

CONSULTATION REPORT

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

Report of PIPS Consultation-6 held on December 5, 2022, in Islamabad



Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

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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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Exploring Pakistan's position, interests and policy options

Muhammad Amir Rana, director Pak Institute for Peace Studies (Moderator)

This is Pak Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS) sixth consultation on Afghan peace and reconciliation. These quarterly expert consultations undertake analyses of the developments taking place in Afghanistan over the corresponding three months. Participating experts also try to understand Pakistan's policy options in line with those developments.

The Taliban have been in power in Afghanistan for more than 15 months now, and there are many issues to be revisited. There has been a change in the top military command in Pakistan, which raises a pertinent question about any shift in Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan in near future.

After welcoming the participants and giving his introductory remarks, Mr. Muhammad Amir Rana requested former senator Afrasiab Khattak to express his viewpoints on the matter.

Afrasiab Khattak, political analyst, and expert on Afghan affairs

In this year's Herat Security Dialogue, which was held on 29th and 30th of November in Dushanbe, the view that resonated throughout the event was that the current setup in Kabul is non-inclusive and non-representative of all Afghans. Most participants were Persian speaking Afghans from the north, and many talked about the decentralisation of power and authority in Afghanistan.

There are competing powers and interests in Afghanistan and neighbouring Central Asian states. At least three regional powers [or alliances led by them] are locked

Pakistan has this opportunity to move forward and leave behind the seventy-year-old policy of remaining an outpost of the West in the region.

Afrasiab Khattak



in a struggle for ascendancy including Russia, Turkey, and China. Russians are facing a tough competition from the CIA. The second ambit of competition is led by Turkey, which pursues a sort of Neo-Ottomanism under President Erdogan. Thirdly, China is furthering its influence through economic engagement and development. Yet, another competitor is out there in form of religious-ideological groups and actors, who are mainly operating from Afghanistan and Pakistan. This brings in the possibility of a thrust from South Asia for establishing its influence in Central Asia. All these powers and actors are employing peculiar methods to achieve their aims.

Although the old regimes are gone, Central Asian politics still has strong elements of authoritarianism. Dynastic politics prevails these days in Centra Asia. This confluence of contrasting developments has the possibility of leading the region to a political explosion.

Pakistan's power elites are pro-West as their interests are closely linked to the West. However, Pakistan has this opportunity to move forward and leave behind the seventy-year-old policy of remaining an outpost of the West in the region. With the transformed regional and international circumstances, it would be unwise for Pakistan to practice such an outdated policy today.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Afrasiab Khattak, for letting us know the details of Herat Security Dialogue which helped us understand the regional context. To move further, I invite Lt. General (Retd) Nasser Janjua to tell us how the change in the military command could affect Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan?

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

There is a hope that the arrival of the new army chief will lead the nation into a better and secure future. However, at present it is not possible to ascertain the order of his priorities. With the change in personalities, things change, and I hope things will

change for better. Presently, as the country is on the brink of destruction, the new army chief will be mindful of it and will have a plan for taking the country out of the crises.

Nonetheless, the importance of Afghanistan for Pakistan can't be stressed further as Pakistan has already suffered heavily from decades of war in Afghanistan.

The TTP has resumed its terrorist activities, and the new military leadership will try to reorient its focus towards internal security. Our expectations that the Afghan Taliban would help Pakistan tame Taliban on this side of the border have been shattered with the emerging developments suggesting otherwise. In addition, our challenges have been multiplied with an eye to keep on the Afghan Taliban, Afghan people, and the resurging TTP simultaneously.

The breaking of ceasefire by the TTP and the failure of the reconciliation process indicate in the direction of a new war breaking out between the country's army and the outlawed militant group. This badly impacts the Afghan Taliban as it will be believed that they have failed to take action against the TTP hiding in Afghanistan. As a result, the relations between the two countries will deteriorate.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you General Janjua for letting us know that the TTP has lately become a spoiler in Pak-Afghan relations. I invite Mirwais Yasini, former first deputy speaker of the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament, to share the perspective of Afghans on the developments happening in the region, and how do they see Pakistan's role.

Mirwais Yasini, former First Deputy Speaker of the Lower House of Afghan Parliament

The coming of the Afghan Taliban into power in Afghanistan was a sudden and unexpected change. The main reason behind the fall of Ghani regime was its bureaucratic sluggishness and negligence to the issues of the Afghan people. Moreover, there is no specific definition of the war on terror, and the war on terror fought in Afghanistan was the war on terror from the American perspective as the 9/11 pro-

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Lt. General Nasser Janjua (Retd)



The Pakistani clergy and policymakers need to converge on the country's Afghan policy as well as on the issue of the growing militancy in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces.

Mirwais Yasini



vided a justification for it. However, the bloodshed in the region has increased since the end of the war on terror with the American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The duplicity of the West is well known to the world as it pursues its self-interest blindly without any care for what happens to other nations as a consequence of its actions.

The mistakes committed both by Pakistan and Afghanistan since 1979 are unforgettable, as rather than focusing on their internal issues, they busied themselves in fighting other people's wars.

