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Report – Public Talk

Ahmad Wali Massoud

**Chairman, Massoud Foundation of Afghanistan & Former
Ambassador of Afghanistan to the United Kingdom**

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The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad organized a Public Talk with H.E. Ahmad Wali Massoud, Chairman, Massoud Foundation of Afghanistan & Former Ambassador of Afghanistan to the United Kingdom on February 19, 2021 under its Distinguished Lecture Series. Members of the diplomatic corps in Islamabad, academics, civil society, former and current diplomats were also present.

Ms. Amina Khan, Director Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) gave welcome remarks.

Mr. Massoud spoke about the special bond Pakistan and Afghanistan share. He said we feel that this is the start of a new dawn and the start of a new beginning of the relation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. We have come with a message of friendship because between Afghanistan and Pakistan there exists a special bond on almost every dimension for example the economic, social, religious, cultural, security and political dimensions. We also share a border of 2400 kilometers so on almost every dimension we are interlinked, therefore dialogue between these two countries is very important for the peace of the whole region. This is why, I have come here as the Chairman of the Massoud Foundation and brother of Ahmad Shah Masood, the late resistance leader of Afghanistan, with the message of friendship, closeness and brothership.

He talked about his late brother, Ahmad Shah Massoud's contribution towards building a sovereign, inclusive and strong Afghanistan. By taking a similar stance, peace can be achieved in Afghanistan, he said. As we all know that after a pursuit for years and years, my brother sacrificed himself to serve Afghanistan. He not only struggled during the jihad time but he also stood against the Russian invasion and then later on against international terrorism. He defended his country until he lost his life. Therefore, in exactly the same way we want to stand for the peace dialogue and for the dialogue between the Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Mr. Massoud was of the view that the people of Afghanistan have suffered for far too long and yearn for peace. According to him, values adopted by different factions in Afghanistan vary in a distinct manner however it is important to take all of them into account if the peace process is to move forward in Afghanistan. Hence, it was time for all stakeholders to accommodate each other.

He stated that in this 21st century, we really have to find ways and means on how to coexist and how to get closer especially between two countries which have got a lot in common. Mr. Massoud said that he had always been of the belief that in order to strengthen peace in Afghanistan, there needs to be direct dialogue between the two countries. In this regard people to people contact is very important. There is no doubt that peace Afghanistan that will affect peace in Pakistan as well and likewise, war in Afghanistan will affect Pakistan as well.

He went on to point out that as with any other relationship, Pakistan and Afghanistan do have a conflict of interest which is very natural but we have to find a way to overcome these through diplomacy, consensus and negotiation talks. Through our shared interests, we can come up with a common vision for the security of the region. This is why our shared interest is a very potential asset between the two countries- something we need to utilize for the interest of both of the country's people. Conflict of interests have in the past wasted a lot of time and energies of both countries. We need to leave the past to the past and see what can we do for the future and open a new page. I have always been of the belief that if there is any conflict of interest between the two countries, they really have to put everything on the table of negotiation. If there is any legitimate claim by any side, we should resolve it, he said.

The world has changed which is why we really have to work hard based on the interest of our countries. As neighbors we really can find ways and means how to do so. Communication can build trust, which is the first building towards a shared vision. Peace in Afghanistan requires a formula which will lead to balance inside Afghanistan as well as outside Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a very colorful countries with more than 30 ethnicities. In this new Afghanistan, almost every young person from every ethnicity questions their place in the peace proces as well as the future of their country. In essence they are claiming their own rights. Hence, we should work towards a system, where we can live with ourselves as well as with the outside system. We should not expect that peace will come from outside. It has to come from within. First pillar of peace in Afghanistan is having a strong government. Throughout history, Afghanistan has been a victim of its own geography. The truth is that unless we have a strong government, we cannot benefit from all of the countries who have got some interest in Afghanistan. Hence, we really have to work for the balance inside Afghanistan as well as outside Afghanistan. We also have to sort this mystery of power because since the time of creation of Afghanistan till today, the

problem is that there has been dispute for power inside Afghanistan. This is why local villagers- the women and men of Afghanistan- have to be empowered so they can exercise their own power which is why besides decentralization, a sort of consensus democracy is also needed so we can bring everybody on board because majority democracy did not work in Afghanistan.

