

CONSULTATION REPORT

AFGHAN PEACE AND RECONCILIATION:

PAKISTAN'S INTERESTS AND POLICY OPTIONS



**Pak Institute for
Peace Studies**

KNOWLEDGE FOR PEACE

Report of PIPS Consultation-7 held
on March 7, 2023, in Islamabad

CONSULTATION REPORT

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

Report of PIPS Consultation-7 held on March 7, 2023, in Islamabad

| Transcription and drafting: Osama Ahmad & Rimal Farrukh
| Editing: Safdar Sial
| Designing: Hazrat Bilal



Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS)

Acknowledgement

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.

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.



List of participants



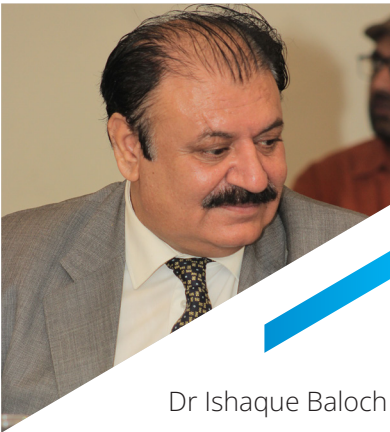
Afrasiab Khattak



Aqeel Yousafzai



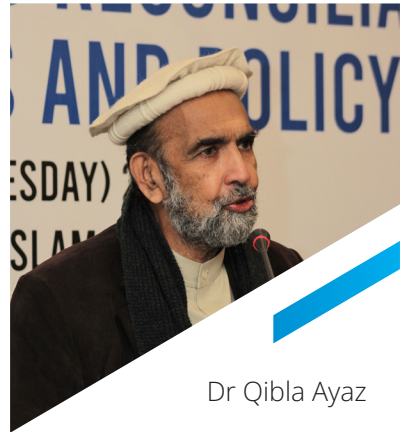
Dr Hazrat Omar
Zakhilwal



Dr Ishaque Baloch



Dr Manzoor
Ahmed



Dr Qibla Ayaz



Farhatullah Babar



Haroon Rashid



Hassan Khan



Iftikhar Firdous



Imtiaz Gul



Lt. General (Retd)
Nasser Janjua



Lt. General (Retd)
Waheed Arshad



Maj. Gen. Inam Ul
Haque (Retd)



Mansoor Ahmad
Khan



Mirwais Yasini



Hadees Pardes



Riaz Mohammad
Khan



Riffatullah Orakzai



Sami Yousafzai



Shahzada Zulfiqar



Tahir Khan



Yar Muhammad
Badini

Executive summary

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organised its 7th quarterly consultation on “Afghan peace and reconciliation: Pakistan’s interests and policy options” in Islamabad on March 7, 2023. The representatives of political parties, former diplomats, academics, retired military officials, journalists, and experts on Pak-Afghan affairs both from Afghanistan and Pakistan participated in the discussion. The main themes of the two sessions of the consultation were, respectively, “Pak-Afghan relations: challenges and way forward” and “Emerging Afghan situation and its interface with the countries near and beyond.” Key findings of the discussion are listed on the next page.



Executive summary

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organised its 7th quarterly consultation on “Afghan peace and reconciliation: Pakistan’s interests and policy options” in Islamabad on March 7, 2023. The representatives of political parties, former diplomats, academics, retired military officials, journalists, and experts on Pak-Afghan affairs both from Afghanistan and Pakistan participated in the discussion. The main themes of the two sessions of the consultation were, respectively, “Pak-Afghan relations: challenges and way forward” and “Emerging Afghan situation and its interface with the countries near and beyond.” Key findings of the discussion are listed below.

- Pakistan’s parliament should take a lead in devising any policy for Afghanistan. The time has come for Pakistan to change its policy towards Afghanistan, making it more inclusive and oriented around winning hearts and minds of Afghan people as Pakistan’s image has continuously gone down in Afghanistan. To give a civilian face to this relationship is very important.
- Some participants lamented that terrorist attacks have increased in Pakistan since the Afghan Taliban came into power in August 2021 putting stress on bilateral relations between the two countries. While the TTP and IS-K, largely operating from Afghanistan, have stepped up their terrorist activities in Pakistan, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Taliban have been failing to help Pakistan in countering the threats of militancy and cross-border terrorism.
- Others, however, underlined that Pakistan’s relationship with Afghanistan is larger than counterterrorism and security, and therefore should be seen broadly. Pakistan needed to focus on trade, economy, and enhancing people to people contacts, thus moving beyond a security-centric Afghan policy. The challenges are piling up for Pakistan because of its ‘flawed understanding of the Afghan Taliban’, who may never launch a crackdown on the TTP for Pakistan as they have both remained and struggled together for past few decades.
- There is a need for a soft management of Pak-Afghan border to remove hurdles in trade activities and movement of people between both the countries. The border management has become a major challenge for both Afghanistan and Pakistan as the problem of visa issuance to Afghans has persisted even after the change of rulers in both the countries.
- Afghanistan is going down the hole, and the claim that under the Taliban rule the living conditions in Afghanistan have improved is not correct. The journalists, civil society, and women, among other segments of Afghan society, are not happy with the Taliban way of governance and establishing order. These are other factors adding to instability and insecurity in Afghanistan if not addressed by the Taliban could have severe implications for their country and the wider region.
- The issue of Afghan women needs to be highlighted and Pakistan should continue raising its voice for the Afghan women as they are now undergoing severe persecution at the hands of the Afghan Taliban and their living conditions in Afghanistan are worsening at an exponential rate. Also, Pakistan’s treatment of the Afghan refugees is reprehensible and should be refined. Pakistan may also introduce legislation on Afghan refugees to lessen the existing distrust between the two countries.



A photograph of Muhammad Amir Rana, director of the Pak Institute for Peace Studies, speaking at a conference. He is wearing a dark pinstriped suit, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is gesturing with his right hand while speaking into a microphone. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. In the foreground, there is a table with a white cloth, a glass of water, and a small bowl.

Exploring Pakistan's position, interests and policy options

Pak Institute for Peace Studies director Muhammad Amir Rana welcomed the participants and explained to them the consultation themes. He said the purpose of the consultation was to get invaluable insights from the esteemed participants on multiple aspects of emerging Afghan situation and suggest policy options and strategies with the view of strengthening Pakistan's support for Afghan peace and stability and intra-Afghan reconciliation.

Exploring Pakistan's position, interests and policy options

Pak Institute for Peace Studies director Muhammad Amir Rana welcomed the participants and explained to them the consultation themes. He said the purpose of the consultation was to get invaluable insights from the esteemed participants on multiple aspects of emerging Afghan situation and suggest policy options and strategies with the view of strengthening Pakistan's support for Afghan peace and stability and intra-Afghan reconciliation.

After his initial remarks, he asked Yar Muhammad Badini, a Quetta-based senior journalist and writer, to briefly describe the security developments that have taken place in Balochistan especially since the Taliban took power in the neighbouring Afghanistan. Mr Rana referred to the question, which he said had been asked in the previous consultations as well, about the collaboration between the Baloch nationalist groups and Islamist militant groups in the province and asked how this possible nexus could be linked it to a recent terrorist attack in Bolan on the Balochistan Constabulary; the attack was initially claimed by the newly formed Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan, and later Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) also claimed it. Mr Rana wondered if such attacks had to do anything with the cross-border militant incursions or material or logistical support from Afghanistan.

Yar Muhammad Badini, Quetta-based senior journalist and writer

As long as the security situation in Balochistan is concerned, the recent terrorist attack in Bolan Pass and the previous similar attacks underscore the relations between the different militant groups in the province. In my recent visits from Quetta to Turbat and from Turbat to Gwadar, I discovered that the security situation in the province is grave. Terrorist activities are taking place with many casualties reported. Moreover, from Panjgur to Turbat, after every two and five kilometres one sees pockets of Frontier Corps stationed and a water tanker that carries water to them is also protected by well-armed vehicles from the same department. This shows the seriousness of the security situation in Balochistan.

The victim of the Bolan Pass attack were folk musicians and dancers in the Balochistan Constabulary who were returning from a musical event held at Sibi festival. This suicide attack claimed the lives of 9 and left several others injured. Such incidents highlight the fact that the law-and-order situation in Balochistan is not good, even though billions of rupees have been spent on the security forces for improving it.

The health infrastructure in Balochistan is in shambles, as it is extremely difficult to find even over-the-counter medicine in the provincial capital Quetta. Nevertheless, a lot of money is spent on improving the security in the province which is not showing any signs of improvement. In addition to this, the education sector in the province is also in a disarray, with no teachers available in schools to teach. Apart from these two issues, there are many other issues as well, however, the priority is to spend billions on security with no improvement in the security situation at all.



Yar Muhammad Badini

The recent terrorist attack in Bolan Pass and the previous similar attacks underscore the relations between the different militant groups in the province

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Yar Muhammad Badini. Now, to take the discussion ahead, I invite Mr. Riffatullah Orakzai to tell us about the security situation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Riffatullah Orakzai, journalist and security analyst

It would be better to first look into the background before going into the details. Previously, when Ashraf Ghani was in power in Afghanistan, terrorist attacks would occur but not with such intensity as these are occurring now. Back then, when any issue, such as the border issue, would arise between the two countries, engagement would happen, and issues would be resolved through dialogue.

When the Afghan Taliban came into power in Afghanistan on 15th of August 2021, in Pakistan there were high expectations that bilateral issues would now be ultimately resolved. Even [welcoming and jubilation] messages were communicated from Islamabad including by the then Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan. However, some saner heads warned that things might not come as have been expected and could even go worse. As had been warned against, it happened that things worsened and looked like everything went against Pakistan's expectations.

Following such developments, a surge in TTP attacks has been witnessed. In the year 2022 alone, TTP claimed the responsibility of 367 attacks. And this is only about one militant group.

Moreover, an increase in IS-K (Daesh) attacks has also been reported since the coming of Afghan Taliban into power. Previously, since the formation of IS-K in 2015 not so many terrorist attacks had been witnessed as have been after the coming of the Afghan Taliban into power. Back then, when the shadow governors or commanders of the Afghan Taliban would visit Pakistan, only Peshawar and Balochistan would be attacked. However, after August 2021, IS-K also shifted its terrorist activities into Pakistan. The horrific attack on a Shia mosque in Peshawar in March 2022 was also claimed by the IS-P, in which more than 50 individuals were killed.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Riffatullah Orakzai. Next, I invite Mr. Hadees Pardes to give his perspective about the situation in Afghanistan.

Hadees Pardes, Afghan freelance journalist

As the Taliban came into power in Afghanistan, there were expectations that the situation might improve, however, with every passing day it is worsening which is the reality. The way media is covering incidents in Afghanistan is also concerning. Incidents are happening, however, there is not a vibrant media in Afghanistan to inform the people about what is happening on the ground. However, the social media platforms are reflecting the reality. Moreover, the IS-K has multiplied its attacks despite the Taliban's claims of having stabilised the security situation in Afghanistan.



Riffatullah Orakzai

When Ashraf Ghani was in power in Afghanistan, terrorist attacks would occur but not with such intensity as these are occurring now

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Hadees Pardes. Continuing with the discussion, now I invite Mr. Iftikhar Firdous to brief us about the key challenges in bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan beyond the security issues.

Iftikhar Firdous, journalist and co-founder of The Khorasan Diary

Apart from the security issues, there is the political economy that should be considered [while exploring prospects of Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral cooperation]. There are many problems in that regard, the foremost being the border management. Even during the Ashraf Ghani regime, the issues around Pakistani way of border management and the bilateral border cooperation were always contested. One may recall the time when there were incursions and cross-border firing and the border from both sides was closed for more than 3 months. However, Pakistan believed that once the Afghan Taliban are in power in Afghanistan, the border issue will be resolved. But many experts believed that this would never happen, which is true now.