At present, the Afghans are in a very pitiable condition—facing an ever-worsening economic crisis. With the Afghan Taliban taking controlling of Kabul and installing their own government, those who served in the Afghan National Army had to become jobless. Combining the figure of ANF members becoming jobless with the rest of the citizens losing employment, a horrifying data of unemployment in Afghanistan surfaces.

Good thing is that crime rate has plummeted tremendously in Afghanistan since the Afghan Taliban becoming rulers of the country. But I don't see the system functioning properly, now or later. Meanwhile, insecurity in Afghanistan will continue to affect Pakistan's security.

The Pakistani clergy and policymakers need to converge on the country's Afghan policy as well as on the issue of the growing militancy in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan province. In a recent video, Mufti Taqi Usmani declared that to use arms for the implementation of Sharia is un-Islamic. In addition to this, there is a need for a legal ruling or decree (*fatwa*) from Pakistan's Islamic scholars about the actions of TTP and other such groups.

Moreover, allying with China and Russia won't benefit Pakistan and Afghanistan economically in the short-run. What both the countries need is to work on their own economies and improve the lives of their citizens instead of expecting the developed countries to aid them in their economic development. No doubt, China is slowly engaging in economic activities in Afghanistan, which will yield result over time.

Besides this, engaging with the Taliban will save the region from further chaos; severing all communications with them will prove destructive.

Furthermore, the concept of decentralisation doesn't apply to Afghanistan as the country is largely inhabited by Pashtuns who will resist this.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you Mr. Mirwais Yasini for letting us know that though the unemployment rate has increased in Afghanistan since the takeover of Kabul by Afghan Taliban, crimes have become less frequent and relative peace has been established. However, the governance system in Afghanistan under the current regime is in shambles.

Lt. General Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Retd), former Defence Secretary and Minister of Defence of Pakistan

[It is heartening to know that] there has been significant improvement in the law-and-order and security situation in Afghanistan under the current regime as compared to the previous regimes. There has seen a sharp decline in the corruption, too. However, I will ask [Mr Yasini] about the narcotics situation.

Nevertheless, there is a need to go deeper and see who is behind all the mess in the region and benefiting from it. There are always interests of big powers and we shouldn't be ignorant of their machinations. They act as spoilers and exploiters. Besides this, it isn't a good policy to respond violently to violence, as the previous experiences have shown that the use of force against violence has not reduced it. The doors of dialogue should remain open.

Moreover, all our issues whether with Afghanistan, India or Iran, have popped up only because of our flawed decision-making. All these issues have political, economic, social and military dimensions to them. If all the dimensions are dealt with by a single department or a single person, mess would result. Each department's mandate should be its own, and no other department should take over another department's activities. Moreover, the civilian leadership should attract the people's trust and not look around for favours from military individuals. Furthermore, the relations between military and civilian leaderships need to be harmonious and warm.

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Lt. General Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Retd)



Mirwais Yasini

Mullah Omar's leadership was a different one, and his government had fully banned the cultivation of poppy. In the current Taliban administration in Kabul, like in the previous Taliban regime, cultivating poppy is punishable. This claim, however, is refuted by the United Nations saying that 84 percent of opium is coming out from Afghanistan. This could be the leftover opium grown during the Ghani regime. Nevertheless, on the narcotics front, Afghanistan has shown tremendous improvement.

Moreover, it is very important for Afghanistan to stay connected with Pakistan and its neighbouring countries. A disconnection would worsen its economic crisis and exacerbate its political instability.

Mehmood Jan Babar, senior journalist, expert on Pak-Afghan affairs

Many Islamic scholar (*ulema*) have issued decrees (*fatawa*) against the militants. Some of them were later targeted and killed by the militants because of their decrees. Regrettably, the religious-political parties lost many of their leaders only because of standing against the militants. A prime example is that of Maulana Hassan Jan. Proper propagation and education of such decrees is as important as issuing them.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Although the *ulema* have largely been with the state as key allies - most recent example is Paigham-e-Pakistan that was endorsed by thousands of Islamic scholars - but the matter needs further investigation. I invite Maulana Yousaf Shah to deliberate on the issue.

Maulana Yusuf Shah, Central Secretary General JUI-S & Chairman Muttahida Ulema Board, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The TTP [believes it] didn't start the war and won't end it on the dictates of the ulema. The ulema, however, have told them clearly - such as Mufti Taqi told them in a recent meeting in Kabul - that war against Pakistan is un-Islamic while in Afghanistan it was Islamic until the withdrawal of the foreign troops. The peace talks with the TTP, which were started by Pakistan military, didn't go smoothly because of the civil-military divide. The peace talks were derailed when the civilian leadership insisted on taking the issue into the parliament. Although the TTP has ended the



ceasefire, but the war has exhausted the group and it wants an end to the violence. The Afghan Taliban are also impressing upon the TTP that they will not allow it to operate from Afghanistan in line with the promises they have made in Doha agreement. Additionally, the TTP is ready for talks even today, but Pakistan's civilian and military leadership are not prepared as they are unable so far to be on the same page. As for the ulema, they are on the same page with anyone who wants to end violence in the region.