Mr Massoud said he had not been really optimistic about the Doha talks in the start because he said that if you get the roadmap wrong it will not get you anywhere. He believed that there is an opportunity for Afghanistan as the international community too are thirsty for needs peace because they are completely fed up with war, However, absence of a proper road map will mean that people will get disappointed without anyone knowing where exactly it went wrong. There needs to be a mechanism in place or some sort of coalition where there is honest representation from all ethnicities. This will ensure consensus in the system and the technical process of the peace process will start. For 19 years, Afghanistan has witnessed a fight for power within the government. This needs to be put aside for the sake of peace. Hence, representation from all segments of society is imperative based on a formula of decentralized system and consensus democracy. In this way, every ethnicity will be empowered. Moreover, this will ensure a balance for relation with different countries so Afghanistan will not be a victim of different power interest.

Talking about Afghan foreign policy, he said a very balanced approach is required so that Afghanistan is not perceived as a threat nor used as a strategic tool by any party. By doing so, balance could be achieved internally as well as externally. He reassured that no country will be allowed to use proxies for pursuing their interests. In this regard, he opined that the people of Afghanistan share an unbreakable bond with the people of Pakistan, and stressed that Pakistan has no enemies in Afghanistan. Reiterating Mr. Massoud's stance, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI said that Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to become a bastion of proxy wars, and aspired for a sovereign and peaceful neighbour.

The talk was followed by a Q & A session which was moderated by DG ISSI, Ambassador Chaudhry.

Answering a question on increased economic cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Mr. Massoud stated that the both countries can utilize the economic potential between them in

the backdrop of peace in Afghanistan. If a transit route is opened from Pakistan, through Afghanistan on to Central Asia, enormous economic benefits can be availed. Of course, it is very important that both countries first define their interests and put it in a strategic document.

While answering a question on the prospects of US troops leaving Afghanistan, Mr. Massoud said he shared Pakistan's stance regarding the need for a responsible US exit from Afghanistan, as it was the people of the region who would face the repercussions of a hasty withdrawal. He said peace in Afghanistan was a precursor for peace and stability in the entire region. He hoped that the new Biden administration is different from his predecessors and supervises the peace process till the end.

Talking about the role regional countries can play in the Afghan peace process, particularly Pakistan, he said that all countries are advising the US to exit in a responsible manner since a lot of players are involved in this issue, everyone especially Pakistan has a stake in peace in Afghanistan. At the moment Afghanistan is in the middle of four security zones, hence the situation is very difficult.

He reiterated that a strong government, representing all ethnicities is important. Other countries should not be allowed to pursue their own strategic interests or carry out proxy wars in Afghanistan. A sound foreign policy is also important which will ensure a balanced relation with all countries. Pakistan has made it very clear it wants peace in Afghanistan and wants a stable, sovereign, independent and prosperous Afghanistan. He said that Afghan soil should not be used against Pakistan. Therefore, it is extremely important that Afghanistan should be left alone as far as its own internal affairs are concerned and not used by anyone else. Every regional country must give peace a chance because everybody will be served better by the peace in Afghanistan.

Mr. Massoud opined that a proper road map encompassing the voice of the Afghans needs to be in place. There also needs to be an understanding amongst the Afghan people themselves to an extent that all outside actors become aware that the Afghans can make their own decisions without external interference. No country should think that they have a legitimate right to have a sphere of influence in Afghanistan.

The talk concluded with Chairman BOG, ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood presenting the Institute's shield to the distinguished guest.