



CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES

FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN AND REGIONAL STABILITY

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES & WAY FORWARD



DIALOGUE ANALYSIS

CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES

September 2021

All rights reserved.

No part of this Report may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission.

Opinions expressed are those of the speaker/s and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre.

President

Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd)

Event Coordinator

Syed Muhammad Ali

Senior Editor

Sarah Siddiq Aneel

Rapporteurs

Zuhaib Anwar, Amna Tauhidi, Ali Haider Saleem

M. Mubashir Ehsan & Moiz Khan

Formatting & Title Design

Mariam Siddiqui

All correspondence pertaining to this Dialogue Analysis Report should be addressed to CASS, through post or email at the following address:

CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES (CASS)

Air Commodore Tanveer Piracha, Director Coord & Admin

Old Airport Road, Islamabad, Pakistan

Tel: +92 051 5405011

Institutional URL: <https://casstt.com/>

Twitter: @CassThinkers

Facebook: cass.thinkers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY..... | 5 |
| KEY TAKEAWAYS | 8 |
| PROPOSED WAY FORWARD..... | 9 |
| SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS | 10 |
| <i>Dr Fazl-ul-Hadi Wazeen, Professor, Salam University, Afghanistan</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Dr Long Xingchun, President, Chengdu Institute of World Affairs, China ...</i> | <i>12</i> |
| <i>Mr Leonid Savin, Geopolitical Analyst & Chief Editor, Geopolitica, Russia</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Dr Syed Qandil Abbas, Assistant Professor, Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan.....</i> | <i>16</i> |
| KEYNOTE ADDRESS | 18 |
| <i>Dr Moeed Yusuf, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan</i> | <i>18</i> |
| CONCLUDING REMARKS..... | 20 |
| <i>Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), President, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Pakistan</i> | <i>20</i> |
| ANNEXURE..... | 23 |
| Press Release | 23 |

INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS) organized an International Webinar on 10 September 2021. The topic of the discussion was '*Future of Afghanistan and Regional Stability: Challenges, Opportunities & Way Forward.*' The key areas focused on were:



The panelists included Dr Fazl-ul-Hadi Wazeen, Professor at the Salam University, Afghanistan; Dr Long Xingchun, President, Chengdu Institute of World Affairs, China; Mr Leonid Savin, geopolitical analyst and Chief Editor, Geopolitica, Russia; Dr Syed Qandil Abbas, School of Politics & International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan.

Dr Moeed Yusuf, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan delivered the *Keynote Address*. The *Concluding Address* was given by President CASS Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd). Mr Syed Muhammad Ali, Director, Nuclear and Strategic Affairs at CASS, moderated the discussion.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the webinar on *'Future of Afghanistan and Regional Stability: Challenges, Opportunities, & Way Forward'* was to engage experts from key regional countries to comprehensively analyze the emerging geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic trends after the US-NATO military withdrawal from Afghanistan and share ideas that could help promote regional security, stability, and progress.

The panel consisted of eminent experts from China, Russia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan while National Security Advisor **Dr Moeed Yusuf** shared Pakistan's national and regional security concerns regarding Afghanistan. He urged the international community not to abandon Afghanistan and engage with the new government in order to help it govern well and rebuild the country. He also stated that no state had suffered more than Pakistan as a direct consequence of Afghanistan's instability.

The Afghan conflict has made Pakistan lose over 80,000 lives, face USD 150 billion in economic damages and led to the displacement of over 3.5 million people. Therefore, it is imperative for Pakistan to seek international assistance to help the suffering people of Afghanistan, to build a stable and normal nation-state, and also reduce the renewed risk of migration and terrorism.

President of the Chengdu Institute of World Affairs **Dr Long Xingchun** congratulated the Afghan nation on becoming independent again and appreciated Pakistan's role in spearheading regional diplomacy aimed at promoting stability in Afghanistan.

Future extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan would bring prosperity and development to not only Afghanistan but also the entire region.

According to Russian expert **Mr Leonid Savin**, the Afghan Taliban's victory would impact global politics. He supported the idea of future cooperation between major regional players such as Pakistan, China, Iran, and Central Asian countries but said that Russia did not appreciate Western role in the future of Afghanistan.