The era of terrorism commenced in 2002, when General Musharraf allowed the Americans to strike Afghanistan. The Afghans only reacted to the American invasion. The Afghan Taliban are willing to establish good relations with all the countries, but the world has shut its doors to them. This is truly harsh from the international community. Recognizing the Taliban government has become a very hard choice for the world, which at the same time has recognized the same kind of government in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries. Moreover, a softer approach towards Afghanistan from the international community will eventually soften the Taliban and succeed in changing their worldview.

Afghanistan of today is progressing well with development works going ahead full steam. Work on minerals is going on, and the economy is improving. The Taliban are also willing to accept international obligations including the girls' education. But the world needs to talk to them.

Minhas Majeed Marwat, Assistant Professor of International Relations at University of Peshawar

The role of clergy in Pakistani politics is indispensable, as it appears impossible to sever politics from religion in the country. Even the United States and others used religion in the 1980s to further their political ambitions [through fighting so-called Afghan jihad].

The war on terror ended—failing to stop terrorism which continues to this day. When the United States invaded Afghanistan, only a few militant organisations were operational in Afghanistan. However, there are numerous terrorist organisations active in Afghanistan today.

What remains to be known is that the US didn't come to Afghanistan for fighting a war on terror. It was to gain strategic prominence in the region, as the Americans are not ignorant of Afghanistan's strategic importance.

In addition, the Taliban government was established with the US support, as the US had to shift its attention towards Asia Pacific, and it couldn't bear burdening itself with more economic and military losses in Afghanistan. Pakistan should be careful about the interests of China, Russia, US, India, Iran and Central Asia while deciding on Afghanistan, as for them a stable Afghanistan is in their interest. China would never want its Belt and Road Initiative be threatened, nor would the other major



Minhas Majeed Marwat

The war on terror ended—failing to stop terrorism which continues to this day.

powers want their interests imperilled in the region. So, it would be better for Pakistan to stay away from deciding anything on Afghanistan until the world has recognized the current setup in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has very limited policy choices and can't afford isolation. By recognizing the Taliban government, Pakistan will risk facing a lot of troubles.

Maulana Abdul Qadir Luni, head of JUI-Nazriyati Balochistan

The ulema of Pakistan have suffered a lot of troubles for being Pakistani. They are not foreign agent and have indeed remained loyal to Pakistan throughout its 75 years history. They have supported any government which wished Pakistan's development and have stood against those which were inimical to the state and its people. I have myself remained in jail for 10 years.



Until the invasion of Afghanistan by USSR, Afghans were peaceful. However, to defend their motherland they started fighting the Russians. Afterwards, the US invaded Afghanistan and received the same kind of fierce resistance from the Afghans. This proves that war was imposed on Afghans, and that they didn't opt for arms on their own but were forced to do so.

The negative depiction of Taliban government in Afghanistan without any evidence is truly uncivilized and insulting to them. There is a need to highlight the Taliban's good points as well, especially by media.

The Taliban government has proven itself capable by establishing control

and peace in 98 percent of the country. An increase has also been observed in trade in Afghanistan. With the Taliban establishing government in Afghanistan, the tradesmen residing in the Balochistan province have been leaving for Afghanistan. Because of such developments, Pakistan's economy saw a 70 percent decline. Likewise, there are no street crimes in Afghanistan like we have in our major cities in Pakistan.

Moreover, the TTP is not the creation of the Afghan Taliban, and they are not providing guns to militants on this side of the border. They can't even transport guns to Pakistan. However, the TTP has access to guns in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the doors of dialogue shouldn't be opened only for the TTP, but for Baloch insurgents as well.

The use of gun is not a solution to the Balochistan problem. Nonetheless, the Balochistan problem isn't a recent one as it has been with us since Musharraf era. The problem is a political one and concerns human rights—requiring a dialogue not force for its solution.

Moreover, both Afghanistan and Pakistan are on brotherly terms with each other,

Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Pakistan's interests and policy options

December 05, 2022 (02:00pm to 05:00pm)

Ramada Hotel



and there is hope that things will get better soon.

Maj. Gen Inam Ul Haque (Retd), Defence and Strategic Affairs Analyst

The issue of Afghanistan needs conceptualisation. There are a few conceptual parameters, largely constants or imperatives, in relationship between the two neighbours.

First is the common geography of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan shares a long border with Afghanistan, so it is in the best interest of Pakistan to have good relations with Afghanistan.

Secondly, the situation in Afghanistan impacts Pakistan and the situation in Pakistan impacts Afghanistan. In our case, KP and Balochistan are particularly vulnerable to any fall-out from Afghanistan side. Our issues are bilateral and need to be solved through a consensus between the two countries.

Thirdly, Pakistan has direct stakes in Afghanistan, so border with Afghanistan cannot be closed just because of one incident or two, and Pakistan should avoid reacting in such a way as such reactions would increase anti-Pakistan sentiment in Afghanistan, to the great delight of detractors of Pak-Afghan amity.

Fourthly, animosity is not an answer as it wouldn't lead to anything positive, and ultimately, we will have to sit down, talk, and accommodate each other.

