

## CONSULTATION REPORT

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

Report of PIPS Consultation-8 held on May 4, 2023, in Islamabad

| Transcription and drafting: Osama Ahmad & Imran Mukhtar  
| 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 eighth 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



Adnan Aamir



Akbar Notezai



Ali Baba Taj



Aoun Sahi



Aqeel Yousafzai



Hafiz Munir  
Ahmed



Hafsa Zafar



Hamayoun Khan



Imran Mukhtar



Muhammad Israr  
Madani



Riffatullah Or-  
akzai



Sabookh Syed



Safdar Sial

# Executive Summary

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized an expert consultation on “Afghan peace and reconciliation: Pakistan’s interests and policy options” on May 4, 2023, in Islamabad. The main themes of the consultation, which was the 8th one in a series of discussions organized by the institute, included “Pak-Afghan bilateral relations: challenges and way forward” and “Emerging Afghan situation and its implications for the region.”

Journalist and researcher Imran Mukhtar, and Joint Director PIPS Safdar Sial moderated the two sessions respectively.

Experts at the discussion warned that banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was making new nexus with Baloch separatists and local militant groups based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan — a development which will likely exacerbate the already precarious security situation in the country.

Unlike the past, this is for the first time that the TTP has started carrying out terrorist attacks in Pashtun areas of Balochistan, which is very disturbing. On the other hand, there is no clarity about Pakistan’s policy for Afghanistan and the ruling coalition in the center is also unclear how to deal with the TTP since talks with the proscribed group failed last year.

The discussants highlighted that the banned group based in Afghanistan and other local militant groups were filling the vacuum left by mainstream and nationalist political parties in KP as they were no longer propagating themselves as only jihadi-religious groups. These militant groups now promote political and nationalistic thoughts to achieve their vested interests.

In addition, some participants in the consultation brought up the point that Pakistan’s problems are not only security-related or linked to Afghanistan but there are deep-rooted social problems as well. Different issues which are the product of faulty and dysfunctional state policies, have exacerbated the polycrisis in Pakistan.

The experts also pointed to the shift from geostrategic to geoeconomics arguing that economic development in the region is now prioritized over security. This was said while considering the recent Saudi-Iran rapprochement and other such developments in the region.

# Exploring Pakistan's position, interests and policy options

**Moderator:** To start with, I will request Mr. Riffatullah Orakzai to share his views about the security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in the light of the worsening law and order situation in the country.

## Riffatullah Orakzai, senior journalist based in Peshawar

Terrorist attacks have increased in Pakistan since the Afghan Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021 as compared to the Ashraf Ghani regime that was considered an extreme opponent of Pakistan. Pakistan expected that with the Taliban coming into power, the security situation in the country would improve. However, the upsurge in the attacks is contrary to expectations of Pakistan. The TTP is continuously carrying out attacks. In April, it carried out 48 terrorist attacks, and in March 42.

Formerly, the TTP used to hit civilian targets. However, this time its strategy has changed as it does not hit civilian targets anymore. Its prime targets are the police and military. Moreover, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police should be given the credit as they are fighting the militancy very bravely. The state should invest in the police to enhance their capacity and morale. In this new wave of militancy, militants are focusing the southern Pashtun belt that extends eastward from the twin Waziristan districts. Most attacks are concentrated in this belt.

Pakistan used its influence on the Afghan Taliban to negotiate with the banned group. However, the TTP's two demands were unacceptable to Pakistan's security establishment and government. One was that its foot soldiers would return to Pakistan along with arms and ammunition, and secondly, they were demanding the reversal of merger of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Unfortunately, the TTP has acquired highly advanced weaponry. For instance, it killed the police officer, Iqbal Mohmand, in a very well protected vehicle. This is worrisome.

On the hand, the people are rising up against the new wave of militancy. Mass demonstrations are held in the province. Around 50 such mass demonstrations have been held so far. These demonstrations were joined by people in large numbers. For this, the credit goes to Manzoor Pashteen and civil society organizations. Furthermore, the people are now suspicious of the state and its promises and are against military operations. This has come about as a result of the heavy losses borne by the people in Pakistan's war against militancy.