Earlier, Pakistan used to close border, but now it is the first time since the Afghan Taliban have come into power that they have closed the Torkham border themselves. This is because of Pakistan's over-reliance on the borders.

Additionally, Pakistan faced a massive flood and to tackle the emerging food security challenge and to cater for our food basket, the country has been heavily reliant on Central Asia and Iran. Pakistan will not willingly close the border now. In the previous regimes, when a single bullet was fired from Afghanistan the border would be closed for months. Now, in 21 days there were 3 incidents of violence at the Chaman border in which even Pakistani troops were killed, but the border was not even closed for half an hour. This shows Pakistan's problem in terms of border security and management.

Moreover, while the situation is directly linked to security, it is beyond the security as well. It is linked to a lot of other dynamics, such as regional cooperation and all other international developments which are taking place in the domain of Afghanistan in which Pakistan wants to be a stakeholder. However, the leverage is not there.

Secondly, one of the biggest problems is the humanitarian crisis. One problem which Pakistan had with the previous Afghan regimes, and which has persisted till date even there is Taliban-led government in Kabul, is the visa issue. Moreover, because of the border fencing, trade has been impeded for the local markets, with the local economies on both Chaman as well as Torkham border simultaneously suffering. Therefore, there is a consistent racket on the border which has taken violent forms on many occasions. A trouble rose in February and recently as well when the main route of the border in South Waziristan was closed just because they required *rahdaari* passes from the traders and travellers to pass over. Therefore, on both sides of the border the issue of humanitarian crisis exists.

Thirdly, one of the problems, which is beyond the conflict but still a part of it, is linked to our major trade agreements, such as the CPEC. The developments in Central Asia, the railroad from Tashkent to Peshawar and other such projects have been impeded by personal relations of Pakistan and the security paradigm which changed after August 2021. Therefore, security cannot be excluded from the developments taking place in the region. Pakistan should realise now that a dialogue is impossible without taking security into consideration, as economies these



Iftikhar Firdous

Earlier, Pakistan used to close border, but now it is the first time since the Afghan Taliban have come into power that they have closed the Torkham border themselves

days are directly connected to the security. However, in a recent visit of Pakistani delegation to Afghanistan which included the ISI chief and the defence minister, the Afghan Taliban discussed everything except security. This means that the Afghan Taliban do not want to talk about security.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Iftikhar Firdous. Now, I invite Mr. Sami Yousafzai to talk about the main challenges in Pak-Afghan bilateral relations.

Sami Yousafzai, journalist and expert on Afghan affairs

There are numerous challenges. The main challenge is linked to our understanding of the Afghan Taliban. The Afghan Taliban are not like politicians. Journalists talk to them as if they are talking to politicians. Moreover, it is quite difficult to read their minds and behaviour. In a recent visit of a delegation from Pakistan, the delegates talked about terrorism and were very serious with the Afghan Taliban. However, in response Mullah Baradar told them that because of Pakistan's closing the border Afghanistan's food stuff and fruit expired on the way before reaching the Pakistani markets. He also said that because of this border closure, business has stopped. This shows how Pakistan misunderstands the Afghan Taliban; while Pakistan was stressing on terrorism and tackling the TTP, the Afghan Taliban emphasised on food stuff and fruits.

One of the major challenges in the way of improved bilateral relations is Pakistan's misplaced strategic depth policy, which has always made it mandatory for Pakistan to establish ties with one group or another in Afghanistan rather than the government. However, as the group supported by Pakistan comes into power in Afghanistan, it changes, and makes totally different policies, [which are mostly] opposed to Pakistan's wishes. For instance, when Hekmatyar and other mujahideen groups were fighting, they were considered as good guys. Nonetheless, after coming into power their priorities and desires changed and they did not listen to Pakistan and eventually lost its favours.

[In a similar way] Pakistan has received a setback from Afghanistan, as it had believed that with their coming into power the Afghan Taliban would clamp down on the TTP, but now the Afghan Taliban are not listening to Pakistan's pleas to rein in the TTP. In addition to this, the TTP leadership is moving around in Afghanistan, even in the green zone of Kabul. Besides this, the TTP camps are open and are receiving support from the Afghan Taliban.

Another challenge for Pakistan is how to engage with the Afghan Taliban. Aggressive posture from Pakistan towards the Afghan Taliban is very wrong and apparently not working. Pakistan does this because it thinks that it helped the Afghan Taliban in attaining power in Afghanistan and now [instead of returning favours] they are not listening to it. The Taliban think that as they are now the rulers of Afghanistan [and have to reflect the sentiments of Afghans], they should be treated as such.

Another major challenge is Afghanistan's mistrust for Pakistan and how to reduce it. The mistrust is because of the drone attacks in Afghanistan, with the Afghans thinking that the drones had been flying from Pakistan.

Another challenge is linked to Pakistan's paradoxical policies. Sometimes, it opens border and



Sami Yousafzai

One of the major challenges in the way of improved bilateral relations is Pakistan's misplaced strategic depth policy, which has always made it mandatory for Pakistan to establish ties with one group or another in Afghanistan rather than the government

sometimes closes it down. Moreover, Pakistan needs to understand that while its relations are not good with the Afghan Taliban at the moment, it should at least facilitate the people to people contact. But as things stand today, there are many hurdles in the Pak-Afghan trade and transit as the visa problem continue to linger, hurting bilateral relations.

In the last two decades, Pakistan used to offer scholarships to Afghans. However, these scholarships have also been stopped now. Pakistan may say that the scholarships were offered to the Afghan government and now that there is the issue of women being banned from universities it cannot give out scholarships anymore, but there is a solution to this. A mechanism, which is to give 50 percent scholarships to Afghan women, can work.

However, the biggest emerging challenge to improved bilateral relations is that the Afghan Taliban are not going to accept what Pakistan wants them to do to the TTP. This will have an adverse impact on relations between the two countries. As said before, if Pakistan wants to engage with the Afghan Taliban, it needs to understand that the Taliban are not 'typical' politicians. Harsh statements from Pakistan will only invite harsh or much harsher statements from the Afghan Taliban.

Moreover, the Afghan Taliban were expecting that once they are in power Pakistan would recognise their government, which did not happen. However, what Pakistan can do is to gradually sever its relations with the jihadist groups in Afghanistan.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Sami Yousafzai. To further the discussion, now I invite General Inam ul Haque to briefly explain Pakistan's current policy towards Afghanistan.

Maj. Gen. Inam Ul Haque (Retd), defence and strategic affairs analyst

The major factor in deteriorating relations between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan is the TTP. Therefore, Pakistan's focus should be on the TTP, which is the actual problem. Moreover, in the prevailing environment following the visit of a Pakistani delegation to Afghanistan in February



Maj. Gen. Inam Ul Haque (Retd)

The major factor in deteriorating relations between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan is the TTP. Therefore, Pakistan's focus should be on the TTP, which is the actual problem

this year there is a ray of hope. The Pakistani delegation was led by a civilian, the defence minister, which is a good signal; it included DG ISI, ambassador Sadiq, foreign secretary, along with other officials. Moreover, the negotiations which took place last year in Kabul Dialogue were a botched attempt to achieve peace. Such complex issues are time bound, where there is no chance of a quick fix. These issues have their own lifetime, according to which they are resolved, which means that both Pakistan and the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' should give these issues some time.

There are three main points which have been specifically highlighted in the press. First, the renegade elements in the TTP will be disarmed and relocated from the border areas; the agreement about their dispersal is a welcome development. Secondly, that the carrot and stick policy has worked at the state level. Thirdly, there is some understanding between the two governments. These and some other things reported by media reflect on a good development. Previously, there was no media coverage of such issues.

Moreover, the Afghan Taliban's [reported] demand that Pakistan should fund the [TTP] relocation is a pragmatic, and to some extent workable plan. They made a similar offer to China for the relocation of ETIM, but the reported strength of the group is around 400. On the other hand, the TTP's rank-and-file strength is approximately

8,000 to 12,000, and the inclusion of families raises it to over 30,000, which compounding the concern about the cost. The way forward is that if Pakistan wants to do this in phases, it is doable.

In addition to this, as discussed in the previous consultation, the terrorists need to be categorised in black, white, and grey. The white ones could be repatriated to Pakistan under safeguards while the grey militants will be punished. However, for the black category of militants there is no place in Pakistan. And the best adjustment for this category is in Afghanistan; it is a welcoming development that the Afghan Taliban are talking about it.

In the previous consultation, it was also discussed that Pakistan should directly approach Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada. Pakistan corrected its policy, and two points were relayed there, following which the Afghan Taliban relented a bit.

Although there is a chasm between the pragmatic Khostwal and Kandhari ideologue factions, the Afghan Taliban officially declared that they are prepared for disarming, dispersing, and relocating the TTP [away from the border] if Pakistan gave it funds. As long as the funding of relocation project is concerned, it is doable in phases. And the relocation should only be done for the black order, as the grey and white category militants can be handled. However, if Pakistan is unable to meet the costs of relocation of militants, it can adjust the costs in tariffs and custom duties.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, General Inam Ul Haque. To push the dialogue further ahead, now I invite Aqeel Yousafzai to give his perspective about Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan.

Aqeel Yousafzai, senior journalist and author based in Peshawar

Pakistan needs to understand the Afghans' thinking and their psyche. While considering Afghanistan's background, history, and its nationalism, Pakistan cannot judge it from its own current situation and background. It is because of the nationalism that Afghanistan has survived and is strongly composed and held even today. However, Afghanistan has not been through what Pakistan has been, such as the major wars with India and now the terrorist attacks. For instance, in February of this year alone, 29 terrorist attacks happened, including four suicide bombings.

In addition to this, Pakistan's intelligentsia, media, politicians, and experts have not tried to understand the psyche of Afghans yet. This is a very dangerous reality that whenever a group supported by Pakistan comes into power in Afghanistan it turns against Pakistan. However, nobody in Pakistan is interested to know why this happens. The only guy, Ambassador Sadiq, whom everybody thought understood the situation in Afghanistan and the Afghans, resigned disappointedly.

Moreover, while Pakistanis were defending the Afghans and thinking of them as brothers, Afghans on the social media are now ridiculing Pakistan because of its economic and political turmoil, and its military scandals. Previously, the Afghans would only criticise, but now they are making fun of Pakistan.

Pakistan has always misunderstood Afghanistan, and especially those guys in whom it heavily invested. Moreover, this is not even part of our national dialogue. However, one thing needs to



Aqeel Yousafzai

Pakistan needs to understand the Afghans' thinking and their psyche.

While considering Afghanistan's background, history, and its nationalism, Pakistan cannot judge it from its own current situation and background

be understood that if the Quetta and Peshawar outposts got conquered or weakened by the militants, the policymakers in Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi will come to understand why are the frontliners fighting. Currently, both the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan province are in a situation of war.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Aqeel Yousafzai. Now I invite Mr. Hassan Khan to let us know that why is Afghanistan always looked from the security perspective and why cannot Pakistan look beyond the security when it comes to Afghanistan? What were the expectations from the Afghan Taliban before their coming into power and what geopolitical and geoeconomics factors were involved?

