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Symposium

Intra-Afghan Dialogue: A New Hope?

The United States-Taliban peace agreement signed in Doha on 29 February 2020, despite its significance, cannot be deemed substantial enough for creating sustainable peace in war-ravaged Afghanistan.



Afghanistan is home to various ethnicities and has witnessed a history of insurrections and presently, lack of cordial relations exist amongst different political entities of the country with no common agendas to converge on. Afghan soil has also been used as a hotbed of proxy warfare by India which could very well jeopardize the intra-Afghan dialogue. Peace settlement cannot materialize if all stakeholders do not accept the legitimacy of their political opponents. Various political groups might appear to be a motley crew, but they are the only way forward to form a grander National Unity Government.

Given these complex and multifaceted issues, the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) organized a Symposium on *Intra-Afghan Dialogue: A New Hope?* on

11 March 2020. Eminent speakers included former Pakistani ambassadors and diplomats. They highlighted that peace in Afghanistan may not suit New Delhi's ambitions for regional hegemony and can cause it to continue intervening in the politics and decision-making of the country. The diplomats cautioned that an intra-Afghan dialogue is the only hope for millions of citizens as well as the refugees hoping to return to their homeland. Such a scenario still seems implausible, but is not entirely impossible.

Ambassador Vice Admiral (R) Khan Hasham bin Saddique, President IPRI, welcoming senior diplomats, academicians, and correspondents of various media outlets, briefly pointed to possible future scenarios including Afghanistan undergoing institutional transition and forming a representative government, as well as falling into a civil war, which would have severe consequences for Pakistan. The foremost being the fresh influx of refugees in the country. He stressed that Pakistan wishes to see a peaceful and stable Afghanistan which is essential for economic integration and prosperity of the region. He hoped that broad-based intra-Afghan dialogue would lead to consensus of political dispensation in accordance with the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan.



Discussing the "US-Taliban Peace Agreement: An Analysis and Future Prognosis," **Ambassador (R) Riaz Muhammad Khan** wished that external actors would give space to Afghan factions to work on their differences. He cautioned that just like many other talks

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Intra-Afghan Dialogue: A New Hope?

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before the Doha agreement, it is unclear whether this one will culminate into something positive.



Outlining the “Complexities of Peace and Conflict Dynamics in Afghanistan: Future Scenarios and Pakistan’s Response,” **Ambassador (R) Ayaz Wazir**

opined that there is mistrust between Afghans themselves, and until they all forego personal interest and make public interest key for political dispensation, it will be difficult to achieve results.

There has been a clear disconnect between the Taliban and the Afghan government’s understanding which has been bridged partially through the post-agreement joint declaration after addressing the concerns of President Ashraf Ghani.

Until all Afghans forego personal interest and make public interest key for political dispensation, it will be difficult to achieve results.

He also pointed out that the presence of Daesh also poses a grave challenge to the peace and stability of Afghanistan, as there could be an influx of hardline militants associated with the Taliban and other insurgent outfits, who reject negotiations with the US and the government in Kabul.

The Afghan peace process should not be held hostage to spoilers’ agenda.



On the issue of “Intra-Afghan Dialogue and the Role of Pakistan and Regional Powers,” **Ambassador (R) Syed Abrar Hussain** highlighted that Pakistan wants a stable and peaceful Afghanistan and stressed that no external power should meddle in the country’s affairs. He was of the view that Afghans should solve their problems in accordance with their own traditions.

There should be no interference from Pakistan in Kabul’s political affairs. Whatever course of action, the Afghans agree on, Islamabad should be the first to recognize and respect it.



The ambassadors agreed that Pakistan would welcome any peace plan that is based on resolving the structural issues underlying the conflict. Pakistan’s economy has suffered immensely since 2001 due to the War on Terror resulting from the Afghan conflict, and would be the largest beneficiary of this peace process.

In the Question/Answer session, it was also pointed out that although peace in Afghanistan is partly contingent on the exit of US troops seen by Afghans as “foreign interference”, the pre and post-US presidential election in November may also change Washington’s strategic interests. These interests include keeping a watchful eye on Chinese and Russian expansion in the region.