Riffatullah Orakzai

Formerly, the TTP used to hit civilian targets. However, this time its strategy has changed as it does not hit civilian targets anymore.

**Moderator:** Thank you, Mr. Rifatullah Orakzai. Now, I invite Mr. Sabookh Syed to tell us that whether the hostility on social media from Pakistan towards Afghanistan has increased or decreased since 15th August 2021.

### Sabookh Syed, senior journalist and social media influencer

The common people in Pakistan and the religious leadership have been looking at Afghanistan from a specific lens or perspective. This is because of the military establishment and Pakistan's policies. This perspective does not change, no matter what happens in Afghanistan. It is true that sometime its bitterness that increases and sometimes sweetness, but the perspective remains.

While the world has improved its relations with the Taliban government, Pakistan, a country that facilitated the Doha talks and campaigned for Afghanistan internationally for aid and its recognition, has failed to do so. Currently, there is no threat from Afghanistan to China, Russia and the US. Instead, it is Afghanistan that feels threatened as these countries are not recognizing the Taliban government. However, the Taliban are trying restlessly to get an international recognition on their own terms.



Sabookh Syed

While the world has improved its relations with the Taliban government, Pakistan, a country that facilitated the Doha talks and campaigned for Afghanistan internationally for aid and its recognition, has failed to do so.

However, the primary question now is that while Pakistan celebrated the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and proudly boasted about its policy, why its policy failed?

It is ridiculous to support the Afghan Taliban and also engage in war with the TTP. The TTP is supporting the Afghan Taliban, and the Afghan Taliban are supporting the TTP. Pakistan started the peace process with the TTP but did not take the political and religious parties into confidence. In addition, Pakistan also said that most of the 80,000 lives the country lost were on the hands of the TTP. Also, Pakistan had to cleanse the tribal areas of terrorists, but then it started talking to them. To worsen the matter, Pakistan did not take into confidence the locals when initiating the peace talks with the TTP.

Additionally, there is an internal problem in Pakistan, which is about policymaking. While Pakistan announced with great pomp that it is going to start a military operation in the tribal areas, it declined to do so after only two or three protests against the announcement. This means that Pakistan is afraid of social media. Pakistan's military and its judiciary cannot stand a twitter trend.

Sadly, there is no deep thought involved in decision-making in Pakistan. Things happen in a very disorderly and confused way. Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan is inconsistent. Because of this, there have been many ups and downs in the bilateral relations.

The Afghan Taliban are approaching the world in a more mature way than Pakistan. They deal with both Pakistan and the international community in quite a methodical way. However, it is true that the Afghan Taliban are, in some matters, immature, but there is a background to it. This is because of their ideology. It has a cadre that fought for 20 years and for this purpose that once they come into power, they will impose their ideology. It, therefore, is not possible in one year to convince them to let go off their ideology and normalize policy.

Social media plays an important role in today's world. Sometimes it promotes bitterness between the two countries and sometimes the opposite. For instance, a cricket match between Pakistan and Afghanistan turned ugly when violence erupted between the audiences of the two countries in the stadium. On the other hand, social media has also helped in bridging the gulf

between the two countries. For example, in a cricket match at NUML, Pakistanis vehemently supported the Afghan team and cheered for it. In Pakistan the social media has become both constructive and destructive.

In addition, sectarian violence in Pakistan has decreased on the ground. However, the sectarian divide and hatred stays in the people's minds. This decrease in sectarian violence is because of some groups and people that have created a new space. They created this new space through social media in which they challenged the traditional Islamic scholars. What is even more interesting is that the TLP has now become less sectarian and focuses more on the political side of things to find adjustment in the Pakistani society and political framework. Moreover, Pakistan is located in a very strange region with its four neighbors totally different from the world. Iran is theocratic, and Afghanistan too. China is authoritarian, and India in the grip of the extremists. Nonetheless, Modi wants to initiate a dialogue with Pakistan, but is confused about whom to talk to in Pakistan.

---

**Moderator:** Thank you, Mr. Sabookh Syed. To continue the discussion, now I invite Mr. Aqeel Yousafzai to tell us first that whether Pakistan's peace efforts were serious? And what role did the Afghan Taliban play in the peace process.

