strategic decision. Moreover, as stated by Maulana Hashmi, we look at the propaganda material (disseminated by Al-Qaeda or IS-K) used for exploiting the region's insurgencies, like the Baloch and Uyghur insurgencies. Besides Al-Qaeda, two militant groups are very important: the TTP and Al-Shahaab of Kenya, who particularly target China. Surprisingly, IS-K and TTP are also reaching out to the Baloch youth to exploit the local and regional sensitivities and the ground realities. Our policymakers should prioritise these areas also to prevent youths falling for militants' groups [operating from Afghanistan or inside Pakistan.]

Maulana Abdul Qadir Luni

We should consider our geographical location as well. We have been connected to this war because Afghanistan is our neighbor. The Afghan nation has been fighting continuously for forty years, and before that, it was in conflict for a century, which is continuing. When the US invaded Afghanistan, Mullah Yaqoob was a toddler who grew up during the rise of the Taliban. It will be naive to expect [easy] negotiations with Mullah Yaqoob, who managed to survive the war for the last 20 years.



Moreover, the Taliban leadership has lived and attained education in Pakistan. The Taliban emir, Sheikh al-Hadith Hibatullah Akhundzada, was a student in a seminary in Pakistan. I agree that there are several sociocultural and economic problems. But I must say with evidence that in Bamiyan, Mazar e Sharif and the other northern provinces the representation has been given only to Hazaras and Tajiks. Unfortunately, we have Eastern- and Western-influenced groups. The East and West have worked so much on our minds that we have forgotten not only Islam but Pashtunwali as well. We are [as a result] against the Taliban. The Soviet cruelty was extravagant when it humiliated Pashtuns and abused girls in the face of their fathers, but we don't consider Russia our enemy. On the other hand, the Americans destroyed our culture leaving no trace of Islam, but we are highly against the Taliban [only]. When the earthquake jolted Afghanistan, and recently when floods wreaked havoc in Afghanistan, all the Taliban ministers were truly sympathetic and were found in the affected areas including the Taliban's supreme leader.

Pakistan couldn't stabilise itself in 75 years, while we are expecting the Taliban to rebuild their country, which has been destroyed by a century of wars, in only one year, and that too operating from their isolation. Our friends here said that Pakistan should issue identity cards to Afghans, but I must tell you that 95 percent of Afghans living in Balochistan have already acquired Pakistan's identity cards. Afghanistan is an Islamic neighboring country, so Pakistan should consider Afghanistan a country and deal with

Afghans according to their preferences. Moreover, as far as Afghans who protest for liberty are concerned, these are the members of the former Afghan government.

Since August 2021, the Taliban have been busy organising and strengthening the political institutes. The Taliban, alone, have invested in constructing government machinery at the union council level as well. Astonishingly, in Afghanistan, the employees are given far better salaries than are given to employees in Pakistan. Indeed, the Taliban's first 5-month performance is better than ours of 75 years. We say that bombings are still occurring in Afghanistan, but here [in Pakistan] where our military is so strong and security structure so enhanced, yet I have been attacked four times. So, Afghanistan will take time in attaining stability. When a bomb blast takes place in Afghanistan, our whole media sector claims that there is no peace in Afghanistan.

Yes, a lot of women are displeased with the Taliban imposing the sharia dress code. If the Taliban stopped practicing the sharia dress code, the parents of those people who willingly martyred themselves for the Taliban cause will ask for what purpose were their sons martyred. Therefore, the Taliban would never allow Afghanistan to be administered on the liberal model.

Muhammad Ayaz Wazir

The peace talks with the TTP were initiated by the Peshawar Corps Commander, and he led the talks [till the later stages]. Moreover, it was not a jirga but a tribal mode of dedication for peace, while jirga is a very different thing. The problem which needs attention is that the terrorists (whether TTP or IS-K) are present in former FATA. Just yesterday, only at a half-kilometer away from my home, an unknown person sitting in a car with black mirrors took someone's life. These instances happen during the daytime. I want everyone's attention towards the fact that against the war in FATA and especially Waziristan, Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) was very active, and still is. Those who think the PTM died away, Manzoor Pashteen got dumped and everything finished when Ali Wazir was incarcerated, should not fall into such illusions. The PTM demanded from the government to not allow their lands to be used as a battlefield. But despite this, their lands are still being used as a battleground, and weapon-keeping has also been allowed in those lands. Nobody knows who these people are, and how they cross the border while there is fencing as well. When I am on my way to my home, I am investigated by military personnel at various places. They check our identity cards, and even the women are also taken off the cars by security personnel for the purpose of search. Despite this extensive [body] search activity, how do these terrorist elements make into our lands and who are these people? If a new war is initiated, it will remain restricted to ex-FATA this time. [During these years of war and TTP-led terrorist violence] almost every household lost one or more family members in tribal areas. There is a limit to everything, and if the people took up guns against

the TTP, a civil war would erupt. And if a civil war erupts, do you think you will be safe here in Islamabad? Gone are those days. Please look at regional politics and international politics. Giving your enemies a growing ground in this country to play with the peoples' lives is terrible.