Russia can consider recognizing Afghan Taliban's government if China recognizes it first.

Professor Dr Fazl-ul-Hadi Wazeen from Salam University was of the view that the new government in Kabul must be given a chance to rule by the international community. However, he urged the Afghan Taliban to keep their promises, adopt a reconciliatory approach and refrain from the use of force.

Afghans and the international community will have to work together to convert the emerging challenges into opportunities.

Dr Syed Qandil Abbas from Quaid-i-Azam University, an expert on Iran affairs, discussed how both Islamabad and Tehran expect an inclusive, permanent Afghan government in the future. According to him, Tehran viewed US military presence in Afghanistan with concern, but considered the current interim government as not being inclusive enough because of the total 34 members, the three non-Pashtuns are also from Taliban ranks.

An inclusive and permanent government will help reduce the risk of civil war in

President CASS **Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd)** chaired the International Webinar. In his *Concluding Address*, he urged the world that after trying everything, peace should be given a chance in Afghanistan and the region. He expressed deep concern at the lack of understanding and commitment by the international community towards the long-standing suffering and deepening humanitarian crisis of the Afghan people. He also emphasized that regional countries and neighbors, in particular, have a common and greater interest in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and regional connectivity projects such as CPEC could herald economic development and prosperity for the entire region.

It is essential for the international community in general, and neighbors in particular, to support Afghanistan through immediate food relief and other critical humanitarian supplies, diplomatic recognition, unfreezing Afghan foreign financial assets and reconstruction of the war-ravaged country.

The webinar generated thought-provoking discussion during the Q&A session in which the Chinese expert voiced concern at the negative role played by India within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and suggested building a new regional arrangement to facilitate regional cooperation that does not include New Delhi.

The webinar was moderated by **Syed Muhammad Ali**, Director Nuclear & Strategic Affairs at CASS. He said that Afghanistan had remained a victim of conflicts and abandonment.

The Afghan people deserve international help to rebuild a stable nation-state, in return for a security commitment by the new government that Afghanistan's territory would not be used against any other country.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The world must think about the cost of abandoning Afghanistan. The only country which bore the maximum brunt of the international abandonment of Afghanistan, and the subsequent War on Terror, was Pakistan. It forced the latter to face an onslaught of terrorism, sacrifice more than 80,000 lives, lose more than USD 150 billion and bear the internal displacement of about 3.5 million people. However, this time, the spillover of negative effects would not remain limited to the region.
- Major powers should not intervene in Afghanistan's internal affairs and must respect its territorial integrity and sovereignty. They should also respect the choice of Afghan people about how they want to govern their own country.
- Afghans and the international community should work together to turn impending challenges into opportunities. Security should be the key focus, but it is important to consider other aspects of security as well such as human, economic and food security.
- The end of war in Afghanistan offers opportunities for trade and connectivity to the entire world, especially regional and neighboring states.
- Neighboring states need to play a leading role in rebuilding Afghanistan as this will benefit the entire region. In this regard, Pakistan is the most important country and should continue to play a constructive role.

“
The international community must engage with Afghan Taliban and unfreeze Afghan money/assets to help them govern their country better.
”



PROPOSED WAY FORWARD



If China recognizes the Afghan Taliban government, Russia is also likely to follow suit. Other regional countries are expected to subsequently follow the same path.

- The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) should be extended to Afghanistan. The Gwadar Port can play a vital role in strengthening the Afghan economy.
- Neighboring countries should play a leading role in strengthening Afghanistan economically and turning it into a bridge for regional trade and connectivity.
- The world needs to engage the Afghan Taliban by incentivizing them towards a governance model that is moderate and acceptable to all.
- For Pakistan, disengagement is impossible because instability in Afghanistan would spill over into the country's borders.
- Pakistan should coordinate with regional countries particularly to build consensus towards a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.
- The United States (US) has now made significant changes in its foreign policy, and can no longer act as the 'Global Sheriff.' Therefore, it is necessary to develop a collective security strategy within Eurasia and for Eurasia.
- The Taliban should keep their promises and bring peace and prosperity to the people of their country and help maintain peace in the region. In this regard, they should consider working towards building a more inclusive government to serve Afghanistan better.



SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Dr Fazl-ul-Hadi Wazeen, Professor, Salam University, Afghanistan

Afghanistan's Troubled Past

Prof. Dr Fazl-ul-Hadi Wazeen underlined the tumultuous history of Afghanistan since 1973 when Mohammed Daoud Khan led a military coup against his cousin, King Zahir Shah. He said that military rule was a sign of instability, and since then, Afghanistan had not been able to get back on track. This was followed by the Soviet invasion, Taliban's first regime, and subsequently, the chaotic US-led occupation. This entire period had an adverse impact on the political and economic situation of the country.

Prolonged turmoil allowed Afghanistan's territory to be used by proxy forces which further deteriorated the social landscape. The ones who suffered the most due to the instability were the ordinary citizens of Afghanistan.

Dawn of a New Era

Dr Wazeen was optimistic that the end of the war and withdrawal of foreign forces would finally usher an era of stability in Afghanistan. He noted that stability was necessary for the progress and development of the country and with Taliban scoring a decisive victory, there was great opportunity for the war-torn country. However, he warned that there would be plenty of internal and external challenges ahead so the Taliban leadership must collaborate closely with relevant stakeholders to address them.

In case, the international community and the new leadership fail to tackle the security and humanitarian challenges, then, the negative impact will be felt way beyond Afghanistan's borders.

He stated that efforts need to be put in place to turn impending challenges into opportunities. Dr Wazeen opined that the opportunities presented were not limited to the people of Afghanistan, but also offered prospects to other countries, especially neighboring states.

Implications of Taliban's Victory

According to Dr Wazeen, a massive change had occurred in Afghanistan which would not only have domestic but also regional and global ramifications. He stated that the present Taliban were different from those who ruled from 1996 to 2001, and the political situation in the country's neighborhood and beyond had altered significantly.

The current Taliban leaders have a better understanding of domestic and international affairs and their governance system will not be the same as before.

Thus, he stressed that the international community should not corner the new government in Kabul, rather, it should work collectively to improve the lives of the people of Afghanistan.

Turning Taliban Rule into Success

To bring positive change in society, Dr Wazeen emphasized that the Taliban should adopt a reconciliatory approach and refrain from using force against opponents and citizens.

The Taliban should keep their promises and deliver peace and prosperity to the people of the country and help maintain peace in the region.

He expressed his disappointment over the recently announced government and representatives as it was not inclusive and contrary to what the Taliban had earlier promised. He urged the Taliban to reconsider their decision to improve the political environment in the country.

Securing Afghanistan's Future

The speaker from Kabul emphasized the need to improve the security situation in the country while elaborating that the definition of security was much broader. He said that Afghan society was suffering in many ways and needed urgent assistance to overcome food, health, and economic challenges. Dr Wazeen added that the newly formed government should make it a priority to resolve the problems faced by the ordinary citizens of the country. In this regard, he suggested that the rulers should

make the security situation conducive for the civil society and the international community to play their part in the rebuilding process.

Dr Long Xingchun, President, Chengdu Institute of World Affairs, China

Eliminating Terrorism from Afghanistan

Dr Long Xingchun posited that the Taliban should keep their promise and not allow Afghan territory to be used against any other country. He said that certain foreign forces would continue to back terrorist outfits in the country to destabilize the region so the Taliban should take a firm stance against them. He called out the major powers to stop intervening in the internal affairs of Afghanistan; and was particularly critical of the US for supporting the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) which was involved in disrupting economic progress in China's Xinjiang province.

The international community should support Pakistan in its counterterrorism efforts as this would also benefit its neighboring and regional countries.

Rebuilding Afghanistan

Dr Xingchun stated that neighboring countries must play a leading role in rebuilding the country as development of Afghanistan would be beneficial for the entire region. In this regard, Pakistan was the most important country and should continue to play a constructive role.

A peaceful and stable Afghanistan is in Pakistan's interest so Pakistani leadership should work closely with its Afghan counterparts. Moreover, the international community should also step up its assistance for the people of Afghanistan as they are facing daunting challenges.

He urged the major economies to provide development assistance to Afghanistan, help train future workforce of the country and create economic opportunities for its citizens.