Fifthly, Afghan politics and society are in a flux, and even the 'Malik' culture [pertaining to key role of tribal elders] is modified in fundamental ways. Tribal power elite are under transformation everywhere in Afghanistan. [Pakistan needs to understand and adjust its Afghan policy to these realities and other changing dynamics].

The sixth conceptual parameter is that Islam cannot be excluded from Afghan society. The US tried to separate Islam from Afghans, but failed.

The situation in Afghanistan impacts Pakistan and the situation in Pakistan impacts Afghanistan. In our case, KP and Balochistan are particularly vulnerable to any fall-out from Afghanistan side. Our issues are bilateral and need to be solved through a consensus between the two countries.



Maj. Gen Inam Ul Haque (Retd)

However, there is a 'variable' which negatively impacts relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and it is the TTP. Talks were held with the banned outfit, but failed. Sadly, the formula used by the negotiating team led by former ISI chief [Lt Gen. (Retd) Faiz Hameed] was not cognizant of the socio-psychological and political undercurrents of the situation. The interlocutors seemingly transgressed the mandate without known political ownership, and conceded ground seemingly under 'some' understanding.

The Afghan Taliban, who form the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, are divided into two major factions: the pragmatist Haqqani faction; and the southern ideologues led Kandahari faction. Haqqanis have been relatively friendly with Pakistan, while the Kandaharis espouse more puritanical views while dealing with Pakistan. Kandahari faction is formed by the Taliban ideologues, led by Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, the spiritual leader of the IEA. So, to make any headway in talks with the TTP, Pakistan should mollify the Kandahari faction and make inroads into Mullah Akhundzada's inner circles. The winning of ideologues to our side and facilitating decree against the anti-Pakistan violence by the TTP would be a worthy coup for our negotiators. Secondly, we may also persist in convincing the Kandahari Shura about potential assimilation of the non-reconcilable TTP cadre on the Afghan side, under the IEA watch.

Moreover, as a related point, Pakistan's perceptions within the Kandahari Shura is important. We are seen as pro-West/US, single ethnicity-driven and less Islamist in outlook. The impression is that our bureaucracy is in cahoots with the US. They are also of the opinion that policy making in Pakistan is dominated by a single ethnicity.

Mehmood Jan Babar

After the takeover of Kabul by the Afghan Taliban, Afghan people sold their belongings at very low prices. Many people lost jobs as well. These were the ones who

flocked the Kabul airport to leave Afghanistan. It became known soon that these people used to work in the Ghani administration, and after its fall they couldn't maintain themselves. However, the job loss was general as the country was struggling with its dilapidated economy.

Moreover, it has also been found that 15–20 percent people leave the country following every regime change; just like people close to the Afghan Taliban left Afghanistan after the establishment of a democratic government, the people close to Ghani administration left the country at the Taliban arrival in Kabul. However, as compared with the Ghani administration, peace has returned in Afghanistan under the current Taliban administration. To this claim, even people who are disapproving of the Taliban government, have testified.

In addition, to keep the Afghan people happy, the Taliban have maintained low prices of petrol and other materials by importing them on discounted rates from their neighbouring countries like Iran. Afghan refugees, who fled Afghanistan and came to Pakistan when the Taliban came into power, are returning to Afghanistan saying that Afghanistan fares better in terms of economy than Pakistan. For one, electric power outage and cost are low in Afghanistan compared to Pakistan.



Mehmood Jan Babar

It is false that Afghanistan is extremely worse on the economic front, as it is doing much better [than seen from outside].

The Taliban government is doing well on governance front. Most of the officers who were working with the previous, Ghani government, have continued to work despite lack of funds for their salaries.

It is false that Afghanistan is extremely worse on the economic front, as it is doing much better [than seen from outside]. Trade is on the rise in Afghanistan, with the Afghan Taliban very serious about it. You see trailers of coal moving on roads across the country and the Taliban government earns about one thousand dollars against each trailer. Moreover, the Taliban have benefitted from all their neighbours—buying things on discounted prices from them.

At present when the Afghan Taliban are busy in easing the lives of Afghans, a threat from them to Pakistan is an impossibility. However, Pakistan's immediate concern should be dealing with the TTP, which is on a rampage in its Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Afghan Taliban have, moreover, kept the TTP tightly in Afghanistan and are extremely strict with its leadership telling it that activities conducted against Pakistan from inside of Afghanistan will invite their wrath.

The TTP has, however, three demands in return for a comeback to Pakistan on which they are not giving up. These demands include: a territory specifically for the TTP; the TTP members will come to Pakistan bearing arms; and that they will come in bands and not as individuals. Without these demands met, the TTP won't come back to Pakistan. A demand from the Pakistani side that the TTP will have to change

the name of its organisation, has been rejected by the TTP. However, these could be the pressure tactics used by the TTP to coerce Pakistan into submission.

The Afghan Taliban can't risk damaging its relations with Pakistan. Therefore, they are strict with TTP.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

There would be three themes now around which the discussion will revolve. How regional connectivity can be furthered, the TTP issue, and bilateral issues like economy. Now, I invite Shahzada Zulfiqar to tell us that whether Baloch insurgency has increased with the coming of Taliban into power in Afghanistan.