Maj. General (Retd) Inam Ul Haque

Everyone here said that Pakistan's Afghanistan policy is not good, but I would say that it is absolutely right one. This policy isn't the product of mere three hours but has come about as a result of many institutions' decades-long research and work. The problem with Pakistan's policy is that its implementation is wrong. If we correct this, everything will be in its right place. For this policy to work properly, everyone must remain inside the policy framework. Other things like women's rights concern the West, while our concern is only security. Moreover, as Maulana Luni has said these Western things will never be accepted by the Taliban, and I agree with it. Our policy is perfectly right. While making a policy, we consider Islamic points as well as ethnic points, but the influx of refugees can impact our country drastically.

The TTP issue is a legacy issue for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). What is frightening is that the presence of TTP in Afghanistan will be a barrier for the IEA in establishing complete territorial control. This state within a state in Afghanistan won't allow the IEA to function normally. Secondly, in the Doha accord, the Afghan Taliban had agreed that they would not allow their territory to be used by any terrorist group. All the Afghan Taliban groups had agreed to this. But why can't they push the terror

elements out of Afghanistan now? There are three reasons for that. First, the Afghan Taliban and TTP are ideological brothers and are very closely related to each other. They have fought against the US together. Secondly, the reason behind this could be the Afghan Taliban's incapability as well. Thirdly, the Taliban cannot open new war fronts at this time as they are already engaged against the IS-K.

So, the question arises how should the issue of TTP be solved? One option is that a coup happens within the TTP, and it is internally fractured and weakened. Moreover, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada should proclaim a decree that the TTP fighters should be punished as they are waging war against Pakistan. I agree with Maulana Abdul Qadir Luni that we should deal kindly with the Afghans as they have been at war for forty years. But also, it is important to avoid confrontation with the Afghan Taliban and engage diplomatically with them.

Farhatullah Babar

The reason behind the PPP's demand that the talks with TTP should be brought to the parliament can be seen in two ways. The viewpoint from which PPP looks at it is that the party is not in the favour of a secretive way of holding talks with a terrorist outfit. The political party wants that all stakeholders should be involved in peace talks, and our parliament is the prime stakeholder. Moreover, two realities should be considered while making our security policy. First, as we believed that the backbone of TTP had been broken when military operations were conducted against it, so holding talks with it would give a message of the state's defeat or the

growing strength of the TTP. Here, the stakeholders in the parliament should be told who initiated the peace talks with TTP and why. If the stakeholders are not taken into confidence, there would be a crisis of confidence between the stakeholders in the parliament and the security establishment. Secondly, the ground reality that Afghanistan is an independent state and not Pakistan's fifth province should be accepted and considered by policymakers while making the Afghan policy. Moreover, the policy of nurturing terrorists behind the curtain here in Pakistan to create a political landscape for destabilising governments should be stopped. These are two ground realities that should act as the central point around which our security and foreign policies should be framed.

Lt. General (Retd) Nasser Khan Janjua

The prevailing pattern within Pakistan through which Afghanistan is being viewed includes the issues of the TTP, refugees, ID cards, etc. While these "small" issues or irritants can be easily resolved with tact and diplomacy, it is worth rejoicing that the real problem, i.e., the presence of US-led international forces, is no more there. The presence of foreign powers in Afghanistan including India threatened Pakistan's sovereignty as well.

There is a need to resolve bilateral issues by appreciating the ground realities and bridging the gap created during the prolonged war and conflict situation in Afghanistan. I don't agree that Pakistan teats Afghanistan as its fifth province. The idea or concept of strategic depth was just a way of expressing unity, which is unfortunately and unfairly used to criticise Pakistan. As for TTP, it is a defeated force and unlike in the past it has no attraction for the youth to join it. Pakistan can dislocate and fight the TTP,

but Pakistan seeks permanent closure of this conflict through dialogue instead.

I would rather like to see Afghanistan from the future perspective, as the two countries share a common future. The regional connectivity initiatives can include Afghanistan, which according to the speakers is the 'heart of Asia' and strategically important. There is no point in wasting our energies worrying about petty issues. There was a general fear of a refugee crisis post-US withdrawal and Taliban takeover, but it proved irrational as the refugee issue remains manageable and we should all support the people of Afghanistan who have been rendered refugees for the time being as the country is reeling from the effects of war and struggling with various economic challenges.