Extending CPEC to Afghanistan

The Chinese speaker was hopeful regarding the future economic prospects of Afghanistan. He underlined that the country was rich in natural resources and could attract foreign investors.

To tap its economic potential, extending CPEC to Afghanistan could be pivotal. The development of Gwadar Port will serve the economic interests of Afghanistan as well, and every country in the region will benefit if CPEC is successfully implemented.

Dr Xingchun suggested that neighboring countries should play their role in strengthening Afghanistan economically and turning it into a bridge for regional trade and connectivity. According to him, Afghanistan's geographical advantage needs to be capitalized for the betterment of the entire region. Pointing to the achievements of CPEC in Pakistan, he added that its extension into Afghanistan would also boost local manufacturing and construction sectors while generating numerous employment opportunities.

Economic Opportunities within Afghanistan under Taliban

Dr Xingchun congratulated the people of Afghanistan on the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and saw this as an opportunity for countries like China to extend their economic footprint in the country. He highlighted that Afghanistan had remained underdeveloped due to foreign occupation and now it required regional partnerships to assist in the recovery.

The Taliban have already welcomed Chinese investment to build infrastructure in the country and China is willing to offer its financial and technical support.

He shared that China was well-known for speedy development of infrastructure projects so the people of Afghanistan can receive meaningful assistance. He hoped that the US withdrawal would result in improvement in the security situation which would encourage investments from countries like China. In this regard, he urged China and Russia to use their influence in the UN Security Council to prevent other foreign countries from playing a destabilizing role in Afghanistan.

Role of SCO in Stabilizing Afghanistan

Addressing a question regarding regional forums, Dr Xingchun was of the view that all the neighboring states of Afghanistan were part of SCO and could contribute towards peace and stability of the country. However, India's role in this regard was not positive as it was playing a spoiler's role in case of Afghanistan. He proposed that considering India's negative role in Afghanistan, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan should form a new cooperation bloc beyond the forum of SCO, which should ensure peace and stability in the region and work to minimize India's role in destabilizing peace efforts in the region.

Supporting the Return of Afghan Refugees

According to Dr Xingchun, prolonged conflict in Afghanistan had forced many people to leave the country and seek refuge elsewhere. However, he said that he expected the situation to improve under Taliban regime and suggested that Afghan refugees should be encouraged to return to their country. He added that many of them had acquired skills and knowledge abroad and should play their part in the reconstruction of their country. He urged the international community to make arrangements for their swift return and help in their resettlement. This move would also be beneficial for host countries like Pakistan whose resources had been stretched over the last few decades.

Mr Leonid Savin, Geopolitical Analyst & Chief Editor, Geopolitica, Russia

Russia's 'Wait and Watch' Approach

In Mr Leonid Savin's analysis, Moscow preferred the 'wait and watch' attitude to avoid international criticism.

However, if China recognized the Taliban, Russia would also follow suit.

He explained how the media had presented the Afghan situation in Russia; and shared that Russian government officials provided abstract statements and there was no clear official proposal or document on the current situation. However, Russia had not condemned Taliban as a terrorist organization. Moreover, Mr Savin stated that Russia would wait and evaluate the global stance regarding the Taliban before making any

official statement. In addition, he said that Russia is not interested to cooperate with the West on the Afghan issue.

Moscow Prefers Regional Players over the West

Mr Leonid Savin expressed that Russia was eager to find solutions for peace and stability with the cooperation and mutual understanding of regional players such as Pakistan, China, and Iran (subsequently adding Turkey and Qatar in the list). His pessimism towards the West was based on a series of historical situations in which, according to him, the latter had been responsible for regional instability. According to the speaker, on 30 August 2021, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution [2593](#) on the situation in Afghanistan.

UN resolution 2593 is evidence that Western powers do not consider regional sensitivities while making crucial decisions for the region.

He said that there were now significant changes in the US foreign policy and they could no longer and do not want to be the 'global Sheriff.' Therefore, it was necessary to develop a collective security strategy within Eurasia and for Eurasia.

Addressing a question linked with this, Mr Savin pointed out that the UNSC had its limitations because the West vetoed Russian and Chinese proposals on several occasions. He regarded cooperation between Russia and China as very successful and suggested that Beijing and Moscow should explore more avenues of cooperation beyond the forum of UNSC, to address regional issues.