Hassan Khan, senior journalist and anchorperson

At the moment, Pakistan has too much on its own plate to talk about. However, the Afghan situation sometimes and somehow poses existential thing to Pakistan. The basic question is that how Pakistan looks at Afghans. Firstly, Pakistan has never dealt with the Afghans as Afghans. Unfortunately, it has looked at Afghans as refugees. Moreover, the "muhajir" term has turned into a derogatory one, especially in the Pashtun belt. We could say that once we used to look to Bengalis the same way, but they were Pakistanis. However, for the Afghans we say they are 'our own'. Once they come over here [as muhajir], we say they are sell-outs. It is now a general perception about Afghans in Pakistan that they can be bought.

Pakistan's establishment is British inherited, with the security forces' manual British written. In the same manner, Pakistan's bureaucracy has also been inherited from the British. As Pakistan inherited many things from the British, it inherited from it the British approach towards Afghanistan as well.

The British used to look at Afghanistan from the security perspective. Their policy towards Afghanistan was security oriented. It was not only for Afghanistan, but for the territories beyond the Indus River as well. Sadly, no changes have been introduced into Pakistan's security policy structures or determinants. The same goes for its bureaucracy as well.

Moreover, Pakistan's lawmakers, civil bureaucracy and military establishment mostly come from Lahore and Karachi. Historically, if you look at the Lahore's mindset for those beyond the Indus and Afghans, it is very different. Till date, the Pakistani mindset has not accepted Afghanistan as a sovereign state.

This mindset can be understood from a recent example when a suicide bomb blast took place in Peshawar Police Lines mosque in which 200 people were targeted, it was followed by a faint commotion in the establishment quarters. On the other hand, when terrorists struck Police Chief Office in Karachi, the establishment was shaken.

If Pakistan changes its opinion about the Afghans, most of its bilateral problems with Afghanistan will be solved.

Moreover, the TTP is only a disruptive force, but Pakistan is bent upon making it a destabilising force and worsening its relations with the Taliban-led government because of it.



Hassan Khan

Pakistan has never dealt with the Afghans as Afghans. Unfortunately, it has looked at Afghans as refugees

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Hassan Khan. To further the discussion, now I invite Mr. Farhatullah Babar to tell us about the much talked about shift from the geostrategic to geoeconomics before the Taliban came into power and that where it stands now and what does it mean for Afghanistan?

Farhatullah Babar, former Senator Pakistan People's Party

Pakistan looks at Afghanistan from the security lens because it is a security driven state, and not a welfare state. Moreover, it is such a security state that it projects its state power beyond its borders with the help of non-state actors under a lethal umbrella. It becomes imperative for such a state to look at Afghanistan from the security lens. It is because of this that Pakistan says that India's 14 consulates in Afghanistan should be closed. Pakistan wants such a government in Afghanistan which supports it.

Pakistan's current policy towards Afghanistan has two components. The apparent one is that the Afghans are our brothers and we have maintained ties with them for centuries. The second component is the unwritten one, which is the actual policy of the state. The second component of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan is that Afghanistan is Pakistan's fifth province and that its government should be formed how Pakistan wants and such people should be in power in Afghanistan with whom Pakistan would be comfortable. This unwritten policy, however, is a fact. This was recognised by Ashraf Ghani when he came to Pakistan in 2014 and set aside the diplomatic protocol and went straight to the GHQ as he knew from where the shots are called.

The other issues might be resolved, but the biggest challenge for Pakistan is the Afghans' distrust which is not going to be reduced by such talk as we are both Muslims and have remained together for centuries. This feeling [of mistrust] is very deep rooted, and indeed a very serious issue, which is related both to the security and economic development. Today, the surge in militancy fostered by the TTP, coupled with the creeping Islamisation, has become an insurmountable challenge for Pakistan. Creeping Islamisation is aiding the TTP and the TTP is promoting creeping Islamisation. Together they have become a deadly combination in Pakistan which is endangering Pakistan's security like never before.

As Pakistan is a security driven state, its security policy is mostly devised or tried to be devised by bypassing the politicians and the parliament. However, when people stood up, efforts were made to have the parliament's sanction.

When a respectable politician who went as part of a delegation to Afghanistan, was asked why he went, he replied that the Corps Commander Peshawar, General Faiz Hameed, had invited him. When asked why did not he tell the 'commander' that it was a matter for the political parties to decide on, he responded that the latter said to him that the political parties have been talked to, which was a lie. The security establishment has been telling lies all along the way and has been promoting the security agenda behind the back of the parliament and the political parties. Unless this is not admitted, things will not improve.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Farhatullah Babar. Now, I invite Dr. Manzoor Ahmed to let us know that how, as an academician, does he look at the Gwadar project and that how much has it been implemented, since the Gwadar project is the largest initiative in the policy shift from geostrategic to



Farhatullah Babar

The biggest challenge for Pakistan is the Afghans' distrust which is not going to be reduced by such talk as we are both Muslims and have remained together for centuries

gloeconomics?

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Professor of Political Economy and Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Gwadar

Before everything else, the overall militancy in Balochistan needs to be highlighted and that how the emerging situation in Afghanistan is impacting the militancy in Balochistan. Moreover, one of the biggest problems faced by Pakistan today is the militancy in Balochistan, the epicentre of which is Makran. And this is very important in the context of Balochistan to understand. Afghanistan's impact on Balochistan's politics and society has always existed, particular in terms of militancy and insurgency. Starting from the 1948, the five major insurgencies in Balochistan have had a role of Afghanistan as the Baloch militants used to have bases in Afghanistan. In particular, the fifth insurgency has strong connections in Afghanistan. However, when things started changing in Afghanistan recently, the radical Baloch militant groups shifted their bases



Dr. Manzoor Ahmed

The policy shift from geostrategic to gloeconomics has a greater context in the Makran coast and the development of Gwadar

to Iran. And this is a new dimension to the insurgency. There are a few very important things to be understood. Firstly, the social structure in Makran has changed, with the militancy now driven by the middle class. Secondly, the proximity of Makran to Iran has benefited the militants as their base has been shifted from Afghanistan to Iran. This has added to their capacity, and they are at a greater ease now to continue the militancy whenever they want. Moreover, the low-level militancy in Balochistan will continue forever if our policies at the national level do not change.

As said earlier, the leadership of Baloch insurgency has been taken up by the educated middle class. And at this moment, the middle class is in no one's control in terms of militancy. The traditional control of *sardars* and *nawabs*, or tribal chieftains, on militancy has almost vanished.

There was policy understanding in Pakistan that once the Afghan Taliban are in power in Afghanistan, the external support to the Baloch militants from Afghanistan will evaporate. However, this did not happen. The Baloch militants perceived this and shifted their base to Iran. Now, apart from Afghanistan, Iran has become the second most

important player in this scenario.

For gloeconomics, the Makran coast is very important. The policy shift from geostrategic to gloeconomics has a greater context in the Makran coast and the development of Gwadar. The reason is Afghanistan's transit importance, which is connecting the Central Asian states to Makran coast and Gwadar. There are two important things to be considered. First is the tumultuous situation in Afghanistan itself and second is the base of Baloch militancy. Now, materialising the vision of gloeconomics in the face of these two problems is a challenging task. This needs to be understood.

If we look at the BRI projects or contextualise the CPEC from the perspective of Gwadar, in which Pakistan is pinning a lot of hopes, their importance is true up to the extent of national connectivity, however, they are not something very big that we should have too many expectations from. It was believed that through the Gwadar there will be a strong connection of the Central Asian states to the Arabian sea, however, that depends more on the Makran coast than the Gwadar. Moreover, the new dimension in militancy in Makran has ruptured the whole process. Many believe that the Chinese are now shifting their focus from making the CPEC a kind of connection from Gwadar to Central Asia and the Western China to making it a transshipment port. This means that the connectivity angle has been completely cropped out from the CPEC and that everything will now be done there.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed. Now I invite General Nasser Janjua to tell us about his connectivity framework and the shift from geostrategic to geoeconomics and that whether all the institutions were involved in the thought process? And if it was the product of thought process, why did it evaporate and where is it now?

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

The shift from geostrategic to geoeconomics is not an overnight process. It takes a long time and requires complete reorientation. Following the four-decade long conflict in Afghanistan, in which two superpowers with their allies fought each other, a change from geostrategic to geoeconomics will not arrive too soon. Moreover, Afghanistan is prey to strategic haze for the whole world because the US with all its lies fled from Afghanistan as a defeated power. Therefore, the US cannot think positively about Afghanistan. Everyone has stopped helping the Afghans following in the footsteps of the US. Moreover, Pakistan is also blamed by the US that it has been sleeping with the enemy and supporting them. Pakistan has also been restricted, with the regional countries under pressure as well. Moreover, the regional countries are not playing their due role to make Afghanistan a peaceful country. As Afghanistan was in a conflict for four decades and was in the security prism when almost the whole world was fighting there, to say now that Pakistan will not think in terms of security is not realistic. Therefore, Pakistan has to look to Afghanistan through the security prism, as there is no alternative at the moment. In the given situation Pakistan needs to measure how Pakistanis are thinking about Afghanistan and how the Afghans think about Pakistan. If this is sorted out, both the countries will benefit.

Moreover, for the bright collective future of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the focus should now be on the aftereffects of the major wars in Afghanistan.

The war has already left Afghanistan divided between the Northern Alliance and the Afghan Taliban. These two have been fighting each other for decades, with the world supporting the Northern Alliance against the Afghan Taliban. Therefore, the opinion in Afghanistan is divided. Moreover, having allied with the Afghan Taliban and supported them, Pakistan has earned the hatred of Northern Alliance, which is half of Afghanistan. This shows the divided opinion.

Now that the Afghan Taliban have come into power in Afghanistan, Pakistan is not understanding their hardships. This is because of the TTP factor, where Pakistan thinks Afghanistan is not helping it. Pakistan looks at Afghanistan from the TTP lens. Therefore, as Pakistan is getting hit by the TTP repeatedly, it considers the whole Afghanistan bad. This has diverted the focus from such things which could help in improving relations between the two countries.

Moreover, Pakistan should decide where it wants to go and reorientate its thinking accordingly. Otherwise, this anger about the TTP and blaming it on Afghanistan is not going to help improve its relations with Afghanistan.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, General Nasser Janjua. Now I invite Mr. Mirwais Yasini to tell us that whether the Afghans have in mind a collaborative future with Pakistan?



Lt. Gen. (Retd) Nasser Janjua

Following the four-decade long conflict in Afghanistan, in which two superpowers with their allies fought each other, a change from geostrategic to geoeconomics will not arrive too soon

Mirwais Yasini, former first deputy speaker of the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament

The biggest hurdle in connecting the Afghans with Pakistanis is the trust deficit, which is increasing with each passing day. We blame the third hand, and it might be involved only temporarily. However, what matters is to ask that what steps have been taken so far to build mutual trust. For the last 40 years, there has been no focus on reducing the trust deficit between two countries.



MIRWAIS YASINI

The biggest hurdle in connecting the Afghans with Pakistanis is the trust deficit, which is increasing with each passing day.

The militants in Pakistan, whether the TTP, IS-K or others should not be taken lightly. In Afghanistan, in the years following the allied forces' invasion of Afghanistan, it was thought that nothing [bad in terms of militancy] would happen now as the constitution is going to be made and foreign support, troops and equipment would also arrive. However, the militants survived and posed a challenge to the Afghan government and its allies. Nevertheless, militancy in Pakistan is a serious challenge and Pakistan and its friends must pay full attention to this dilemma.

Moreover, it is also important to devise methods on how to increase people to people contact and build mutual trust.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Mirwais Yasini. Continuing the discussion, now I invite Mr. Tahir Khan to tell us about the three advantages of Pakistan over Afghanistan that it could use as leverage.