---

### Aqeel Yousafzai, senior journalist and author based in Peshawar

Pakistan is very much confused about its Afghan policy. For instance, when the talks between Pakistan and TTP started, two major political parties objected against the peace talks. These parties were the PPP and the ANP. These parties were hit hard by militancy as many of its members were killed by the militants. However, nobody tells that when these parties were in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they also held talks with Mullah Fazlullah in Swat.



Aqeel Yousafzai

Afghanistan is not only Kabul. There are many provinces in Afghanistan where people do not even know the name of the person who is ruling Afghanistan.

Now that General Faiz Hameed is no more in the service, any criticism can be levelled against him. However, he was not the only guy responsible for the negotiations with the TTP, but the political parties were also quite supportive of the peace talks. Not only were they supportive, but their representatives were present in the delegations sent to talk with the TTP. In addition, Pakistan's expectations from and misunderstandings about Afghanistan, were not of the military establishment. For instance, General Qamar Javed Bajwa and Shah Mehmood Qureshi had warned about that the consequences of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan without instituting an interim government would be borne by Pakistan.

Nevertheless, there happened something very strange. The Afghan Taliban were expecting that out of the 300,000 Afghan army, at least 100,000 soldiers under the command of the northern alliance commanders would resist their advance. They were waiting for two months to reach Kabul and claim it. However, it was discovered after two to three days that the Afghan president with his advisors had fled the country by a helicopter and the rest had surrendered. The 300,000 Afghan army on which billions of dollars were spent disappeared. Seeing this, the Taliban had to rush and enter Kabul in no time. However, in the confusion following the fall of Kabul, around

3,000 – 4,000 TTP fighters including the 15 top commanders fled the prisons.

To be very clear, the US had not come to Afghanistan for the extermination of the Taliban. Moreover, it also did not intend to renovate Afghanistan or create a democratic structure in Afghanistan. Similarly, the US willingly left Afghanistan in a situation of turmoil because of which Afghanistan's neighboring countries will now have to do deal with the Afghan Taliban for five or



more years.

Moreover, Afghanistan is not only Kabul. There are many provinces in Afghanistan where people do not even know the name of the person who is ruling Afghanistan. Therefore, when it is said that the international community will pressurize Afghanistan and make it do what it wants, most Afghans have nothing to do with it.

What is even more surprising is that the TTP under Noor Wali Meshud has become more a political and nationalist group rather than remaining as a religious-jihadist group. His Eid statement was completely political, and there was not even a mention of the word jihad in it. In this statement he termed the Pashtuns as victims of genocide and that the TTP is fighting for freedom and the survival and preservation of Pashtun race. From the past three to four years, the TTP is emerging as a Pashtun nationalist group. The TTP also has started entering alliance with the Baloch militant groups and there is a greater understanding between them. Not only this, but the former Pashtun nationalists from ex-FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are sympathetic towards the TTP. What is threatening for Pakistan is that the opposition to military operations is not coming only from Manzoor Pashteen, but the Baloch nationalists, other Pashtun nationalists, and the TTP as well. For the first time have the left and right joined hands against Pakistan, and this time it is not like the situation of 2000 for Pakistan's security establishment. So, Pakistan held peace talks with the TTP because it had no other option.

Moreover, a new problem has emerged for the Afghan Taliban. It is the challenge of Daesh or IS-K. Since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, IS-K has claimed 75 attacks in Afghanistan including 12 in Kabul. While trying to appease Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban feared that pushing the TTP forcefully out of Afghanistan would turn the top TTP commanders into their enemies who would join the IS-K. Therefore, the Afghan Taliban refused to force the TTP for negotiations on Pakistan's terms.

Additionally, the doors of dialogue must remain open considering the mounting terrorist challenge. A case in point is that in few instances the Pakistani security personnel in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa surrendered to the TTP. They cannot fight the well-equipped TTP fighters. Also, the parties on which one could rely, and which could take a stand and influence the establishment's policies, i.e., the PML-N and PPP, have 'surrendered' to PTI in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Moreover, both parties also seem very much uninterested in the situation of both provinces.