The UNSC is nothing more than an amalgamation of Western entities like the World Health Organization, World Bank and IMF which impose policies that are not in accordance with the interest of all stakeholders. There is need to develop a new platform which will ensure more cooperation between its member states, not only in political and military domains but also to explore additional options through Track II diplomacy.

Development of a Collective Security Strategy for the Region

The Russian speaker referred to regional forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and emphasized that creating more effective regional forums to

respond to emergencies is necessary for future collaborations. He agreed with Dr Long Xingchun on regional geo-economic issues and underscored the urgency for regional players to invest in Afghanistan to establish peace and stability. Lastly, he stressed that Russia was interested in investing in Afghanistan to support peace and stability and suggested economic integration of regional stakeholders through various projects and economic development.

Dr Syed Qandil Abbas, Assistant Professor, Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan

Historical Background of Afghan-Iran Relationship

Dr Syed Qandil Abbas presented a comprehensive overview of Afghanistan-Iran relations. He emphasized that the region faced decades' long instability due to foreign invasion and civil wars in Afghanistan. The speaker highlighted the series of events that influenced the Afghan-Iran relationship.

First Phase: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

Dr Abbas explained that after the Soviet takeover of Afghanistan, Iran experienced the Islamic Revolution. According to the speaker, since the new leadership of Iran adopted a foreign policy based on 'neither East nor West', this indicated that during the Cold War, Tehran was not ready to join either the Eastern or Western bloc. Hence, in practical terms, Iran opposed the invasion of both the US and former Soviet Union.

Second Phase: Rise of the Taliban

The speaker explained that the Taliban gained dominance during the 1990s and implemented their strict ideology, which concerned the Iranians. He cited the incident in which Taliban militants killed nine Iranian diplomats, which led to extreme tensions between Afghanistan and Iran and even created a risk of war between the two countries.

Third Phase: Decline of the Taliban

Dr Abbas stated that the decline of Taliban and arrival of the US military in neighboring Afghanistan was a persistent concern for Iran and seen as a threat. Nonetheless, during this period, Iranians deepened their relations with the Afghan society, which included visits and meetings with the Taliban leadership. According to the Pakistani speaker, this transformed the traditional Afghan-Iran relationship.

The present developments in Afghanistan are very important for Iran, as well as for the neighbouring countries. This time, Iran has a good relationship with the Taliban, who have also learned from their previous experiences, and they have also established good relations with Iran, as well as with other neighboring countries.

Fourth Phase: US Military Withdrawal from Afghanistan

Dr Abbas was optimistic about the future prospects of Iran-Afghanistan relationship in the post-US military withdrawal era, provided the new government was inclusive. In his view, the Taliban were now interested in having a peaceful relationship with the neighboring countries and the current council resembled the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He further elaborated that the Iranian political system was based on the ideological supervision of its political leadership under the Supreme Leader and a similar system was being developed by the current Taliban government. However, he said that:

Iran is demanding an inclusive government in Afghanistan, based on power sharing between all ethnic, religious, and political groups.

Spoilers within Afghanistan

According to Dr Abbas, there were two types of spoilers in Afghanistan - states and non-state actors. He referred to India as a state actor because of its strategies against the peace process in Afghanistan. He described ISIS as a non-state actor and a serious threat to the peace process.

Inclusive Afghan Government & Internal/ Regional Stability

Dr Abbas expressed his concerns regarding the interim government, recently announced by the Afghan Taliban and said that the interim setup comprised of 34 members, out of which 31 were Pashtuns and only three members were non-Pashtun (two Tajiks and one Uzbek), which was not an adequate representation of their respective communities. The speaker stressed that there was a strong need to develop a permanent setup that was inclusive as non-Pashtuns and the Northern Alliance were dissatisfied with the current interim Afghan government.

Pakistan and Iran, as neighbors, should play a role in the development of an inclusive government in Afghanistan through their diplomatic efforts.

To Recognize or Not to Recognize the Taliban Administration

While responding to the question of recognizing the Taliban administration, Dr Abbas commented that it was a mistake when only three countries - Pakistan, UAE, and Saudi Arabia recognized the Taliban government during the 1990s. Therefore, in order to avoid repeating the same mistake, he was of the view that Pakistan should recognize Taliban's government when there was an international consensus on the issue.