Tahir Khan, senior journalist and expert on Afghan affairs

At the moment there is no leverage of Pakistan over Afghanistan. And this has a factor of mistrust in it. The Taliban as well as Afghans are not trusting Pakistan at all. It is possible that they may have a reason for this. However, a few things are not in Pakistan's control as it is very weak country from a specific angle. Nevertheless, Pakistan has the right to look after its own interests.

The drone issue is also a barrier in improving bilateral relations and building trust. On July 31, 2022, when Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in Kabul in a drone strike, the Afghan Taliban openly and publicly said that the drone had flown in from Pakistan. Moreover, a few visits to Afghanistan would let everyone know that how the Afghan Taliban think about Pakistan.

The tragedy is that in Pakistan focus is laid on statements. While Pakistan encourages the world to engage with the Taliban, how much has it itself engaged with the Taliban? On December 2, 2022, Pakistan's diplomatic mission's head, Ubaid-ur-Rehman Nizamani, was attacked in Kabul. He came back to Pakistan on December 5 and is in Pakistan even today. One asks: how is Pakistan engaging with the Taliban-led government?



Tahir Khan

The drone issue is also a barrier in improving bilateral relations and building trust

Iran's policy is remarkable in this regard. Its most powerful man, the envoy of Iranian president, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, was made ambassador to Afghanistan. Where does Pakistan stand?

Pakistan's security concerns are legitimate, but while it talks to the world about engagement with the Afghan Taliban, why did it disengage itself?

Pakistan's biggest problem is that there is no political ownership of things. The foreign minister of Pakistan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, said that parliament should have a role while deciding on Afghanistan. It happened as well. However, the problem is that nobody is interested in taking the political ownership of things related to Afghanistan. The irony is that most people do not even know. Moreover, there is a lack of consultation as well, stemming from the confusion as to whom to consult.

Pakistan talks about building trust. But how? It has almost stopped giving visas to Afghans. Because of Pakistan's flawed border management policy, the Afghan Taliban became so frustrated that they themselves closed the Torkham border. Never in the past did this happen. Previously, it was Pakistan that used to close the border on petty issues.

Moreover, Imran Khan's visa policy was a liberal one and exemplary. It was in use for some time, but now it has also been put out of use.

Nevertheless, around 200 Afghan journalists are currently in Rawalpindi and Peshawar and all of them have their visas expired. Somebody in Pakistan should talk about this. Sadly, the role of Pakistan's foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, is zero in this regard. In addition to this, most of Pakistan's politicians have no idea of Afghanistan and take input on Afghanistan from the military. However, in the former government Asad Qaiser would convene some meetings on Afghanistan or Ambassador Sadiq would highlight the Afghan issues.

Although Pakistan itself is in a trouble, it cannot neglect Afghanistan. Besides this, the practice of harsh statements from ministers in Pakistan towards Afghanistan need to stop as this is counterproductive. Because of the harsh statements, the Afghan Taliban are displeased with Pakistan and its ministers. If harsh statements are conveyed from Pakistan, then it cannot expect softer statements from Afghanistan.

Moreover, Pakistan should not expect that the Afghan Taliban would pressurise the TTP for it, as they simply cannot. They have played whatever role they could play. They facilitated the peace talks and hosted the delegations from Pakistan and might even have encouraged the TTP towards peace as well. The decision resides with Pakistan. If the TTP has conditions for its surrender, it is for Pakistan to accept or not. Moreover, Pakistan has time even now to reduce the trust deficit it has with Afghanistan.

Successive governments in Afghanistan have repeatedly asked Pakistan what it exactly wanted from Afghanistan to do. Rather than engaging with a group in Afghanistan, why cannot Pakistan sort its issues out with the Afghan government?

Now as Pakistan is trapped in its political and economic issues, it is unclear whether Afghanistan is its priority or not.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Tahir Khan. Now I invite Mr. Haroon Rashid to let us know that what Pakistan wants from Afghanistan.

Haroon Rashid, Managing Editor of The Independent Urdu

It is a problem itself that whether Pakistan has Afghan policy or not. There is a lot of confusion. Moreover, the shift from geostrategic and geopolitical to economic is also confusing, and it is unclear who is driving it.

Moreover, the resignation of Ambassador Sadiq Khan is not impactful as his role in bridging the gap between the two countries was negligible. Pakistan has not even tried to bridge the gap,

which shows that its strategy is somewhat else.

Every country has its own concerns in Afghanistan, and it is not only Pakistan which is having the TTP problem. Afghanistan's women, who constitute half of the Afghan population, have been encaged. Only a few talk about them.



HAROON RASHID

Afghanistan's women, who constitute half of the Afghan population, have been encaged. Only a few talk about them

In Pakistan's immediate neighbourhood, three countries have one party rule. These countries are Afghanistan, Iran, and China, with the former two being theocratic. How is this going to endanger Pakistan's own democratic values with the creeping religious fundamentalism almost overwhelming it? This needs to be thought about as well. Moreover, it requires a long time to deal with this problem effectively, not two to five years.

Furthermore, the mistrust between the two countries is the biggest impediment in improvement of their bilateral relations. In a recent visit to Polish embassy, when I asked one of the Polish diplomats about how they managed the burden of Ukrainian refugees. He said they are our people and if now they need our help we are helping them. On the other hand, in Pakistan the Afghan refugees are considered a burden, to such an extent that Pakistan blames them for its very own problems. If Pakistan continued with this attitude, things would not improve.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Haroon Rashid. Taking the discussion further, now I invite Mr. Tahir Khan to tell us about the problems faced by those Afghans in Pakistan whose visas have expired.

Tahir Khan

Two hundred Afghan refugees have applied for visa extension. In the past, Pakistan's diplomats used to be helpful and kind towards the Afghan journalists when they were approached for visa issues. The police treatment of Afghan refugees is also an issue. But the police are not as much cruel as depicted, because they are not going after every Afghan refugee in Pakistan despite knowing their addresses.

If an Afghan journalist gets an immigration offer from abroad and his Pakistani visa is expired, he then needs to have an exit permit. In Pakistan, one would have to go through a lot of trouble before one gets the exit permit. Moreover, if one's visa has expired the previous year, he or she would have to pay a heavy fine for this.

Basically, their (Afghans) problem is related to the visa extension and the exit permit. Many Afghans are stuck in this loop. They are in a trouble, with some journalists under threat in Afghanistan. If Pakistan can do anything, it should help those who are in Pakistan.

Moreover, the Afghan refugees in Pakistan have many other issues as well, such as the economic issues but their visa extension issue cannot be neglected. Their economic condition is pathetic as they have been homeless for more than a year now. They have left their homes and jobs in Afghanistan. Moreover, not every Afghan refugee in Pakistan has someone abroad to help him or her financially or have lands in Afghanistan to generate wealth for them. Although they have economic issues, they do not discuss.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Tahir Khan. Now I invite Mr. Afrasiab Khattak to let us know that how much empowered is Pakistan's parliament to debate on the Afghan policy and make a policy framework for Afghanistan.

Afrasiab Khattak, political analyst and expert on Afghan affairs

Pakistan's parliament has never been empowered regarding the Afghan policy. Nawaz Sharif won the 1997 general election by a two-third majority and emerged as a powerful prime minister. It was during his reign that Pakistan recognised the previous dispensation of the Afghan Taliban. Ironically, he himself came to know about this development from the television. He did not know that who has taken the decision [to recognise the Taliban government]. He asked his information minister immediately that who has done this. The information minister replied that his ministry received it in written from the foreign ministry and thought it was the decision of the prime minister. And the foreign minister was Gohar Ayub Khan, who when asked about the dilemma by the information minister asked the information minister that has not the ISI informed him as they were saying to have consulted the PM. This was the situation of a PM with a two-third majority. Even today, the Afghan policy is prepared in the GHQ and executed by the ISI.

The military establishment says that it has never given refuge to the Afghan Taliban. This statement is insulting for us, as we know that the Haqqanis came to Pakistan in 1974. They have their homes and properties in Pakistan. Despite of this evidence, saying that they have never been in Pakistan can only be a joke as everything is an open secret.

Moreover, Pakistan's Afghan policy is a failed and flawed policy. When is Pakistan going to accept this? It is already a failing state. Its economy is bankrupt, and its PM goes on begging from the world. In addition to this, it is politically polarised, and its institutions are dysfunctional. Its parliament is at the same time present and absent, and its judiciary divided. Things are even worse in the military. The competition for the seat of the army chief, which we witnessed recently, is what warlords do. Unfortunately, for the seat of army chief planned lobbies and campaigns were conducted. And even at this stage, Pakistan is not accepting that it has committed grave mistakes and needs to change its Afghan policy. Besides this, Pakistan should befriend Afghanistan and Afghans. Why is Pakistan befriend groups? It befriended Hekmatyar, and then the Taliban.



Afrasiab Khattak

The military needs to let the political dimensions of the Afghan policy be led by the politicians, restricting themselves only to giving the security feedback

The military needs to let the political dimensions of the Afghan policy be led by the politicians, restricting themselves only to giving the security feedback. As the situation in Afghanistan has changed, it looks like it is in a strategic haze. But why is it like this? It is because of the global powers hedging their bets. The Russians are busy in Ukraine and do not want to open another front in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Chinese are also cautious. What is more, Iran is busy with the Baloch. In addition to this, Iran has recognised and embraced every Afghan government but has fought it from behind. Even today, it is doing this with the Afghan Taliban. Iran has given the Afghan Taliban an embassy in Iran because it has killed a lot many Baloch in Zahedan and do not want the Afghan Taliban to support the Baloch in fighting Iran.

The equation has transformed not only in the region but across the world. Pakistan must realise this. It needs to integrate in the region. It should befriend China, talk to India, Afghanistan, and Iran. Integration in the region is the only way out. Pakistan talks much about the forty years' war in Afghanistan. However, despite this long war, Afghanistan's three neighbours have launched their trains into Afghanistan. While Uzbekistan's train arrives to Mazar Sharif, that

of the Turkmenistan to Afghanistan's border and Iran's to Herat. In contrast, Pakistan did not even construct a railroad for a centimetre. Surprisingly, it even closed the old railway lines as well. Pakistan has exported Taliban to Afghanistan, and while there is evidence to this it is still in denial.

The resignation of Ambassador Sadiq Khan is a setback for Pakistan. This resignation might have come about as a result of his frustration with the double talk of the Pakistani policymakers/establishment. When the Afghan refugees were coming to Pakistan, it was said that Pakistan's gates would be open for them, and they would be facilitated and helped as well. However, when they came the opposite happened. In Karachi, hundreds of Afghan minors and women are in jails. Their pictures are published on daily basis which are not any different from those of the victims of Israeli brutalities in Palestine and Ghaza. Despite of this, Pakistan wonders that why Afghans are against it. Moreover, which government in Pakistan has given statement on the Afghan refugee problem? Not a single government official yet. Additionally, the Taliban are Afghans and if Pakistan's attitude towards Afghanistan did not change, they will also be frustrated and will turn away their face. It might be a general perception in Pakistan about the Afghan Taliban that they are illiterate, but they know how to negotiate.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Afrasiab Khattak. Now I invite Mr. Imtiaz Gul to give us his perspective about Afghanistan.

Imtiaz Gul, Executive Director of Center for Research and Security Studies

There has been a discourse on why Pakistan looks at Afghanistan from the security prism. As mentioned by General Nasser Janjua, the security prism has been here for the last forty years and will not be easy for Pakistan to abandon it completely in two to five years. I will add that the security prism will not disappear even in next forty years if the situation continues to be approached unwillingly and in a half-hearted manner.