Recommendations

1. Afghans should resolve their conflicts in accordance with their own traditions without external interference.
2. ISIS/Daesh should be declared a common enemy as there could be a surge in terrorist attacks in order to magnify the trust deficit and derail the peace process.
3. All stakeholders must remain vigilant of any regional players, especially India, which might jeopardize intra-Afghan dialogue.
4. Afghan politicians must be wary of issuing irresponsible statements which may disrupt efforts to find a solution to this twenty-year old conflict, as well as accept the legitimacy of their political opponents.

Impact Analysis of COVID-19: Pakistan & Beyond

IPRI has been closely monitoring and analysing how policymakers from Pakistan and other countries, are organizing their healthcare and economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have also been looking at how communities, families, educational, charitable and religious institutions are adapting to new ways of living under its threat. This virus has also changed the way media, especially social media functions, as well as upended politics, security and foreign affairs. Here's a bird's eye view of how:



China's Blanket Measures and Critique from Media Outlets by **Hamzah Rifaat Hussain**, Assistant Research Officer

Chinese authorities are being targeted with criticism over their inability to curb the coronavirus epidemic. The regular coverage of the official response has been largely negative and fails to underline the measures taken by China to curb the epidemic. China's ability to deal with its internal disasters is based on the Communist Party of China taking the lead role in the policy-making process. It is within this context that Western criticism could be viewed as targeting China politically. Furthermore, positive coverage over measures taken by the Chinese government, which include imposing a blanket ban on all wild animal sales and consumption across the country, has been absent in many Western media outlets. Trust in Chinese authorities to manage the situation is missing from those who continue to oppose China or the policies of its government. A state which suffers greatly from a dire nationwide crisis requires an international response which is based on empathy and humanitarian assistance with considerable acceptance of the measures being undertaken and the enormity of the task at hand.

Daily Times, 1 March 2020, <<https://tinyurl.com/va7p9tf>>



The Wisdom behind China's COVID-19 gains by **Hannan Hussain**, Assistant Research Officer

Fewer new local cases of the novel coronavirus and decrease in trend of local transmission have demonstrated the effectiveness of China's fight against COVID-19. These developments are complemented by drastic slowdowns in death rates, and a relaxation in quarantine measures across Wuhan. China's transition in its progress on COVID-19 has been the direct result of precise, target-oriented measures including the prioritization of first-responders and critical health infrastructure, bolstering the supply side of public health; development of a strong government-academia rapport; accelerating contributions to the existing body of COVID-19 research; paving the way for informed policy interventions; sustained economic stimulus; and implementing quarantine measures in a way that does not fracture social interaction.

China Global Television Network, 23 March 2020, <<https://tinyurl.com/vkoetx8>>



The Politics of Coronavirus by **Muhammad Firas Shams**, Media Coordinator and Protocol Officer

The outbreak of COVID-19 is fuelling right-wing nationalism and xenophobia, and thus, proving to be a hindrance for countries to solely focus on containing the virus. China is being blamed especially by the US, for launching a biological weapon against the Western world. Moreover, it is being probed for not being transparent on the actual number of cases and provenance of the disease. Europe's populist right is using the virus to crackdown on migrants and close down borders. Given the gravity of the situation at hand, accusations based on obstinate prejudice is not what the world needs to focus on. This path of confrontation will lead to further de-globalization, protectionism, tariffs, and closing down of borders, which would only aggravate the pandemic. The way forward is through international collaboration.

The Fortress, 25 March 2020, <<https://tinyurl.com/r9puzhx>>

Coronavirus Origin: The Politics Which Will Allow More Viruses to Spread by **Muhammad Firas Shams**, Media Coordinator and Protocol Officer

China is being criticised for the provenance of coronavirus. Its squalid wet markets are the perfect breeding ground for the spread of such a deadly pandemic, and both politics and poverty supported such markets. While large corporations controlled production of popular foods like poultry, peasant households, in order to eke out a living, turned to wild animals. The products, generated by the industry, are marketed for their various qualities, making them quite popular with the Chinese elite.