Afrasiab Khattak

The racial profiling of Pashtuns as terrorists based on the belief that all Taliban are Pashtuns would have far-reaching consequences. The demonisation may result in the bombing of Afghanistan and the genocide of Pashtun as a racial group in the region. We are probably incapable of self-reflection and self-correction. I once heard Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa admitting that Pakistan had made a mistake by supporting the Taliban. It does not make any sense to say that we have always been right and that our Afghan policy is flawless. In order to move ahead successfully, it is indispensable to accept any shortcomings and mistakes committed in the past. A strong Afghanistan instead of a conquered and controlled Afghanistan is in Pakistan's best interest.

Muhammad Amir Rana (moderator)

There is no denying the importance of revisiting Afghan policy with changing times aimed at carving a greater common future under the framework of regional integration.

Senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar

The military doctrine of 'strategic depth' was used in the context of Saudi Arabia and was irrelevant in the context of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a sovereign country and Pakistan does not treat Afghanistan as a fifth province, however, there is a need for translating Afghanistan's sense of equality. No one except the Afghan people should have a say in choosing their representatives. There are several factions or groups in Afghanistan and the literature produced over the years by scholars has played an important role in shaping the global outlook towards the Taliban that is now in de-facto control of Afghanistan. Afghans have historically been pragmatic, by nature independent, and capable of managing their affairs. For instance, the Afghan Taliban, without the alleged support of Pakistan, managed to put formidable resistance and eventually achieve the US withdrawal. After 2002, Pakistan never ran any training camps for the Afghan Taliban.

Farhatullah Babar

There is a need to establish a 'truth and reconciliation commission' to determine the role of various players in the Afghan conundrum, especially

with respect to the role of Pakistan and its military's policy towards Afghanistan.

Mushahid Hussain Syed, Member Senate of Pakistan (PML-N)



I express my gratitude for the opportunity to share my view and appreciate the diversity of the forum. Our biggest fallacy on Afghan policy is that we have been playing favorites. [It is deplorable] that even after over 40 years, the Afghan story is not over and there are new challenges in this regard. In the context of Pakistan, the focus should be “who makes the policy and what policy should be made.” [I also support the suggestion that] a working group should be formed on the Afghan issue.

From 1973 to 1997, five rulers came into power indicating the political turmoil preceding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. [There is a book titled] ‘Power and Principle’³ [which] provides detailed account of the CIA’s covert operations in Afghanistan and military support to the Afghan forces against the Soviet troops in a bid to avenge the defeat in Vietnam.

Pakistan’s foreign policy should be determined by political leaders and civilian actors and not by intelligence agencies and the military. I empathise with Afghanistan in view of the criminal treatment of the US which has deprived the country of its money. Pakistan has magnanimously managed

³ An apparent reference to *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* by Zbigniew Brzezinski.

the issue of refugees which reflects the generosity and hospitality of the Pakistani people.

At the end, **Muhammad Amir Rana** (Director PIPS) delivered a note of thanks and offered gratitude to the worthy discussants for their productive policy-oriented discussion and views.

The event was covered by print and electronic media.

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

About this report

This report is outcome of the 5th PIPS-led structured consultation out of a series of eight such events that have been designed to discuss and critically evaluate evolving aspects of Afghan conflict and political reconciliation and suggest policy options and strategies to the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan. To that end, PIPS has established a network of credible resource persons including former diplomats, academicians, government officials, and representatives of political and religious parties, security and law enforcement agencies, civil society, and media, as well as those living at the border including Afghan refugees. The underlying goal is to support Afghan peace and reconciliation and tackle its trickle-down effect for Pakistan including in terms of militancy and insecurity, among other things.

About PIPS

Established in 2005, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an Islamabad-based research and advocacy organisation. It offers a range of services through a combination of independent research and analysis, innovative academic programmes, and hands-on training and support that serve the following basic themes: Conflict analysis and peacebuilding; dialogue; prevent/counter violent extremism (P/CVE); internal and regional security; and media for peace and democracy. It also conducts frequent structured dialogues, focus group discussions, and national and international seminars to understand the issues listed earlier and strengthen partnerships. The outcomes of PIPS research and planned events have frequently and extensively been reported on media that adds to its credibility as an active, effective and well networked civil society organizations. Many of PIPS policy reports and recommendations have been credited and included in the state policy documents and discourses mainly those on security and CVE.



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