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IPRI-HSF International Conference Achieving Peace in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospects

‘A politically negotiated settlement is the most viable option for bringing lasting peace to Afghanistan. Towards this end, Pakistan has been making sincere efforts for facilitating talks between the Afghan Government and Taliban. The Taliban must give up violence and join the peace process.’ This was emphasized by **Mr Sartaj Aziz, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs** in Islamabad today at the International Conference on ‘Achieving Peace in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospects’ organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF). Mr Aziz said that the challenges in Afghanistan have multiplied since January 2015 when the NATO ended its combat mission and Afghan forces assumed direct security responsibilities. He pointed out that the peace process during the Murree talks in July 2015 was undermined by forces which are against reconciliation. He said that Pakistan has been a victim of brutal terrorism but since 2014, the Government’s resolve to root out this menace from society has remained firm. ‘Our success in counterterrorism has been recognized by US Congressional leaders and military commanders who visited the Pakistan-



Afghanistan border including North Waziristan’ he shared. FATA reforms are being introduced to mainstream FATA politically and administratively and to accelerate its development and safeguard its security. ‘Effective border management with Afghanistan is essential as it would prevent the movement of terrorists and miscreants and would help address the Afghan allegations regarding TTA and Haqqani networks’ presence in Pakistan’, he highlighted. Mr Aziz also pointed that Pakistan extends transit trade facilities to Afghanistan through its ports under the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) without any quantitative limits or barriers, and that under the bilateral assistance package, Pakistan has undertaken development projects in Afghanistan worth USD 500 million. He underscored that ‘connectivity with Afghanistan is an important element on our agenda. Projects including Peshawar-Kabul motorway and Quetta-Kandahar Rail link are in the pipeline which would only come to fruition if an environment of peace and stability is achieved. Energy cooperation through projects like CASA-1000 and TAPI will bring huge dividends for Pakistan, Afghanistan and the region.’

Welcoming the distinguished scholars from Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia, the United States and Pakistan, **Brig. (R) Sohail Tirmizi**, Acting President of the Institute said that converting Afghanistan into a Western styled democracy has failed because sustainable peace in the country is not possible without a political settlement. ‘This requires that all those who are supposed to be at the negotiating table are there. Bringing parties in conflict to the negotiating table is not just Pakistan’s responsibility. It is a difficult undertaking and will require patience and continued

effort,' he said. Brig. Tirmizi also highlighted that central to Afghanistan's problems was chronic dependence on foreign aid, flourishing illegal parallel economies, drug trafficking, gender inequalities, poverty, illiteracy and radicalization of society. Any effort for peace in Afghanistan cannot succeed without simultaneous improvement in these social indicators, he concluded.

In his opening remarks, **Mr Kristof Duwaerts**, Resident Representative of Hanns Seidel warned that abridging notions such as 'Turban, Taliban, Terrorism' are hurtful and do not contribute to sustainable relationships. According to him, the bad public image of Pakistan in Afghanistan does not reflect the contributions and sacrifices which Pakistanis have made for their Afghan brethren. He argued that the number of common and shared challenges between Pakistan and Afghanistan have increased since 9/11 and the international troops' withdrawal. 'There is a huge constituency for understanding and dialogue in and between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Commonalities by far outweigh the few political topics. Those divergences should not keep down the relationship between two brotherly nations, and a wide scale dialogue must be started to address the outliers,' he recommended.

In the first session on the 'Existing Situation in Afghanistan' chaired by Mr Inam ul Haque, Former Foreign Minister, Government of Pakistan, **Dr Farhan Hanif Siddiqi** Associate Professor, School of Politics & International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University presented his paper on 'Regional Dynamics and Implications for Afghanistan' and discussed geopolitical and geo-economic trends. He stressed that Pakistan-centred geo-economic pursuits need to be



translated into a regional game of playoffs where unit-level gains lead to regional prosperity; and geopolitical competition needs to be tempered through elimination or suspension before geo-economic gains can be concretely realized. Looking at Afghanistan's history, he said that if geo-

political trends manifest themselves, Afghanistan will resemble a 'game without an end' but if geo-economic trends manifest themselves, the country can become a part of a regional nexus of trade and development. He reflected that it is essential for Pakistan and Afghanistan to move beyond the immediate threatening issues to medium to longer term horizons which are conciliatory.

Dr Attaullah Wahidiyar, Senior Policy and Program Advisor, Ministry of Education, Kabul, Afghanistan spoke candidly about the 'Ingress of Non-State Actors (NSA) in Afghanistan – Islamic State (ISIS) & Al-Qaeda'. He shared that NSA are the officially disowned subsidiaries of states who perform legitimate or illegitimate tasks which a state does not want to perform itself; and in doing so they often create mayhem and societal chaos. He said that while both internal factors like violent state policies, injustice, discrimination, over-ambition of state power, and external factors like the holes created by hegemonic rivalries, lack of confidence or mistrust between states, societies and individuals continue to feed and grow non-state actors, it is the external factors that have been responsible for their creation and workings in Afghanistan. In fact, even globally there is hardly any extremist NSA that does not have some kind of institutional or financial or moral support from someone, somewhere. While much damage has been done and is still going on due to the workings of these NSA, he called on the global, regional and local powers to look into symbiotic bonds of prosperity and opportunity. 'It is time for the world to

look at Afghanistan as a ‘connector’ rather than as an ‘insulator’, and to stop the blame game, he urged.