Shahzada Zulfiqar, Quetta-based senior journalist, former president PFUJ

The issue of fencing along the Durand Line needs a dialogue among the two neighbours. However, the Afghan Taliban are duplicitous about the policy regarding the uprooting of the fence along the Durand Line saying that it's not a state policy while apparently it is their state policy.

Moreover, the TTP resumed its terrorist campaign in the country by ending the ceasefire, saying that many violations occurred while the talks were ongoing. One might ask that If the Afghan Taliban are truly sincere with Pakistan, they could at least have pressurized the TTP. However, they haven't so far. If they cannot act as guarantors, they should pronouncedly quite the role.

Pakistan used to complain to the previous Afghan government that the regime is in not acting against the TTP and Baloch insurgents freely roaming in Afghanistan. It continues to complain the same yet again to the friendly Taliban government in Kabul. Pakistan was hopeful that with the coming of Afghan Taliban into power, things would change. However, things have remained unchanged.

The Afghan Taliban have neither handed over the TTP members required by Pakistan nor proclaimed that the Baloch and TTP insurgents should leave Afghanistan. They rather have a policy that as the insurgents have relatives across the border, they can't stop them from visiting each other.

Moreover, the claim that the Baloch rebel leaders have returned from Afghanistan is not true, as most of them are still residing in Afghanistan.

Pakistan refrained from executing a Baloch rebel leader, Gulzar Imam - who was reportedly detained by Pakistani authorities in Istanbul and was later seen in Islamabad or Karachi - thinking that it cannot afford creating another hero for the Baloch as it happened in the past such as in the cases of Sher Muhammad Baloch and Lala Munir. Moreover, many of Baloch rebel leaders are living with convenience in Iran. As military opera-



Shahzada Zulfiqar

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tions are underway in Makran and other regions of Balochistan, why would Baloch leaders return from Afghanistan or Iran?

Jaishul Adl is active in Pak-Iran bordering areas. Both sides keep blaming each other for cross-border infiltrations. The religious-nationalist uprising in Iranian Baluchistan is also growing with clerics like Hamid ud Din flaring it up, and Iran is worried about it. When after Ormara attack, Pakistani prime minister reached out to Iran for finding and handing over the culprits, they had also put forth a list of their 'culprits' hiding in Pakistan.

In the early days, talking about the missing persons was like inviting the wrath of the intelligence agencies. However, in recent days there has been witnessed much softness from the military towards the issue of missing persons.

Pakistan uses border diplomacy as well. When there is an incident on the Durand Line, Pakistan closes the border in order to pressurize Afghanistan that further attacks will not be tolerated.

Farzana Ali, Bureau Chief Aaj News, Peshawar

The Afghan women who constitute 50 percent of the Afghan population are faced with numerous insecurities, which cannot be neglected. Those women who had lived through the previous Taliban government do not want to see their daughters suffer the same fate in the current Taliban government. Most worryingly, the women in Afghanistan have been barred from going to school. Thus, their dreams of making a career have been destroyed.

Moreover, the Taliban have been giving ultimatums upon ultimatums for allowing women education but so far all have been lies.

Formerly, there were a lot of avenues for betterment of Afghan women. However, with the coming of Taliban into power, all such avenues were shut down.

It is true that peace has returned to Afghanistan, but the lives of Afghan women have worsened in the Taliban regime.

It is the time now to impress upon the Taliban government in Afghanistan that they should allow women their rights, and there is a hope that they might allow. Moreover, it is not un-Islamic for a woman to sit amongst men when they are formulating a policy which concerns the women.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

We have among us Mr Baqir Sajjad, who covers foreign policy issues for daily *Dawn*. We may ask him if Pakistan can have any formal engagement with the Taliban on



Farzana Ali

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the core issues of border security and the TTP? Secondly, what is the current position or direction of our Afghan policy?

Baqir Sajjad Syed, senior journalist associated with Dawn

The Taliban run a de-facto regime in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's neighbours do not recognize it, but all of them have engagement with the Taliban. They keep exploring broader areas of cooperation, and countering terrorism is one.

We know about the Taliban's relationship with terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan, but the picture displayed by some here - that everything is fine - appears contrary to the ground reality. While the Taliban have maintained close ties with Al-Qaeda, many other groups have also been strengthening such as Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), the TTP, and Central Asian militant outfits. The IS-K activities are growing and offering a great deal of security challenge to the Taliban. The group is not active only in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but has also fired rockets into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in more than one instances. Without controlling plethora of these terrorist organizations, the Taliban cannot claim to have achieved control and security in the country.

Secondly, the Afghan Taliban also need to focus border issues, as there have been repeated incidents of armed clashes on Afghanistan's borders with Iran and Pakistan. And as I mentioned earlier, the IS-K also made cross-border attacks into few Central Asian states.