Global Village Space, 25 March 2020, <<https://tinyurl.com/vkoetx8>>



Can COVID-19 bring US and Iran closer? by **Khurram Abbas Minhas**, Research Officer

The ongoing COVID-19 has revealed complex manifestations of international politics. At a time when nations are seeking international cooperation to fight against the deadly virus, Iran has rejected offers of assistance from US and has failed to use the opportunity to integrate the country into regional and international cooperation. The Iranian foreign policy, known for its pragmatism, is seen to be divided. The attitude of the clerics needs to be more realistic, logical and rational, given their statements are considered final say in Iran. Both, US and Iran, need to play their part. US needs to undertake measures to mitigate mistrust, and Iranian leadership needs to understand any policy that does not cater lives of its citizens will be widely unpopular among the masses, and the current situation demands a pragmatic approach.

Global Village Space, 26 March 2020, <<https://tinyurl.com/ro7powj>>

Newspaper Articles

Brig. (R) Raashid Wali Janjua Director Research

1. "Tale of an Unsung Hero"
2. "Militarisation of Space by India"
3. "FATF: The Hanging Sword"
4. "Afghan Peace — Still in Limbo"
Pakistan Observer

Ambassador (R) Asif Durrani
Senior Research Fellow
"Afghan Peace Agreement: The Real Battle Begins Now"
Daily Times

Dr Talat Farooq
Senior Consultant
"Pursuing the Dream"
SouthAsia Magazine

Khalid Chandio
Research Fellow
"Will Deal Win Trump Re-election?"
Daily Times

Muhammad Nawaz Khan Research Officer

1. "Psychiatric and Societal Impact of Terrorism"
Daily Times
2. "Shared Waters, Shared Responsibilities"
Regional Rapport

Khurram Abbas Research Officer

1. "Politics of Mediation"
Daily Times
2. "Can Covid-19 Bring US and Iran Closer?"
Global Village Space

Amna Ejaz Rafi Assistant Research Officer

1. "Pakistan Zindabad Slogan"
Pakistan Observer
2. "Internal Strength and Political Say"
Daily Times

Adeel Mukhtar Mirza Assistant Research Officer

1. "Fallout of Citizenship Amendment Act on India & Pakistan"
Daily Times
2. "With Longing for Kashmiris' Listening Silence"
Geopolitica

Muhammad Firas Shams Media Coordinator and Protocol Officer

1. "Coronavirus Origin: The Politics Which Will Allow More Viruses to Spread"
Global Village Space
2. "The Politics of Coronavirus"
The Fortress

Hannan Hussain
Assistant Research Officer
"The Wisdom behind China's COVID-19 Gains"
China Global Television Network (CGTN)

Hamzah Rifaat Hussain Assistant Research Officer

1. "China's Blanket Measures and Critique from Media Outlets"
Daily Times
2. "BJP, RSS and Gujarat 2.0 in the Delhi Riots"
3. "Trump and a Crippled Iran – Capitalism Trumps Humanitarian Concerns"
China Global Television

IPRI on PTV News Program 45 Minutes Pakistan and Blue Economy



Ambassador Vice Admiral (R) Khan Hasham bin Saddique, President IPRI, **Dr Syed Anwar**, President Maritime Study Forum, and **Dr Aneel Salman**, Professor, COMSATS University, discussed the potential of Blue Economy in Pakistan on the PTV News program *45 Minutes* with **Naheed Chaudhary**. They highlighted that while 2020 has been declared as the year of "Blue Economy", there is no general public or policy level awareness on the issue since there is a dichotomy of policies and on-ground realities. President IPRI pointed out that 2020 would be a year of opportunity for Pakistan if the transition towards a blue economy was undertaken through proper planning and prioritization. For this, strong leadership will be required to bring relevant stakeholders on board to develop, spearhead and mainstream blue economy initiatives into public policy and development planning, he stressed.

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