Policy duplicity and policy deception are not exclusive to Pakistan only but are practiced by every country today. They are part of the present-day diplomacy toolkit. In a book written by S. Jaishankar, the minister of external affairs of India, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*, the author has quoted examples from the epic Mahabharata in which there are characters that are deceiving each other. While trying to justify the Indian policy towards Pakistan, he has repeatedly alluded to the characters of Mahabharata. This is what happened in Pakistan as well under the TTP since 2007. The Indians, the Americans, everybody practice these statecraft techniques.

While in the modern developed countries, power is shared among multiple power centres equally, in Pakistan there is only one power centre which is running everything, including the Torkham border. At Torkham, Pakistan has state of the art scanners, but they become dysfunctional, and the computer system hangs up when an expensive cargo is going through for certain people. In this whole game, the low-level security officers play the role of second fiddles. In a recent case, a mother with her son reached the Torkham border where the mother was allowed to cross the border while the child was barred from crossing the border by security forces. The son was brought back to Peshawar as there was an FIR registered against him. The police system had failed in showing that case as a green case which had been upgraded from red case.

However, nine hours were wasted in this and the agony the mother and her son went through was enormous. All of this happened because there was a red flag in the police computer system



Imtiaz Gul

Policy duplicity and policy deception are not exclusive to Pakistan only but are practiced by every country today. They are part of the present-day diplomacy toolkit

which kept the child back from crossing the border with his mother. This one power centre in Pakistan is the biggest complicating factor.

While the political or civilian ownership of things is possible in Pakistan, the problem is the lust for power which compels the political figures to compromise, whether that figure is Imran Khan, Asif Ali Zardari or Nawaz Sharif. If the prime minister is thinking he has been side stepped, he should resign. As Imran Khan is claiming now after losing power that he was powerless and shots were being called from somewhere else, the same claim was made by Nawaz Sharif after he lost power. They should have simply stepped down. Why hang on to power when you could not use the power and then reveal after losing power that someone else was in-charge? The best way is to resign. However, our politicians have chosen to compromise to sustain their rule. This is how things have gone from bad to worse. These political figures have skeletons to cover that is why they do not step down and go to public telling them about what is happening to them. There is no point in telling the public afterwards that I was helpless.

Moreover, self-serving civil-military elites go by the notion of command and obey. Civilians are not different either and this could be observed by just looking at the houses of Sharif and Zardari. Even the Taliban shura is similar. Whatever is decided by Hibatullah Akhundzada, the Emir, cannot be challenged. These civil-military elites are self-serving. [Former finance minister] Miftah Ismail recently said that this country is a one percent republic. The army, which is only 0.4% of the total population, is part of that one percent. The inefficiency in the civilian sector has been the result of the military control everywhere. This has killed the civilian initiative.

Pakistan is still going by the 19th century mindset, which is to ban, suspend, arrest, and detain, etc. Sometimes it bans Facebook, and then the YouTube. PEMRA comes with its own ban on the dissenting TV channels, shutting down the ARY and other channels. This all is happening because of completely pliant bureaucrats who are playing second fiddle to the civilian as well as military power elites. Moreover, the security prism has blinded the Pakistani elites, diverting their attention from a better economic and socio-political future of the country. Because of this Pakistan is in trouble today and has no policy options. Its policy, whether regarding India or Afghanistan, was framed by a few individuals which has stunted the growth of policy in this country.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Imtiaz Gul. Now I invite Dr. Ishaque Baloch to tell us about the concerns of the Baloch national parties about the Afghan refugees in Balochistan; how big a concern is this; and how much does it affect Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan?

Dr. Ishaque Baloch, Central Vice President National Party

From the very beginning, Pakistan has not recognised Afghanistan the way it should have been recognised. Pakistan is facing the consequences of its policies of the past forty years. Pakistan's policymaking bodies need a paradigm shift. Whatever happened in the past forty or seventy years was wrong and Pakistani policymakers and power circles should accept that first to start a revisit. There is a need to reconsider all that, whether related to India, China, Iran, or Afghanistan.

Iran has never favoured the Baloch. However, if Iran is giving refuge to the Baloch rebel leaders it is not because of its love for the Baloch. This is because of Pakistan's own policy decisions. Whatever has Pakistan's foreign policy been for the past many years, it needs a comprehensive reconsideration.

In 1986, an all-party conference was conducted in Pakistan, which was convened by Muhammad Khan Junejo. Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo made a historic speech and said: "Pakistan should not be thinking that it will conquer Kabul. The extremism it is promoting now will grow so considerably one day that Islamabad will also become insecure." Today, Islamabad and Pakistan's other major cities are not safe. However, this issue has many dynamics.

The fourth generation of Afghans is currently living in Balochistan. However, there are some issues to consider. Firstly, there is a very sensitive issue that the local people do not want Balochistan's demography to change. Secondly, there is no policy initiative to define the status of the Afghans living on Pakistan's territory.

The Baloch have historical ties with Afghanistan which are very respected. Even today when a Baloch visits Afghanistan he is welcomed and vice versa.



DR. ISHAQUE BALOCH

The Baloch have historical ties with Afghanistan which are very respected. Even today when a Baloch visits Afghanistan he is welcomed and vice versa.

Pakistan needs to rethink about its Afghan policy. When Afghanistan had sovereign governments, Pakistan conspired against them, and is now facing the consequences. Pakistan has to recognise Afghanistan as a sovereign state. Moreover, it is the Afghans' own choice to establish relations and ties

with whomever they want, in which Pakistan has no right to interfere. When it interfered, what were the results? It resulted in mistrust as the Afghans do not trust Pakistan anymore. More than anything else, the need of this hour is to build mutual trust.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Dr. Ishaque Baloch. Now I invite Mr. Shahzada Zulfiqar to tell us about the importance of Balochistan in Pakistan's Afghanistan policy.

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

There are few Afghans in Balochistan with the status of Afghan refugees. However, the Afghan refugees have generations there now and are settled. Because of the long border shared by Balochistan with Afghanistan and the possible nexus between the TTP and Baloch militants, many people have expressed their concerns for Pakistan's security. There is some flaw in



Shahzada Zulfiqar

The fault in Pakistan's Afghan policy is that it is made while considering other areas and their interests, but completely neglecting Afghanistan

Pakistan's Afghanistan policy because whatever steps it takes, they backfire. There was a hope that with the Afghan Taliban coming into power in Afghanistan, the TTP and the Baloch militants will be done away with or that the Afghan Taliban will force the Baloch militants to leave Afghanistan or would hand them over to Pakistan. But none of that has happened.

Formerly, when Ashraf Ghani was in power in Afghanistan, a news item appeared on almost daily basis that a Baloch militant commander has been targeted in Helmand. It was also reported back then that some Baloch militant commanders were apprehended and killed on the spot by the Afghan forces. Considering these successes, Pakistan thought that with the coming of Taliban into power in Afghanistan the Balochistan issue would be resolved. It was hoped that the Afghan Taliban will not allow any space to the Baloch militants in Afghanistan. However, there is evidence that although some have moved to Iran, others are still present in Afghanistan even today. The Afghan ambassador said in an interview about six months ago that as the Baloch are living both in Afghanistan and Balochistan, Pakistani Baloch can come whenever they want and meet and live with their Baloch relatives in Afghanistan.

He said further that Afghanistan will not pressurise them or act against them, but if anybody is going to use the Afghan soil against anyone, it will not be allowed. Seeing the security issues in

Balochistan, it is important to take Balochistan into perspective. The fault in Pakistan's Afghan policy is that it is made while considering other areas and their interests, but completely neglecting Afghanistan. It is because of this gap that Pakistan is facing problems.

In addition to this, after the establishment of the Taliban government in Kabul and the release of the TTP fighters from Afghan jails, the TTP has become bold. Just recently a newly emerged militant group attacked the Balochistan Constabulary [in Bolan]. However, the group is not new; just to confuse Pakistan, the militants are changing their names [to claim attacks] and imply that they are so strong that they can attack Pakistan from unexpected points to puzzle it.

The TTP also announced that a Baloch militant group had joined it and that both will now carry out attacks jointly. In the early days, it was confusing, and nobody talked about the issue clearly because nobody knew what exactly was happening. Even in Pasni such elements are being reported, which we thought only existed in Panjgur. Moreover, the nexus between the two [religiously inspired militants and Baloch insurgents] is becoming a reality as they are now comfortable with each other and have an understanding to a larger extent. They will benefit from the nexus, as their enemy is same, which means that an attack by any of the two groups will be an achievement for both.

Furthermore, a spike in the attacks by the Baloch militants has been witnessed recently. A video was released by the BLA, which showed the BLA fighters moving into the FC fortress in Kahan and removing Pakistan's flag and painting their own soon after the FC left it. This place was considered as the headquarters of Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri and his supporters. As to why the FC withdrew from the fortress, it was believed that the withdrawal was due to a consideration that because of being spread across the province the forces had become vulnerable to terrorist attacks and therefore the FC withdrew so that the forces could concentrate and regain strength.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Shahzada Zulfiqar. Now I invite Mr. Sami Yousafzai to enlighten us about the Afghan Taliban's policy towards Pakistan.

Sami Yousafzai

There is no such policy, as the Afghan Taliban have not even come up with a policy for Afghanistan yet. The only thing talked about in the Afghan Taliban's circles is that they defeated the US. However, some individuals in the Afghan Taliban think that the TTP is creating problems for them as their previous regime [in the 1990s] was also derailed by [a militant ally] Al Qaeda. They think that Pakistan's concerns should be accommodated as they recognise the assistance Pakistan used to provide them when they were as refugees in Pakistan. Nevertheless, they also say that Pakistan should not apply further pressure on the Afghan Taliban for the TTP issue as the top leadership in Kandahar does not possess a positive image about Pakistan and will not be pressurised to disarm the TTP. Moreover, the talk about the Afghan Taliban asking for money to tame the TTP seems untrue or made up. Had they been 'the men after money', they would have handed over Osama bin Laden to the US and made a lot of money in return.

Sadly, the Taliban policy towards Afghan women is going to become harsher and stricter. It is wrong to think that the Taliban have big internal differences and divisions, because it is like a mafia and every person has a network and interests. However, if somebody is shoved out of the network, his interests also vanish. In addition to this, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada is the only authority, and his authority is extending further as his favourites and close associates are becoming ministers.

The Afghan people and Taliban are displeased with Pakistan; if anybody issues a softer statement towards Pakistan gets a reaction from the Afghans. The Afghan defence minister, Mullah Yaqoob, did not meet the Pakistani delegation after repeated requests.

The Afghan Taliban have created an abnormal state. They do not care about their people.

Those Afghans who leave Afghanistan feel like they have been freed from prison. Afghanistan's economy is also in a worse shape. Moreover, you cannot like and dislike on Facebook. Because of this, many people are in jail. Even the policymakers there do not understand what is happening. When the Afghan foreign minister was told that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan does not conduct elections, he said some other countries also do not conduct elections. They are thinking about Afghanistan on the lines of Saudi Arabia, UAE or North Korea.

Pakistan needs to understand that it should talk to the Taliban in their own way, as they are not politicians. They are straightforward people, and not much should be expected from them. Pakistan should, moreover, gradually sever its relations with the militant groups in Afghanistan. With the former Afghan governments, Pakistan had the issue of Pashtunistan or Durand Line. That has changed to Taliban nationalism or Islamism as the Afghan Taliban are thinking that the TTP is their part and deserves to have an Islamic government in its territories as well. Moreover, Pakistan needs to restrain itself from giving strong and harsh statements as they only displease the Afghan Taliban.

Moreover, it looks like the Afghan Taliban's policy is that whatever they say should be accepted by the world. They say that if they are not giving women their rights it is fine, and that nobody should question it. This shows that it is extremely hard to deal with the Afghan Taliban.