Pakistan needs to engage with the Taliban government in economic and trade deals as well. They have made a deal with Iran for oil import, and are exporting coal to multiple destinations. Most of the commodity items are exported to Afghanistan from Pakistan. But we have failed to utilize this leverage in enhancing cooperation in bilateral trade and other areas. Mahmood Jan Babar just mentioned that the TTP is present in Afghanistan but their activities are restricted by the Taliban. If the Taliban are able to restrict the TTP activities, then they can bring them to the table also for meaningful talks. If the Taliban government wants recognition, it will have to act against terrorist organizations based in Afghanistan.



Baqir Sajjad Syed

The Afghan Taliban also need to focus border issues, as there have been repeated incidents of armed clashes on Afghanistan's borders with Iran and Pakistan.

With regard to Pakistan's policy on Afghanistan, I think Pakistan is going with the international community. The Taliban government is not inclusive, and there are issues related to human rights. If compared with the first regime of the Taliban, then we can say there is an improvement in security. But there is still a free flow of arms, and Afghanistan's neighbors have their security related concerns.

By sending a woman minister, i.e. Hina Rabbani Khar, to Afghanistan, Pakistan gave a message to the Taliban: "Even if you are suppressing women, we are sending a woman to negotiate with you.". The Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari himself could have visited, but we had to send a message.

Pakistan must engage with the Taliban on issues pertaining to security TTP, Baloch insurgency, etc. Similarly, there is scope of devising trilateral counterterrorism co-operation among Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Now we will ask Yar Muhammad Badini that in what ways the the takeover of the Taliban has affected Balochistan, and its business, security, and overall society?

Yar Muhammad Badini, Quetta-based senior journalist & writer

Balochistan shares about a thousand miles long border with Afghanistan that divides families on both sides. The Taliban's first government did not get much time, but they have got one more chance to rule. Quetta can be considered second Kandahar for Afghans and also the Taliban. Due to geographical proximity between the two cities, the Taliban can travel to Quetta for lunch after breakfast and then can get back to Kandahar for dinner. The Taliban own properties in Quetta. Our Afghan brothers are more hardworking than the local Pashtuns, and own most of the plazas, businesses, and the export-import ventures; most also have Pakistani nationality and passports.

Apparently, there are high unemployment rates in Afghanistan as Afghans arrive here [in Balochistan] in a helpless conditions. Afghan patients through the Chaman border area and other adjacent locations travel to Quetta for treatment and then return back. They tell the stories of their economic and other difficulties in their country. And as was just said here, significant human rights violations are reported from Afghanistan. For one, girls are not allowed to continue their studies after they have completed primary school education. There are limitations on the media.

In recent months, Balochistan has supplied thousands of tons of fertilizers to Afghanistan. Similarly, wheat was also smuggled to Afghanistan. As a local from Quetta, I can attest that the Baloch people do not receive any agricultural facilities or tube wells for themselves; everything is supplied to Afghanistan, instead.



However, more than Afghanistan, Balochistan's fate is linked with Islamabad. The province needs two to three free and fair elections, which should not be a big deal. I think, the situation in Balochistan will improve if we show some empathy and provide political and economic power to the Baloch people based on merit and democratic principles.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Now, I will request Mr Ayaz Wazir to give his invaluable opinion on Pakistan's Afghan policy?

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

I personally have concerns regarding Pakistan's foreign policy. I have said it before, and I'll say it again: Pakistan's foreign policy toward Afghanistan needs to be taken seriously. Our bilateral relations with Afghanistan have been estranged for two fundamental reasons, which have remained unaddressed so far.

First, Afghanistan did not grant Pakistan a vote at the UN when every other country was casting a vote in Pakistan's favor on September 30, 1947. However, on October 20, 1947, Afghanistan reversed its decision and cast a positive vote in Pakistan's favor. Sadly, in Pakistani conferences and forums, just the negative vote is talked about while the affirmative vote is completely ignored.

Pakistan's first grave mistake was the violation of the Durand Line back in July 1949, by sending an aircraft to bomb a village in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan apologized for this unfortunate incident. But the Afghans remained indignant and called a large Jirga to discuss the matter. After deliberating, the jirga decided that although the Afghans regarded the Durand line contentious, Pakistan's violation of it at the state level rendered all the agreements and treaties between Pakistan and Afghanistan null and void.

For the past 40 years Afghanistan has not been completely under one stable government, as the country remained politically unstable, mainly due to protracted wars. While

Muhammad Ayaz Wazir,



For the past 40 years Afghanistan has not been completely under one stable government, as the country remained politically unstable, mainly due to protracted wars. While governments existed during this time, they were opposed by the larger segments of the Afghan society. However, since the takeover of Kabul by the Afghan Taliban, internal resistance has been becoming fainter by each passing day while outside resistance, which existed in the earlier days, has faded away. Therefore, with the Afghan Taliban taking over Kabul, a great extent of stability has returned to Afghanistan for the first time after 40 years of wars and political instability.