According to him, the Taliban needed to address three things, in order to be internationally recognized:

1. Form an inclusive government,
2. Allow women to play their role in the new political setup, and,
3. Respect international law.

In his view, if the Taliban were successful in implementing these three things, spoilers would not be able to play their destructive role.

Dr Moeed Yusuf, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Recalling Past Mistakes

Dr Moeed Yusuf delved into the history of Afghanistan to warn the international community of the destabilizing implications of invading and then abandoning the country.

The Western world committed catastrophic mistakes after the Soviet-Afghan Mujahideen conflict in Afghanistan.

Dr Yusuf described abandoning Afghanistan and sanctioning the 'most allied of allies, Pakistan' as major US mistakes. According to him, the Western world neglected the

civil war, security vacuum and economic meltdown in Afghanistan but Pakistan had to deal with this fallout.

The security vacuum in Afghanistan led to 9/11 after which the Western world carried out its military campaign in Afghanistan, with the ill-fated goal of total military victory. Today, in some Western circles, this is recognized as a mistake.

Impact of Afghan Conflict on Pakistan

While discussing the impact of the 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan, Dr Yusuf, stated that the only country which faced the backlash of the Afghan conflict was Pakistan, owing to the onslaught of terrorism, losing more than 80,000 lives, more than USD 150 billion and internal displacement of about 3.5 million people.

The Blame Game

The NSA emphasized that Pakistan had maintained for years that the only settlement of the Afghan conflict was a political one. He deplored that the Western world ignored Pakistan's assessment that the lack of good governance, rampant corruption, and the lack of credibility of Afghan institutions would not help stabilize Afghanistan.

Instead of addressing critical domestic issues, the former Afghan government created a narrative to blame Pakistan in order to deflect attention from their own internal failures.

Two Choices about Afghanistan's Future

Keeping in view the Taliban's announcement of an interim government in Afghanistan, Dr Yusuf argued that the real challenge was how to move forward, with only two choices in hand - either to abandon the country again or to engage the ruling authorities.

Engagement needs to be comprehensive to ensure that Afghanistan does not again face economic meltdown and collapse of governance, which would once more result in a refugee crisis and create a fresh security vacuum.

The Security Challenge for Pakistan

Pakistan's National Security Advisor emphasized that for Pakistan, disengagement was impossible because instability in Afghanistan would spill over into Pakistan. Moreover, he stressed that the country could not afford anti-Pakistan militants, sponsored by India, to again start operating from Afghanistan, to attack Pakistan and undermine its internal security.

International Obligation to Support Afghan People

Dr Mooed Yusuf warned that the world needed to be wary of the costs of abandoning Afghanistan again. He stated that this time, the spillover of negative effects would not remain limited to the region.

The world needs to engage Afghan Taliban by incentivizing them towards a governance model that is moderate and acceptable to all.

He stated that the major goal of engagement should be to provide support to an average Afghan citizen who had been ravaged by decades of war. He reasoned that abandonment of the Afghan people by those who engaged them during the 'War on Terror', would be a tragedy.

While warning against scapegoating Pakistan, Dr Yusuf suggested that the only way to achieve stability in Afghanistan was through constructive engagement, in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis and prevent the creation of security vacuum, which could be filled by militants. He affirmed that Pakistan was coordinating with the international community and trying to build regional consensus for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), President, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, Pakistan

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd) thanked the panel for offering their insightful assessment of the future of Afghanistan, its implications for regional stability and reiterated the key arguments made by the speakers.

Afghanistan: An Internationally Neglected Human Tragedy

According to Air Marshal Khan, the first and foremost challenge that Afghanistan was currently facing was a human tragedy because of the lack of cooperation by the world community. When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, the country's foreign reserves worth around USD 9 billion were frozen, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stopped issuing Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and Western allies also withdrew their support. He drew attention towards the critical financial situation in the country because the banks were closed due to which the government was unable to give salaries, inflation was on the rise and under such conditions, cities might face chaos.