Pakistan thinks it knows the Afghan Taliban as it has remained in touch with them for the last twenty years, but even those close to them say that it is very difficult to deal with them.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Sami Yousafzai. Now I invite Yar Muhammad Badini to suggest a step for reducing the mistrust.

Yar Muhammad Badini

For the past forty years, Pakistan has been deceiving itself. Pakistan used to think that Ashraf Ghani was giving the TTP and other militants safe havens in Afghanistan, but now with the Afghan Taliban in power the TTP and other militant groups enjoy greater freedom in creating problems for Pakistan. Pakistan's biggest problem is that it has not learned from its past experiences. It held talks repeatedly with the TTP and freed its fighters, but to no purpose as it did not surrender and is carrying out deadly attacks. Moreover, Pakistan needs to revisit its foreign policy and think over what is better for it.

The Afghan Taliban are neither letting the Afghan women and girls study, nor allowing them to work. Pakistan sent Hina Rabbani Khar, but it needs to sit with the Afghan Taliban and talk about the issue in detail.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Yar Muhammad Badini. Now I invite Mr. Aqeel Yousafzai to suggest a step for reducing the mistrust.

Aqeel Yousafzai

There is a book by Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud by the name of *Inqilab-e-Mehsud*, upon reading which one concludes that the book has been written by a strong Pashtun nationalist. This shows that the TTP is merging Pashtun nationalism with their militancy. The 400 attacks, which PIPS showed the world in its security report, were not aimed at the public. It shows the TTP is not targeting the public, but the security forces. For a month, the TTP fighters targeted the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan police. And now for two weeks they have been attacking the Pakistani army in Balochistan and Waziristan. It has happened in the past as well that the nationalist leaders in Afghanistan joined the Taliban.

Moreover, when Imran Khan said that he is going to be assassinated by an individual hired for task from Waziristan, no party reacted to this statement the way the TTP did officially by saying that this is an act to defame the Pashtuns and Waziristan. While the TTP looks to be enjoying the upper hand in this whole scenario, Pakistan's policy seems to be non-existent.

Another TTP policy is that it does not consider the power centres to be Quetta and Peshawar, but Rawalpindi-Islamabad and Karachi-Lahore. This was revealed when the TTP struck Karachi.

When the ANP was in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2008, the TTP asked it for a permission to allow them a passage to Punjab, but it refused. After that many of the ANP and PPP leaders were assassinated. These days Peshawar has many IS-K individuals with reported 14 madrassahs having produced fighters for them, and all of them are Pashtuns. The same goes for Quetta as well.

An individual from the Afghan Taliban said that they have worked with the Americans as well as Pakistani generals and ISI and know the tactics of both. He said that they are now fully able to test the power on Pakistan which it was testing on them. He said further that they are now going to fight Pakistan's war in Pakistan through the TTP.

If the policymakers in Islamabad, Lahore or Karachi think that once again Peshawar and Quetta will be acting as a bulwark against the TTP and that they will be safe, they are wrong. According to reports, they are now present everywhere and there is no ANP or PPP government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to stop them. Moreover, the TTP's biggest revenue headquarters is Karachi.

Pakistan's policy priority and the discussion in its parliament is that whether to arrest Imran Khan from Zaman Park or to harass the PTI leaders. If these are Pakistan's policy priorities, then whatever it will learn eventually it will not be in the right place to complain. Unfortunately, because of the Doha agreement, the Afghan Taliban have been given such a protocol and raised to such a position from which to come down will take years.

Farhatullah Babar

The step that could be taken to reduce the Afghans' mistrust for Pakistan is that Pakistan should stop using the Afghan refugees as a political football. It should legislate on the Afghan refugees and prevent their exploitation. The human rights committee of the National Assembly had made a subcommittee which also suggested that the time has come to legislate on the issue with all the stakeholders involved. Moreover, this is the item no. 19 of National Action Plan which has not been put into practice yet. In addition, this is the cabinet decision of 2007 as well. But this decision is of that time when the cabinet was destabilised by Faizabad sit-in. As these policies are made in Rawalpindi, neither has the NAP item no. 19 been put into practice nor the cabinet decision of 2007. Now, in the light of the decision taken by the human rights committee of the National Assembly, Pakistan must proceed with making legislation on the Afghan refugees. Furthermore, there is no reason for the merged FATA areas to still remain 'cantonments' where even the parliamentarians find hard to go. The ex-FATA regions need to be demilitarised as they are now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Farhatullah Babar. Now I invite Dr. Manzoor Ahmed to tell us that cannot Pakistan accommodate the Afghan girls in its universities? Also, now that the environment is conducive for the TAPI, why should there be the visa policy an issue?



Aqeel Yousafzai

Unfortunately, because of the Doha agreement, the Afghan Taliban have been given such a protocol and raised to such a position from which to come down will take years

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed

There are two important things to consider. The progress which was made in the education sector before the Taliban takeover was unprecedented. Previously, when the Afghan Taliban were in power there was only a few institutions of higher education. However, by the time they came into power again after two decades, dozens of new public and private universities had been established.¹ This whole education program was financed by aid agencies. According to the UN statistics, 34% of the enrolment was of girls. Suddenly, all of them were stopped from going to the universities when the Taliban banned the female university education. What Pakistan can do now is to offer scholarships specifically to the Afghan girls through the Higher Education Commission (HEC). As it looks like, the Afghan Taliban are more hostile to the female education than to the male education.

The important thing is that Pakistan's economic situation is dependent on the regional connectivity. And it is impossible to have regional connectivity without taking Afghanistan on board. TAPI would not be realised without this. At present, there is a shortfall of gas in the country, and it is projected that Pakistan's 50% supply would dry out in next five years. The only viable alternative is TAPI. As said before, TAPI would be impossible without taking Afghanistan on board, and without TAPI the demand in gas cannot be met.

Moreover, Pakistan is putting a lot of hopes in the BRI and CPEC projects which are totally dependent on Afghanistan. At present Pakistan is confronted with two security challenges, one is the TTP, and another is Baloch militants. It would be better to deal with these groups in a transnational manner than in a domestic one, with the Afghan Taliban and Iran on board. This issue is not a domestic issue anymore. With the security issues resolved by taking these two countries on board it would be possible then to go towards the transnational projects and complete them successfully.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed for these very practical suggestions. Now I invite Mr. Hadees Pardes to let us know about the suggestions he has.

Hadees Pardes

The main problem is differentiating the insurgencies and terrorist groups into white, grey, and black. As long as there is a belief that there are good and bad terrorists, things will not improve.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Mr Aqeel mentioned that a TTP attack in Karachi occurred. Why is the TTP targetting police? Indeed, the group has been increasingly targeting police and security forces in recent years, as compared to past years when their attacks were random, and civilians were also a major target. What is their strategy behind this?

Rifatullah Orakzai

One of the reasons for that could be that the police are the first line of defense. You see them everywhere, because they are involved in people's affairs. That makes them a primary or foremost target. Apparently the TTP has also transformed into a nationalist or political party [which cares for the public sentiment]. It openly says that their fight is against Pakistan's army and attacks on police were because of their defending the group's main enemy from the front; In some cases, the group even released the captured policemen to demonstrate that.

Currently, the state of affairs is such that the army conducts operations only in specific areas where militants try to establish themselves. But these days the militants largely employ hit-and-

¹ There are 39 public sector universities, and over 125 private sector institutions of higher education in Afghanistan (source: <https://www.mohe.gov.af/en/government-educational-institutions>).

run attack tactic, which makes the police a key target because they man the check-posts, and constitute the patrolling teams, besides being stationed in police stations in cities. However, [instead of meagre resources and equipment] the police have been fighting the militants with an utmost bravery and efficiency and have rendered the most sacrifices.

This does not just involve ordinary police officers but also includes two additional IG's, two DIG's, and SSP's as well, meaning high-ranking officers were martyred in many instances. I would like to mention something based on what was said earlier about Baloch groups and the TTP nexus. Their relationship is becoming stronger. If you follow the TTP's Umar media, every other week it releases a video related to Balochistan. Some videos are on the missing persons of Balochistan and entail strong criticism of Pakistan's institutions. Two Baloch groups have joined the TTP upto now. As Aslam Baloch² said about Nushki: it seems that if all the groups in Balochistan join together in the future with the TTP it will pose a major threat for the country.

Maj. Gen. Inam Ul Haque (Retd)

My focus is TTP. If we go on the sidelines and talk about minor things while forgetting the major thing then that is not a good way forward. The main source of friction between Pakistan and Afghanistan is TTP and this is an existential problem whether anyone agrees or not. I will give a small comment and move forward. We all say that Pakistan's Afghan policy has been negative. I think otherwise. Pakistan's Afghan policy was a well-considered and well-executed policy. It was through this policy that the USSR was defeated and the US-led alliance of several states was forced to retreat out of the country. Pakistan's national interest has been guarded extremely well through the execution of this policy.

Moving forward, I will say that the TTP issue is complex and we should expect any quick fixes. A crisis like this has its own linkages and its own life. Secondly, policy formulation on the national level also needs to be consistent. My recommendation is that there should be a functional policy level and then there should be a policy making at a higher rung. The governments can keep changing but this policy making level should not change.

The political or civilian government should have the ownership of these processes [of reconciliation]. The army, the ISI and other intelligence agencies may give their input but should remain on the side. They have no business in policy formulation and policy implementation. In that context, negotiations with the TTP should also be held at the correct level.

It is my understanding that the Afghan govt is extremely pragmatic. The Taliban have a history of negotiations and have fought a number of forces. Saying that we have no leverage over Afghanistan is absolutely wrong - we have plenty of leverage.

Mansoor Ahmad Khan, former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan

I think it has been a very candid dialogue, which is much needed because of the complexity of the subject. Misunderstandings and distrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan have continued to accumulate and grow over the years. After the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, Pakistan started to face an additional dilemma: many Afghans generally believed that Pakistan had brought the Taliban to power. There has already been a widespread perception in Afghanistan that the Taliban are a product of Pakistan.

Not only in Afghanistan, but I had to confront this accusation, explicitly or implicitly - that Pakistan brought the Taliban to power - wherever I traveled in the West after the Taliban's takeover. This is a burden on us and also on the Taliban. If Pakistan demands something from the Taliban, they are already under this pressure of not being seen as Pakistan's stooge or product, especially to the Afghan people. This is a very important factor and I do not think most people in Pakistan have its understanding or realisation.

² This is not the same Aslam Baloch, who is known as Aslam Achu. Aslam Achu was renowned leader of his own faction of BLA, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2018 and was succeeded by Bashir Zeb.

And this also remains a fundamental issue of the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. As I am an eyewitness to Pakistan's engagement with Afghanistan, first during Karzai and Ghani governments and then the Taliban's government, [I can tell you that] Afghans have had a very clear demand and desire that there should be a state-to-state relationship, there should be a civilian relationship and it should be a civilised relationship. I believe that until we address this the things will remain problematic on both sides. Just look at a meeting in Kandahar on border issues. From the Afghan side, the governor of Kandahar participates, and from our side the Corps Commander Balochistan participates. Why is the Balochistan Governor not there?

The Corps Commander's delegation can participate, for certain, but giving a civilian face to the relationship is extremely necessary. The problems here are very deep-rooted. For example, Afghan governments actually also prefer to deal with our military and intelligence stakeholders because they believe that if they have any steps, concessions or measures then that is where the action or implementation will come from. So I think this is something which has been there and this has been there because the region has been facing conflict, war, instability, chaos, Jihad, militancy, for the past 50 years.