Not learning from the past experiences and setbacks, Pakistan made the same unsuccessful attempt as the US and other nations had made to take control of Afghanistan by force and strength. Moreover, Pakistan cannot impose its will on Afghanistan or use force to subdue it. Pakistan should, therefore, reorient its Afghan policy and plan and look for new and more effective ways to improve its relationship with Afghanistan. Both governments should come to the table and acknowledge the errors they have made in the past. Moreover, they should apologise and not allow their past mistakes affect their current policies. Progress and the way forward would be impossible without such an approach.

In addition to this, if the civil leadership and the military establishment reached an agreement on the country's internal policy, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan can improve. Before moving forward, Pakistan must reach a consensus internally, with all the stakeholders available, on what kind of Afghan policy would suit better. Moreover, Pakistan needs to stop interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

Afghanistan is a sovereign country and will prove a great neighbour if it is treated with respect. Moreover, it needs to be understood that the Afghan Taliban could be Pakistan's good friends, but not slaves. If Pakistan's interests coincide with Afghanistan's, that's great, but even if they don't, Pakistan still has to remain friendly with Afghanistan. Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan will improve if focus is laid on these issues in its policies. However, if Pakistan continued focusing minor issues, relations will deteriorate rather than improving.

Moreover, the Afghan Taliban aren't capable of kicking the TTP out of Afghanistan yet, as they await recognition from the international community. Interestingly, when Afghanistan was fighting the Americans, TTP provided shelter to the Afghan Taliban. Now in power, the Afghan Taliban are merely returning the favour.

The mistakes made in merging FATA with KP needs to be corrected. No matter FATA was merged into KP, but the people of FATA have been given nothing so far. The situation cannot be more distressing as the people are coming out onto the streets demanding peace. It is disappointing that a 14-day long sit-in in Waziristan, demanding peace, didn't get the media coverage. In order to save the region from lawlessness and militancy, the issues faced by the people of erstwhile FATA should be addressed.

Moreover, dialogue is the proper way of finding solutions to the people's problems. However, as things stand today, FATA and Balochistan seem to be gradually slipping out of Pakistan's control.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Now I invite Dr. Fazal ur Rehman to share his opinion on the context of CPEC and Afghanistan and to what extent are the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the security situation going to improve by CPEC.

Dr. Fazal ur Rehman, Director Pakistan Institute of China Studies at the University of Sar-godha

Firstly, the topic of decentralisation was considered long ago when the Geneva Accords were signed. It was suggested that federating entities might have a better chance of regaining sustainability if they are given more power. Secondly, the issue of recognition is crucial as Afghanistan has not been recognised by the international community yet. The main reason behind this is that there are certain established norms and practices within the UN which need to be accepted to a certain degree without which it is difficult to achieve recognition.

Thirdly, as revealed by the statistics from the UN, Afghanistan's economy is in dire crisis. Food shortage has left a lot of people starved and malnourished. Moreover, the international community is already fatigued as it has been providing subsistence to Afghanistan for quite some time now. In such a situation, the impending political and internal instability will delay the political reconciliation and normalisation considerably, thereby impacting Afghanistan's neighbours.

Talking about CPEC, the previous administration was unable to handle it. However, in the second phase of CPEC attempts were made to change the core structure of CPEC which Pakistan failed to achieve. Nevertheless, there was an endeavor to bring it in a people-centric way, aiming to benefit the people.

Originally, CPEC was intended to inspire social mobilisation. However, efforts made in this direction didn't bear any fruit due to the prevailing bureaucratic sluggishness in the country. Instead of providing blueprints for and advocating for the special economic zones on its own, Pakistan requested China for recommendations. As far as the benefits of CPEC for the general public are concerned, it has benefited them in the infrastructure and energy sector, but it has failed in providing them jobs.

Afghanistan is the member of Belt and Road Initiative and is connected with Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan serves as the hub for all international trade, with minimum barriers. Chinese goods are transported to Pakistan before being delivered to Afghanistan. However, with the approval of China and Pakistan, Afghanistan should be included in CPEC.

Moreover, due to the prevailing security situation in the country little progress has been made on the project yet. Nor would any progress be made unless the security situation improves. The recent terrorist attacks on Chinese targets led to the departure of Chinese teachers and other officials from the country—exemplified by the non-availability of Chinese teachers in the country's five Confucius institutes. If the project fails to deliver because of the security situation in Pakistan, it would be quite challenging to extend the project to Afghanistan as well, as the security landscape there is in a deplorable condition.



Dr. Fazal ur Rehman

It was suggested that federating entities might have a better chance of regaining sustainability if they are given more power.

Knowing well the troubles faced by the Chinese in Pakistan, China cannot invest further in Pakistan in CPEC in any foreseeable future. Unless the security situation improves and political instability returns, China will remain hesitant to enter long-term commitments with Pakistan.

Maj. General Inam ul Haque (Retd)

As the TTP is a militant group it should be dealt with force. Additionally, while negotiating with the TTP, the negotiation team should include people with an understanding of tribal sociology. These individuals should understand the proverbs of the Pathans, their language, culture, and history. It would be impossible to negotiate successfully with the TTP while remaining ignorant of local culture.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are at this time worried by the possibility of an alliance between the TTP and IS-K. If that happens, it will be a good development for Pakistan, as the alliance between the two outfits would concentrate military's focus in one place, thereby reducing the cost to lives and resources. Furthermore, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is lenient towards the TTP, as they have a shared fighting history.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Now I invite Maulana Yousaf Shah and Maulana Abdul Qadir Luni to let us know what is the main agenda of the TTP? It has started forming its shadow government and area administrators now. In which direction do the changes in the TTP point?