The TTP has come up with an alternative 'governance system' to which the people in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are getting attracted. An unannounced understanding is also developing between the pro-Taliban elements and the Pashtun nationalists in the 8-9 Afghan provinces bordering Pakistan. This is very dangerous for Pakistan's security establishment. Also, the leadership positions in religious groups in Pakistan are held by Pashtuns. Therefore, the TTP is not only a threat to the democratic and liberal groups and parties in Pakistan, but to those religious groups in Pakistan that believe in democracy and constitution.

The way forward is that until Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are declared as the defense frontlines, and the two largest parties in the present government take notice of the security situation, things will only deteriorate further.

---

**Moderator:** Thank you, Mr. Aqeel Yousafzai. To further the discussion, now I invite Mr. Akbar Notezai to tell us that with the coming of the Taliban into power in Afghanistan what new changes have happened in Pakistan's two major problems, i.e., border trade and border fencing, and internal security.

---

#### **Akbar Notezai, feature writer and reporter based in Quetta**

Pakistan's problems and crises, whether in Balochistan or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are made by Pakistan itself. In the same way, Pakistan created the Afghan Taliban, supported them through

the years and brought them into power in 2021. However, as the Afghan Taliban are getting stronger now, Pakistan's problems are multiplying. Moreover, Pakistan has completely neglected Balochistan. There is a perception in Pakistan that Balochistan has no issues. However, Balochistan's issues are countless including those related to Afghanistan. The southern provinces in Afghanistan, such as Kandahar and Helmand where the Taliban emerged, border on Balochistan. Therefore, since 1979 the problems of Afghanistan have directly impacted Balochistan.

Apparently, Pakistani establishment is aware of the problems of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan as it takes the two provinces very seriously. The problem is that Pakistan's policies and interests have been strategic rather than people friendly. Pakistan needs to revisit its security and foreign policies. However, any civilian government that tried to revisit and change the foreign policy was overthrown. There is the example of two terms of Benazir Bhutto, after which she was assassinated. There is also the example of three terms of Nawaz Sharif which were never completed. Thrice was his government overthrown.



Akbar Notezai

Pakistani establishment is aware of the problems of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan as it takes the two provinces very seriously.

In the 1990s, the Afghan Taliban and many other jihadi groups emerged such as Lashkar e Jhangvi, the TTP, and Kashmiri jihadist groups. All these groups had good relations with the Afghan Taliban. However, these groups unleashed terror on Pakistan later. In 2021, Pakistan brought the Afghan Taliban into power once again. This resulted in the resurgence of the TTP.

Moreover, with the coming of Afghan Taliban into power the Baloch insurgents became stronger. Rather than getting resolved, this problem is growing. This is opposite what Pakistan had expected. Furthermore, as there is no clear policy to end the conflict, it is worsening.

---

**Moderator:** Thank you, Mr. Akbar Notezai. Continuing the discussion, now I invite Miss Hafsa Zafar to tell us that what is this conflict about and what are the challenges in this conflict for Pakistan and Afghanistan.

---

### Hafsa Zafar, researcher in peacebuilding and development

There is no social consensus in Pakistan on the importance of war on terror. Similarly, there is public resistance to both the military operations and the war. Besides this, there is also an ideological shift and mainstream political parties are ignoring the significance of how much the people are going to suffer in this security crisis. On the other hand, regional and religious parties are very much attracted to the new political alternative that is being presented by the Afghan Taliban. It is a multifaceted problem.

Pakistan does not have security problems alone. There are issues on the social front as well with the state failing to address them. Their impacts are felt at the grassroots level. Maybe there is a consensus within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that the people do not want a military operation, or they do not want to be the victims of the war on terror. But the question is that how much are the people against the terrorism? However, the bigger problem is the absence of information that also breeds confusion.

The international community has an agenda that it will not recognize the Taliban government unless the human rights violations, such as the women rights violations, are stopped. It is also to be understood that in war and conflict the foremost affectees are the children and women. While a safe environment is required for the vulnerable communities to survive and thrive, it is

not present in Afghanistan.