The second issue about which Afghans are extremely categorical is related to movement of the people and trade. I believe that without addressing this issues, things would not move further. We talk about the geoeconomic approach, geoeconomic strategy and connecting Afghanistan through Central Asia or China and other countries of Eurasia. But with our current border crossing points this cannot take place. Then there is subhuman treatment of the people at Torkham, Chaman, Kharlachi, and Ghulam Khan border posts. I will not go into who is doing it and who is not - whether it is civilian or military leadership - but this is a fundamental issue for the Afghans, who want it to be addressed at the earliest.



Mansoor Ahmad Khan

I believe that Afghans demand absolute sovereignty [in their relationship with Pakistan], and I think there is nothing wrong with this demand

The third issue we spoke about is sovereignty. I believe that Afghans demand absolute sovereignty [in their relationship with Pakistan], and I think there is nothing wrong with this demand. When we deal with other states in the world, we deal with them as sovereign states but when it comes to Afghanistan, we become reluctant to do the same. That is despite our stated policy narrative that Afghanistan is a sovereign state, an independent state, and that we believe in the territorial integrity. Our dealings with the Afghans in the past 50 years have remained in a certain way [and perhaps that also controls our way of looking at them].

In April last year, there were strikes in Khost and Paktia that triggered a very serious reaction from Afghanistan; they asserted that it is extremely important that their sovereignty is respected.

Fourthly, I have observed that Pakistan's image has continuously went down in Afghanistan in the past three decades, at least. If you compare it what Pakistan's image was there in 1990 and the level of respect it then enjoyed. If you compare it to 2010, you will see it has gone down. But if you compare it to today's situation of 2023 it has fallen much further - and within it there is a variety of opinion from Afghan political parties, Afghan civilians, and Afghan Taliban. Yes, external interventions might have played a role in it including US presence and Indian influence, among other things, but only Pakistan and Afghanistan can address this issue together.

There are a number of steps that can be taken to address this. Instead of fencing the border, we need soft management of it; this is not the sort of border where we can erect a fence and say that it will prevent cross border terrorism. The people who pass across designated border crossings and have been doing so for years are not typically involved in terrorism. The ones who are involved in terrorism will come in any case.

Somebody [here] gave a proposal for scholarships [to Afghan girls]. When the Taliban government came to power, I had suggested that we should increase the number of scholarships to 1500 as Afghan people are in need of them; we had been giving 1,000 scholarships since 2010 to Afghans. But after the Taliban government came into power, we have not given them scholarships, not even one. Pakistan's economic difficulties may have had a role in this but this is where we need to play a proactive role. With visas, there is the same situation. During Afghanistan's previous government, we would issue 2,000-3,000 visas per day, but now we are issuing very few visas. When visas are not issued, naturally they will be sold in the blackmarket for \$1,000/\$1500; it is not a rocket science and we need to understand this.

With regard to connectivity, in the 1970's a bus used to pass through Pakistan and Afghanistan. We tried so hard to revive this bus services but there is so much inertia within institutions, departments and governments that makes us unable to run a bus. The Torkham-Jalalabad road construction started in 2007, and a small section of it is yet to be completed. For its completion sometimes there are disputes between NHA and FW or there is some other reason such as financial one [only the government can tell].

Within the field of health, we have multiple advantages. Many Afghans come here for treatment. If along the border we establish hospitals every 50 km or so it will prove highly beneficial for the Afghans. While Afghans are investing all over the world, including in Turkey and Europe, in Pakistan we have kept Afghans out of investment policies. What message are we giving to the world by withholding Afghan refugees from business and investment?

When it comes to the TTP, the solution lies in engagement with Afghanistan. Through engagement the solution can be found very easily, but the [Pak-Afghan] relationship is larger than countering terrorism security issues. We have to look at the longer term larger picture. When we shift our perspective towards it we will be able to rethink it and reset it.

Lt. Gen. (Retd) Waheed Arshad, former Chief of the General Staff (CGS), Pakistan Army

We have a cultural issue in Pakistan where we never blame ourselves; either we blame a foreign conspiracy, or the army. Within Pakistan, we blame the army, and outside of Pakistan we blame America, the Jews, India and others. It is a cultural issue and we are unable to come out of it. For things to get better, we need to get our own act together. When it comes to Afghanistan, it is a valid argument to treat Afghanistan as a sovereign state. Afghanistan also needs to see Pakistan as a sovereign state. Until both countries view each other as sovereign states, which have their respective legitimate interests, bilateral engagement will not strengthen. Both countries need to understand this. At present, apparently, strategic interests of Pakistan and Afghanistan have no convergence. Pakistan's strategic interests are linked to countering the TTP and managing/fencing the border. Afghanistan, nonetheless, does not see strategic value in fencing the border or acting against TTP, but its strategic interests entail trade, people to people contact, health and education issues, and recognition. The strategic interests of both countries are divergent, so until we sit down together and there is a dialogue as sovereign states the issues would not progress further. But my own view is that we are talking about it as if we will fix Afghanistan. Why should we? Is it our responsibility? It is a sovereign country.

Yes, we should of course help them. And if our strategic interests are being met in providing that assistance and the strategic interests of both states are converging then we can help. When they are not, then even if we wish to help them we cannot. In my view, we need to focus on two things, as in the current time the interests are not converging. We should support Afghanistan from the perspective of the people of Afghanistan. Previously there was Ashraf Ghani government, now it is the Taliban government, and in future someone else will be ruling there. But Afghanistan's general public is important for Pakistan from all perspectives. Our relationship with Afghanistan is not like it is with any other country, nor should it be nor will it be.

Therefore, in my opinion, Pakistan needs to invest in Afghanistan's people - there is a long debate about what we can do and cannot do. Another thing to mention, as was said before, is

that for Pakistan security is a main issue. The Afghan government needs to help because the TTP militants are in Afghanistan.

It is very easy to say that there is no political ownership, but why is it not there? Paid by the state, if the politicians do not like something they need to issue a statement that they do not like something. They approve and take ownership of the policies that benefit them personally or their parties. But when it comes to this difficult question, they refrain from taking the political ownership of it because it does not fall into the broad category of their interests, resulting in their ignorance about it. Why the Pakistani army, GHQ, or ISI interfere in policymaking? Because there is no understanding on the other side. If there is any understanding on the other side,



then the military would not interfere. There needs to be a way out of this. It cannot be like this: "Now that I have lost power, I can blame the army for not letting me do what I wanted when I was in power." One should ask that what were you doing when you were in power?

Whether it were the previous governments or the current one, tell me if they issue policy statements on Afghanistan, or simply tell what their official Afghanistan policy is; there had never been such a policy in the past and none exists at present. When there is a vacuum, somebody has to fill it. Has the Pakistani government given a policy statement on the TTP, border-fencing, Afghan refugees, people to people contact, and trade? No. It is not such a difficult question. The thing is that we should admit our collective failure. If we blame the parliament, the politicians, or the army then this will continue. The focus should be on how to improve relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is strategically critical. Moreover, both countries cannot afford worsening their bilateral relations.

Until we fix our relationship with the Afghan government and reduce the distrust with the Afghan people things will stay the same.

Lt. Gen. (Retd) Nasser Janjua

Without going into past, I would say that we need to reorient our thinking towards Afghanistan. Pakistan's future is with Afghanistan on which it should focus. Allama Iqbal used to call Afghanistan the heart of Asia. Moreover, Afghanistan should not be a barrier but a bridge. If this region has to flourish, the secret to it lies in Afghanistan and Pakistan's connectivity.

In addition to this, Pakistan should not keep its brighter future with Afghanistan hostage to the TTP and its anger. Pakistan should improve its relations with Afghanistan on a higher level, transcending terrorism, and security. Moreover, for the Afghan and Pakistani economies to flourish, integration in the region is necessary.

As a war-torn country, there are all kinds of challenges in Afghanistan. While the current government in Afghanistan is very committed, its problems are so abundant; at the moment it is trying to normalise a war-torn country. Knowing all this, Afghanistan should be dealt with compassion, and when it comes to the Afghans' problems one should support them so that the region can quickly stabilise and normalise. The TTP is the remnant of the long war in Afghanistan for which Pakistan needs to find a solution. For Pakistan to succeed in this, it should work together with Afghanistan.

Afrasiab Khattak, political analyst and expert on Afghan affairs

The first thing is that Pakistan should befriend the state or nation of Afghanistan, and not the groups there. I remember in 2019 there was a group of Pashtuns which spoke to the army

officials. General Bajwa asked how should we engage the non-Taliban Afghans so that we befriend them? Ambassador Sadiq Khan gave the most intelligent response: he said what you are saying please start practicing it. While Pakistan should start befriending Afghans, it should not make unrealistic demands from them. There are many things that the Taliban even today have not stated publicly, if they did Pakistan would not be able to respond.

Moreover, it has been announced that 'Jihad' in Afghanistan has ended once and for all, but this will not happen just with an announcement as many such announcements have been made in the past as well. It is time for Pakistan to prove that with its actions. It should assure the citizens of Afghanistan that the past will not be repeated once again. Then people will be convinced. Pakistan should, moreover, admit its past mistakes. But to say that everything was fine yesterday and that everything is fine now and that everything will be fine in the future, will correct nothing.

The US wants to start the war on terror 2.0. However, it will not be with a bang like the previous one. It will be done in a technical way and the TTP and IS-K would be a part of it. Unfortunately, Pakistan will be the frontline state in it.

While talking about the TTP, we should talk about the project Taliban. Is the TTP another creation? No, they are Taliban. They both [Afghan and Pakistani Taliban] have the same emir and share similar ideology. The most important thing is that 50,000 madrassas in Pakistan are not registered. Every year, these madrassas produce countless graduates. One wonders where these people will go? They will work here. Jihad is their industry. If Pakistan did not shut down this industry and kept on saying that it wants to end the war, the war will never end.

While the PTM's pamphlets are seized in the country, how are the books of Daesh published? Moreover, Ali Wazir remains in prison for two years. In Peshawar Daesh's books are published in Pashto the same way the books for the Mujahedeen's used to be published in the 1980's and for the Taliban in 1990's. One needs to ask the question that who is publishing them and how? The group's magazines are being published in Urdu, Pashto, and Dari. The Pakistani army should investigate this.

Riaz Mohammad Khan, former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan

Pakistan's policies are very intricate as there are so many institutions and actors involved. Although Pakistan's policies are complex and confusing, there is also some direction. In Pakistan's foreign policy, there are a few things that are very clear; for example, the country's relationship with China, as well as nuclear policy. Afghanistan has been a very complex case. The army had a lot of involvement in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. For [evolving] Pakistan's new policy towards Afghanistan, a lot of clarity and ease in relationship are needed. An overarching policy would be better to engage in a state-to-state relationship keeping in view the very peculiar cultural and historical affinities.

Pakistan should be sensitive about all these factors and should keep them in mind. For example, while the Durand line is de jure for Pakistan it is not the same for the Afghans. Moreover, Pakistan does not have to push any Afghan government, whether it is the Taliban's or any other, because this way it will not get the response that it desires. The other problem is regarding security. There is absolutely no conventional threat which Pakistan is facing from Afghanistan, ie armies marching into peshawar from Afghanistan.

There is a need to maintain state-to-state relationship which entails bilateral convenience and cooperation. If there is any danger to Pakistan from Afghanistan and the retrogressive ideologies there, it needs to realise that its own contribution are tremendous. The number of madrassas in Pakistan are more than in Afghanistan. Therefore, these things need to be scrutinised.

If the Taliban survived politically, with its current ideology, it will not be for very long. Saudi Arabia today provides a good example of this as it is leaving behind its Salafist past and becoming

progressive. Moreover, Pakistan is also struggling with modernisation. However, modernisation doesn't mean Westernisation. China is modern but the West considers it a principle threat. There needs to be a clear distinction between these two terms.