Such financial chaos is bound to affect the neighbors and while the first country affected by this perceived scenario would be Pakistan, other countries like Iran and Turkmenistan would also be equally vulnerable.

According to Air Marshal Khan, after having signed an agreement and exiting from Afghanistan, the US and its allies, by freezing Afghan assets, had done grave injustice to the country, its people and to the peace and stability of the region.

In order to ensure peace and stability in the region, there was a need to engage with Afghan Taliban and unfreeze Afghan assets.

Inclusive Government in Afghanistan

According to him, Afghanistan needed to be seen from a historic perspective. The country was divided ethnically and had factions on the basis of ideology. Moreover, with spoilers like India, it was difficult to achieve consensus in a short time. While Taliban were supposedly working to engage all factions, they had kept the door open by calling it an 'interim' government, to eventually also include ethnicities and groups.

Role of Regional Countries

President CASS stressed that regional countries had a very important role in Afghanistan. Besides helping the state economically and resolving the humanitarian crisis, regional states should also help Taliban build an inclusive government, based on consensus.

All the kinetic means had been tried for decades in Afghanistan which had only caused human suffering. Now, it is time that the world at large and the region in particular, should try to establish peace.

Taliban must fulfil their Promises

Air Marshal Khan agreed with the Afghan speaker Dr Wazeen that the current Taliban were not the same Taliban as they were 20 years ago. They had reformed and were trying to engage with the world. However, he underscored that they needed to deliver on the promises about peace, better governance, a corruption-free society, respect for human rights, particularly women rights, and above all, the elimination of terror outfits like TTP, ETIM and Daesh, which was a prerequisite for most neighboring countries.

Diplomatic Recognition

Air Marshal Khan said that diplomatic recognition was yet another hurdle the Taliban were facing, mainly coming from the West which had failed to accept its military defeat.

After winning a 20-year war, the Taliban had earned independence for the people of Afghanistan. Therefore, the government of Afghanistan needs diplomatic recognition so that international engagements and funding can start for the country's reconstruction.

He concluded that:

1. While the US and its withdrawing allies were lax in recognizing the human sufferings of the Afghan people, peace and stability in Afghanistan were a common objective of regional stakeholders.
2. Opportunities for mutual engagement and regional connectivity, like CPEC, could be a harbinger for economic well-being and prosperity of the whole region.
3. International support to Afghanistan in terms of food security, diplomatic recognition and reconstruction was essential.
4. While the world had tried everything in the past, less peace, it was now time to give peace a chance in Afghanistan and in the region.

ANNEXURE

Press Release

Abandoning Afghanistan will be a Mistake: *National Security Advisor Dr Moeed Yusuf*



Pakistan's National Security Advisor Dr Moeed Yusuf has said that abandoning Afghanistan again by the international community will be a mistake. He was delivering the keynote address at an international webinar organized by the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad on '*Future of Afghanistan and Regional Stability: Challenges, Opportunities & Way Forward.*' Dr Moeed Yusuf said that the world needs to constructively engage Afghan Taliban in order to prevent governance collapse and avert another refugee crisis. He said Pakistan was coordinating with the world to have a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Dr Yusuf said that after the Soviet-Afghan Mujahideen conflict in Afghanistan, the Western world committed catastrophic mistakes, including abandoning Afghanistan and sanctioning its "most allied of allies" and Pakistan was the only country which bore the brunt of abandonment of Afghanistan and the subsequent War on Terror. Terrorism has cost Pakistan more than 80, 000 lives, USD 150 billion and caused displacement of around 3.5 million people.





Dr Long Xingchun, President Chengdu Institute of World Affairs in China said that neighboring countries have to play the leading role in rebuilding Afghanistan and Pakistan is the most important country in this regard. He said that CPEC should be extended to Afghanistan and Gwadar port can play a big role in strengthening Afghan economy. He stated that major powers should not intervene in Afghanistan's internal affairs and must respect its sovereignty. He also said that Afghanistan is rich in natural resources and there are plenty of investment opportunities in the country.

Russian geopolitical expert Leonid Savin said that the recent take-over by Afghan Taliban has changed the regional political dynamics and this will have an impact on global politics. He said Russia can recognize the new government if China recognizes it first. However, he emphasized that future cooperation with regional players such as Pakistan, China, Iran and Central Asian countries will be beneficial and Moscow is



not interested in interacting with Western countries regarding Afghanistan.