Moreover, Pakistan has hostilities both with India and Afghanistan. With Afghanistan the bone of contention is security and with India Kashmir. It was said that China has cordial relations with Pakistan, but the warmth has cooled off because of the mishandling and delaying of CPEC projects. On the other hand, Afghanistan has established good relations with all of its neighbors and the countries in the region. It has sound trade and economic relations with Russia, China, India, and Iran. Unfortunately, while there is no foreign policy or consolidated Afghan policy of Pakistan, one wonders where it is going to come from.



**HAFSA ZAFAR**

It was said that China has cordial relations with Pakistan, but the warmth has cooled off because of the mishandling and delaying of CPEC projects. On the other hand, Afghanistan ha

**Moderator:** Moderator: Thank you, Miss Hafsa Zafar. Now I invite Mr. Hamayoun Khan to let us know that what potentials are there for improvement in bilateral cooperation?

**Hamayoun Khan, programme advisor at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Pakistan**

From the very beginning, the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been bitter. Having cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and social similarities as neighbors, the relationship should have been the best. However, not only the relationship did not stay the best, but it did not even remain ordinary. There used to be animosity between governments and institutions of the two countries in the past. However, over the years the common people of both countries have also learned to hate each other. For instance, in Pakistan’s foreign policy Afghanistan features as the second country after India with which it has the most issues. Also, Afghanistan considers Pakistan responsible for its many problems and destruction. However, the main issue between the two countries is mistrust of which there are many reasons.



**Hamayoun Khan**

Pakistan considers itself a gateway to Central Asia and South Asia for which Afghanistan acts as a land bridge. If both the countries improved their strategic relation, both would benefit.

Nevertheless, the power of decision making in Pakistan has not been with the political and democratic forces but with the security establishment. Moreover, the inclusion of political and religious figures in the delegations was only a face-saving attempt. Therefore, as long as Pakistan remains a security state, the power of decision making will be elsewhere. From visa issuance, allowing medical facilities, to border management, the decisions are made by the security establishment.

Furthermore, Pakistan considers itself a gateway to Central Asia and South Asia for which Afghanistan acts as a land bridge. If both the countries improved their strategic relation, both would benefit. Moreover, there is a global shift from geo-

strategic to geoeconomics with the economy prioritized more than security. For instance, the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran is the best example of this shift. This rapprochement will reduce the intensity of the proxy war between the two countries, which would result in the restoration of peace and stability to the region.

While Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa hold great importance for Pakistan its promises

made to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and ex-FATA region have not been fulfilled yet. People have grievances. These grievances are well voiced and known to the politicians, military establishment, and bureaucracy. For Balochistan, the decision now lies with Pakistan that whether to treat its largest province with massive resources on a national security, linguistic and ethnic basis or utilize the resources for its development. Now, with multiple crises converging all at the same time on Pakistan there is a realization that the national security narrative is not sustainable anymore.

In dealing with the issue of the TTP and other Pak-Afghan issues Pakistan has tripped many times. Afghanistan also have had its shortcomings in them. However, all issues can be resolved if they are looked at from the perspective of national strategy. Unfortunately, Pakistan also has not reformed its police yet, which is the first line of defense. While Pakistan can enumerate many of its problems, it has not provided any solutions yet.

Moreover, Central Asia has huge opportunities if it connects to South Asia. For this connection, Afghanistan is of critical importance. There is also a realization in the current leadership of Afghanistan about this. Besides this, the Afghan Taliban have passed their budget and are negotiating on the women and human rights issues with the international community. The US is still connected with Afghanistan. However, from the American point of view Pakistan's utility has plummeted in this whole scenario. Also, China is investing in Afghanistan and has signed around 20 to 25 agreements with the current government since its coming into power.

---

**Moderator:** Can you please shed light on trade issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan after Taliban seized power in Kabul in August 2021?

---

### Adnan Aamir, Quetta-based journalist and contributing writer for the Nikkei Asia

Security officials for the last 15 years had been claiming that the law-and-order situation in Balochistan would improve if Taliban came into power. The situation is completely different, contrary to that claim, since August 15, 2021.