The Afghans are very proud and intelligent people and if Pakistan believes that the Afghans are going to align their policies to its own, it is entertaining a delusion. Pakistan can try to convince them of its interests but there are areas where the two can cooperate free of interests.

Moreover, the TTP is a big problem for Pakistan, and it should make it very clear to the Afghan side that if the TTP is operating from there then they have to control it. However, if the Afghan side denied the TTP's presence in Afghanistan it should do so with concrete evidence. Pakistan should not make the mistake of going into Afghanistan and taking actions there.

At the same time, the murderers of our children cannot be pardoned. Additionally, the state and non-state actors cannot be negotiated with on the same level. While the TTP fighters are Pakistanis, they have to give up their arms before being allowed to live in Pakistan. However, Pakistan should be very clear about this.

For improved Pak-Afghan relations, Pakistan should provide all facilitation that it has already been providing to Afghanistan in terms of transit, etc. If there are other reasonable demands, Pakistan should accommodate them as well. As Afghanistan is a brotherly country, bilateral relationship has to be built on compassion. However, it is only reasonable that Pakistan should do whatever is possible for it to do. One of Afghanistan's issues is regarding transit trade with India, that goods from India should go via Pakistan to Kabul. Pakistan could provide Afghanistan with the facilitation that its goods can reach the border, but it cannot provide India such facilitation because of the unavailability of bilateral agreement with India. This transit facilitation is always based on a bilateral relationship between two countries. As relations with India will improve then it will be fine. However, this should not be such a major issue for Pakistan. India is already finding alternative routes via Iran and Central Asia. Therefore, the thinking that something worst will happen if Pakistan opens up doors to India is misguided. If this is done through a bilateral agreement, then alright. However, for facilitation, there should be economic relationship first. Moreover, Pakistan should go beyond trade with Afghanistan, for example there is the TAPI [Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India] pipeline idea.



Riaz Mohammad Khan

For improved Pak-Afghan relations, Pakistan should provide all facilitation that it has already been providing to Afghanistan in terms of transit, etc

This is very important for geoeconomics. When it comes to geoeconomics, it is not such a daunting idea. It is all about mindset. When Deng Xioping decided to open China to the West, the Chinese overcame all their hesitations regarding America and they opened up to the West. In 2003, there were 40,000 Chinese-American joint ventures in China let alone the number of Chinese joint ventures with other countries.

In Pakistan, the mindset is to suspect a foreigner. If Pakistan is serious about geoeconomics then it needs to change its mindset. All the security issues of Pakistan are also because of its mindset.

Moreover, there is no threat from outside to Pakistan. Pakistan is a nuclear power. Its problems are basically internal. Nevertheless, for a country like Pakistan with 230 million people looking for someone to give it 2 to 3 billion dollars is extremely humiliating.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

Thank you, Mr. Riaz Muhammad Khan. Now I invite Dr. Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal to give his perspective about Afghanistan.

Dr. Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal, former Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan

As an ambassador, I was critical of both Afghanistan's policy towards Pakistan and Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. However, I am thankful to the Pakistani military intelligence and the political leadership for tolerating my views.

Here is the TTP issue now to deal with. The TTP is a symptom. We need to look at the causes of all this mess in which both Afghanistan and Pakistan are stuck. They need to look back and explore the circumstance that that led to [the rise of] the TTP.

Every action has a reaction. An exaggerated reaction based on a perceived potential threat generates an action which brings that perception into reality. This is what is happening in Pakistan. Unfortunately, Pakistan looks at Afghanistan as a potential threat. In the backdrop of such a threat perspective, there has to be an agency capable of extinguishing that threat. This is where Pakistan's policy has ended up. Its institutions only know how to deal with threats, and they do not how to deal with opportunities, which may annoy many. This kind of dealing has generated certain actions and materialised the threats that were only previously perceived. Whether Pakistan's threat perception is related to India or TTP, it has affected its policy.



Dr. Hazrat Omar
Zakhilwal

An exaggerated reaction based on a perceived potential threat generates an action which brings that perception into reality

The Afghans also react to such attitude and perception, which [in turn] irritates Pakistan. This mutual irritation has now turned into mutual threats – real threats on both sides.

I have been involved with Pakistan for 20 years now and negotiated the Afghanistan-Pakistan trade and transit agreement in 2010. Pakistan's minister of commerce and finance told that such things in trade are beyond them. However, I told them that let us conclude it if only partially and let us create positivity which would lead to something good. I even went further and revived CASA project after it had been dropped by the ADB through the World Bank. This was meant to generate positive dependencies in Pakistan on Afghanistan. For this I went to the Prime Minister Gillani, without even consulting President Karzai. Besides proposing the CASA project, I told him that let us have a joint investment on Kunar River which would generate 2000 megawatts of electricity and that the produce would be shared by both Pakistan and Afghanistan. He liked the idea and invited the minister of power. In the morning, this had turned into a breaking news in the newspapers. Seeing this, President Karzai called and inquired that "What is this thing about

Kunar?" and told me to return quickly to Afghanistan. Going back, I told the President that I want to create a positive dependency of Pakistan on Afghanistan and that these potential opportunities in Afghanistan should be turned into realities. I explained further that if we have a few million Pakistanis dependent on power from CASA and a few million more on Kunar and few thousand industries as well, they will become our advocates for a policy change in Pakistan and support stability and peace in Afghanistan. President also liked this idea and ordered that this idea should be brought into the cabinet and approved by it. I brought it into the cabinet and got it endorsed first from the President Karzai.

When Nawaz Sharif became prime minister in 2013, President Karzai travelled to Pakistan on a state visit. I had arrived in Pakistan the day before and met Ishaq Dar with my proposal. I told him that when the president comes tomorrow let us work on an economic plan. Moreover, I

had signed the 44-point agenda.

As Pakistan is so much fixated on border management, I proposed an alternative. The proposal was to increase the exit points to 17 initially and then to 50 or 40. Adding up with the already 4 exit points at the Durand Line, the total would become 44. However, I said that this would happen only if the ministry of finance and commerce manages it. Rather than calling it border management, let us call it trade management. If it is called trade management, every province bordering Afghanistan would be demanding crossing points as well. I explained further that this would not exclude the deployment of border security forces there, but it will be only called trade management. We decided on this.

Next year when President Ghani came, I was his National Economic Advisor as well as his minister of finance. And the exact same thing which we had expanded upon, we signed it the next day. Moreover, before the arrival of President Ghani into Pakistan I had been working on his agenda and went to LUMS. President Ghani had ordered me to go to Lahore saying, "I want LUMS in Kabul". I went there and met Shahbaz Sharif and LUMS faculty. However, on the way there the ambassador told me that there is a change in President Ghani's program – he is going to the GHQ. I immediately called the president and told him that this is a huge risk. The president replied that it is a risk worth taking. We went to the GHQ, and I remember even today the promises which were made there and how many. However, none were seriously meant. Following the meeting, within months, the political situation for the president in Kabul worsened. Later, when I talked to the president Ghani, he said that he has a severe relationship with Pakistan. I sat with him and told him to let me go to Pakistan. This is how I came to Pakistan as his special representative in 2016 – fully authorised. When I came here, I told the concerned person that you support the Taliban, or your institution supports them – you cannot deny. He was surprised as he did not know much about it. However, I cleared it that I am not here to ask why you support the Taliban as you might have a reason for supporting them.

Look at Pakistan's economy today. Nobody mentions the Afghan factor, but it is a huge factor in the economic instability of Pakistan. The Afghan factor is probably the biggest factor in Pakistan's economic turmoil. India's per capita was below Pakistan in 2000 and 2002. However, now it is seen as a major economic power. There is the example of Bangladesh as well. There is not much difference between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. But the priorities are different.

Ironically, Afghanistan is [seen as] a potential threat to Pakistan. It has been a potential threat for 50 years now. However, when the communists took over Kabul, there was no Soviet invasion.

The Jihad against the communist government in Kabul started in Peshawar or the call for Jihad was given in Peshawar. It was wrong. It was not that Pakistan was concerned about Islam. It was an opportunity for Pakistan, as the terrorist elements had already been trained. The focus in Pakistan was that these elements could be eliminated once there is someone friendly in power in Afghanistan. It was wrong as without the people's support there cannot be anybody friendly to Pakistan in power in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Pakistan alienated the Afghan population in the process of trying to bring someone friendly into power in Kabul. The Afghan 'mujahedeen' groups, who were trained in Pakistan, became Pakistan's enemies in Afghanistan in only 3 months. If this attitude of Pakistan did not change, it cannot have a policy that could really work. Pakistan's winning of the Afghans' heart will eventually lead to the coming of someone friendly to Pakistan in power. Therefore, Pakistan should focus on the Afghan people.

When the Taliban were hating the Ghani and Karzai administrations in Afghanistan, it was understandable. The Taliban had support and shelter; therefore, they were encouraged. Although they needed the support, they had their own reasons to fight. However, Pakistan's reason to support them was not because of the love for the Afghan Taliban, but to threaten Afghanistan. Now in power, the Taliban think that Pakistan's intention has not changed. They think that Pakistan supported them when they were a threat to the state, and now that they are in power Pakistan perceives them the same way. They do not think Pakistan to be supportive of them. This is the perception of the Taliban.

Now that the Taliban are in power there is no Pakistani ambassador in Afghanistan. It was not like this during the previous Afghan administrations. It means that things have downgraded there for Pakistan. Because of this, the Taliban think that Pakistan treats them worse than Ghani. Drones are conducting attacks in Afghanistan. These drones are coming from the Pakistani space. Pakistan has, however, denied this which makes Pakistan even more suspicious.

Muhammad Amir Rana (Moderator)

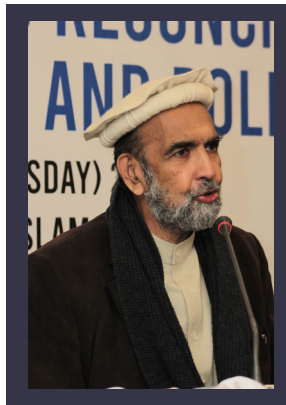
Thank you Dr. Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal. Now I invite Dr. Qibla Ayaz to deliver his concluding comments and the note of thanks to all the participants.

Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Chairman Council of Islamic Ideology

Note of thanks is the best way to sum up this discussion, as whatever that should have been said here has already been said. In my opinion, Pakistan has always had an Afghan policy. In the same way, Afghanistan has always had its Pakistan policy. In this discussion, however, we came to know that both countries' policy needs basic changes.

Moreover, trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan has never stopped even in times of war or when the borders have been closed. This is the same for the Chaman and all other border-crossing points, as well as the ones with Iran. However, all the trade activities along the Durand Line need documentation to reduce the risk of smuggling.

Additionally, there should be a focus on the humanistic side of things as well. Instead of looking for profit-making from health and educational initiatives in Afghanistan, Pakistan should expect humanistic dividends. Although this might take longer for change to materialise, change will eventually emerge.



DR. QIBLA AYAZ

Trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan has never stopped even in times of war or when the borders have been closed.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had once said that Pakistan-India border would resemble that of Canada and the United States. However, it was strange to utter this kind of futuristic opinion at a time when the two countries came into existence as a consequence of conflict. And if the same had been said for Afghanistan, we would not have been so much dejected and sorrowful today. However, we are not short of time and great minds even today. There is still a possibility on both sides for change.

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 7th 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.



PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES (PIPS)
P.O Box. No: 2110, Islamabad, Pakistan
Tel: +92-51-8359475 Fax: +92-51-8359474
Email: pips@pakpips.com
www.pakpips.com