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One-Day Roundtable: Afghanistan Peace Talks: Challenges and Prospects



L-R: Ambassador (R) Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhary, H.E. Mr. Yao Jing, with Acting President, Brig. (R) Mohammad Mehoob Qadir and Lt. Gen. (R) Asif Yasin Malik

A One-Day Roundtable on the subject 'Afghanistan Peace Talks: Challenges and Prospects' was organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) on 30 January 2019. The proceedings of the Roundtable were conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

Eminent discussants included:

1. H.E. Mr. Yao Jing, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Embassy of the People's Republic of China to Pakistan
2. Ambassador (R) Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhary, Director General, Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS), Islamabad

3. Lt. Gen. (R) Asif Yasin Malik, Former Defence Secretary, Government of Pakistan.

The roundtable also included senior general officers, ambassadors, diplomats, academicians, members of civil service and IPRI Scholars. They deliberated on how regional dynamics are changing in favour of peace in Afghanistan as major stakeholders are becoming serious in discussing its prospects, mutual concerns and future plans, which ultimately places high expectations on the peace talks. As talks progress, China hopes that while the US is negotiating with the Taliban, concerns of the National Unity

Government (NUG) will also be addressed by the major stakeholders. Trump's strategy for South Asia hints at the US' designs to give India a greater role in Afghanistan.

The participants reviewed the seven areas under discussion in the negotiations, namely, withdrawal of troops (with or without consensus); ceasefire by the national forces and warring factions; formation of interim political setup; prisoners' swap; counterterrorism and delisting; enforcement mechanism of deal; and creation of broad regional consensus.

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Afghanistan Peace Talks: Challenges and Prospects



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They also highlighted the following challenges:

- sidelining of the National Unity Government;
- possibility of the use of Afghan soil for proxy warfare in the future; &
- actual composition of the interim political setup.

The roundtable noted that the peace process and its developments will be a challenge for India's policymakers; and the country's role in Afghanistan is part of its plans for strategic encirclement of Pakistan.

The speakers further pointed out that those in the Afghan government have nothing in common with ordinary Afghans as they are the beneficiaries of international assistance and war in the country. The possible withdrawal (with or without consensus) are apparently bargaining chips for the talks to happen between the US and Taliban. There is a need to consider the impact of this withdrawal on the domestic audience (of the US) and how it could turn out for Trump's future in the White House.

Recommendations

1. There are fears that a hasty withdrawal of the US forces may lead to anarchy and factional fighting in Afghanistan. The US should undertake 'responsible withdrawal' as any precipitate one will have regional ramifications, with Pakistan facing its maximum spillover effects.
2. In order to set a positive course of

action, a guaranteed mechanism for possible peace agreement needs to be established with a group of guarantors in which countries like the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, China, Russia and Pakistan should be included. The US should reach out to all the regional stakeholders and disclose contours of the future agreement for better understanding, which is an essential requirement for a structured peace process.

3. A settlement at this point would require using the influence of the global and regional stakeholders for convincing the Taliban to stay engaged and start talks with the Kabul government.

The US should undertake 'responsible withdrawal' of its forces from Afghanistan as any precipitate withdrawal will have regional ramifications, with Pakistan facing its maximum spillover effects.

4. In order to ensure stability, the Afghan Taliban have to cooperate for an inclusive political settlement — one where all regional actors are also on board. That is why there is also a need for a regional agreement guaranteeing non-interference in Afghanistan.
5. Pakistan aspires for a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, which should be demonstrated regardless of

which government is in power in Kabul. A 'stable and neutral government' is in Pakistan's interest. Therefore, Islamabad should also proactively take steps for fostering friendly relations with the Kabul government.

6. The 'soft power' of Pakistan is shrinking in Afghanistan. The current dynamics require proactive diplomacy and investment in soft power to assure the people of Afghanistan that Pakistan is not condescending towards them.

The end picture in Afghanistan must be a reasonable, solid peace deal followed by consensus based 'responsible withdrawal' and reasonably guaranteed political setup.

7. The present peace dialogue is a positive step. Pakistan has facilitated such a dialogue process in the past and should continue its support to facilitate diplomatic arrangements in the future as well.
8. The Afghan security situation keeps worsening as a result of all sides' (Washington, the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan government) simultaneous attempt to negotiate from a position of strength. A ceasefire requires that these three actors should stop pursuing the 'talk and fight strategy'. In this regard, a prerequisite for successive peace talks could be mutual ceasefire agreement between all these parties.

The formation of an interim political setup would be a challenge after the US forces withdraw from Afghanistan. The consultation of all stakeholders, including the National Unity Government, should be taken into account as a crucial element for a stable and peaceful country.