Adnan Aamir

There can be no meaningful activity in the southwestern province due to on-going insurgency with addition of the TTP factor.

The Islamic militants, including TTP, and separatists have increased their attacks in Balochistan since Taliban seized power. The TTP had not only increased its attacks in Baloch areas but also for the first time, it has started carrying out terror activities in Pashtoon areas of the province. "This is a new trend." It is being believed that TTP did not use to attack Pashtoon areas as families of Afghan Taliban had been living there. These families have now gone back to Afghanistan.

The TTP even has increased its footprints in Baloch areas as at least three local Baloch militant groups have recently joined it. The banned group is promoting its political agenda in the province by showing its sympathies for the people of Balochistan and wants to increase its presence in the province. TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud in this regard has been making strong messaging. The TTP also wants to make Balochistan its stronghold like KP.

There can be no meaningful activity in the southwestern province due to on-going insurgency with addition of the TTP factor. Pakistan till yet has not started some significant trade with Afghanistan except Afghan transit trade that continues like the past.

**Moderator:** Moderator: Can you let us know about coverage of Pakistani media on Pak-Afghan relations, and why did the incumbent government disown the peace talks process initiated by the last government with the TTP?

**Aoun Sahi, Director Current Affairs Pakistan Television**

The government had requested the interim Taliban government through Foreign Office for a permission to establish bureaus of state-owned PTV, Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) and Radio Pakistan in Kabul but faced a cold response from the other side. Taliban put a condition that Pakistan should recognize their government first if the latter wants to open offices of its state-owned media in Afghanistan.

The Taliban did not want coverage of Afghanistan, in any way. Afghan journalists living in Pakistan do not want to report on Afghan issues, fearing that Taliban would target their families.



Aoun Sahi

The Afghan Taliban wants to improve its relations with the US on the issue of curbing Islamic State (IS) or Daesh in their war-torn country.

It is wrong to expect that the Taliban would not spread their specific philosophy of a certain school of Islamic thought on the basis on which they seized power. Similarly, it is not possible for the Taliban to withdraw their support from TTP, which was their rally in the war of terror. The Afghan Taliban wants to improve its relations with the US on the issue of curbing Islamic State (IS) or Daesh in their war-torn country. Any development at this front would not be good news for China, Iran, and Pakistan in the region.

There are reports that TTP and Baloch insurgents have entered into some operational agreements. The TTP is supporting Baloch insurgents by providing them safe havens in Afghanistan and both have entered into some joint training programmes.

Afghanistan was one of the central points of the agenda when Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir visited China in April this year. The new military leadership has disowned the talks process initiated with the TTP by its successors.

There is confusion in Pakistan who would make a new Afghan policy as the previous one failed to produce results. It is also unclear who is now leading any Afghan policy. So far, there is

no Special representative of Pakistan for Afghanistan since March when Mohammad Sadiq quit his position.

**Moderator:** Mr Taj, we will want to know your views on whether or not mainstream political parties are serious to resolve the law-and-order problems of Balochistan. A participant has informed that the situation has worsened after the Taliban takeover.

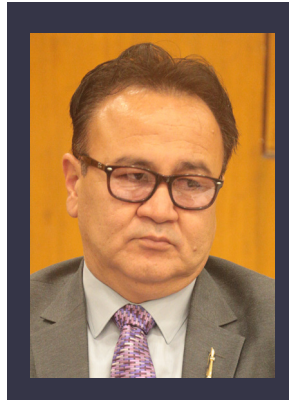
**Ali Baba Taj, Educationist and social scientist**

Afghanistan is still a “buffer zone” and efforts are underway that it remains the same. For enhancing trade, first issues of Pak-Afghan border are needed to be looked into thoroughly.

Afghan refugees have been staying in other countries including Iran, India, Bangladesh, and Central Asian States but “effects of jihad” reached Pakistan only. He added that they would have to understand the cultural roots of terrorism.

There are serious apprehensions over the Taliban government’s decision to deprive women

of their right to education, and employment in both the public and private sectors. Many “so-called liberal segments” of the society in Pakistan are not raising their voice over the injustice being done to Afghan women. Many Afghan women are the only breadwinners of their families. There is a need for bringing an inclusive government in Afghanistan as Afghan Taliban have not included all groups in the interim set up.