Maj. Gen. (R) Ijaz Hussain Awan, HI (M), Former High Commissioner to Brunei Darussalam provided his insight on ‘Effective Border Management between Afghanistan and Pakistan’. He was of the view that the Pak-Afghan border is described as the most volatile area because of the presence of terrorist safe havens and lax governmental control. Various forms of illegal activities such as smuggling of weapons, narcotics, vehicles, timber and electronic goods are routine matters between this border, he said. The Major General stressed that border management is an important issue for both countries as previously people living near border areas entered without any legal documents. ‘Given its successful military operations in the border areas, Pakistan can ill-afford an open border with Afghanistan anymore’, he cautioned. He said that while the United Nations has been deliberately kept out of the Afghan region, it needs to be included at the negotiating table if a peaceful settlement of Afghanistan is to be achieved. He shared that when borders between two countries are contested, military management is the answer but in case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the situation is unique with a mix of both traditional tribal management as well as the Frontier Corps (FC) management. In this case, since the lines between freedom and control have remained blurred for so many years, a hybrid (military-administrative) model needs to be explored. He remarked that while raising the FC cadre, construction of more border posts and fencing in many places are now underway, much more needs to be done given Pakistan’s pressing national security imperatives and in furtherance of the fulfillment of its international legal obligations to effectively counter terrorism.

In the second session on ‘Structural Problems to the Security of Afghanistan: Review of Non-Traditional Challenges’, chaired by Lt. General (R) Asif Yasin Malik, Former Defence Secretary, **Mr Sayed Mahdi Munadi**, Head of Research, Center for Strategic Studies (CSS), Kabul, Afghanistan discussed three important aspects of the Afghan Unity Government in terms of security, governance and economic management.

He discussed the various projects underway in Afghanistan and said that among all the important projects, TAPI is one of most important projects, followed by CASA 1000 and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan- Pakistan 500-KV which seeks



to export year round power to both Afghanistan and Pakistan and is commissioned for completion by 2018. He was optimistic about the Belt and Road initiatives since the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor would facilitate connection between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and expand cultural and economic cooperation. ‘These economic projects are crucial because they are changing the narrative from ‘economy for security’ to the narrative of ‘security for the economy’. ‘It is a mistake to put emphasis just on security for security’. However, one must remember that it is important to keep local communities on board even for large scale projects since such inclusiveness ensures that projects are protected by the local people as they offer jobs and economic security. He cautioned that while the Afghan Unity Government has brought important political parties to the table, the process of change is slow. The NUG is strengthening the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF)’s ability to counter insurgencies and is also in the process of consultations with ethnic communities. He recommended that for a peaceful Afghanistan, it is essential for major stakeholders to support

economic initiatives multilaterally; convince local people to own and protect the economic initiatives; start to negotiate with the Taliban and others to save these initiatives. Only through economic security will the security dilemma of Afghanistan change for the better, he predicted.

Discussing ‘Poppy Cultivation and Drug Trafficking: A Financial Resource of Terrorism’, **Major General (R) Khawar Hanif**, HI (M), Former DG, Anti-Narcotics Force, Pakistan, shared that farm gate value of Afghan opium is USD 1 billion and the total value of poppy is USD 150, while the money coming back to Afghanistan is USD 10 billion. He emphasized that there is an urgent need to stop the inflow of drugs from Afghanistan to Pakistan; interdict drugs and precursors trafficking in order to stop their proliferation/ spread within the country. The speaker shared that financial resources of transnational terrorism include both legitimate sources like charities, ethnic communities, religious funding, endowments, diaspora donations and business enterprises; as well as illegal sources like drug, arms and diamonds trafficking, oil and human smuggling and the Hawala system. As a way forward, counter narcotic efforts should be delinked from geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic competition. A stricter control on movement of controlled substances and timely and transparent intelligence sharing at international and regional level is needed, he recommended.

According to political analyst, **Mr Rahimullah Yusufzai**, the issue of IDPs and returning Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran are contributing to challenges of poverty and unemployment in Afghanistan. He was presenting his paper on ‘Poverty, Unemployment and Illiteracy: State of Human Security in Afghanistan’. Poverty and unemployment rose after the withdrawal of foreign forces, and the growth rate is now down to 2 per cent from 10 per cent. While skilled jobs were created in large numbers due to the presence of foreign forces, there has been little international spending on agriculture which employs most poor Afghans, he lamented. While actual figures are either incorrect or inflated, nearly 42 per cent children are out of school in Afghanistan, he said. ‘What kind of leaders can such a ratio produce?’ he asked. Jobless young Afghans could join the insurgency, resort to easily available drugs in a country that produces more than 90 per cent of the world’s opium production, or embark on a risky journey in high seas to Europe, he warned. While there are improvements such as better school facilities and new enrollment of children which is gradually increasing the literacy level, progress is slow and time is of the essence if future generations of Afghans are to see a brighter, more peaceful and prosperous future.

Lt. General (R) Asif Yasin Malik, Former Defence Secretary, concluded the session by saying that the US created a strategic mess in Afghanistan. “We are witnessing a manifestation of ‘controlled chaos’ in Afghanistan that is prevailing almost in the entire region,” he stated. Peace is not only necessary for Afghanistan but it is very much needed for the people of Pakistan as well. Sociopolitical development is the only solution for Afghanistan, which the Afghan people rightly deserve due to decades of war in the country.