Maulana Yusuf Shah

The agenda of TTP is well known to everyone since 2001. Moreover, the group is now open to talks and has a few demands. The TTP, however, can be limited to a small area, but this could be achieved through dialogue and not by using force.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

What could be the strength of TTP now that the state of Pakistan feels threatened by it?

Maulana Abdul Qadir Luni

The TTP isn't that powerful to be scared of, as its resources are scant, and it has a few hundred personnel. Moreover, the group's members are willing to return to Pakistan, but they fear that their enemies in Pakistan will create troubles for them.

Lt General (Retd) Nasser Khan Janjua

If Pakistan hadn't stood by Afghanistan when the USSR invaded it, Afghanistan could have been overwhelmed and its existence threatened. This would have made Pakistan the neighbor of USSR and India—an undesired outcome.

Similarly, in the event of the US and 48 other countries succeeding in Afghanistan after the 9/11 incident, Pakistan would have suffered a terrible fate. Therefore, there is more to the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan than merely their shared borders and geographic location. Both countries have served as a source of security for each other. However, despite of the conflict dragging on for 40 years, both Pakistan and Afghanistan have survived—thanks to their resilience.

As Pakistan and Afghanistan were forced into a war after the 9/11, both the countries faced terrible consequences. However, Pakistan suffered heavily as the TTP spread its tentacles throughout Pakistan and carried out attacks deep in Sindh and Balochistan as well, and not only in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Fortunately, the TTP fled when Pakistan launched military operations against it.

Moreover, Russia and the Central Asian states are worried about the movement of the ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the region.

Furthermore, a prosperous Afghanistan is in the best interest of Pakistan, as with its western border secure Pakistan can focus on its eastern border. Moreover, the Taliban government in Afghanistan is struggling with multiple challenges.

The main challenge for Pakistan at this hour is the TTP. Soon after the takeover of Kabul by the Afghan Taliban in August 2021, the TTP started emerging in Pakistan. To deal with the TTP, an action plan with the doors of dialogue open to the TTP can work. Moreover, Pakistan hasn't been as cruel as has been portrayed, which has always opted for peace talks with TTP before taking any stern action against it.

Mehmood Jan Babar

The Taliban regime and NATO discussed the issue of women education in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban government does not accept co-education, and without the availability of resources for separate female education, there is almost zero possibility of women getting education in Afghanistan. With the release of Afghanistan's frozen financial assets and other financial aid, separate educational institutes for women can be opened in Afghanistan.

Lt. General (Retd) Naeem Khalid Lodhi

Movement along the Durand Line needs to be made easier, as currently there are many complications faced by people who trade and travel in the border region. Moreover, if it serves Pakistan's interests to recognise the current setup in Afghanistan, it shouldn't be wasting time in waiting for its recognition by the international community.

Additionally, to solve the problem of women education in Afghanistan, Pakistan's sending its female teachers to Afghanistan would prove effective.

Mirwais Yasini

It is in the best interest of the Taliban regime to allow women education and press freedom, as it would not be able to carry on for longer without allowing such rights.

Afrasiab Khattak

Pakistan's 40-year-old policy towards Afghanistan needs to be reviewed. The "jihad" in Afghanistan was an American doing. While the leftists in Afghanistan acknowledged their mistakes, the "jihadis" never did. Dr. Najibullah regretted that the Russian invasion was a great mistake.

Moreover, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban cannot be normalised as they took over by force, and not by securing a popular vote in an election.

Furthermore, recognising the current regime in Afghanistan could be catastrophic for Pakistan. What if some terrorist organisation sheltered in Afghanistan perpe-

trates a major terrorist attack in the US or West? Needless to say, after 9/11 Pakistan couldn't have chosen to stay out [of US-led war against terrorism], as it had recognised the Taliban government. Unless the Afghan Taliban assure the world by their actions that incidents like the 9/11 will not be repeated, international community will not recognise their government.

Moreover, the issue of women education in Afghanistan is very important and should be solved immediately.

Terrorism needs to be rooted out forthwith, as the security situation in the country is deteriorating at an alarming speed. Moreover, Pakistan's failure to work on the National Action Plan has led to the current worsening of the security situation in the country. Besides this, IS-K needs to be taken seriously, as the group has recently claimed high profile terrorist attacks in the region.

Interestingly, Pashtuns are protesting against the rise in militancy. While the state is not attending to this matter of immediate concern, the people are not going to be silenced this time. The TTP is facing stiff resistance this time from the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan needs reorientation as it should be more friendly towards the Afghan people rather than one group or another. Moreover, the decision to choose who should rule Afghanistan lies with Afghans. Even if the Afghan Taliban are the choice of the Afghan people - after an election or whatever local way of electing people's representatives is adopted - this decision shall be respected.

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 6th 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.

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