ALI BABA TAJ

Afghan refugees have been staying in other countries including Iran, India, Bangladesh, and Central Asian States but “effects of jihad” reached Pakistan only.

Pakistan should review its Afghan foreign policy “technically” in the light of ground realities. Pakistan has been affected the most due to the spillover of Afghanistan despite the former gave many sacrifices, for the latter, including providing Afghan people with shelter and health facilities.

**Moderator:** What is the security situation in Balochistan after Taliban took power in Kabul and what was the role of political parties in the peace talks process with TTP?

**Hafiz Munir Ahmed, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) leader from Quetta**

Asia’s peace is linked with that of Afghanistan. There is a need to include people of Balochistan and KP in the decision-making process through public representatives. The decisions are taken somewhere else, and policies are made after bypassing the opinion of the common masses and political parties. After policies are made, powerful quarters want from political parties to get the same implemented.



Hafiz Munir Ahmed

Pakistan’s Afghan policy should be led by civilian set up and parliament. Political parties should be given an opportunity to make such a policy.

Military operations in KP and Balochistan are not a sustainable solution to the problem. Any new military operation in KP would prove counterproductive and this strategy to restore peace in the province would not succeed. The long-term solution is to give due rights to the people of Balochistan.

Terrorism cannot be curbed in Balochistan despite construction of a fence on Pak-Afghan border that cost the national kitty billions of rupees. To restore peace in the province, give financial resources to it and end deprivations of its people.

Political parties in Pakistan were never given authority to make domestic and foreign policies. Pakistan’s Afghan policy should be led by civilian set up and parliament. Political parties should be given an opportunity to make such a policy.

Afghan Taliban are still in the transition phase and the expectations are wrong that they would set things in the right direction in a short period of time.

**Moderator:** How does the Taliban-led interim government in Kabul see those problems of Pakistan linked with its country?

**Moderator:** Muhammad Israr Madani, President International Research Council for Religious Affairs (IRCRA)

According to a senior functionary of the Taliban government, Al-Qaeda, Daesh and TTP are not their products, but they inherited their presence in Afghanistan.

Taliban say that they would need time to settle these issues, and it is wrong to expect from them they would do this in months or a year. The Taliban official I cited earlier said that a strong anti-Pakistan sentiment has developed in Afghanistan, which is now reflected in their local politics and media. He said that Kandahar, which is the power hub of Taliban, is no more sensitive towards Islamabad.

There is a need to enhance people-to-people contacts and trade to decrease hostility of Afghans towards Pakistan.

On average 30,000 Afghan people cross Chaman border daily and they have many reservations about immigration policies of Pakistan. Local Afghans living in border areas should be given access to some facilities like health and business in Pakistan if they give assurance that there would be no cross-border terrorism.

There is a need for religious diplomacy and religious scholars should be involved (to improve relations with Afghanistan) as neither the international community nor Pakistan are making any progress at this front. As many as 30 percent cabinet members and key functionaries of Taliban government have studied from Darul Uloom Haqqania in Akora Khattak and many others have studies in other seminaries of Pakistan, which makes the case for initiating religious diplomacy.

A meeting among religious Pakistan's scholar Mufti Taqi Usmani, Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, and TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud was a big breakthrough but it didn't get attention of quarters concerned.

Pakistan should make its border management policy people-friendly to facilitate the Afghan people. It should hold talks with Afghanistan continuously on different issues and these should not be limited to a single sitting. The agenda of such talks should be clear. International engagement with the Afghan Taliban is very necessary to move forward.

**Safdar Sial, Joint Director PIPS (Concluding remarks)**

Pakistan's engagement with the Taliban-led interim government in Kabul is the ultimate solution of all problems. The civilian government in Pakistan should take the ownership of Afghan policy, which should be led by parliament, and security agencies must have their input in it. The Taliban also want to initiate engagement with the civilian government.



Muhammad Israr Madani

On average 30,000 Afghan people cross Chaman border daily and they have many reservations about immigration policies of Pakistan.