Networking Visits:

School of International Advanced Studies, Johns Hopkins University, USA



A 10-member student delegation led by Dr. Joshua T. White, Associate Professor of Practice and Fellow from the School of International Advanced Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, Maryland, USA visited IPRI on 16 January 2019 for a discussion on Pakistan's current security environment, with a particular focus on energy security; the ongoing US-Afghanistan peace talks with the Taliban; and Pakistan-US relations. The discussion was held under the Chatham House Rule. Salient points of interest included the following:

- The US views Asia holistically as an integrated region, rather than as a divided one. Therefore, it has configured the 'Indo-Pacific' into a single broader zone, which includes regions from East Asia to the Horn of Africa.
- China's novel economic statecraft in the form of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) took the US by surprise. As a result, there is a heated debate in Washington regarding how Beijing

is likely to take advantage of the BRI by spreading its influence within the Eurasian heartland, and how the US can articulate its concerns over critical components of this strategic initiative.

- The US view about South Asia has changed due to dramatic reduction in terror threats emerging from the region towards its mainland. For the most part, Pakistan is recognized for shouldering its responsibilities in the global War on Terror.
- There is profound uncertainty about Afghanistan with respect to President Trump's erratic decisions as well as inherent problems within Kabul due to which over the short-term bilateral relations between Pakistan and the US will mainly revolve around the Afghan question. Pakistan can help the US in facilitating the Afghan peace process.
- Pakistan does not condition its bilateral relations through the lens of any third country. It treats its engagements in a sovereign and pragmatic manner.

For the Afghan peace process to work, it must be recognized that the road to Kabul passes through Khyber, therefore, Pakistan must be accorded its due weight; the throne in Kabul is a Pashtoon right, in that, blue blood Pashtoon; no proxy can rule the country; peace is never absolute, it is always relative; Afghans have their own conflict resolution mechanism, which is free of time constraints.

Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

A 35-member student delegation from the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Peshawar, Pakistan visited IPRI on 25 January 2019 led by Dr. Rabia Fayyaz and Dr. Imran Ahmad Sajid.

Brig. (R) Mohammad Mehboob Qadir, Acting President IPRI, welcomed the delegation and delivered the welcome address. Mr. Adeel Mukhtar, Assistant Research Officer, presented a brief overview of 'Pakistan's Foreign Policy Outlook'.

Salient points of discussion included:

- Security and development are interlinked, with the former having evolved in the post-Cold War era. Currently, states are emphasizing 'Comprehensive Security' which includes

border security, economic development, strengthened export industry, human and food security, and poverty alleviation.

- Expected increase of Chinese businessmen, professionals and workforce in the country vis-à-vis the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) should not be seen as a 'cultural invasion'. This term is being used by vested lobbies to promote negativity about the project. Over the past centuries, this region has hosted people from Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. This inflow did not materially change the culture of this region, rather it enriched its society and people.



Asghar Ali Shad
Research Fellow

"Sikhon Ko RSS Mein Zam Karne Ki Sae!"

Nawa-i-Waqt

"Pak Fauj...Amn-e-Aalam Ki Daai"

Roznama Pakistan

"Qomi Zarurat...National Action Plan!"

Roznama Pakistan

"Bharat...Hajoomi Qatal ki Baheemana Rawish (1 & 2)"

Roznama Pakistan



Khalid Hussain Chandio
Research Fellow

"The Patriot's Dilemma"

Daily Times



Muhammad Nawaz Khan
Research Officer

"Pakistan and Central Asia Relations: An Analysis"

Regional Rapport



Amna Ejaz Rafi
Assistant Research Officer

"Pakistan and Its Villains"

Daily Times



Umar Farooq Khan
Assistant Research Officer

"The Plight of Kashmiris and

Western Apathy"

Daily Times



Sajjad Haider
Assistant Research Officer

"Kashmiris Struggle for Freedom"

The Nation



Usama Nizamani
Junior Consultant

"Artificial Intelligence and E-Governance"

The Nation



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**Institutional Collaboration:
Rasanah (International Institute for
Iranian Studies) Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**



A delegation from Riyadh-based think tank Rasanah (International Institute for Iranian Studies) visited IPRI on 17 January 2019. The delegation included Ambassador (R) Dr. Ali S. Awadh Asseri, Board Member of Trustees, Rasanah (IIIS); Dr. Mohammad Al Sulami, Founder, Rasanah (IIIS), and Bandar Abdul Aziz Al Zamel, Researcher, Rasanah (IIIS).

The think tank expressed interest in furthering cooperation with IPRI in areas of research and joint event collaboration in order to understand perspectives from Pakistan regarding the immediate and broader region. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two is now in the pipeline.

The delegation highlighted that Saudi Arabia attaches significant importance to Pakistan's economic and security well-being and is interested in strengthening the country's economic base.

Acting President, IPRI informed the delegation about the importance of strong third party mediation through a group of facilitators/mediators in order to bring peace and stability in the region. He also informed the delegates about the efforts to promote peace with India, particularly, the opening ceremony and ongoing development of Kartarpur Corridor to facilitate visa-free entry of Sikh pilgrims from India to Pakistan.

**CALL FOR PAPERS IPRI JOURNAL
2019-20**

The biannual IPRI Journal welcomes original high-quality papers/studies, review articles and book reviews which debate contemporary international relations issues and ideas of academic relevance.

Important Dates

- For the Summer 2019 issue: End of March
- For the Winter 2020 issue: End of September

Submission Guidelines for authors are available at:
<http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Guidelines-Contributors-IPRI-Journal-1-August-2018.pdf>

Submission Address
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