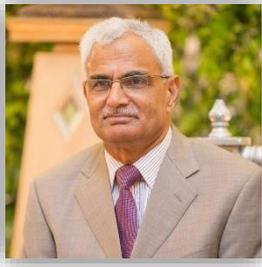


Professor Dr Fazl-ul-Hadi Wazeen from Salam University, Kabul said that the international community should not corner Afghanistan and give the new government a chance to rule while Afghan Taliban must also keep their promises, adopt a reconciliatory approach and refrain from the use of force. He said Afghans and international community should work together to convert the emerging challenges into opportunities.

Dr Syed Qandil Abbas from Quaid-i-Azam University said that both Pakistan and Iran expect an inclusive permanent Afghan government in future. He said after the decline of Afghan Taliban, Tehran viewed the US presence in Afghanistan with concern but the recent take-over of Afghan Taliban has created a different dynamic. He said that the current interim government is not inclusive which has included only three non-

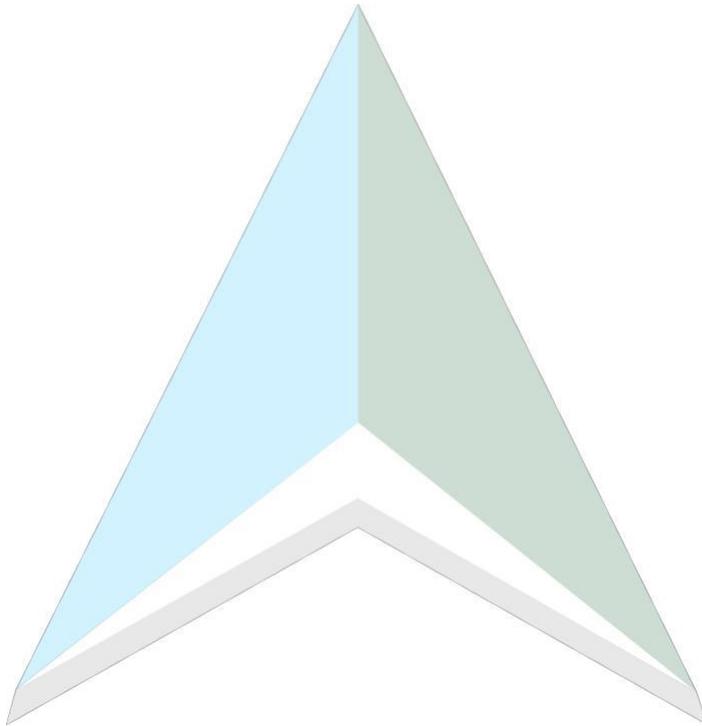


Pushtun individuals, out of a total of 34 and Iran expects a greater accommodation of non-Pushtun people if a civil war is to be avoided in future in Afghanistan.



Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan (Retd), President CASS chaired this international webinar. In his *Concluding Address*, he urged the world to give peace a chance in Afghanistan and the region, after trying everything else in the past. He expressed deep concern at the lack of understanding and commitment by the international community towards the sufferings of the Afghan people. Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan also stressed that the regional countries have a common interest in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan while regional connectivity projects such as CPEC could be the harbinger of economic well-being and prosperity for the whole region. Therefore, it is essential to support Afghanistan through immediate food relief and other critical humanitarian supplies, diplomatic recognition, unfreezing their foreign financial assets and reconstruction.

The webinar was moderated by Syed Muhammad Ali, Director Nuclear & Strategic Affairs at CASS. He said that Afghanistan has remained a victim of conflicts and abandonment. Now the Afghan people deserve international help to rebuild a stable nation-state, in return for a security commitment by the new Afghan government that Afghanistan's territory will not be used against any other country.



CENTRE for AEROSPACE & SECURITY STUDIES (CASS)

Old Airport Road,

Islamabad, Pakistan

Tel: +92 051 5405011

Institutional URL: <https://casstt.com/>

Twitter: @CassThinkers

Facebook: cass.thinkers

LinkedIn: Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies

Instagram: cassthinkers

YouTube: Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies